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Articles

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True Multilateralism: Conceptual Development, Core Essences, and China's Practices

Abstract: At present, the profound changes unseen in a century are intensifying globally, and global governance encounters a growing array of challenges. The international community needs to advance global governance through true multilateralism. Nevertheless, unilateralism and hegemonism are undermining multilateralism, which faces significant obstacles. China actively advocates and practices true multilateralism, a concept it has proposed, refined, and developed. The core principles of true multilateralism include upholding fairness and justice, maintaining openness and inclusiveness, adhering to the purposes and principles of the UN Charter, promoting extensive consultation, joint contribution, and shared benefits, and keeping pace with the times. China advances true multilateralism through concrete actions, such as nurturing the idea of a community with a shared future for mankind, safeguarding the UN system, enhancing multilateral mechanisms, providing high-quality international public goods, and promoting legal frameworks in global governance.

Keywords: global governance, international order, true multilateralism concept, community with a shared future for humanity, PR China

Multilateralism boasts profound ideological roots and an extensive history of implementation (Ma, 2024, pp. 13-14; Wu & Liu, 2020, p. 23; Liao, 2023, pp. 61-62). In the academic community of international relations, multilateralism is generally defined as the institutional framework for managing relations among three or more nations based on widely recognized principles of conduct. Since the end of the Cold War, globalization and multipolarity have continued to advance, making multilateralism a widely accepted approach within the international community for promoting global governance. At its core, multilateralism entails coordination and cooperation among multiple stakeholders in the governance system. Recently, several nations have pursued various forms of "pseudo-multilateralism" to serve their own interests, significantly undermining the governance effectiveness of international multilateral institutions and posing a serious and immediate threat to world peace and development.

More than ever, the world needs to promote and practice true multilateralism to steer the globe from turbulent change toward stable development.

I. Proposal and Development of True Multilateralism

The major-country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics focuses on the future and destiny of humanity. It contemplates the main challenges facing global governance in the context of the significant changes unfolding over the century and the underlying issues in effectively implementing multilateralism. It advocates that in the face of a myriad of complex global issues, upholding and practicing true multilateralism is the way forward. Overall, the evolution of the concept of true multilateralism proposed by China has followed the process below.

In April 2021, President Xi Jinping first put forward true multilateralism at the Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference.[1] From September 2021 to June 2022, in multiple international conferences, Xi elaborated extensively on true multilateralism, emphasizing the need to practice it and improve global governance. True multilateralism has since become the mainstream discourse of China on global governance.

In October 2022, the Report to the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China stated that China plays an active part in the reform and development of the global governance system. It pursues a vision of global governance featuring extensive consultation, joint contribution and shared benefits. China upholds true multilateralism, promotes greater democracy in international relations, and works to make global governance fairer and more equitable.[2] This demonstrates that true multilateralism has been elevated to the will and strategy of China's ruling party.

On July 1, 2023, with the implementation of the Law on Foreign Relations of the People's Republic of China, the commitment to upholding and implementing multilateralism – as well as engaging in the reform and development of the global governance framework – was further established as an objective in China's development of foreign relations. The law emphasizes upholding the international system centred on the United Nations, preserving the international order based on international law, and maintaining the basic norms of international relations founded on the purposes and principles of the UN Charter. It also underscores the global governance concept of extensive consultation, joint contribution and shared benefits; participating in the formulation of international rules; promoting the democratization of international relations; and

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[1]   Xi Jinping's Video Keynote Speech (Full Text) at the Opening Ceremony of the Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference 2021, Chinese Government Website, April 20, 2021, https://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2021-04/20/content_5600764.htm.

[2]   Xi Jinping: Holding High the Great Banner of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics and Striving in Unity for the Comprehensive Construction of a Modernized Socialist Country - Report to the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, Chinese Government Website, October 25, 2022, https://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2022-10/25/content_5721685.htm?eqid=afd4626e0007882000000003647edae0.
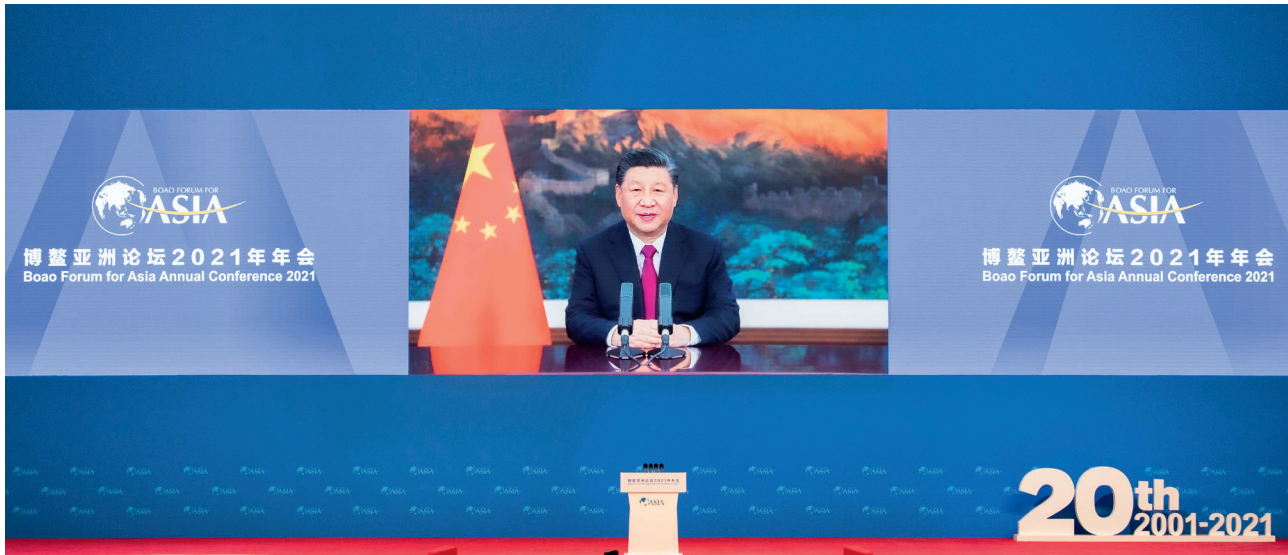
The president of the People's Republic of China, Xi Jinping, during his speech at the Boao Forum for Asia annual conference
in Boao, Hainan Province, April 2021
Photo: Xinhua

making economic globalization more open, inclusive, balanced and beneficial to all.[3]In that way, the law further clarifies the core connotations of practicing true multilateralism and its significance in the process of China's diplomacy as a major power.

In the same year, the Central Conference on Work Relating to Foreign Affairs held in December stated that to keep the progress toward greater multipolarity generally stable and constructive, the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter must be observed by all, the universally recognized, basic norms governing international relations must be upheld by all, and true multilateralism must be practiced.[4] This means that, in the current and the coming period, true multilateralism will continue to be transformed into practical actions in China's foreign affairs work.

In June 2024, at the Conference marking the 70th Anniversary of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, Xi stated that advocating the vision of

[3]　　Law on Foreign Relations of the People's Republic of China, Chinese Government Website, June 29, 2023, https://www.gov.cn/yaowen/liebiao/202306/content_6888929.htm.

[4]　　Central Conference on Work Relating to Foreign Affairs Held in Beijing with an Important Speech Delivered by Xi Jinping, Website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, December 28, 2023, http://new.fmprc.gov.cn/web/zyxw/202312/t20231228_11214409.shtml.

global governance featuring extensive consultation and joint contribution for shared benefit – and practicing true multilateralism – means insisting that international rules should be made and jointly observed by all countries. World affairs should be handled through extensive consultation, not dictated by those with more "muscles".[5] This underscores China's firm determination and resolve to advance global governance through true multilateralism.

In September 2024, the Beijing Summit of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation was successfully held. Xi attended the summit's opening ceremony and delivered a keynote speech,[6] organically combining the core concept of true multilateralism with the grand vision of modernization for the Global South. His address delivered a powerful message that developing countries have an equal right to modernization. During his meeting with United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres, who attended the summit, Xi emphasized that "practicing true multilateralism, supporting the UN to play a core role in international affairs, has always been a principle that Chinese diplomacy adheres to and will not change. At present, as the international situation becomes more turbulent and intertwined, the UN's important role is even more prominent and should take more proactive actions". This statement clearly indicates that practicing true multilateralism inevitably requires supporting the

UN – the core platform of multilateralism – and demonstrates China's resolute stance in safeguarding the authority of the UN.

II. Core Essence of True Multilateralism

True multilateralism is not only an innovative development of the global concept of multilateralism but also a creative transformation of the essence of China's outstanding traditional culture, forming a theoretical system that is rich in thought, profound in connotation, and logically rigorous. Among its core principles, upholding fairness and justice is the primary criterion, openness and inclusiveness are essential, adherence to the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter is the fundamental guideline, practicing extensive consultation, joint contribution, and shared benefits is the necessary path, and keeping pace with the times is an inevitable choice.

(1) Upholding fairness and justice is the primary criterion. Upholding fairness and justice underscores the moral foundation of true multilateralism. True multilateralism advocates for mutual respect, equal participation, and consultative cooperation in advancing global governance. This means that all countries share both governance responsi-

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[5]   Xi Jinping's Full Text Speech at the Conference Marking the 70th Anniversary of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, Chinese Government Website, June 28, 2024, https://www.gov.cn/yaowen/liebiao/202406/content_6959889.htm.

[6]   Xi Jinping's Full Text Keynote Speech at the Opening Ceremony of the Beijing Summit of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, Chinese Government Website, September 5, 2024, https://www.gov.cn/yaowen/liebiao/202409/content_6972495.htm.

President of the Republic of Serbia, Aleksandar Vučić, and Ambassador of the People's Republic of China to Serbia, H.E. Chen Bo, during the cornerstone-laying ceremony for the "Shandong Linglong Tire Co., Ltd." factory, Zrenjanin, March 2019.
Photo: Office of the President of Serbia

bilities and rights, thereby promoting the democratization of international relations, resisting all forms of hegemonic, high-handed, and bullying acts and collectively advocating for world peace and development. Advancing global governance through multilateralism must fully embody the principle of fairness and justice. Every nation, regardless of size, strength, or wealth, is an equal member of the international community. An international order based on imperialism, hegemonism, or colonialism – which enforces hierarchical structures – is out of step with the trends of the times, and the pursuit of injustice and the law of the jungle, where the strong prey on the weak, is deeply resented.

(2) Upholding openness and inclusiveness is essential. Multilateralism and global governance share

an inherent consistency. Their commonalities are reflected in all-win value objectives, multi-layered actors, diverse issue areas, and pluralistic pathways (Wu & Liu, 2020, p. 23). Multilateralism upholds the cooperative spirit of openness and inclusiveness, emphasizing respect for diversity, rejecting closed and exclusionary approaches, and advocating open cooperation to address global issues. Openness and inclusiveness entail upholding the concept of a community with a shared future for mankind, seeking common ground while reserving differences, and building consensus to "maximize the openness and inclusiveness of cooperation mechanisms, concepts, and policies" (PDC & FMPRC, 2021, p. 161). It is through embracing openness and inclusiveness that we can steer and advance the healthy progression of globalization, stimulate global economic growth, and tackle the increasingly significant challenges we face worldwide. Only by maintaining openness and inclusiveness, and by upholding a civilization view characterized by equality, mutual learning, dialogue, and mutual accommodation – along with promoting the common values of humanity such as peace, development, equity, justice, democracy, and freedom – can we overcome ideological prejudices and achieve harmonious coexistence and collective progress in the international community. Actions by certain countries aimed to draw ideological lines and foster confrontations run counter to the principles of true multilateralism.

(3) Adherence to the purposes and principles of the UN Charter is the fundamental guideline. True multilateralism steadfastly safeguards the international system centred on the United Nations, the international order based on international law, and the basic norms of international relations founded on the purposes and principles of the UN Charter, while supporting the UN in playing a greater role in international affairs. Over the past 400 years, whether it was the European public law of the 17th century or the international order based on the international law of "civilized nations" during the colonial periods of the 18th and 19th centuries – although these systems were formally supported by multiple countries – their essence was still rooted in colonialism or hegemonism. It was only after the establishment of the UN Charter that a truly global multilateral international order could be realized (Ma, 2024, p. 16). The purposes and principles of the UN Charter provide crucial guarantees for global peace and development, preventing the international community from being dictated by those with stronger arms or larger fists.[7] True multilateralism further emphasizes that international relations should uniformly adhere to international law, with all countries observing international law and the universally recognized basic principles of international relations under a set of unified rules that clearly distinguish right from wrong, without any country resorting to "exceptionalism".

(4) Practicing extensive consultation, joint contribution, and shared benefits is the neces-

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[7]   Xi Jinping's Speech at the General Debate of the 70th Session of the UN General Assembly (Full Text), Xinhua News, September 29, 2015, http://www.xinhuanet.com/world/2015-09/29/c_1116703645.htm; Xi Jinping, Let the Torch of Multilateralism Light up Humanity's Way Forward – Special Address at the World Economic Forum Virtual Event of the Davos Agenda, People's Daily Online, January 26, 2021, http://politics.people.com.cn/n1/2021/0126/c1024-32011618.html.

sary path. The global governance concept of extensive consultation, joint construction, and shared benefits is a distinctive connotation of true multilateralism. „Extensive consultation" entails that all countries pool ideas and engage in communication and dialogue on the basis of sovereign equality, thereby promoting fairness in rights, opportunities, and rules. "What kind of international order and global governance system is beneficial for the world and the peoples of all countries should be determined through discussion among the peoples of all countries, not decided unilaterally or by a select few".[8] "Joint construction" means that all parties participate together and maximize benefits through cooperation – essentially, working collectively to enlarge the proverbial cake. In facing global challenges, no country can isolate itself; only by sharing risks and responsibilities, practicing true multilateralism, and cooperating hand in hand can effective solutions be found. "Shared benefits" involves distributing the outcomes of cooperation across various fields equitably, ensuring that the benefits of cooperation reach all countries, the international community, and the wider public, and ultimately allowing all parties to share in development opportunities and achievements.

(5) Keeping pace with the times is an inevitable choice. Keeping pace with the times reflects the timeliness and innovative spirit of true multilateralism. At present, the once-in-a-century upheaval is accelerating, with changes in the world, the era, and history unfolding in unprecedented ways. The foundational strength of multilateralism is undergoing significant transformation, and new issues in global governance are emerging continuously, while the construction of multilateral mechanisms lags behind and deficits keep growing (Wu & Liu, 2020, p. 35). True multilateralism must also adhere to the principle of preserving its core values while innovating, and it must look to the future in order to continuously rejuvenate its vitality and enhance governance effectiveness. Otherwise, it will fall behind the times and be unable to adequately address emerging challenges.

III. China's Practice of True Multilateralism

China is not only an advocate of the concept of true multilateralism but also a practitioner, promoter, and leader in its implementation. China actively defends, develops, and promotes true multilateralism – taking the lead in upholding equality, cooperation, integrity, and the rule of law – thereby proving to be a responsible major country with a pivotal role in advancing the reform and improvement of the global governance framework.

(1) Developing true multilateralism through the concept of a community with a shared future for mankind. Xi proposed the concept of building a community with a shared future for mankind, advocating for a world characterized by lasting peace, universal security, common prosperity, openness and inclusiveness, and a clean and beautiful environment. He calls for all nations to jointly shape the destiny of the world, participate together in global governance

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[8]   Xi Jinping, Speech at the Celebration of the 95th Anniversary of the Founding of the Communist Party of China, Chinese Government Website, April 15, 2021, https://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2021-04/15/content_5599747.html.

and rule-making, and share the benefits of human development, thereby forging a new consensus on global governance through true multilateralism. The concept of a community with a shared future for mankind upholds openness and inclusiveness – it does not draw ideological lines, target specific groups, or form exclusive "cliques"; it advocates fairness and justice, emphasizing that no country should monopolize international affairs, dictate the fate of others, or dominate development advantages; it calls for harmonious coexistence, whereby countries, while seeking common ground while reserving differences, can achieve peaceful coexistence and common development; it champions pluralistic mutual learning, respecting different histories, national conditions, ethnicities, and customs, and promoting intercultural exchanges; and it underscores solidarity and cooperation, opposing "national priority" and advocating a shared destiny where all countries collaborate to address global challenges (Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, 2023). Since its proposal in 2013, the concept has been incorporated into UN documents multiple times and has received high praise and support from numerous national and international leaders (Jia, 2022).

(2) Safeguarding the UN System and perfecting multilateral mechanisms. First, China firmly upholds the authority and status of the United Nations. As the second-largest contributor to UN assessed contributions and a major contributor to UN peacekeeping, China has played an active role in promoting UN reform and enhancing the representation and voice of developing countries. UN Secretary-General António Guterres has commended that since the restoration of its legitimate seat in the UN, the People's Republic of China has become an increasingly important contributor to UN work and a major pillar of international cooperation.[9] Second, China is committed to perfecting multilateral mechanisms to further the development of true multilateralism. China actively promotes the reform of existing multilateral mechanisms toward a more just and equitable direction, strengthens solidarity and cooperation among the "Global South", and enhances the international discourse power of developing countries. For example, China has actively promoted the African Union's accession as a formal member of the G20. In addition, by working with various parties to lead international mechanisms such as the BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, China has continuously expanded these platforms – through measures such as membership enlargement – so that they become important platforms for emerging market countries and developing nations to safeguard their interests, enhance their international influence, and drive the reform and improvement of the global governance framework (Zhao & Tao, 2023, pp. 13-20).

(3) Providing high-quality international public goods. Firstly, to build a platform for more inclusive multilateral cooperation. China has injected new momentum into global development through high-quality Belt and Road cooperation and multilateral mechanisms such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, the BRICS New Development Bank,

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[9]   United Nations Secretary-General: China Has Become an Increasingly Important Contributor to the UN and a Main Pillar of International Cooperation, China News Service, October 25, 2021, https://www.chinanews.com.cn/gj/2021/10-25/9594811.shtml.

and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). Secondly, by proposing the "Three Global Initiatives", China provides public goods for world peace and development. At the United Nations, China initiated the "Group of Friends of the Global Development Initiative", attracting more than 70 countries.[10] The Global Security Initiative advocates a new path for security – characterized by dialogue rather than confrontation, partnership rather than alliance, and win-win rather than zero-sum outcomes – which has received support and praise from over 100 countries and international regional organizations. It has been incorporated into more than 90 bilateral and multilateral documents in China's engagements with other nations and international organizations.[11] On June 7, 2024, the 78th Session of the UN General Assembly, by consensus, adopted a resolution proposed by China to establish an "International Day for Dialogue among Civilizations". The resolution, centred on the core tenets of the Global Civilization Initiative – namely, the four key pillars proposed by Xi – received enthusiastic responses and broad support from the international community, fully demonstrating that the Global Civilization Initiative aligns with the trends of the times and meets current global needs.[12]

(4) Advancing the rule of law in global governance. Promoting the transformation of the global governance system requires advancing the rule of law in global governance and building an international legal order. China firmly upholds an international order based on international law, actively participates in the formulation and improvement of international rules, and promotes the rule of law in international relations, thereby providing legal safeguards for global governance. China actively practices the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence. Since their proposal 70 years ago, these principles have been enshrined in the Chinese Constitution, as well as in establishment communiques, bilateral treaties, and numerous important international documents with almost all countries with which China has diplomatic relations. They form the cornerstone of China's independent and peaceful foreign policy and have become the universally applicable basic norms of international relations and fundamental principles of international law, setting a historical benchmark for international relations and the rule of law. China has also strengthened international law enforcement cooperation and promoted the rule of law in global security governance. By enacting laws such as the Law on International Criminal Judicial Assistance

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[10]   Seminar on Joining Hands to Promote Global Development and Accelerate the Achievement of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals organized by the Permanent Mission of China in Vienna, China International Development Cooperation Agency, November 29, 2023, http://www.cidca.gov.cn/2023-11/29/c_1212308183.htm。

[11]   Report on the Implementation Progress of the Global Security Initiative (2024), by the China Institute of International Studies and the Global Security Initiative Research Center, p. 10, China Institute of International Studies website, July 18, 2024, https://www.ciis.org.cn/xwdt/202407/W020240718528334066314.pdf; Press Conference on April 19, 2024, Hosted by Spokesperson Lin Jian, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the People's Republic of China website, April 19, 2024, https://www.mfa.gov.cn/wjdt_674879/zcjd/202404/t20240419_11285033.shtml.

[12]   Press Conference on June 11, 2024, Hosted by Spokesperson Lin Jian, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the People's Republic of China website, June 11, 2024, https://www.mfa.gov.cn/web/wjdt_674879/zcjd/202406/t20240611_11424807.shtml.

and the Law on Anti-Organized Crime, China has solidified the legal foundation for combating organized crime. Under the framework of the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, China has engaged in diverse and effective cooperation with other countries. In international law enforcement efforts against transnational drug trafficking, terrorism, and other challenges, China respects the sovereignty of other nations, abides by relevant conventions and agreements as guiding principles, clearly delineates the law enforcement authorities and responsibilities of all parties, and enhances joint law enforcement exercises.

Conclusion

True multilateralism is an inevitable choice for humanity to address global challenges and advance global governance. It has forged a consensus among people worldwide in the pursuit of peace and development, aligning with the tide of historical progress and bearing immense global significance. It serves to purify multilateralism, sharply contrasting with unilateralism and various forms of pseudo-multilateralism. Whether in addressing current global challenges or jointly creating a better future for humankind, the international community must further join hands in practicing true multilateralism. Looking ahead, practicing true multilateralism requires commitment in five areas: first, steadfastly promoting the building of a community with a shared future for mankind; second, firmly upholding the authority of the UN Charter; third, resolutely safeguarding the right of all nations to participate equally in international affairs; fourth, maintaining a clear focus on action; and fifth, firmly opposing unilateral hegemony and all forms of "pseudo-multilateralism".

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Geopolitics of Chaos and Geopolitical Vacuum

Current conflicts in the global geopolitical order of power

Abstract: The paper elaborates on the current geopolitical issues with potential far-reaching consequences for establishing the future order of power in international relations, as well as on the geopolitical powers themselves. The paper will analyze primarily the existing and potential crisis hotspots, as well as the changes occurring after US President Donald Trump came to power, and anticipations of potential results and consequences of the changes he initiated in his second presidential mandate. Moreover, attention will also be drawn to the analysis of the current position of large geopolitical powers with the already proven status of rivals, competitors and disputers of decades-long domination and hegemony of the Atlanticist West. In addition, we will try to answer the question about the possible end of the globalization era and the potential emergence of the post-globalization order.

Keywords: geopolitics, international order, power, crisis hotspots, globalization

The unipolar geopolitical order of power which definitely acknowledged the Atlanticist domination is symbolically marked by the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the unification of Germany (the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic). The United States of America prepared its unipolar domination and hegemony even earlier by destroying (or, according to some Serbian and Western authors who intentionally use a more neutral term, *dissolving*) the Soviet Union and, thus, the disbandment of the Warsaw Pact as a military and political alliance. Before that, during the period of the so-called Cold War and bipolar world order, these very political and military formations had for decades maintained a certain balance of power in international relations, and, in geopolitical terms, the balance of military power as well. All processes of economic-political and state degradation and complete structural destruction of the main rival of Atlanticism were prepared long and secretly, under

the codename "Harvard Project" (Petrov, 2020, p. 48), with disastrous consequences to the so-called Soviet bloc. Other international political structures, economic institutions and global organizations founded after the Second World War (the OUN, the Non-Aligned Movement, the Arab League, the Organization of African Unity, OSCE etc.), which had for decades tried and partly managed to rein the overall power of the Atlanticist West, have also become largely dysfunctional.

The planned process of establishing unipolarity also took place in the territory of the contact zone and the always-turbulent Balkans by the dissolution of the SFRY because of the externally induced religious-civil wars in 1991 and the immediate recognition of the independence of Slovenia and Croatia by the Vatican and Germany. With the frozen conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina as formalized by the Dayton Agreement from 1995, many regional hotspots with the mighty destructive potential remained in the post-Yugoslav geopolitical space, mainly in the territories and in the state-like creations in which the Serbian nation continued to live outside the state borders of the Republic of Serbia (as well as in it). Historically it has already been shown that the Balkan region is suitable for political and then armed activations whenever the states from the circle of Atlanticism, the EU or regional powers, e.g., Turkey, assess that it is geopolitically profitable. In that period, ominous for us, of unipolar domination of Atlanticism, in 1999 there was first a brutal and illegitimate aggression against our country and then the malignant and overall occupation of Kosovo and Metohija. It is effective evidence that the Serbian factor was really considered the greatest geopolitical opponent of the Atlanticist West in the Balkans, which had to be "adequately" punished by robbing it of the most important geostrategic part of the country (the so-called geopolitical macro-fortress) which has not been returned yet under the legal-political, territorial and state sovereignty of the Republic of Serbia. This refers exactly to Kosovo and Metohija with the invaluable historical and identity importance for Serbs as a sacred sanctuary of the Serbian people and the birthplace of its founding "national myth" embodied in Saint Sava's Orthodoxy and the Kosovo Covenant (Despotović, 2025, p. 69).

After decades-long geopolitical domination and hegemonistic relations contextually situated in the globalization processes by imposing globalism as an ideology and an attempt of building a new world order reflected in one world government, the period of so-called *geopolitics of chaos* began. This stage in international relations began intensively manifesting its destructive power first in the Ukrainian political crisis, and then in the escalation of its military component. Afterwards, in the domino-effect manner, numerous crisis hotspots were opened and radicalized worldwide (the Middle East, Central and South America, the Central East, the Far East, the Pacific power projection zone etc.). Dangerous release began of a huge amount of destructive energy accumulated over decades, which threaten to enter the stage of even larger radicalization and decomposition of the unipolar order of power. Geopolitics of chaos was defined by Ignacio Ramonet back in the 1990s as the beginning of the process of politics defunctionalisation (by displacing decision-making outside the state's political institutional order), de-democratization of political systems and violation of human

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rights and freedoms. The destruction of national states continued, particularly their legal de-sovereignization and territorial fragmentation, followed by the accelerated consolidation and inauguration of the identities of synthetic nations produced by social engineering.

Geopolitics of chaos has had a particularly destructive effect through radical forms of uncontrolled "fission" – splitting of the core, deconstruction and destruction of the axiological corpus of national cultures and total civilizational collapse. "Everywhere, in international relations and within society, power is transformed", Ramonet states. It happens in such a manner that the degree of its malignity has reached the potential of a global conflict with unforeseeable consequences (Ramonet, 1998). The above-listed destructive changes, exactly because they were not processes of controlled fissional splitting of the existing order, consequently led to the creation of dangerous forms of civilizational confrontation (called "the clash of civilizations" by Huntington). It is the conflict in which, through the agendas of the political, legal and cultural engineering, but even more of bio-. Techno- and geo-engineering, the globalized world even more rapidly fell into the state of geopolitical chaos – international anomy (marked by basic disrespect for international law), radicalization of anti-civilizational ideologies (globalism, anti-humanism, nihilism, individualism, gender ideology etc.) or the return and recovery of old political paradigms through new movements and forms (Nazism, fascism, racism, colonialism), and revision of history, all these accompanied by numerous depopulation agendas (social eugenics, genetic engineering, global pandemics etc.) (Despotović, Glišin, 2024, p. 43).

Partial geopolitical vacuum

In the continuation of the paper, we allowed ourselves as authors the specific freedom of entering the context of theoretical analogy between physics and geopolitics in an attempt to provide as precisely as possible a sketch of current problems and changes in the geopolitical and international order of power, which is partly suggested by Ignacio Ramonet himself. For this purpose, it was necessary to make an elementary comparison of basic concepts of *physical vacuum* and its analogue, which we are trying to introduce into the theoretical discourse of geopolitics as a synthesis science – the concept of *geopolitical vacuum*. In physics, the general theoretical-conceptual axiom of vacuum has long been "determined in elementary terms as a space without substance", i.e., since it is the state difficult to achieve as an ideal-type model, there is a substitute concept more frequently used instead of it – *partial vacuum*, which is considered the "space in which the pressure is lower than the atmospheric pressure". This conceptual determination can be found in every elementary textbook of classical physics, which is also in line with the currently applicable theoretical postulates of quantum physics. It is further stated that "even if all matter might be removed from the given volume, in that space no absolute vacuum would be achieved due to the existence of vacuum fluctuations, gamma radiation, cosmic radiation, the presence of neutrinos and the existence of dark energy" (*Chambers, 2004).* In a word, within the domain of the quantum theory this may be also defined as the so-called *zero-point field*, as an ocean of microscopic vibrations conceived as an absolutely empty space – therefore, as vacuum,

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but in cosmic relations it is not and cannot be, because due to the mentioned micro-vibrations of particles, a certain amount of energy is created which fills it (Taggart, 2009, p. 19). Therefore, in our opinion, the analogy between *partial vacuum* and *geopolitical vacuum* may be seen almost literally, because in geopolitics, space is one of the most important conceptual categories, while power, particularly its hard aspects – economic-financial power, military power, and scientific-technological power – is in compliance with force (political pressure, destructive vibrations etc.) which is projected in some of the forms of this multidimensional space (territory, air, water, underground layers of space, immediate universe environment etc.), which Bertrand Russell a long time ago made equal to energy the fundamental concept in social science is Power, in the same sense in which Energy is the fundamental concept in physics") (Pavlović, 2012, p. 163).

Therefore, the geopolitical triad of the concepts *power–force–space* has the qualitative characteristics of *partial geopolitical vacuum* – permanent power pressure through projected force on some or all aspects of the space which, as its result, leads to certain changes in it, but they are not finally condensed and structured into its final geopolitical order. Thus, it is not a completely empty space without substance, but the space in which there are always some micro- or macro-vibrations of the force which maintain a certain tension (pressure) in it. This, as we have shown, is an acceptable theoretical comparison and conceptual explication of the cooperation between physics and geopolitics as sciences, especially when it is applied to the processes in the current space of geopolitical relations. It is theoretically and methodologically even more plausible when projected onto the stage or phase of the change of the existing order of power (unipolar order) when it changes, dissolves or disappears, but

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the new one has not emerged yet, or is still in the stage of embryonic conception and development (multipolar order). Using the language of physics, it means that the projected geopolitical force in the space of new geopolitical actors is still lower than the current "atmospheric pressure" (the force of the existing international order) and thus insufficient to create from the projected and used force the pressure strong enough to have a consequence or a result in the form of, for example, a polycentric world order of power. As a matter of fact, the current processes in international relations, when it comes to their basic geopolitical foundation, are in a complex state of overexertion, which ranges from a relatively controlled geopolitical chaos (destruction of the old unipolar order and forms of globalism to date), particularly when speaking of the last decade, with uncertain elements of partial geopolitical vacuum (the current stage) before the creation of the new order of power (the multipolar order). Namely, this is to a large extent time-related and geopolitical uncertainty as to whether and when the marked processes will become a real alternative in the field, i.e., when they will reach the level of internal cohesive relations and organizational structures which will qualify it a s a new and stable geopolitical configuration or formation. And, consistently with the language of physics, when it will pass from the current formative state into a controlled stage of the *fusion* of a new geopolitical order of power.

In the text below we will show in an orientation sketch only part of the current processes of partial geopolitical vacuum (crisis hotspots) in order to, first of all, determine a correct scientific description of its main neuralgic points and problems, and, in the final part of the paper, to confirm our starting hypothesis, explained through a theoretical-conceptual "dialogue" between physics and geopolitics. In the analysis procedure with an actually limited scope, we will try to emulate something that was done by our unrivalled scientific genius, Nikola Tesla, in his rich research opus (the application of his physical axioms to global issues of war and peace), while being aware of our own incomparably modest cognitive capacities, particularly the degree of quality and reliability of scientific results obtained by such an approach (Abramović, 2015, p. 107).

Current and potential geopolitical hotspots

Geopolitical hotspots are geopolitical *topoi* (spaces) where the strength of geopolitical power weighed continuously or occasionally in a direct conflict of large geopolitical powers and political-military alliances or their political exponents at the points of geographical contact, contact zones or regional and international conflict regions. Geopolitical or international hotspots are most often territories (or regions) where tensions are manifested deriving from political confrontations, open military conflicts of today increasingly used combined network-hybrid war, with a higher or lower intensity of using available resources from the "rich fund" of hard, soft and smart power.

The category of these hotspots with their centuries-long history or decades-long inventory of conflicts can include several regional spaces: the Balkans and, in particular, the post-Yugoslav space (Croatia, Serbia – Kosovo and Metohija, Bosnia

and Herzegovina, North Macedonia), Albania etc., the space of the Western parts of the former Soviet Union (Poland, Ukraine and Kaliningrad Oblast – enclave), the Baltic (Lithuania, Estonia, Latvia, Finland, Sweden) , as well as the Black Sea region (Transnistria, Moldova, Romania, Bulgaria), the Aegean water area (Greece, Turkey, Cyprus), North Africa, in particular its coastal part (Tunisia, Algeria, Libya, Egypt), the Middle East, always territorially fragmented and conflicting space (Israel, Palestine, Syria, Iran, Yemen), the Central East (India, Pakistan, Vietnam, Burma, Nepal, Myanmar, Laos etc.), the Far East (primarily North and South Korea, Japan…), the Pacific and the Indian Ocean water area (China and the USA with their respective allies) and so forth. Therefore, those are primarily the hotspots situated in the zone of the so-called Rimland, in which centuries-old geopolitical interests of thalassocratic and tellurocratic powers confront.

Currently active hotspots may include primarily the Ukrainian conflict, whose armed stage has lasted for more than three years, while its intensive preparation form goes back to the 2014 coup, when the neo-Nazi junta and pro-Western opposition came to power after unconstitutionally and illegitimately overthrowing President Viktor Yanukovych. Its profound historical genesis began through confessional infiltration and centuries-long processes of religious conversion conducted by the Vatican, creating a Uniate church organization in the territory of today's Ukraine, i.e., Greco-Catholic identity of a number of the Orthodox population there. An immeasurable "contribution" to these processes was given first by Roman-Catholic Poland and then by the USSR by creating an artificial Ukrainian state, as well as by some Western powers (primarily Germany, France and Great Britain) by precoding (identity engineering) the value corpus of Little Russians and Ruthenians (so-called Ukrainians) for the purpose of creating anti-Russia as an open and strong geopolitical exponent of Atlanticism exactly in that very important territory for both sides in the conflict (Ukraine, the USA, the NATO, the EU and Great Britain on one side, and the Russian Federation of the other) (Despotović, 2025, p. 60).

The tragedy of both Slavic nations reached huge demographic and economic proportions. Even now it is possible to see an irretrievably large number of casualties and a whole complex of resource and structural losses, especially those of Ukraine. Such an intense war conflict is not close to its end because the initially proclaimed goals of Russia's special military operation have not been fulfilled yet: de-Nazification, demilitarization, liberation of the territories with the majority Russian population, its efficient legal, cultural, political and religious protection, Ukraine's giving up the plan of becoming a member of the NATO, i.e., maintaining political and military neutrality etc., which were essential reasons for the conflict radicalization. To all these, we should also add the constant propaganda incitement to war and direct military armament of Ukraine by the Atlanticists, particularly during Biden's administration and now by its numerous European satellites. This is accompanied by US President Donald Trump's superficial and inefficient "efforts" for the alleged pacification and cessation of hostilities In such partial geopolitical vacuum, in our opinion, there are only two possible outcomes of the special military operation – the first, considered more realistic and strategically justified, is Russia's overall domination and acceptance of its legitimate goals and state interests, whereas in this option the time

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dimension of the conflict length is rather uncertain; the second, quite unlikely in our opinion, is Russia accepting, for tactical reasons, the temporary cessation of the conflict, which would lead to the level of a camouflaged, frozen conflict. Of course, in that case, explosives would be put aside, but there would be even more destructive consequences after the period of reconsolidating the capacity of the hard power of basic actors, when the conflict reactivation would once again be possible. If things go in that direction, the following stage of the conflict will have the form of a total and direct confrontation of Atlanticism and Russia, in which they will go to the end, to the final collapse or victory of one of its actors. "Global rulers of the world have estimated that a shift must be made, they did not renounce either globalism or the main Atlanticist vector towards Russia. They are only trying to freeze the conflict globally, from Ukraine to the Middle East, which should last until Atlanticist rulers decide that they have recovered sufficient power to re-enter the globalization stage. The truth is that the USA will focus its attention primarily towards China, its main rival from the aspect of global power both in economic and military segments. It will not change the strategic goal of subordinating Russia to control, particularly in its European part".[2]

Another current armed conflict with its historical length, religious-eschatological origin and state-territorial disputes has been going on in the territory of the Middle East between Israel and Palestine, with frequent stages of reactivation and open hostilities between Israel and Arab-Islam world in its surroundings. The long history of their confrontations after the Second World War has had forms of destructive military destruction and territorial shifts, but, more frequently, forms of terrorist acts which were the reason for their reactivation. With all the characteristics of extreme destruction and total dehumanization, this conflict is slowly entering its long-term explication with a clearly evident intention of its end when one of the sides in the conflict fulfils its maximalist goals and interests. Whether and when it will happen depends on the resource support to both sides in the conflict, whereas it should be emphasized that Israel's position in these terms is extremely dissymmetric.

In the Middle East as a volatile geopolitical region, there is a "tradition" of millennium-long confrontations of large monotheistic religions, unstable state-like creations and imperialist interests in the background (Lewis, 2004). More than four decades ago, Bernard Lewis, an American historian of Jewish origin, projected the plan of future conflicts under the code name "bloody borders", which was adopted by the foreign policy committee of the US Senate at the beginning of the 1980s. This program contained a whole range of political measures and secret intelligence operations which would serve to destroy the existing authorities, to change state borders, to conduct territorial atomization or total liquidation. That is exactly why, in the near future, it is likely to expect a really destructive conflict in the Middle East between Israel (and the USA, its trans-Atlantic guardian and mentor) and Iran, which has been generated for a long time in the sphere of insurmountable religious and

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[2]   Lj. Despotović, "Agenda for America: a shift towards hard power and white man", *Večernje novosti*, 19 January 2025, p. 8.

civilizational differences between the two countries. However, the primary reason is Iran's nuclear program which its well-known arch-rivals would like to eliminate completely or put it under efficient control It is quite unlikely that the conflict will be avoided through political negotiations about restricting it to civilian aspects of the use of nuclear power, while the attempt of military destruction of Iran's nuclear technological plants is much more likely, which would prevent Iran from producing real mass destruction nuclear weapons.

The potential conflict may cause even graver consequences having in mind the fact that Iran has signed an agreement on interstate strategic cooperation with the Russian Federation and that its

complex implementation is yet to be expected in the following years. Russia is trying to return actively into this geopolitically quite important region and to realize the projection of its long-term geopolitical and geo-energetic interests. With this policy, it would largely aggravate the realization of Atlanticist plans and substantially undermine their decades-long domination and future positioning in the region. Here, it is also necessary to mention the long-term and not so transparent cooperation of Iran with the People's Republic of China, which is also assuming more and more serious connotations, particularly when this cooperation is perceived through the perspective of the Chinese initiative "Belt and Road" and Pakistan's increasingly impor-

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tant role in the strategic projections of power. It goes without saying that in the extremely probable military conflict of the USA and Israel with Iran, neither Russia nor China will enter a direct military confrontation with them, but will definitely support Iran with all other available instruments of political power so as to help Iran exit this conflict with as few strategic consequences as possible.

At the moment when this paper was written, yet another decades-old crisis hotspot has been opened in the Indian subcontinent, between Pakistan and India. In the essence of all their conflicts so far there are insurmountable religious differences, but incomparably more territorially unsolved disputes between the two countries, deliberately kept in that status at the time of the formal end of Great Britain's colonial rule. Occasional terrorist acts, mostly by Islamist extremist organizations (with the tacit organizational, intelligence and financial support of the USA and Great Britain) serve as a trigger for the beginning of the military confrontation between two nuclear powers. Although this confrontation so far has had a limited and controlled character, its huge destructive potential must not be underestimated. The current conflict will probably, as many times before, assume the status of a temporarily frozen conflict, before one of the opposed sides is suggested by its sponsors once again that, due to the current interests, a new form of military-political confrontation should be induced. Numerous experiences confirm that the conflict will primarily serve as a media cover which diverts the attention of the public opinion from major places of geopolitical confrontation, as well as to keep the large Middle East territory in the state of permanent instability, tension and continued large military and economic overexertion.

The challenge called Trump
– the beginning of the end or
a temporary crisis of globalism

In this segment of the paper, we will mainly use the normative-axiological theoretical-explicative matrix which will focus first on the normative structure and values of civilization and culture in its foundation. Current confrontations and conflicts in this area will be analysed first as attempts of re-composing their deep structures, organizations and institutions, as well as re-coding of the identity code for the purpose of getting new aspects and forms of international power. Speaking more precisely and at the level of the methodological modelling, we will analyze two models of globalism, the so-called *old globalism*, which expressed the essence of the unipolar structure of the international order of power accompanied by the unquestionable hegemony of the USA and the Atlanticist geopolitical paradigm, and the so-called *new globalism,* which tries to constitute itself after a turbulent stage of internal conflicts both at the level of the "global deep state" and of deep conspiratorial structures of power, thus performing the accelerated structural re-composition, new articulation of basic crypto-political interests and aggregation of available capacities of power in an attempt to find globally adequate responses to strong and better organized challenges of an increasing number of geopolitical actors of multipolarity.

The concept of the "deep state" is often used in the public discourse for denoting the network of secret and influential structures inside and outside the government which act independently of formal democratic institutions of the state. This conceptual construct derives mostly from the disciplinary field of political science,

geopolitics and modern international relations in an intention to determine the structure, content and forms behind its lapidary-constructed crypto-political phenomenology. "Constructed" in this manner, it conceals crypto-political interests and less visible conspiratorial structures placed in the centre of organization because in its narrower terms they are directed only towards the state apparatus and administration; that is the part which most frequently remains in its institutional positions regardless of occasional post-electoral changes in them. However, its broader conceptual determination also implies the part of the corporate and conspiratorial sector in which a huge amount of institutional and extra-institutional power is concentrated. Certain "media analysts" use this construct as a label for the so-called global deep state, thus spreading the zones of its influence and power to the global level of international relations and their main actors.

This conspiratorial structure of power, invisible to the ordinary man's eyes, is concealed by the opaque screen of official institutions of political power and the backdrop of the state's constitutional-legal order, building a parallel deep state-social coupling and a complex network of infiltration of crypto-political interests, which definitely includes the "invisible" representatives of large capital, multinational corporations, highest representatives of conspiratorial organizations etc. Although it has been created patiently for several centuries now, the so-called deep state as its most visible part has manifested its full swing and strength in the past few decades, during the unipolar domination of the USA and its "alleged" Western allies (essentially with a single important role – efficient transmission of crypto-political interests into the global space). Moreover, its role, not less impor-

tant, was the control and coordination of the rest of the profane world, which became more significant with the acceleration of globalization processes and creation of the multi-layered network of *global interdependence*. The above-listed has been realized primarily through international organizations and global actors as its official structures and institutions (the OUN, the EU, the IF, the World Bank, the WTO, the NATO, the IGO, NGOs etc.).

Since in this paper there is not enough room for dealing in further detail with conspiratorial structures of power and crypto-political interests lying in the deepest segments of public policies and planning, initiating, controlling and directing globalization flows, we have only labelled them in disciplinary terms as an inevitable fact without which the following analysis would not have its most relevant analytical and theoretical foundation (Despotović, Glišin, 2024, p. 43).

President Donald Trump's inauguration on 20th January this year and his introduction into the second presidential mandate were accompanied by the loud echoes of unhidden thunder of messages from his presidential campaign. This media and political clamour marked the beginning of the practical stage of his clash with the representatives, organizations, institutions and projects of the so-called global deep state not only within the USA, but also in the entire territory of the Atlanticist West. This primarily meant that President Trump as the nominal holder of the monocephalic executive in the US constitutional order and presidential system with his first decisions and so-called executive orders began to undermine and decompose the decades-established and corrupted network of subversive organizations and institutions destructive to the state itself and to the

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external world o (USAID, NALED, the EU, the NATO, global NGOs, "humanitarian funds", "development funds" etc.). These are exactly the organizations and institutions which were the worst parasites on the financial and state tissue of the USA and its taxpayers, turning it into a monstrous para-state leviathan that greedily eats the vital substance of the empire itself and is directed at enticing radical destabilization of everything that might stand in the way of the interests of global scum elites. As soon as such course of the changes began, very quickly, even before the end of the first hundred days of the presidential mandate, after the expected short-term shock and confusion, the response of the globalist deep state started to be organized and prepared both in the territory of the USA and within the European Union and the NATO. Just seemingly defeated forces and slightly shaken globalist structures of power began preparing for a long-lasting conflict with the other cluster of power in the field of conspiratorial structures which is currently personalized in the domain of running the practical and invisible part of political struggle by US President Donald Trump and his administration.

The analyzed conflict came to the surface in its visible form when part of global *power clusters*, composed of numerous cartel organizations (fortunately, those perceived as a whole are not a homogenous and compact organization) properly assessed and realistically considered the cruel truth that it was impossible to continue the old, decades-long practice of irrational wastefulness and accelerated fragmentation of available and particularly important hard aspects of power (economic-financial power, military power, and scientific-technological power). In the conflict with the chief global rivals and challengers (the Russian Federation, PR China, BRICS,

SCO etc.), this decades-long wasteful and arrogant practice of old globalism could rapidly lead to the total collapse of the new order of power, primarily of hard capacities of the empire's power and its inevitable collapse which was becoming increasingly clearer on the horizon. That it has become even empirically visible will be proved by listing only several important indicators of the looming collapse: US excessive financial debts (external and internal), lagging behind in the scientific-technological development, particularly in the military domain, exhaustion of national ore resources and increasingly harder availability of foreign resources, the threatening fall of the financial power of the dollar, the ever-growing anti-American atmosphere worldwide, the depletion of military assets due to both direct and undisguised support for Ukrainian neo-Nazi formations in the armed conflict with the Russian Federation, as well as Israel's long-term and continuous conflict with its Islamic surroundings, financing numerous terrorist organizations around the world, subversive activities through financing and organizing networks of global NGOs and their local branches for infiltration and destabilization of national states (e.g., attempts of the so-called colour revolutions in Serbia, Georgia etc.), huge costs of maintaining military bases, but also logistical resources of the EU and the NATO, sponsoring the loyalty of the whole network of local political scum elites, which have, with the unprecedented extent of system corruption, exhausted the pathologically metastasized financial resources, hypertrophy of institutional capacities and organizations in the sphere of the security sector and numerous intelligence agencies, para-state as well as private military companies, relocation of production capacities –

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and thus, of modern technologies – to other, often competing countries (e.g., China), the constantly profit-greedy sector of transnational corporations, megalomaniac requirements of the military-industry complex, corruptive pharmaceutical companies, and a number of other bleak indicators.

For decades during the period of the US unipolar power, the entire hypertrophic structure of old globalism used the strength and power of the empire which was so large that the brutal robbery of the rest of the world through the transnational sector, whose profit mainly remained within it, could not void the creation of enormous structural overexertion, material fatigue and pathological costs. The cost side of this policy was possible to hide and cover by FED's uncontrolled dollar emission or by any other palliative measures of economic policy or numerous forms of financial speculations (contaminated financial derivatives, uncovered loan debts, adjusted ratings of investment reliability etc.), which pushed globalized imperial power even further towards the edge of its total institutional, as well as essential disaster. "The most obvious indicator of the declining power of the Atlanticist West led by Washington is the fact that they have waged war against Russia for three years without managing to resolve the Ukrainian issue the way they wanted. That is why part of the deep state has received the task to make a shift, via Trump and his administration, towards classical liberalism and not post-liberalism, as believed by Dugin."[3]

Quite soon the radical and accelerated response followed through Trump's newly-established administration in an attempt of urgently stopping negative trends and structures of recovery, primarily of the USA's hard power. Without it, chances that the empire will continue going along the old road and that globally it encounters challengers and disputers, kept losing the realistic ground for an adequate response. Hence quick and radical responses of Trump's administration. Aware that the recovery of imperial power is impossible without overall interventions and measures, Trump as their main visible exponent not only reached for short-term measures and the US manoeuvre return, the so-called Monroe doctrine, but also showed unhidden appetites directed towards territorial, resource and geo-strategic expansion and revitalization of hard power. He directed his plans in that field towards large stretches of Canada and Greenland, primarily towards regaining full control over the Panama Canal. Simultaneously with the proclaimed measures of power recovery in his "own backyard" he also undertook initiatives for calming or freezing the Ukrainian conflict, the de-escalation of armed actions in the Middle East, the reduction of costs for the NATO through openly pressurizing the alleged European allies (remnants of the old global structure, Great Britain, and the largest part of the EU member-states). He did it by exerting strong pressure and ultimately requesting assuming an increasing burden of financing overall costs intended for defence and strengthening military capacities in the west of the European continent (defence spending allocations accounting for 5% of the annual national GDP). The focus of his work included several other similar measures so that he may achieve visible results in the following years in the process of the comprehensive action of recovering the imperial power of the USA and

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[3]   Lj. Despotović, "Agenda for America: a shift towards hard power and white man", *Večernje novosti*, 19 January 2025, p. 8.

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of Atlanticism, or new globalism. Trump is determined in his intention to prepare this geopolitical formation on a large scale for the inevitable and priority conflict with PR China and its projected aspirations towards global economic and technological leadership. This is an increasingly pronounced intention of both geopolitical rivals to project and maintain their respective power in the water areas of the Pacific and the Indian Ocean, as well as to accelerate the achievement of the long-proclaimed policy of China's territorial unity through the joining of Taiwan that is, at least for the time being, impossible to achieve peacefully.

However, despite President Trump's clearly defined goals to recover the aspects of the US global power defined in this manner soon encountered organized resistance and actions of temporarily undermined and disempowered powers of the *old concept of globalism*, substantial parts of the deep state, and conspiratorial elites that stand and have for decades stood behind them. Both in the territory of the USA and within Western Europe, they carried out political consolidation and interest solidarity in an increasingly organized and rapid manner. European globalists (with active communication and coordination with the same forces in the US deep state) are intensively collection all available economic-financial and military resources, rather exhausted due to supporting the Ukrainian side in the military conflict which is continuing and which they do not want to renounce despite the general opposition of Trump's administration. There are also attempts of forming new organizations and alliances, non-democratic acting towards all those putting up resistance both in the member-states and in the joint institutions of the European Union (Hungary, Romania, Slovakia).

The entire political system of the EU, from its projection to its foundation, is deliberately politically delegitimized and de-sovereignized (where the member-states, and particularly their citizens, are unable to appoint and control the highest EU structures). The Europeans certainly do not want war, but the Brussels administration is evidently pushing them into the conflict. It is a huge problem that the European Commission is appointed respectively by the prime ministers of the EU member-states. They are the executive power and they choose the body with the legislative power, which is impermissible. Hofbauer, an expert on international law, comments it as follows: "If the EU asked for its reception in the European Union, it would not be accepted because it does not fulfil the basic criteria."[4] All this has been further manifested through the strengthening of the measures of political repression, media censorship, annulment of electoral results, political trials, persecuting and criminalization of sovereigntist parties and leaders, favouring old globalist activists in desperate attempts to maintain their own acquired positions, available capital, levers of the state and system power, as well as long-term interests of conspiratorial structures which have made them and support them all the time.

In the USA, such resistance and rebellion against changes began relatively quickly, and were personally shown through Biden's public criticism of Trump:

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[4]   "When trade sanctions fail, weapons speak out", the interview with Haness Hofbauer, published in *Večernje novosti*, was conducted by Boris Subašić on the occasion of Hofbauer's book *In the economic war. The West's sanctions policy and its consequences. The example of Russia*, pp. 10–11, accessed on 18 May 2025.

"He had the worst hundred days that no president has ever had", Biden said with no hesitation. While Trump is trying to consolidate the new administration and make it efficient for the planned projects of resource power recovery, and the analysts from both sides are drawing lessons from the initial results of the political struggle, "the question remains – Is the American political system still ready for a leader outside the traditional frameworks? Would Biden's different decision have changed the course of history or did the 2024 election only acknowledged deeper divisions and unwritten restrictions within the society that is proud of democracy? The answers perhaps do not come immediately, but one thing is certain – the political struggle in the USA is entering a new and unpredictable stage."[5] Here are only a few fresh examples of the "answers" provided by the old deep state: the US Federal Court froze many high customs duties introduced by Trump to other countries, claiming that he had overstepped his legal authority; moreover, the court also disputed Trump's measure about abolishing the Department of Education, and several thousand previously fired employees were returned to work; Elon Mask thanked the president for the offered chance and left his office for state financial audit and prevention of system corruption; USAID's high representatives complained to the relevant courts and asked for the annulment of all Trump's decisions and returning to the former state, with huge financial compensations etc., media are full of such and similar news, which serves as a clear indicator that the consolidation process has already been underway on a large scale.

The above-mentioned conflict will not take place only within the USA, but also in other parts of the globalized world and battles will undoubtedly be waged exactly under the auspices of its imperial structure and state institutions. The winning side in that conflict will crucially affect the rest of the same structures in the world, particularly in West Europe. Trump's resistance and "throwing the glove" into the face of old globalist structures and still powerful parts of the deep state will in the following years (perhaps in more than a decade) answer the question: Is it the beginning of the end of old globalism or the construction of power of new globalism?

We believe that the answers may be discerned even now. Regrouping of power, aggregation of preferences, new articulation of interests, re-definition of goals and change of exit strategies will enable globalist formations (old and new) with their clusters and cartels of power to await more readily the inevitable conflict with the actors of the polycentric world in the formation. This epochal conflict, currently indicated by the facts, will be impossible to avoid, and exactly this awareness will make globalists do everything in order to gain with joined forces the decisive advantage before the open conflict. When such direct conformation begins, all options will be possible – from a total planetary disaster to the change in the geopolitical order of power from the unipolar into the multipolar world of polycentrism.

However, one thing is certain; no matter how this clash of the tectonic plates of opposed geopolitical structures ends, the essence of capitalism as a political, economic-financial and legal order of power will not

[5]   "Biden speaks fiercely about Trump: The worst 100 days in history, and I still believe that I would have beaten him", *WebTribune,* accessed on 11 May 2025.

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change. The announcements of some geo-politicians, e.g., Aleksandr Dugin, of the arrival of the new post-liberal epoch and post-capitalism do not seem realistic, plausible and argument-based. It seems that A. Dugin was carried away by doctrinarism enthusiasm of his geopolitical theories and that it was the reason why he rushed with these geopolitical anticipations, overlooking the toughness of the economic-political capitalist order (Dugin, 2009). Capitalism as a socio-economic formation will not have its adequate planetary alternative in the foreseeable future, not because it is not potentially likely and plausible by the projection of new political-value formations, but because of the strength and amount of power which has been maintained by capitalism as an order for centuries and has also entered the structural order of those powers at least principally disputing and publicly criticizing it, unconvincingly searching for its alternative. By occasionally changing the forms of its manifestation, but not the essence of capitalist relations in its foundations, liberalism as its main apologetic and civilizational cover will still remain the essential feature of the political-economic ideology that has changed the models of its existence throughout modern history (proto-liberalism, classical liberalism, modern liberalism, neo-liberalism etc.), but not its original essence and purpose (Despotović, 2022, p. 48).

Scientific-technological power as a new aspect of hard power

In the final part of the paper, it is important to note that in the classical literature on international relations, the so-called *hard power* is characterized primarily by *economic-financial power* and *military power*, while some authors also add the size of the territory, resource capacities or demographic capacities of a country (Nye, 2012, p. 42). In our opinion, the established model of hard power must also include a new element (resource) – *scientific-technological power* (artificial intelligence, nanotechnology, geoengineering, technoengineering, bioengineering, Teslaian physics, laser technology, hypersonic technology, quantum computers, controlled fusion, synthetic materials technology, "green" steel, new energy sources, systems for time and space control, super-powerful telescopes, universal industrial robots, information quantum medicine, generative drugs with extended shelf life etc.), which needs to be transferred from the model of so-called *soft power* into the model of hard power. The reasons for this proposal are contained in the fact that its accelerated development in the past few decades has made exactly this segment of action an immeasurable source of potential domination over opposed rivals. In the following years and decades, in this domain it will become possible to acquire or lose quickly the position in the hierarchy of the ruling order.

Only one essential qualitative move, step or leap in any of the above-listed, as well as other areas of new techniques and technologies may change literally overnight the established ORDER of power in the world. Hence that amount of secrecy and conspiracy in the sphere of new scientific research among the majority scientifically and technologically developed international subjects, from transnational corporations to large geopolitical powers. They compete feverishly and unscrupulously as to which one and in which segment of the above-mentioned technologies unrivalled advantage over the competitors will be achieved, thus taking the global position of *hyperpower*.

This assessment is particularly important if we take into account the fact that in the systems of secret scientific research, especially of military character as compared to civilian science (whose knowledge and technologies are already becoming obsolete in the cycles of three to five years), military science and technology are estimated to have the time advantage of as many as three decades in the accomplishments of their development (Taggart, 2009, p. 19). Knowing this, we cannot even anticipate how close we are to the end of the world we know and in which, as ordinary citizens, we find it increasingly harder to find our bearings and direction, somewhat naively trying to determine in advance at least some meaning of our own existence.

Due to the "knowledge warriors", in its final ideological stage and by its brutal essence globalism is actually reduced to a pure concept of antihumanism, which destructs universal value systems of humanism, man's autonomy and freedom. Not even traditional monotheistic religions have been spared, while Christian religion has been affected particularly destructively. Even more destructive are continued and ever stronger assaults on Eastern Christianity, its ecclesiological structure, dogmatic teachings, value identity and, most of all, its spirituality and Christocentricity (Despotović, 2025, p. 357).

New technologies brought along by transhumanism have already reached the potential of threatening man's elementary survival because of his alleged improvement and specialization (Schwab, Malleret, 2020). If it were to be realized in the full capacity of its available powers, it would bring hu-

manity into a post-humanism stage in which survival would no longer be possible for a large part of human population (Despotović, Glišin, 2024, p. 207). That is why uncontrolled development of new findings and technologies inevitably accompanying it is not only an area of unimaginable powers, but also a poisoned spring of huge dangers to man as a species. "In his interview for the *Indian Express,* Gates shared his thoughts about artificial intelligence, including three professions that, according to him, will not be replaced by seismic technology. As published by Marca website, Gates predicts that three careers will be safe from artificial intelligence: biology, experts on energy, and computer programmers".[6] This is not only the destruction of the current nomenclature of professions and the production of masses, or the so-called working population redundancy, but also of the existing order of geopolitical power, or even a new one that will be bu8lt in the future. That is why in this short overview we want to point to unimaginable potentials of power, as well as risks brought along by accelerated scientific-technological development and, apart from transnational corporations, forced by the most powerful geopolitical actors nowadays.

Conclusion

As we have tried to argue in the paper, the current processes and ongoing changes leave a whole series of new geopolitical questions completely open. Changes are evident in many aspects, but they are still far from their end and are definitely new config-

[6] "Gloomy predictions of Bill Gates: Only this will survive artificial intelligence", *Večernje novosti*, accessed on 19 May 2025.

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urations of international relations. In our opinion, the current processes will remain an enigma for at least one whole decade, with different possible outcomes; namely, they will remain contextually situated in the conceptual zone of partial geopolitical vacuum. How all this will end is certainly unknown at the moment. Judging by the current international indicators and from numerous bilateral meetings in Moscow on 9 May 2025, on the occasion of the 80th anniversary of the victory over Nazism and fascism, particularly the agreement reached by the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China, it is becoming increasingly clearer that geopolitical cards have been dealt once again and no one can claim that all the cards have stayed in the hands of the Atlanticist West and its allies. On the contrary, the bloc of the countries opposing the Atlanticist and globalist structure is becoming larger and more comprehensive, while their grouping is becoming more organized, qualitatively stronger, and better networked in economic- financial and military terms. It this development continues in the same direction, the Atlanticist-globalist countries will find it difficult to give an adequate answer in the world of power multipolarity. This is yet another indicator and proof that the global geopolitical board is being slowly but certainly reestablished. President Xi and President Putin have publicly emphasized that their countries will continue their mutual support in building the "new world order". Although the Western powers have tried to isolate Russia, the fact that the Chinese leader appeared in Moscow exactly on 9 May, on the great national holiday, clearly shows that isolation is not functioning – at least when it comes

to the players of this calibre. If we leave the symbolics for a moment and see the broader picture, something much more important can be observed: long-term orientation of the two countries towards deepening their cooperation, despite pressures. When two nuclear powers with global ambitions say that they want to build the new world order – it is not only diplomatic courtesy. It is a strategic message".[7]

As the above-listed processes become an increasingly certain global alternative, in our humble opinion, it will also lead to the change in the geopolitical perspective of both Serbia and the Serbian people on the whole. With strengthening multipolarity, our geopolitical orientation will inevitably begin to change in the qualitatively more positive meaning, towards the vector of coming closer to the increasingly organized territory of Euro-Asia. This is, among other facts, also proved by the following example: the first man of the Russian state corporation *Rosatom*, Alexey Likhachev, answered affirmatively the question posed by the RIA Novosti journalist – yes, there were talks about the construction of a nuclear power plant in Serbia – not any sort of plant, but a serious one that could redefine the energy landscape of the West Balkans. "Essentially, President Vučić's visit marks the beginning of a new stage of work with Serbia in terms of the potential placement of a nuclear power plant. This is a very important moment", Likhachev said, pointing out that from now on nuclear power is also formally part of the agenda in the relations between Moscow and Belgrade. Russia is entering Serbia with technology, while Serbia is entering the Russian/Euro-Asian

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[7]   This caused Trump's unprecedented anger. Putin declined the greatest offer ever received from the States", *WebTribune*, accessed on 11 May 2025.

space with an ambition. Will nuclear power become a new pillar of Serbia's energy identity? One thing is certain – the game is now played at a higher level, while Belgrade and Moscow have just raised their stakes"[8] Of course, this example is only part of the anticipation about the geopolitical alternative for Serbia and Serbian people being conditioned by real and deeper changes in the geopolitical order of power and increasingly stronger multipolarity.

We hope that the above-listed indicators and arguments give real hope that in the near future it will be possible to construct a new international geopolitical order which will be fairer, freer and more human than this one, which we have barely survived in the past few decades, painfully and with many sacrifices. As it has already been clearly indicated in the paper, resistance to the multipolar order will continue to be ample, discouraging and marked by a dose of uncertainty. However, on the other hand, there are also real actors and powers which may combat global challenges in the following period and create a polycentric world order relying on new foundations.

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[8] "Serbia and Russia enter a historical project: the first nuclear power plant to be constructed in Serbia", *WebTribune*, accessed on 10 May2025

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Geopolitical concepts: definition and importance

Abstract: In practical terms, geopolitics is manifested through geopolitical concepts. These concepts are strategic perceptions based on geographical (socio-geographical and physical-geographical) and political indicators relevant for shaping certain goals. This paper explains the definition and importance of geopolitical concepts, as well as the necessary conditions for their legitimization. In that context, to understand certain geopolitical concepts (i.e., to understand the constants on which concepts are based), it is necessary to know the long-standing historical processes which also form collective strategic perceptions. Illegitimate geopolitical concepts cannot be successful, nor can they last in time, which is essentially opposite to the objectives of geopolitics. That is why a conclusion is imposed that successful geopolitics may not be based on any *ad hoc* actions, but they imply strategic deliberation, long-term planning and a multidisciplinary approach in ensuring interests of the state and the nation creating the state.

Keywords: geopolitics, geopolitical concept, geopolitical environment, order, USA, Russia, China

The increasingly frequent use of the term *geopolitics* in the past decades has caused understating of different things under geopolitics, where events and processes that in fact have very little in common with geopolitics are declared as geopolitical phenomena. Not every politics is geopolitics and, to call certain politics – geopolitics, it must be manifested through designed and rounded geopolitical concepts. In order to understand geopolitical concepts, it is also necessary to explain the concepts of geopolitical subjects, geopolitical processes and geopolitical order. Together, these elements structure the geopolitical environment (as shown in Table 1).

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Geopolitical subjects	States and non-state actors that bring their own geopolitical concepts and affect the order and processes in that manner
Geopolitical processes	Events affecting the establishment of the order and may be initiated by the implementation of certain concepts
Geopolitical order	The pattern establishing the hierarchy and thus reserving the place for each subject in relation to others
Geopolitical concepts	Long-term projections of the subjects directed towards increasing power and ensuring a more important place in the order

Table 1. The structure of the geopolitical environment (Kilibarda & Mijalkovski, 2006, pp. 18–20)

Each geopolitical concept differs in a certain geopolitical environment. Therefore, these projections must take into account other elements, rely on the realistic perception of power and goals of other subjects, proper assessment of own place in the established hierarchy and perception of the development of key processes.

Analyzing the geopolitical environment and the position of the USA at the beginning of the 21st century, Saul Cohen, for example, states that in the post-Cold War world, "certain renunciations are necessary". "Modern geopolitics should not be confused with the classical geopolitical „worldview referring to the struggle between land and naval forces or with the long-discredited German geopolitics (*Drang nach Osten*, the author's note)". This American theoretician also recommends that modern geopolitics should not be identified with the concepts of *Containment*, *Domino Theory*, *Linkage* and the "most important member of the group" (*Lynchpin*) because these ideas are related to the deterministic use of the geographical space in the formulation of the US foreign policy. According to him, these concepts were simply embedded in the Cold War real politics with the aim of promoting US expansionism in global proportions at one historical moment. In the post-Cold War approach, it is more opportune to follow Henry Kissinger's advice that refers to ensuring own position in the context of preventing the emergence of a regional power that might threaten US domination in certain parts of the world, or several different states with global ambitions, whose association might create effective balance of power in international relations. Cohen suggests shifting the focus on the home politics of potential "challengers" and their direct surrounding, with inevitable isolation or problematization of the national security question in case it is necessary (Cohen, 2003, pp. 2–3). At the moment of the publication of this proposal, the USA remained the only super-power with no equal rivals in global proportions and with the secured position of the most important factor of

regional security in all parts of the world that are relevant for national security. There was no need to spend resources to an extent and in all those "critical spots" as during the Cold War period because there was no longer "Soviet threat" to be parried. Weapons have changed, a new order has been established and it is possible to act differently towards other subjects and their concepts.

After the breakup of the Soviet Union, Russia mostly avoided confrontations with the USA and the EU, satisfied with its interests being appreciated in political negotiations about resolving crises in certain regions (the Balkans, the Caucasus, Tajikistan, Moldova) and it took part in the implementation of peace treaties which were essentially created by the USA, relying on the NATO and the EU. However, it transpires that this approach did not stop the expansion of the NATO eastwards, which was seen as a huge threat in Russia. Therefore, at the 43ʳᵈ Munich Security Conference (*Münchner Sicherheitskonferenz*) in 2007, Vladimir Putin announced a turn. "On that occasion it was practically announced that Russia would focus on establishing balance of power in international relations, and leave itself the right to act just as the USA in certain international crises. Reporting from this conference, Ljubinka Milinčić wrote: "The Russian president's speech, which lasted more than an hour and a half, with its directness and occasional sharpness, almost shocked the politicians used to diplomatic ways of acting in gloves, particularly because it largely exceeded everything seen so far – there are many who compared this speech with Khrushchev pounding his shoe on the delegate des in the United Nations. Putin spoke about numerous problems of today's era, but will be remembered chiefly for his

accusing the USA of an attempt to rule the world, the NATO of provoking Russia, and OSCE of turning into a "vulgar instrument serving the interests of one state or group of states. At one moment he addressed Gates [Robert Gates, US Secretary of Defense, the author's note] and reminded him that Russia and the USA had signed an agreement about reducing nuclear potential to 1,700–2,200 missiles. Then he told him: "Russia fulfils its obligations. Can the new US minister say that the USA is not hiding excessive missiles in the storehouses, under the pillow or under the duvet?" He surprised many when he explained that he knew about the USA developing new nuclear weapons, but since it would not admit it, he would pretend that he did not know it. "However, what we do know is that you deploy your missiles in our proximity, and you are saying that they are not directed against us. Well, then our weapons are not intended for you either!" Putin also reminded of the words by Werner, the NATO General Secretary, in Brussels on 17 May 1990. "It is a fact that we will not deploy the NATO army outside the territory of the German Democratic Republic gives the USSR firm guarantees of security. Where are those guarantees, Putin wondered" (Milinčić, 2007, pp. 6–7). What Putin implied by this was soon to be seen, in August 2008. Russia immediately admitted unanimously declared independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, which was also the answer to the US action in Kosovo inn March of the same year.

Geopolitical concepts are always oriented towards achieving certain political goals in the precisely defined geographical area. Of course, the goal itself may also be changing the geopolitical order or preventing the implementation

of geopolitical concepts of the others. India, for example, "shows an ambition to coordinate activities in a broader regional framework and to strike balance both towards China's influence and towards activities of the USA in South Asia. Moreover, to find an adequate answer to the establishment of the Chinese-Pakistani partnership, India developed the same type of relations with Japan. After the meeting of India's and Japan's prime ministers in November 2016, it was pointed out that between these two countries "there was a high degree of mutual bringing closer of political, economic and strategic interests, which provides a permanent basis for a long-term partnership". Therefore, India's great strategy is something simpler to understand than that of China, and it includes significant reliance on political power, since India is imposed as a political leader in this part of the world. Apart from its strategic partnership with India, Japan has taken several steps towards increasing political power. For a long time, Japan used to base its foreign on so-called Yoshida Doctrine, named after Shigeru Yoshida, the first post-war Prime Minister of this country. It was founded on three main elements: "Continual reliance on the alliance with the USA, which ensured security to Japan, putting an emphasis on economic relations with foreign countries for the sake of recovering domestic economy and keeping a low profile in international politics. Externally, this doctrine was based on the lack of military power. The government was forced to accept the international environment as a given fact and to hope that the US security umbrella would persist". However, from the second half of the 1990s, changes and orientation could be detected towards a "multi-layered approach" in foreign policy positioning. It means using "internal resources" and "external classification" to respond to new security challenges in the Asian-Pacific region. The instrument for implementing the new foreign policy includes strategic partnerships established with Australia, India and Vietnam. China's growing power potential poses a threat to Japan, while the USA's decreasing power makes Yoshida Doctrine non-functional to a certain extent. Although Japan was the key country for establishing the Trans-Pacific partnership, which points to the maintenance of the high level of relations with the USA, additional measures are undertaken for the sake of ensuring national security" (Proroković, 2018, p. 619).

Nevertheless, in determining goals and aspirations towards their achievement, it is also necessary to ensure their legitimacy. Why do Americans care to keep the dominant role in the world? How much does it cost them? How do the Chinese look at the loans given by official Beijing to many other countries, from Tajikistan to Serbia? Does it mean that all problems have been solved in China, and now it can also "export the capital"? Does the recognition of the equal status to their state by other most important geopolitical subjects (for example, the USA, China and the EU) mean something to Russian citizens? Do they have the reason to support such goals? Why would the Japanese accept to allocate larger budget funds for spreading the cultural or political influence in Southeast Asia? This money can also be used for some other purposes in Japan itself.

The formation of geopolitical concepts takes place not only through looking for answers to the

questions *What?* and *How?*, but also to the question *Why?* The concepts failing to answer the third question sooner or later lose broader public support and, without it, there is no necessary legitimacy either. If there is no legitimacy, it is difficult to apply concepts and, therefore, to maintain the existing order or create a new, planned one. Poles, Czechs, Slovaks and Hungarians were not delighted to accept their joining the Eastern bloc despite the duration of the "socialist camp", the existence of institutions, the observance of laws, even in the relative economic and social development in one period, and they "used" the first opportunity to "run away from the Russian hug". Despite the functioning within the communist system, anti-communist sentiments remained pronounce

and citizens' anti-system positioning could also be seen manifesting in line with the circumstances and personal readiness for sacrifice. Unlike these examples, Bulgarians kept their positive attitude towards Russian influence, which could not be changed even by the NATO membership, just as in Montenegro. The increasing American-Russian confrontation after the escalation of the Ukrainian crisis in 2014 led to all the NATO members being forced into implementing the US geopolitical concept (which can essentially be labelled as *Containment*, regardless of Saul Cohen's advice) and, accordingly, undermining their bilateral relations with Russia (participation in military exercises at Russian borders, voting for political resolutions in international organizations directed against Russian

Photo: Shutterstock

interests, introduction of sanctions, expulsion of diplomats etc.), but it remained an open question as to what extent such decisions of Bulgarian and Montenegrin authorities were – legitimate. There was no reasonable answer to the question *Why are they doing it?* in every aspect (answers were reduced to usual phrases about "the allies' duties" and "the allies' solidarity", but it is not known that anyone in

these two countries thoroughly explained in what way Russia threatened their security, which was the main reason for their joining the NATO and, even less, how it would contribute to their better positioning in the geopolitical order in the long run). From these illustrative examples, it becomes clear that if it is easier to answer the first two questions, then the third one entails a longer debate.

Geopolitical concepts	
What?	Definition of the goals affecting geopolitical processes and shaping the geopolitical order.
How?	By designing strategies and tactics thanks to which the defined goals are achieved in the given geographical area
Why?	For ensuring national security, creating conditions for economic growth and maintaining social stability

Table 2. Three questions in forming a geopolitical concept

The answer to the question *What?* refers to goals. Goals are general – long-term oriented, individual – medium-term oriented in relation to positioning towards certain questions and geographical regions, and current – short-term oriented in relation to specific situations. Table 3 shows the case of defining and classifying the goals of the USA and Russia in the second half of 2020 in relation to the Azerbaijani-Armenian war over Nagorno-Karabakh. Current goals of both sides were determined "on the go", towards individual goals and in line with the general projection. The USA saw this war as a chance for further problematization of the relations in the South Caucasus region, which would force

Russia into direct involvement in the armed conflict (Armenia is a member of the Collective Security Treaty Organization and the Eurasian Economic Alliance together with Russia); afterwards, it was easy to assume Turkey's reaction as well (the strategic agreement on military cooperation with Azerbaijan). This was the continuation of the "campaign" for destabilizing Russia's border territory (and beyond), initiated practically immediately after the breakup of the Soviet Union, and for implementing preparatory activities for the admission of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania to the NATO. By containing Russia and preventing the spread of the Russian influence across the border, the "ranking" is prevented of the

largest country in the world among great powers and the legitimization of its status as one of the centres in the multipolar world. To achieve the general goal – maintaining its dominant role in the world politics, the USA must push challengers "out of the game",

and that is why individual goals are defined and, for the sake of their achievement, all opportunities are taken and, accordingly, current goals are defined in specific situations. It goes without saying that Russia's goals are completely opposite.

Goals	USA	Russia
General	Maintaining the dominant role in the world politics and slowing down the transformation of the structure of the world political system towards a multipolar structure	Legitimization of the status of the equal great power and accelerating the transformation of the structure of the world political system towards a multipolar structure
Individual	Exerting a constant and continual pressure on Russia's borders to prevent the spread of the Russian influence in the surroundings and to prevent the legitimization of this challenger's status of an equal great power	Intensification of cooperation with the countries in the immediate surroundings, involvement in joint political initiatives and increasing the scope of economic and cultural exchange with the aim of the Russian influence penetration
Current	"De-freezing" conflicts with the aim of directly involving Russia in the war and thus creating conditions for the outbreak of a larger-scale and longer armed conflict	Quick end of the war with the consent of both sides and involving Turkey in order to prevent the outbreak of a larger-scale and longer armed conflict

Table 3. Geopolitical goals of the USA and Russia in relation to Nagorno-Karabakh in 2020

The answer to the question *How?* covers strategies and tactics. Strategies refer to general and individual goals, implying a general plan of actions to be implemented, while tactics for individual and current goals refer to the implementation of specific tasks, thanks to which the probability of achieving general goals will be larger. Both strategies and tactics are integral part of the acting of the subjects' institutions. Strategies are directed towards a deeper and more comprehensive distribution of power in a certain geographical area, while tactics are directed towards creating the ambience for realizing it. The observed strategies and tactics, visible in the US acting aimed at implementing the geopolitical concept, are shown in Table 4.

Goals	Strategies and tactics
General	**Strategy**: Spreading influence by accepting the thesis about the US exceptionality in global proportions and increasing other subjects' dependence on the US military, economic and political power
Individual	**Strategy**: Preventing the emergence of challengers that may threaten the domination at global or regional levels **Tactics:** Creating asymmetrical partnerships through bilateral or multilateral arrangements. Influencing the immediate surroundings or home policy of the challengers who refuse the asymmetrical (unequal) status.
Current	**Tactics:** Designing international standards, forming international organizations that will serve the achievement of general and individual goals, excessive borrowing of other subjects, conducting colour revolutions, inducing interstate and interethnic conflicts in geographically neuralgic spots, the use of military forces etc.

Table 4. Strategies and tactics in the implementation of the US geopolitical concept

Specific decisions are made in line with the geopolitical logic and must contribute to the achievement of individual goals and make the general goal more feasible. In compliance with it, foreign and security policies are determined, where improvisations are not desirable, although they are present to a larger or smaller extent.

The answer to the question *Why?* is somewhat more complex. As it has already been described, it refers to legitimacy. The concept of legitimacy is organically related to political science. "A legitimate order is the one accepted by citizens who believe in its justification, usefulness, solidity and justice" (Stančić & Gujančić, 2014, p. 138). Legitimacy "primarily means acceptability, permissibility, justification and the like" (Gujančić, 2013, p. 248). If citizens or the interested political public do not accept certain decisions, the established order or normative acts, it is impossible to speak about the existence of legitimacy, even when everything has been done within legal frameworks. Therefore, something may be legal without simultaneously being legitimate.

Geopolitical concepts need to be justified, acceptable, solid, just and permitted. As such, they will be broadly accepted, supported, and they will motivate society to support then and participate in them. For explaining legitimacy in the context of establishing and implementing geopolitical concepts, there is a useful thesis by Max (Maximilian) Weber about the existence of three types of legitimacy of authority: rational, traditional and charismatic (Stupar, 2010, p. 44). For this German thinker, as Mihailo Đurić explains, rational authority is the rule of "impersonal law"; traditional authority is based on "the faith in the holiness of the existing social norms", while charismatic authority has only a transient

nature and is characterized by the absence of rules, and it is not established either on the rational or on the traditional (Đurić, 1987, pp. 149–155). Of course, Weber's typology is intended for examining other phenomena, so that legitimacy of authority within a society is described, and the use of this parallel is conditional. Just as Weber used these abstract-analytical constructions for sociological research of certain phenomena, now they will be used for examining the legitimacy of geopolitical concepts. Furthermore, just as authority is most often based on the combination of these two types of legitimacy, the acceptability of geopolitical concepts is also ensured in this way.

The first way of the public or society supporting a certain concept is by observing rational reasons. On the one hand, the rational may be explained as useful. If an action brings indisputable benefits, if the gain is certain, the public will support it. On the other hand, denying support leads towards re-examination of the correctness of defined goals, which may also result in the transformation of the long-term geopolitical concept and the alteration of the existing frameworks. If such acting causes clear harm and gains are not quite certain, then it is rational to support the decisions of the institutions or the elite without bringing the achievement of current goals into question. Usually, great interest of the public may be detected in relation to the questions considered vital. To the Serbian public, the "Kosovo question" is vital; to the Armenian public, it is the relationship with Turkey and Azerbaijan; to three Baltic republics, it is the "Russian threat", to the Pakistani public, it is the relationship with India, and to the Palestine public – it is Israel! How much is the Portuguese public interested in the events in Belarus? Probably very little or not at all! Why did Portugal introduce

sanctions to Aleksandr Lukashenko in the autumn of 2020 and joined all the restrictive measures introduced by the EU to the officials in Minsk (EU, 2020, pp. 1–6)? Because something like that is rational. The lack of interest can also be a rational choice when an alternative is the re-examination of the established goals. To the Portuguese public, Belarus election was an occasion too small and uninteresting to open up the major process of re-examining the geopolitical concept of the entire EU. In fact, when legitimacy is explained by rational reasons, the public follows the attitude of the elite and institutions that define goals and determine geopolitical concepts.

Another way of legitimization is ensured by insisting on traditionality. Tradition is heritage, a set of material and spiritual knowledge and experiences on which the identity of a culture relies. If rational choices are most frequent for practical decision-making, then traditionality dominates when we speak of the conceptual dimension of geopolitical concepts. Naturally, tradition changes, but it changes through several interactions, and it is only when new knowledge and experiences become generally accepted and stand the test of time, that the old is rejected or transformed. Maintaining tradition is quite important because of social stability, which is the prerequisite of development and, consequently, the determination of geopolitical concepts. Traditions have also succeeded in forming practice in many religious, and hence the difference between certain nations and societies from the same "religious circle" in practising religious rites, even in interpreting certain teachings. As a matter of fact, traditions observed in the broadest terms lead to divisions inside the Cristian bloc into eastern and western branches, just as the Mohammedan world is divided into Shiite and Sunni!

A great return of the religious and unavoidable in the geopolitical in all post-communist countries, including China, where, for example, contrary to the Tibetan and Uygur spiritual diversity, Confucianism was offered from the official level as a specific quasi-religious substitute, speaks volumes about the rooted traditions and the ability to preserve tradition, customs and (historical) memory despite all prohibitions and repressive measures during half a century.[2]

Donald Trump's victory and all the consequential events that followed in the USA also speak in favour of the thesis that traditions are difficult to change and that for establishing a new system of values, it is not enough to institutionally promote new patterns (opposed to the previous tradition) and to conduct a campaign directed towards their acceptance. A large number of the US citizens (in the 2020 presidential election, it essentially transpired that the US society was divided into two equal blocs) did not accept new patterns regarding family values, legalization of same-sex marriages, implementation of a gender equality policy, and even those regarding the prohibition of racial discrimination, which proves that the decisions made for decades were legal, but their legitimacy was brought into question.

The conceptual arises from the traditional, and on this basis images are created about friends and enemies, unimportant and important matters, the permissible and the impermissible. Such images shape the geopolitical logic on which geopolitical concepts are defined and distribution of power in space is legitimized. That is why the conceptual can also sometimes be irrational. In history, there are quite a few examples of the irrational in the formation of geopolitical concepts. The most illustrative one is related to the Nazi regime in Germany. In the political chaos after the capitulation in the First World War, the distorted interpretation of certain historical events and their harmonization with weaker or more conspicuous historical images and rooted perceptions, the ideas were spread of anti-Semitism, Aryan superiority and, therefore, the predetermination of the German-Aryan race (*Volksgemeinschaft*) to dominate over less valuable nations (*Untermensch*) inhabiting the "living space" (*Lebensraum*). In practice, it led, on the one hand, to terrible atrocities and horrible crimes and, on the other, it united previously opposed great powers into a single anti-German coalition. Instead of domination, the irrational positioning caused a total disaster.

Moreover, for example, in February 2021, in the pre-election campaign in Bulgaria, one political party (the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization) addressed the "Macedonian question", considering historical processes through the framework constructed in this manner, and on several occasions it spoke in a rather ugly and inappropriate way about Serbia's position and role in the Balkans. The matter was even worse because the IMRO was led by the former Minister of Defence, and his assessments had "greater weight" and "official importance". At that moment, there was not a single rational reason for disrupting correct and promising bilateral relations between Bulgaria and Serbia, especially because the

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[2]   The credit for the classification of Confucianism as a religion goes most probably to the European missionaries who recorded religions in non-Christian societies in the middle of the 19th century. Essentially, Confucianism is rather a social and political philosophy with a strong influence on the development of Chinese society, traditions and customs.

argumentation in which politicians cited the decisions of Emperor Samuil from the 10th century could not be used for something like that! However, the most interesting thing of all is that such justifications were well received by part of the public. In any case, if something different had been expected, politicians would not have used that trump card in the pre-electoral period. Hence, here there is a top-down influence by part of the public, perhaps rather narrow and small in numbers, but focused on one political question, which led to the definition of certain geopolitical goals aimed at keeping the territory of Vardar Macedonia as a unique cultural area in the Bulgarian sphere. To conclude, it is important to emphasize that historical perceptions, even those based on wrong assumptions or those based on myths, may affect the idea dimension of geopolitical concepts. Regardless of the attitude of the elite or the projections of institutions, regardless of rationality, legitimacy for certain aspirations still exists and it directs geopolitics. This is important because the deconstruction trend, visible primarily in the western part of the world, contaminates science on a large scale. You often cannot see the forest for the trees. Consciously or unconsciously, collectivities and general interests are ignored, frameworks are built insisting on the non-existence of nations and societies as stable categories. Everything is fluid, inconsistent, while the general interest is presented as a simple sum of individual interests. Geopolitical concepts are not always or, more precisely, not only based on direct and practical benefits, but also on the conceptual, which most often comes from the depths of the traditional, historical and religious. Geopolitics as a discipline cannot and must not take into account only the top-down principle in perceiving political processes.

The practical dimension of geopolitical concepts develops in line with the goals related to ensuring national security or gaining certain economic or political benefits. That is why distribution of military, economic and political power in a territory is projected. Hence the direct connection of foreign and security policies, as well as of public policies with geopolitics. Looking from the perspective of practicality, distribution of power towards certain geographical areas is conducted in line with own potentials and in order to parry rivals most efficiently. Geopolitics is a view of the space from the state's perspective. Maintaining the adequate someone else's order or its transformation in order to ensure a better place are projected through geopolitical concepts. Great and regional powers or state systems with a long history of practical acting have capacities and knowledge to project long-term policies towards a certain geographical area. Masterful Habsburg or, in a later phase Austro-Hungarian policy towards East European nations was directed towards changing cultural patterns so as to bring elites closer to Vienna and distance them from Moscow in the long run. Such approaches also affect the conceptual dimension of other nations' concepts, leaving trace and transforming value patterns and shaping geopolitical patterns of others. The period of unipolarity, which continued after the sharp Cold War ideological confrontation, during which new values, new content of universality and global ideas were promoted, based on the concept of political correctness, also left a deep trace in the transformation of geopolitical logic of a whole series of nations and societies.

On the other hand, however, there is also the conceptual dimension of geopolitical concepts as a historical process, as maintaining certain aspirations

and objectives of a series of nations and societies, which may be affected by practical geopolitical concepts to a certain extent, but not completely. How much has the new content of universality and global ideas affected the Muslim societies? Or, in addition, how much has it been affected by communism, which is accepted in part of the Muslim world? There have been certain transformations as, in fact, in the previous historical epochs. The Islamic practice in Bosnia and Herzegovina was grafted onto roots different from those in Pakistan or Nigeria, and their customs are also manifested differently – just as Orthodox Christianity in different regions continued the traditions created in certain geographical and political circumstances. That is why there are differences in the customs between Russian and Greek patterns. Nevertheless, the essence has persisted, the conceptual closeness is reflected in the attachment to the same or similar value patterns, which cannot be altered by the current change of the geopolitical order either. Peoples, nations and societies, with the general interests that are not a simple sum of individual interests, are also geopolitical subjects, namely individuals making decisions or institutions designing geopolitical concepts simply cannot be avoided. On the contrary, others must adapt to them. To be legitimate, geopolitical concepts must be cloaked in the conceptual, which is traditional, ideological or religious, but most frequently ideological relying on the traditional and/or religious. The US geopolitical concepts are cloaked by the idea of freedom and human rights, and they have relied on it ever since Woodrow Wilson's famous speech. Both foreign and security policies in the Middle East may be defined in line with quite specific interests regarding energy security and stability of the dollar system in international

economy, as long as geopolitical concepts are based on the story about human freedoms and rights which Americans brought to the oppressed people of Iran, Iraq and Syria, legitimacy will be ensured. Russian geopolitical concepts, ever since the time of Nikolay Danilevsky, have relied on the development place, the presentation of own uniqueness, Eurasian worldview, so different both from the Western, Chinese, Indian or Muslim ones. Even communists, including the staunchest among them, ensured legitimacy in very difficult situations among the people by resorting to this logic. One speech by Joseph Vissarionovich Stalin, beginning with "brothers and sisters" did perhaps much more for the legitimization of Soviet aspirations than repressions and red terror. Imposition spreads fear and due to it three is a loss of manifestation of the customary in everyday life, but deeper traces of the conceptual can never be erased, regardless of how much they have transformed or adapted.

That is why political research cannot be based only on exploring the practical dimensions of geopolitical concepts, which is becoming a concerning standard. Such research must also take into account the historical development of the conceptual, from which legitimacy for any type of acting derives. Moreover, the historical development of the conceptual has always taken place in certain geographical areas with physical-geographical and socio-geographical characteristics. Denying that geography plays a role in determining the conceptual is as dangerous as geographical determinism itself.

From the perspective of international security and world politics, this should be taken into account. The Cold War victory of the West or, more precisely, the USA, opened the doors to a flood of neoliberalism and broad promotion of the hypermodern as the only

mutually complementing concepts. Perhaps it is best summarized in the title of the book about the end of history by Francis Fukuyama. The end of history may also mean the end of the conceptual. Moreover, the transition to the neoliberal paradigm meant that all this had to be seen through the market prism. Everything must have its mathematical expression and numerical value. Namely, in the contest of geopolitical concepts, everything must be explained rationally, point to the practical and applicative, and be paid off quickly. To a certain extent, it also became a new logic, called *New Age Religion* by Gregory Copley. *New Age* began, which will be completely different from all previous historical eras. This illusion that is the anteroom to new conflicts, fierce disruption of international security. International relations were predominantly seen through the prism of own views; the world was measured by oneself and not by others, which, instead of understanding, brought stereotypes. The Western view of the events in Russia was reduced to the conclusion that it was necessary to work with the elite and produce changes by the media pressure. The absence of changes, the inability of bringing down Vladimir Putin's relatively high rating during the second decade of the 21st century, was interpreted by a simple statement that it was due to the institutions led by the individuals defending their privileges. However, the idea of loyalty to the ruler in Russian society is much deeper than that. The process of shaping a centralized hierarchical system proceeded throughout history exactly due to geography, forming the practice that also became part of tradition. The first prerequisite of survival of the nation-creating process in cruel climate conditions in the course of centuries was surviving winter, then protecting from natural disasters and immediate threats, and then ensuring sufficient quantities of food. An individual could not survive in a cruel natural environment without relying on the collective. Commitment to collectivity is primordial, hierarchy is necessary, while opposition or disagreement with decisions is expressed in a completely different way than in the US society, which is the place of development of different patterns. Once again, Russia's shock by the decisions of the West after 2014 could not be hidden. The campaign about Russia's malign influence was a great surprise. To a certain extent, Russia does not understand the logic of West European nations to whom the threat has always come from the geographical East (or Southeast). Invasions of the Mongols and Huns, the confrontation with Byzantium and then with the Ottoman Empire, had a logical continuation in seeing Russia as an enemy even much before the foundation of the Soviet Union. In that respect, Russia's policy of cooperativeness regarding Western interests, implemented in the 1990s, made very few changes. Within the conceptual framework, it is implied that the threat traditionally comes from the East, and orientalism as such, either Oriental or Eurasian, threatens the foundations of Western civilization. Again, the Chinese projected their approach within the long tradition of meritocracy as the dominant principle and mercantilism as the basis, which is logical in the circumstances when one society, large n numbers during a long uninterrupted period, develops in a relatively small geographical area with limited resources, therefore using economy as the foundation of their growing influence and geopolitical projection. To them, it remains hard to understand where anti-Chinese elements have suddenly come from, the struggle against *Chinfluence*, when they decided to overcome disputes through negotiations or even to prevent them through very precise

agreements. They took time to understand that they are not welcome everywhere, exactly due to the differences in the conceptual, although economic relations are built on practical benefits, often mutual.

Power distribution in an area implies actions, whereas each action cause a reaction. Reactions are based not only on the specific answers and institutional acting to protect strategic, economic and political interests in a certain area, but also on the conceptual, which lasts and is manifested in such situations. The basis and causes of conflicting interactions in international relations (and, in the case of geopolitics, in the observed geographical area) should be sought not only in the conflict of the practical, but also in the confrontations of the conceptual. Speaking of geopolitical concepts, in analyses it is necessary to take into account both dimensions. Without it, a distorted picture is obtained of the processes and a bad interpretation of events.

Comprehensive and successful geopolitical concepts must answer not only the questions *What?* and *How?*, but also the question *Why?* The established goals, primarily the general ones – long-term oriented, and, to a certain extent, individual, medium-term oriented, must be legitimate, no matter whether legitimacy is drawn from the rational and/or the traditional.

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35 years from the fall of the Berlin Wall: consequences and modern tendencies

Abstract: The paper examines modern processes in Europe three and a half decades after the fall of the Berlin Wall. The time distance offers more favourable conditions for perceiving the Berlin wall and its role, as well as the causes of the fall of real socialism and the ensuing processes by using the historical and comparative method, and also the synthetic-analytical method. The paper is divided into three segments: the first one deals with the demystification of the Berlin Wall and its historical role from the time of its construction to its destruction; the second segment deals with the analysis of direct and long-term consequences of the fall of the Berlin Wall, while the third one is dedicated to the forms of changes and their tendencies in Europe. The conclusion of the paper synthetizes the findings from all three chapters and gives a critical review of today's state of affairs on the European continent.

Keywords: Berlin Wall, unification of Germany, fall of socialism, transition, geopolitics

Introduction

The fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989 was indisputably one of the most important world events of the 20th century – the culmination of the crisis of the East European real-socialist system which ended by the collapse of its federal states and the beginning of transitioning processes due to which these territories were gradually joined to the semiperiphery of the world's capitalist system. Left without its Cold War rival, the West entered the state of its zenith, the "unipolar moment" reflected in the domination of the USA in international relations and world economic processes with unquestionably imposed solutions in line with the Washington consensus, i.e., the neoliberal agenda.

The destruction of the Berlin Wall, which had huge symbolic and real-political significance, has been raised to the mythical level in the past three and a half decades – by projecting binary

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oppositions between Western liberalism and Soviet command economy, liberalism and authoritarianism, multiparty and one-party regimes, with the aim of glorifying the triumph of the former, allegedly positive, and fully denigrating the latter, historically unsuccessful and allegedly negative. Of course, this is a Manichaean simplification which hides rather than reveals the true social and political processes that followed.

The Berlin Wall from its beginning to its fall

The division of Berlin was a direct consequence of the Second World War results and the beginning of the Cold War rivalry of the two opposed blocs. Just as whole Germany, its capital Berlin was occupied at the end of the war and divided into four allied occupation zones: three Western (American, British and French) and one Eastern (Soviet). Through the unification of its occupation zones into the capitalist Federal Republic of Germany, this country was included first in the Marshall plan (1948) of the economic recovery of Western Europe (see Hogan, 1989) and then in the NATO (4 April 1949). The Soviet reaction followed in the form of establishing the German Democratic Republic (7 October 1949) and, subsequently, of the socialist military alliance – the Warsaw Pact. A similar situation occurred in the city of Berlin.

The beginning of the conflict related to West Berlin referred to the so-called "Berlin Airlift", by which the Western countries avoided not only the control of everything entering (and leaving) Berlin, but also maintained the army's presence in "their part" of Berlin. Moreover, maintaining the existing status quo preventing reaching any permanent peace solution regarding Germany's position in Europe. The pro-Western "Berlin enclave" was a thorn in the tissue of the Eastern interest sphere: it set an example of successful Western market society and represented a specific springboard for a mass exodus of East German population to the West.

The causes of this situation were multiple: the western part of Germany had already been economically more developed and territorially much larger than its eastern part. In addition, the western part suffered less in the war devastation in 1944–1945, while it also received a disproportionately larger aid during the Marshal plan. In the same period, the eastern part of Germany was treated as an occupied region from which the Soviets initially took away goods in order to compensate for the damage inflicted on them in the German invasion of the USSR

During the Cold War, the Soviet Union never actually intended to attack the Western capitalist part of Europe (Gaddis, 2005b, pp. 61–83). Despite the great military power, the Soviet leaders and their East European satellites could clearly see the extent to which their countries lagged economically and socially behind the leading Western countries. For those reasons, all the belligerent rhetoric and rattling of weapons from the East had in fact a defensive character. In the last stage of his reign, Stalin offered a deal to the West about the unification of two Germanys and becoming an armed, neutral state between the two ideologically confronted military blocs (Kissinger, 1999, p. 441). His proposal was rejected by the Americans who did not

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want the devaluation of their efforts in integrating West Europe in their military and political camp (Kissinger, 1999, pp. 438–439). Closing the borders and isolation of West Berlin was only a form of a threat shown by the Soviets in order to force the West to return to the negotiations. In fact, as early as 1953, the Soviets rudely refused the request of the East German communist leadership to close the borders between the two parts of Berlin. The Kremlin warned its German party comrades that

such a step was politically unacceptable, urging them to implement on their own "as liberal policies as possible", embodied in the so-called new course (in June 1953), the consequence of which would be a much better living standard of the population in East Germany, strengthening them in their intention to stay in their country. The Soviet recommendations did not encounter approval of the East German political leadership (Brzezinski, 1967, pp. 101–120).

The Berlin Wall (Berliner Mauer) in the Tiergarten district of Berlin, October 1988.
Photo: Shutterstock

Khrushchev began giving in to the requests of the German Democratic Republic only at the beginning of the 1960s, after the unsuccessful negotiations with Kennedy at the Vienna summit in June 1961 (Kempe, 2011, p. 247). At that time he was forced to resort to a new and undesirable defensive strategy, into which he was pushed by the East German allies. In the end, Khrushchev let the East Germans build the Berlin Wall and thus prevent passage of its population towards the western part of Berlin (Hope, 2003, pp. 9–10).

The construction of the wall began at midnight, on 13 August 1961, after the East German army units closed all border crossings and demolished the streets, and then started putting barbed wire and fence in the length of 156 kilometres and, in the later stages, raised a concrete wall instead of it. The true effect of the wall became clear in the very first days of its existence: due to its construction, a large majority of East Germany citizens could no longer (without a complex legal procedure) enter West Berlin and migrate further to the West. Despite all this, during 28-year-long existence of the Berlin Wall, about 100,000 East Germans tried to cross it and flee to the West, about 5,000 of whom succeeded in it (www.chronik-der-mauer.de).

The situation remained more or less unchanged in the following two and a half decades. During the 1980s, it became evident that the entire Eastern bloc and its political and economic system were affected by a deep crisis. Simply, the practical visible life was deeply opposed to the proclaimed ideals whose achievement lacked real beliefs and morals. The West used the occasion to support and help the spontaneously emerging protest movements against the ruling regimes in those countries, whose main impetus was mostly not pro-capitalist and multiparty-parliamentary, but primarily national, and even nationalist. It was only later that the reformist-nationalist movements here and there transformed into specific advocates of Western liberalism, mostly for the reasons of profitability of acquiring direct aid from the only remaining superpower (see Klingemann et al., 2006, pp. 9–10).

The year of 1989 witnessed a whole series of revolutionary events in East European socialist countries, first of all in Poland and Hungary. Like a chain reaction, they were also spread into East Germany, the staunchest Soviet satellite. During the summer months, Hungary turned into a "flow boiler" through which, after the opening of the borders, the refugees from other Eastern bloc countries hurried to the West, primarily those from Romania and East Germany, where the situation was the most difficult both in political and economic terms. This was soon followed by mass anti-regime demonstrations led by church dignitaries; they spread all over East Germany during September and grew into the so-called "peaceful revolution" during the autumn of 1989. Faced with the dissatisfaction that could not be stopped by repression, the long-term leader of East Germany, Erich Honecker, resigned on 18 October and was replaced by much more moderate Egon Krenz. By the beginning of November 1989, the protest movement reached its culmination in the demonstrations in Berlin's Alexanderplatz, where about half a million people gathered. When the pressure of the refugees on Czech and Hungarian borders became unbearable, Krenz's government opened East German border crossings towards West Germany, including those in Berlin itself (see Rottman et al., 2008).

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At 10.45 pm on 9 November, the border authorities opened the passage for the crowds which were, on the other side of the wall, joined by many citizens of West Berlin. During that evening, young people from both sides of the wall began climbing and destroying it. Thus, the night of 9 November became "the night when the Berlin Wall fell down" (German *Mauerfall*). On 22 December, the Brandenburg Gate on the Berlin Wall was opened, and West Germany's Chancellor *Helmut* Kohl was the first to pass through it on his way to meet his East Germany's counterpart, Prime Minister Hans Modrow. The following day, the no-visa regime was agreed about between the two parts of Berlin. During the spring of 1990, East Germany's army completely destroyed the Berlin Wall in the length of 156 kilometres. Only its six segments were left to stand as monuments of one epoch. The whole process was completed in November 1991, when two Germanys were already unified.

Direct and long-term consequences of the fall of the Berlin Wall

It transpired that the destruction of the Berlin Wall and the unification of two Germanys were only the first stage of the total collapse of the Eastern bloc. The dissolution was marked by a number of dramatic events, interethnic disputes and conflicts within the Soviet Union during which some of the federation members declared their independence from Moscow. Federal Czechoslovakia was gradually divided into two states – the Czech Republic and Slovakia (the peaceful separation agreement was signed in Bratislava on 23 July 1992). Socialist

Yugoslavia, although it did not belong to the Eastern bloc, but played an inter-bloc role, was dissolved from the autumn of 1991 to the spring of 1992 in the bloody civil war between the secessionist republics and those members which wanted to preserve the federation. Unified Germany played an important role in the collapse of Yugoslavia because it supported the positions of the secessionist republics and rushed to recognize their independence (forcing the newly-formed EU into it by conditioning the Maastricht Treaty with the support to the division of Yugoslavia) (see Baun, 1996). As early as January 1990, the European Economic Community (the predecessor of the EU) established the PHARE program of aid to democratic transition in the eastern part of Europe, which was available chiefly in Poland and Hungary. This was one of the first big steps of the future EU on the international scene.

The biggest direct consequence of the fall of the Berlin Wall was the creation of the unified German state in the centre of Europe. Unified Germany immediately started playing the key role on the old continent and assumed the leadership within the EU institutions, gradually directing it towards the achievement of its priority interests (see Hofhansel, 2005).

Germany persistently used other methods to achieve the majority of its goals which it had not achieved by force in the first half of the 20th century: to create an autonomous geopolitical pan-area with Germany itself in its political, economic and cultural centre, surrounded by a belt of weak and dependent states into whose territory it would be able to place its products and from which it would, in turn, be able to receive enough favourable resources it lacked. The main obstacle in the way of German

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plans to peacefully achieve its strategic interests is the US hegemony in Europe, i.e., its geostrategic approach aimed at simultaneous "restraining" (see Gaddis, 2005) through "the implementation of the strategy of geopolitical separation, i.e., preventing continental integrations past America between the eastern part of Europe and the Eurasian Heartland, on one side, and its peripheral, highly developed but resource-poor western part on the other side. The slogan reflecting this geopolitical vision is: *Keep Germany down, Europe in. and Russia out*" (Gajić, 2010, p. 4).

The fall of the Berlin Wall and the destruction of the real-socialist bloc enabled the USA, through the processes of transition and Euro-integrations, attract in geopolitical terms former socialist countries into its orbit, to spread the NATO eastwards, to the very borders of Russia, and then to push such reformed countries into the EU so as to have a multiple role – to constitute a burden resisting to German hegemony in the EU and causing it constant problems, while also becoming a new "sanitary cordon" that prevents contact and any coming closer between unified Germany and consolidated Russia. The EU expansion process was realized in geopolitical terms by using it to implement the construction of the internal regional balance of power in the contours of modernized Spykman's R-H doctrine (Spykman, 1942). Layne (Layne, 2003, p. 17), for example, directly points to the fact that this strategy is based on 1): intimidating all other Germans, which should make American presence be accepted as necessary: 2) preventing every separate, authentic common external and security EU policy ("second pillar obstruction"); 3) encouraging "over-expansion" of the EU for the sake of watering

down and preventing the creation of a unique and efficient policy and bringing divisions that reduce the strength of the EU.

In the past three decades, Germany succeeded on the largest scale in reintegrating the eastern part into a unique legal, political and economic order: the high mortality rate in the territory of former East Germany was reduced to the level close to that in the western part of the country; the economic growth rates in this period were higher in the eastern than in the western part of the country. Nevertheless, the unemployment rate in the east remained much higher than in the rest of the country, except for two regions (but only after 2006). The territory of former East Germany is still less integrated in international markets than the western parts of the country. Foreign direct investment is far lower, as well as the share in the country's exports. Moreover, the share of immigrants in the total population in the east of Germany (about 2%) is substantially lower than in the west (9%). As for the unification of the living standard, the best results were achieved. On average, the nominal GDP per capita in the east of Germany amounted to about 20,000 Euros in 2005 as compared to 29,000 Euros in the west (Buch, Toubal, 2007, p. 5).

The greatest success was achieved in the sphere of social integration: inhabitants' pensions were unified by fully recognizing the work experience to all those who had acquired it in former East Germany; earnings in the eastern part of Germany amount to about 98% of identical earnings in the west; legal systems, just as all forms of social assistance were unified, while huge efforts were invested into uniform investments in infrastructure, environmental protection and healthcare. However, a whole set of

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problems remained: young, highly-educated population from the east of the country still migrated to the western parts of the country; although the birth rate increased in comparison to the beginning of the 1990s, it is still not good. The legacy of socialism in the east of Germany is still visible, particularly in the resistance to the abrupt social stratification into the excessively rich minority and the majority that somehow makes ends meet, then in less pronounced tendencies towards being involved in entrepreneurship and preference for being employed in public services, stronger requests for social justice and egalitarianism than it is the case in the western part of the country.

Forms of changes and their tendencies in East Europe during the past 35 years

Numerous social and political processes occurred in the territory of Central and East Europe during the period after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the "velvet revolution" which led to the end of the real-socialist system. Contrary to the euphoric predictions about the "end of history" (Fukuyama, 1992), the following three and a half decades showed that history had other courses than the predicted ones, with new and deep divisions in different spheres of European life.

The European Union is divided into the countries within the unique monetary territory and outside it; into the developed north and the undeveloped south; into non-religious and partly re-traditionalized part; into "old" and "new" Europe; into Europe with sovereignist authorities and rope; into Europe with sovereignist authorities and Europe inclined towards bureaucratic Bruxelles; Europe in which populist movements of left and right options arise, and Europe with still prevailing the system, liberal and anti-populist agenda; those antagonistically disposed towards Russia and those that want to recover and keep as good relations as possible with it.

After the escalation of the Ukrainian crisis, Russian military interventions and the sanctions against Russia imposed by the EU and the USA, a new "iron curtain" fell over Europe, this time in the West. In its modified form, it aspires to repeat the Cold War antagonism from the past. Russia is trying to parry it by protecting its vital strategic interests. Former socialist countries of Central and East Europe have remained behind the line of this division, in the Western interest sphere or on its margin (e.g., Ukraine), most of them as the members of the EU and the NATO, and some with the status of membership candidates. All of them also have different roles in internal divisions and rivalries within the Western institutional structures, trying to keep part of their sovereignty and to defend national interests before they see in what direction the territories of Europe will further be taken by the ongoing historical processes.

Looking from outside, former countries of real socialism do not essentially differ from West European countries by their political and social organization. They are considered democratic states due to the degree of achieved civil rights and political freedoms, due to the general voting right for all adult citizens, due to the multiparty political system with periodic electoral cycles, due to the possibility of accessing the public sphere through media for all forms of political association etc. However,

the degree of the population's participation in democratic elections shows significant differences between West European countries and former socialist countries. While in the west of Europe, average voter turnout is 40–50% of the electorate, during the first decade after the introduction of the multiparty system in the east of the old continent, voter turnout was much higher, accounting for about 65% of the electorate. This turnout began dropping during the first decades of the 21st century and went down to about 55% (European Commission, 2014, p. 30). The main reason for it lies in the increasing degree of apathy and the belief that elections cannot substantially affect social and political processes, i.e., social elites initiating and implementing them. Most former socialist countries are considered "consolidated democracies" today, while only a small number of them are considered "semi-consolidated democracies" (Romania and Bulgaria) (see Ágh, 2019). According to some attitudes, in certain democratic systems, stable until yesterday, there is a reverse process due to the populist disruption of division and mutual control of the branches of power, and these countries once again start being seen as "semi-consolidated democracies" (Hungary, Slovakia, Poland) (Ágh, 2019, p. 12). In reality, the transition of the former real-socialist countries into multiparty democracies and market economies turned them into specific "hybrid regimes" with different forms of society transformation, in which legacies of socialism and etatism are intertwined with national sovereignism and (neo)liberal influences. Only in the countries of special strategic interest to the USA (e.g., Poland and some Baltic states) it is allowed not to privatize strategic industries, but to recapitalize and keep them in the state's majority ownership. In other

countries, brutal privatization and "shock therapy" as prescribed by Jeffrey Sachs were conducted, in line with the principles of Washington consensus (Gore, 2000). It was only ten or more years after the collapse of the "old order" and numerous transitioning troubles that the privatized economy of these countries began coming closer to the level of the economies in these countries before their deep system crisis of the 1980s. However, the redistribution of these funds is different now because of the increasingly pronounced degree of inequality and social divisions into the rich minority and the more and more impoverished majority, with the weakening of the middle class which has been halved or on the verge of disappearance (Baldassarri et al., 1993, pp. 49–61).

The biggest changes are definitely those in the economic sphere. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, the whole former real-socialist bloc turned to market economy in its liberal or socio-market form (Poland, Hungary). This system is characterized by the withdrawal of the state and political decision-making from economy, decentralization of decision-making and opening the market for free competition, particularly for the participation of foreign companies in economic activities. All these countries were included in the world's capitalist system as its semiperiphery (see Wallerstein, 2004), with new accompanying forms of inequality and the increased unemployment rate. On the other hand, there are no longer chronic shortages of certain consumer goods, so characteristic for the previous economic system, due to the strong influx of imported goods.

In the period from the end of the 1990s to 2009, the economic gap between the old, West-

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ern members of the EU and the newly-received, former socialist countries gradually decreased, but still remained large. The convergence process was caused by foreign direct investment and open trade relationships, i.e., by including former socialist countries into a broader unique market and customs territory. The quality of production was significantly raised as the main form of profitable economic activity, but also the level of services in the tertiary sector (see Rapacki et al., 2009). In a new position of well-being for the post-socialist territory were direct foreign investment and licenced transfer of technologies. These investments and transfers arrived in the former socialist countries mostly from Germany, Austria and the Netherlands. The biggest receivers of direct foreign investment were Poland (as many as 36% of all investments in comparison to 10 countries admitted into the EU in 2004), the Czech Republic (19%) and Hungary (14%) (EU Commission, 2014, p. 43). During and after the world economic crisis, foreign investments started decreasing abruptly, which bears witness to the structural weakness of some of the "pumped-up" economies of the newly-received EU members (first of all, Baltic countries, but also Romania, Hungary etc.) (Götz, 2016, pp. 15–33). During the second decade of the 21st century, economies of these countries begin to recover, although the level of their economic development is still far below the levels recorded before 2008.

Three and a half decades after the beginning of transition and the introduction of the multiparty system, and more than two decades of the membership in the European Union, in post-socialist countries there is an evident series of problems: widespread system corruption, political intolerance,

discrimination against ethnic minorities and the adoption of formal, "façade" democracy as an instrument of manipulating the electorate. Moreover, there is a specific resistance of former Soviet satellites towards forms of supra-national connecting. In fact, the collapse of real-socialism was seen by the inhabitants of these countries as an opportunity for recovering national states, with traditional, historical identities and all the characteristic of sovereignty. Quite naturally, post-socialist countries are not delighted by the idea of sacrificing their newly-acquired sovereignty for the sake of new supra-national integrations, particularly because these integrations bring more and more problems similar to those survived by these countries as part of the former eastern camp. In the circumstances when in the territories of the West there are ongoing processes of deconstruction of traditional and collective identities simultaneously with the thriving of other, alternative identities, their adoption and promotion in the seats of supra-national edifice only causes an increasing resistance in the newly-received member-states.

There are other controversial processes as well, while the most pronounced one refers to the mass migration of younger population to economically developed countries in the territory of the old continent (e.g., Poland, Baltic countries, Romania and Bulgaria). Although life expectancy in these countries has been extended by as many as three years due to the improvement of general living conditions as compared to the last years of the socialist system – mass migration further aggravated negative demographic trends in these countries (see Liikanen et al., 2016). Disbalances in the working-age structure of the population threaten both economy and

pension systems of the former socialist countries in the long run, facing their political elites with the problems equal to solving the "squaring the circle".

Final considerations

Historical distance offers us more favourable conditions to perceive more realistically and critically the Berlin Wall and its real role in the Cold War period, as well as the causes of the collapse of real-socialism and the ensuing processes.

    At first sight, it is clear that the Berlin Wall, its construction and role were not the consequence of different ideological worldviews and essential features of the two opposed social systems, but, first of all, the forced tactical decision due to the impossibility of reaching a compromise between the superpowers at the time. The Soviets supported the construction of the wall only when no other option was available. To declare a forced, partitioning fortification-type system for a symbolic feature of a socio-economic order, opposed by its social antipode in every aspect, is a rough simplification and mystification. Both parties, on both sides of the wall, were mutually closed, in the Cold War guard and military readiness, while open for cooperating with ideologically close countries or Third World countries (although on different foundations) (McMahon, 2003).

    Moreover, today it is becoming clearer and clearer that the claim about the triumph of the capitalist and individualist West over the socialist and collectivist East owing to the fall of the Berlin Wall is rather problematic. The eastern real-socialist system collapsed from within, on its own,

due to its weaknesses and rigidity. However, the West performed subversive operations of the wide range, but they had second-class significance for turning the back to the outdated socialist regimes. Additionally, the thesis is completely unsustainable about Regan's investing in the armament race (the "Star War" project) having exhausted th3 budget of the Soviet military superpower, forcing it to invest more funds in keeping the military balance, while in other segments, primarily those referring to the production of consumer goods, the Eastern bloc was lagging behind on a large scale. All the plans about military investments in the USSR in the 1990s had been made much earlier, in the first half of the 1970s, and they could not be affected by the fear from Regan's "Star War" – namely because this program began much later. As for the media influence and openness of the West, it is true that the Eastern bloc could no longer maintain the negative picture of the opponent among its own population. Nevertheless, faced with cruel capitalism in which they found themselves quite soon – most of the recently socialist countries and their citizens immediately opted for the permitted socio-market concepts (that is why in the majority of these countries, reformed communists in the socialist or socio-democratic versions returned to power in the 1990s). The problem was that, with the disappearance of the so-called communist threat, West European social-market state itself was disassembled, while the territory of the most developed European countries was also gradually subjected to the neoliberal agenda which adamantly crushed the legacy of the "welfare state" (see Wahl, 2011). In the final outcome, the damage from the collapse of socialism was borne not only by the

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east, but, to a large extent, the west of Europe as well (Gajić, 2011, pp. 11–13).

Today's confrontations and divisions into antagonized camps also show us that the territory of Europe has not become the territory of peace and wellbeing. The old strategy of "eastward penetration" in a new guise, along with Eurointegrations, has led to dangerous expansion of the NATO into

the depth of the Eurasian continent. It caused the Russian reaction, particularly after the idea about the construction of the "nuclear shield" in the territory of East Europe which was intended by the NATO to neutralize the danger of the potential Russian nuclear "backlash". Step by step, new antagonism led to the total isolation of Russia from the larger part of Europe and ostracism of all those

Berlin sharing during the Cold War, map at Mauermuseum Check point Charlie
Photo: Shutterstock

European political subjects advocating reconciliation and an attempt of achieving new forms of cooperation. Former countries of the real-socialist camp are subordinated to the trans-Atlantic hegemon and forced, to, willingly or unwillingly, play the allotted role in new forms of continental confrontations.

In the meantime, the territory of entire Europe became exposed to new (mostly negative) trends, post-ideological influences and social processes: aging and decreasing number of inhabitants, cultural and identity decadence, caused mostly by hedonistic culture of the West with its egocentric determinations; mass migration from the Third World territories; terrorist activities, as well as the thriving of alternative identities and their post-ideological agendas whose goals are undoubtedly disputable in the long run for the survival of modern societies and all forms of community. Faced with these challenges, the east of Europe is proving more resistant and vital than its western part, which has delved deeply into the spaces of scepticism, apathy and desperate grasping of small, most personal material privileges. In the territories of former socialist countries, it turns out that historical identities and religious beliefs are stronger than in the west of Europe. It is

evident that during the Cold War and the existence of the Berlin Wall, under proclaimed atheism and communist internationalism, the layers of traditional values, religious beliefs and national-collective determinations remained conserved, while nihilistic processes in the West deeply cut into these identity layers, so that today these "open societies" appear unable to cope with modern challenges.

In any case, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the world did not become better, more peaceful and safer; on the contrary, today the Cold War balance of power is seen as the time of stability, while the political and social circumstances of the time are considered much more favourable than those today. In the period following its fall, it transpired that the Berlin Wall and real socialism were not the greatest danger pressurizing European nations and pushing them into unnecessary and dangerous mutual confrontations. The awareness emerged of a much more dangerous wall standing and determining the destiny of the world's nations – "Wall Street", and that only its fall might lead to partial fulfilment of the wishes which used to be (and it can be seen now, too early) awakened by the fall of the less important and substantially less ominous one – the Berlin Wall.

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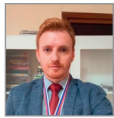
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Reviving the Monroe Doctrine – Trump's Campaign for Panama, Canada and Greenland

Abstract: The research subject in this paper is the foreign policy of the newly-appointed US president Donald Trump in relation to the parts of the Western Hemisphere – primarily Panama, Canada and Greenland, openly claiming them for the United States of America. The starting hypothesis is that Donald Trump wants to revive the Monroe Doctrine formulated as early as 1823 and stipulating that the United States should be the indisputable master of the Western Hemisphere. The research results show that, despite Donald Trump's pompous announcements that he would expand the territory of his country during the first six months of his mandate, no significant steps were taken in that direction. In the research, the historical method, the analysis method and the case study method were applied.

Keywords: Donald Trump, United States of America, Monroe Doctrine, Western Hemisphere

Introductory considerations

After the magnificent and convincing victory in the presidential election held on 5 November 2024, with 49.80% votes (a total of 77,302,590 votes, 312 out of 270 necessary electoral votes) and the defeat of his rival from the ranks of the Democratic Party, Kamala Harris, who won 48.32% votes (a total of 75,017,613 votes, and 226 electoral votes), Republican Donald Trump became president of the United States of America for the second time. Few people were not surprised and taken aback by the fact that Trump had defeated Harris in all the so-called swing states – Nevada, Arizona, Georgia, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Michigan and Wisconsin (CNN, 2024). During the pre-electoral campaign, Trump clearly announced to his voters and Americans in general that, if he was elected president of the state, he planned to continue where he had left off four years earlier. As his internal political and social

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priorities, Trump established the opening of new vacancies for US workers (especially the poor and the middle class), reduction of inflation and taxes, protection of Christian family and public values (fight against the LGBT ideology, *woke* culture etc.) and deportation of illegal migrants, particularly those with criminal records. The foreign policy aspects of Trump's pre-electoral promises concerned, first of all, stopping the wars in Ukraine and in the Middle East, and then economic reining of China, introduction of customs duties on the imports of goods from a large number of the countries worldwide and financial "disciplining" of other NATO member-states (N1, 2024).

After officially taking the oath on 20 January 2025 as the 47th US president, Trump presented his "Project 2025" to the US public – a 900-page list of public policies he was planning to implement in the following four years. The most important proposals in "Project 2025" are the following: placing the entire federal bureaucracy, including independent agencies, under direct control of the president (so-called unitary executive theory, abolition or substantial reduction of the scope of operations of certain state agencies such as the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), restriction of the sale of abortion pills (Trump had previously given up the idea to demand the abortion prohibition at the national level), deportation of millions of "undocumented" migrants and continued construction of the wall on the southern border with Mexico, leaving international treaties regarding climate protection and exploitation of the US energy sources (the famous slogan *drill, baby, drill*) and recognition of male and female genders as the only natural genders (Wendling, 2025).

The concept and meaning of the Monroe Doctrine

To understand Trump's foreign policy orientation, which will be elaborated further in the paper, and whose core implies full political, economic and security domination of the United States of America, first it is necessary to look at the concept and meaning of the Monroe Doctrine, which laid the foundations of such thinking and practice as many as two centuries ago. The Monroe Doctrine is a brief US foreign policy strategy devised by US President James Monroe in 1823. According to it, most succinctly, it was supposed to prohibit further colonization of the countries on the American continent by Europeans under the slogan "America to Americans", on one side, as well as to put the given territory under the direct military, political and economic control of the USA, on the other side (Petrović, 2023, p. 10). It is impossible to understand the Monroe Doctrine without understanding the historical context in which it emerged. At the beginning of the 19th century, the United States was a young state which still feared British colonialism, as well as other European colonialisms and, for the sake of their suppression and prevention, it was guided by two kinds of logic – the first, to take as much space as possible for itself on the North American continent (through purchase, military conquests, displacement of autochthonous populations), and the second, to spread its influence as much as possible onto the geopolitical territory today referred to as Latin America. At that time, Latin American countries had just began liberating themselves from Spanish and Portuguese colonialism and were much more backward than the USA

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in all aspects. In fact, most of them copied the US political system, with the president as a dominant political figure, a bicameral parliament, and even a two-party system. What significantly differed the countries in this region from the USA were clientelism, amoral familism and caudillism (the cult of adoring the strong paternalist leader) as gener-

ationally rooted negative forms of socio-political relations (Krstić, 2014).

There is no doubt that from 1823 to 1898, the United States managed to establish absolute hegemony in the Western Hemisphere. The year of 1898 was marked by the American-Spanish war, which resulted not only in Spain's defeat, but also

James Monroe, by Gilbert Stuart, 1820-1822, American painting, oil on canvas
Photo: Shutterstock

in the complete collapse of the Spanish Empire, which practically ceased to exist. Apart from the Philippines and Guam, the United States also took over Cuba from Spain, and thus began spreading its influence in the Caribbean region. What should not be forgotten is that the US domination over its Latin American neighbours was also confirmed during the American-Mexican war (1846–1848), when the US not only kept Texas, but also conquered a third of the young Mexican state, where the US troops even marched into the capital, Ciudad de Mexico. As for Canada, which actually gained its independence from the United Kingdom in 1931 and with which the US shares the longest land border between two countries worldwide, the United States did not experience larger political, let alone military conflicts. To tell the truth, the United States waged war with the British troops in today's Canadian territory long ago, in 1812, but that conflict had no American-Canadian features in today's meaning of these concepts, but represented Britain's attempt to recover former American colonies and put them under its control. During the 20th century, the United States conducted a series of both direct and indirect supported military actions across Latin America with the aim of overthrowing unsuitable regimes both ideologically and in other ways. Their number is estimated to have been even more than 50. Thus, the US army invaded the Dominican Republic in 1965, Grenada in 1983, Panama in 1989, and Haiti in 2004. It wholeheartedly supported the right-wing anti-communist regimes (particularly after the fear of the spread of communism after the success of the Cuban Revolution in 1959) in the broad and dec-

ades-long operation known under the code name "Operation Condor)" – from Augusto Pinochet in Chile, via Jorge Rafael Videla in Argentina, Alfredo Stroessner in Paraguay, (Hugo Banzer in Bolivia and Francisco Morales Bermúdez in Peru, to the support to Manuel Noriega in Panama and the so-called Los Contras in Nicaragua. The outcome of all this was that the United States entered the 21st century as an absolute hegemon in the Western Hemisphere, and definitely as the only global superpower in the period after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the implosion of the Soviet Union. The latter had a particularly negative effect on communist Cuba and Sandinistas in Nicaragua as the last point of resistance to the US geopolitical and geoeconomic ambitions in that part of the world.

Trump like Reagan – anticipated invasion on the Panama Canal?

It is important to understand the history of the US-Panama relations in order to understand Trump's unhidden ambitions concerning the return of the Panama Canal under the US control. Panama gained its independence from Colombia in 1903 thanks to the direct political and indirect military aid of the United States. In the meantime, the United States negotiated with Colombia and managed to get permission for digging the Panama Canal on the narrowest isthmus separating the Caribbean Sea from the Pacific (after the failed French attempt to do it at the end of the 19th century). In 1914, the Americans finally completed the canal 82 kilometres long and between 90 and 350

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metres wide, putting it under their control. The most important political figures in Panama in the second half of the 20th century were two dictators – Omar Torrijos and Manuel Noriega, whereas both of them stayed in power thanks to the US support, and both of them were overthrown at the moment when they no longer worked on behalf of the US interests. The only thing remaining useful for Panama's long-term interests after Torrijos was the agreement he signed with US President Jimmy Carter, stipulating that the Panama Canal was to be returned under Panama's sovereignty in 1999, which actually occurred later. It has already been emphasized that the United States invaded Panama in 1989, when it successfully overthrew Manuel Noriega's narcokleptocratic regime, the consequence of which was Panama's democratization, but also the end of the Panama's army. Today, the United States is the largest Panama's import and export partner and the two countries have had the free trade agreement since 2012 (Petrović, 2023).

Only two months after his victory in the presidential election and before his inauguration, Trump threatened, in his own way, that his country would put the Panama Canal under its control, just as had been the case before 1999. In fact, Trump accused Panama of charging excessively high prices for the transport of goods through the Panama Canal, emphasizing that such a situation is not only extremely unfavourable for the United States (because China's trade and infrastructural presence in that area was becoming dizzyingly strong), but also unfair, because his country had built that canal. The newly-appointed US president

has rather explicitly stated that he would not let the Panama Canal "fall into wrong hands", referring to CK Hutchison Holdings, with the seat in China, operate two strategically important ports, one of which is situated at the entrance to the canal from the Pacific, while the other one is at the entrance from the direction of the Caribbean Sea. In one of his addresses to the American nation via the social network Truth Social, Trump said that the United States was stolen from in the Panama Canal, as well as in other parts of the world, emphasizing that the fees charged by Panama were ridiculous and rather unfair. In addition, Trump said that if Panama's authorities failed to be fair to the United States regarding the utilization of the Panama Canal, the United States would recover the Panama Canal quickly and fully. On the other hand, the president of Panama, José Raúl Mulino, in his address to the Panama's public, said that China did not operate the Panama Canal, that Panama's independence cannot be the subject of negotiations, and he clearly pointed out that every square metre both of the Panama Canal and of its surroundings, belonged to Panama and that would not change (Voice of America, 2024).

However, Panama's blunt answer did not discourage Trump in his intention to continue the pressure on this country because of the Panama Canal. In fact, in his inauguration speech Trump promised his fellow Americans to return the Panama Canal under US control, citing the "Manifest Destiny" – a concept of the US expansionism according to God's providence which, under the strong influence of the puritan religious thought, was formulated back in the 19th century. He ac-

cused Panama of shifting its operations in relation to the control of the Panama Canal to China and thus breaking the promise made in the agreement that came into force in 1999. "We didn't give it to China. We gave it to Panama and we will get it back", Trump said (Milikšić, 2025). At the end of April 2025, Trump emphasized that US ships, both military and commercial, should be allowed to go through the Panama and Suez Canals free of charge, explaining that these canals would not even exist without the United States. On that occasion, Trump added that he had asked US State Secretary Marco Rubio, son of Cuban anti-communist immigrants, "to take care of this situation immediately" (Politika, 2025a).

Trump's proposal about joining Canada to the United States of America

Historically looking, the relations between the United States and Canada as to neighbouring and young countries in the Western Hemisphere were extremely good until recently. Both countries are the NATO members and their defence policies are additionally interwoven through joint air command of the United States and Canada – the North American Aerospace Defence Command (NORAD). They share the border 5,525 miles long which is not guarded by military forces, while the geographic, traffic and economic connectedness of the border parts of these two countries is also important – namely, Seattle and Vancouver and their surrounding areas form a single macro-re-

gion, where the border is often crossed only with a driver's license or student ID card. From 1993 to 2018, the United States and Canada, together with Mexico, functioned within the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), subsequently replaced by the new agreement in 2018. The American-Canadian economic interaction is significant and, for example, during 2023, the cross-border exchange of goods and services exceeded the value of 2.5 billion dollars on a daily basis. The overall relations of the United States and Canada were raised to an even higher level during the mandates of two left liberal presidents – Joseph Biden and Justin Trudeau in the period between 2020 and 2025 (Gatz et al., 2025).

However, the beginning of Trump's second presidential mandate brought drastic worsening of the US-Canada relations. In fact, as early as December 2024, before his official inauguration, or only a month after his electoral victory, Trump spoke to Canadian Prime Minister Trudeau and not only threatened to introduce high customs duties to the northern neighbour, but also proposed that Canada should become the 51st US federal state, which shocked both the American and Canadian, as well as the world public in general. Trump clearly underlined that he found Canada, just as Mexico, guilty of being allegedly unable to stop the entry of illegal migrants and narcotics from its territory to the US territory. The US president also told the Canadian prime minister that the trade deficit with Canada exceeded 100 billion dollars, warning that he would impose customs duties of 25% on all Canadian goods. Trudeau pointed out that such a move

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might destroy Canadian economy, while Trump, in an extremely mysterious way, commented that Trudeau might find it nicer to have the title of the governor of the 51st US federal state than the current title of the Prime Minister (Stefanović, 2024). The following month, Trump invited Americans not to buy Canadian products, repeating that he would like to see Canada as the 51st US federal state. Although, on the other hand, Trudeau said that it would not happen, Trump did not stop his rhetoric, but further strengthened it by publishing the map of the United States with Canada as its part on his profile on the Truth Social network. After Trudeau's resignation from the position of the Canadian prime minister, Trump said that the US-Canadian border was artificial and that many Canadians would rather be part of the United States (RTS, 2025a). In February 2025, Trump once again repeated that the solution to the tension in the Canadian-American economic relations (after Trump fulfilled his promise in January 2025 by introducing customs duties of 25% on all Canadian goods) might be Canada's annexation to the United States. Canada responded reciprocally by introducing tariffs on the US goods in the amount of 25%, while Trump subsequently recalled part of the imposed tariffs. However, the US President sent the following message via the Truth Social network: "We are paying billions of dollars for subsidies to Canada. Why? There is no reason for that. We don't need anything they have. We have an unlimited amount of energy sources, we should produce cars on our own ad we have more timber than we can spend. Without our subsidies, Canada would exist as a sustainable

country. Harsh but true!" (Politika, 2025b).

In the meantime, the British research agency "YouGov" conducted a survey among the Canadians about the potential joining of their country to the United States, where 77% respondents said that they opposed it on a larger or smaller scale. On the other hand, only 36% Americans (mostly Trump's voters) were in favour of annexing Canada, while 42% of them (mostly voters of Democrats and Kamala Harris) were against it. As many as 74% Canadians think that the potential annexation would be a difficult process, and this opinion is shared by 68% Americans. In contrast, only 13% Americans and 15% Canadians think that joining the two countries would proceed easily (Politika, 2025b). It did not discourage Trump who, at the end of April 2025, before the parliamentary election in Canada, wished this country good luck in the election, repeating his attitude that it should be joined to the United States. "Choose the man with strength and wisdom to halve your taxes, to increase your military power to the highest level in the world, free of charge, to quadruplicate your operations with cars, steel, aluminium, timber, energy and all other industries with no customs duties or taxes – all this if Canada becomes the 51st US state", Trump wrote on that occasion on the Truth Social network (Politika, 2025c). However, the election was won by the Liberal Party of Mark Carney, Canada's new prime minister, who said that Trump would not succeed in breaking Canada and achieving his goal of possessing it, speaking emotionally about the United States wanting the Canadian land, resources and water (RTS, 2025b).

Greenland – from the buyout proposal to open threats to Denmark

Greenland is an autonomous territory which, together with Denmark and the Faroe Islands, makes part of the sovereign Kingdom of Denmark. It is the biggest island in the world, with the surface area of 2,166,086 km², situated on the North American continent and constituting part of the Arctic Circle. Its population is mainly Inuit (wrongly and deroga-torily called Eskimos), whose status has never been equal to that of Danes as the ruling and economic elite in that region. Apart from being rich in fish and tourist potentials due to rarely seen and intact nature, it is supposed that under its ice surfaces Greenland abounds in gold, coal, copper and zinc. The island fell under the rule of the Vikings as early as the end of the 10th century, when Eric the Red and his expedition landed on its shores, while it has been under the control of the Danish crown since 1721. During the past 300 years, Denmark, in line

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with its authorities, exploited Greenland economically, spread Protestantism and its own cultural pattern among the oppressed Inuit population and, thanks to Greenland, even today the Kingdom of Denmark has the status of the largest country in Europe (excluding Russia as a Eurasian country), as well as the status of the Arctic power (Vićentić, 2021, p. 160). The Inuit way of life in harmony with the nature and from the nature has been disturbed for generations under the tutorship of official Copenhagen, which substantially led to the fact that today's Greenland is the area with the highest suicide rate in the world. Accordingly, many Inuit people strive to make Greenland an independent state, seeing it as the only way of protecting both their own identity and natural resources (Petrović, Babić, 2024, p 185).

Owing to its exceptional geostrategic importance in the context of "the race for the Arctic" between great powers which is inevitable because of global warming and the melting of thick ice covers, Greenland has become almost an obsession for Donald Trump. Although 80% of the territory of Greenland is covered by ice and has only 56,000 inhabitants (mostly living in and around the capital Nuuk on the southwest shore of the island), the United States have its Pittufik Space Base on Greenland (formerly Thule Air Base), which is an important segment of the US defence strategy on the Northern Hemisphere and the projection of power towards the Artic in the future. During his first presidential mandate, in 2019, Trump first offered the Danish authorities to buy Greenland, but a clear answer came from the Danish government and Ministry of Foreign Affairs – that the island was not for sale, which put an end to this story at the time (BBC, 2019). However, Trump's return to power brought a different and more decisive rhetoric about the future of Greenland. Namely, he once again offered Denmark the opportunity to sell Greenland to the United States, but at the same time he clearly stated that the military option of taking over Greenland was also considered in case the purchase was not realized. The US president repeated many times in the first half of 2025 that Greenland might be part of the United States in the future despite the fact that the Danish government did not want to give up this island and the Greenland's Inuit population did not want to join the United States. Nevertheless, Trump proved the seriousness of his intention by sending Vice President, James David Vance, as well as his son Donald Trump Jr to Greenland. During his visit to the above-mentioned Pittufik Space Base, Vance said that "the United States must take control over Greenland in order to stop the threat of China and Russia" (Politika, 2025d). He repeated Trump's position that Greenland should be part of the United States for the sake of world peace and that official Copenhagen had not invested enough in the people of Greenland or in the future of this island (Politika, 2025d).

Conclusion

There is no doubt that newly-appointed US President Donald Trump wants to make the United States a great country once again, which was also contained in his famous pre-electoral slogan, primarily in military and geopolitical terms. Trump's promises to his voters and all citizens of the United

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States were numerous and often grandiose. One of them, although indirect, was that their country would remain the unrivalled military, political, economic and geostrategic master of the Western Hemisphere, just as it has been in the past hundred-odd years. In that respect, wanting to keep the United States competitive to China and Russia, two growing global powers, Trump resorted to the revival of the Monroe Doctrine, established as early as 1823. According to it, Americans have to important tasks – to prevent the entry of other powers into the Western Hemisphere and to make the United States the absolute master of this area. Trump's decision to have the Gulf of Mexico officially renamed into the Gulf of America Bay clearly speaks about how meticulously this enterprise is addressed. Unlike Russia, whose presence in the Latin American territory is not significant, China really constitutes a great American rival in the observed part of the world, where it is sufficient to mention that today China is the most important trade partner to all countries south of Colombia and Ecuador. It is in this context that Trump's intends to overburden China by high tariffs, on the one hand, and to take over the Panama Canal, Greenland and even Canada, on the other hand.

After the first hundred days of Trump's administration we can certainly say that Trump, apart from his intensified rhetoric, has done nothing specific to strengthen the positions of the USA in the Western Hemisphere within the context of his unhidden intentions concerning Greenland, Canada and the Panama Canal. Specifically speaking, Trump did not join any of the observed territories to the United States nor did he put them under the US direct control. Canada decisively declined the wave of Trump's initial threats that it might become part of the United States, official Washington still does not apply import tariffs to the goods from Canada, while the new Canadian government is even more determined than the previous one in its intention to keep the sovereignty and territorial integrity of its country. What should be taken into account here is the factor of the Francophone Canadians in Quebec (more than 20% of total Canadian population) who have for decades fiercely resisted Anglo-Canadian domination and assimilation and would not accept to be part of yet another, even larger Anglophone unit. The smallest chances for implementing Trump's new Monroe Doctrine refer exactly to the case of Canada. Trump has somewhat bigger chances when it comes to the future of the Panama Canal. Although this country's authorities vigorously refuse the proposal of renouncing control over the canal, not so long ago Panama has already fallen victim of the US military invasion. An extenuating circumstance for Panama might be the fact that today's China depends too much on the Panama Canal in terms of trade that it would so easily leave it under full US control. Finally, it seems that Trump has the best chances for realizing his intentions in Greenland. The situation there is that most Greenlanders on the one hand and most Danes on the other hand are against the sale of this island to the United States, but the question arises as to how ready and able they would be to put up defence against potential US invasion. In security terms, Denmark as part of the NATO directly depends on the United States, while the aggravating factor may definitely

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be the fact that Greenlanders are not interested in defending Danish interests in their own territory. To conclude, there is no doubt that Trump will further strengthen his rhetoric in the direction of the three above-mentioned territories, but it remains to be seen whether the self-proclaimed "world peacemaker" will take a step further and use force.

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Military force mobility as a challenge for the European Union in the field of defence

Abstract: The paper analyzes the triggers for the consideration and the extent to which the European Union has improved military force mobility in Europe. Military force mobility ensures efficient, timely and safe transport and deployment of military staff, weapons and equipment for the needs of conducting missions, operations, exercises or everyday activities. The Russian-Ukrainian conflict pointed to an urgent need of substantially improving military force mobility within and outside the European Union through the realization of projects related to military mobility and through the development of the dual-purpose transport infrastructure within the trans-European transport network. Free movement of military forces in Europe, without any obstacles, is the question of strategic importance both for the EU and the NATO. However, it has been concluded that the current state of traffic communications is not at the satisfactory level and, according, the EU (and the NATO) undertake comprehensive measures to create conditions for completely unobstructed movement of their own military forces. The conclusions in this paper have been drawn mainly by the use of the analysis method and the comparative method. The data were collected by the qualitative content analysis of the relevant documents and statements, while the presentation is mostly chronological. In disciplinary terms, the paper is founded on science of international relations, chiefly on the foreign policy analysis.

Keywords: European Union, military forces, mobility, collective defence, defence initiatives

Introduction

Military force mobility in Europe, which implies quick transfer of forces and equipment from the west to the east of the continent is the topic that has for a longer period of time been high on the agenda of the top-level meetings in the European Union (EU) and the NATO. It is the organized movement of military staff, weapons and equipment in the existing traffic network, including crossing the

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borders between the countries by using different modes of transport – by land, water and air. Efficient military mobility within as well as outside the EU improves its capabilities of responding to crisis situations in its neighbourhood. It enables the member-states of the EU, as well as of the NATO, to act faster, in line with their defence needs and obligations, and in the context of collective defence (the NATO) and military and civilian missions and operations within the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), i.e., within various national and multinational military activities. However, military mobility is potentially affected and disturbed by the current various national, European and international rules, procedures, regulations and directives. That is why it is necessary to define a comprehensive "European" approach, which would be shared with relevant international entities present in the "European" territory, such as the NATO and the states with no membership in the EU and/or the NATO, in order to resolve potential problems in this respect and ensure fast and unobstructed movement of military staff, weapons and equipment in all regions where it is necessary.

Although military force mobility in historical terms is present, particularly during the Cold War, changes in the strategic environment and expansion of the EU and the NATO into the former members of the Warsaw Pact produced simultaneously problems in its realization due to various factors, such as differences in the infrastructure, but also neglecting this segment in the West. Key changes occurred after the first stage of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict in 2014, and particularly after February 2022. The intensification of the military mobility question has been present at the EU level, especially since the adoption of the EU's Global Strategy in 2016, which gave a new momentum in that domain. At the same time, a number of deficiencies have been observed that needed to be resolved, while it is also necessary to perform adequate coordination at the level of a series of EU's new initiatives in the sphere of defence.

Military force mobility in Europe

The practical starting point in the consideration of military force mobility in Europe was the military exercise *Saber Guardian* conducted in Romania in July 2017, where part of the US Armed Forces, based in Germany and Poland, also participated. In the course of re-basing the equipment necessary for the implementation of the exercise, due to complex administrative procedures in Romania, part of the equipment was "kept" for a period of time, while simultaneously, due to the lack of railway transport capacities, it was not known how much time it would take to send the military equipment of the US Armed Forces to the given location. However, the key trigger for initiating the question of military force mobility in Europe was the temporary landing of the helicopter transporting the former Commander of the US Land Forces in Europe, Lieutenant General Benjamin Ben Hodges, from the Bezmer Air Base in Bulgaria to Capu Midia in Romania, because of the necessary customs procedures (Judson, 2017).

In historical terms, the problem of military force mobility in Europe was also present on a smaller scale in the Cold War period. In fact, during that period the NATO regularly conducted large exercises extremely remote from the bases, crossing

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the borders of the member-states with no obstacles. Moreover, there was a build infrastructure for the NATO forces. It was defined exactly what roads and railways were used for the transport of military forces, as well as load-bearing capacity of bridges and dimensions of tunnels on those sections. Even the specific-purpose pipeline system functioned for supplying fuel to allied forces stationed throughout Central Europe, but with the gradual expansion of the Alliance eastwards, no standardized infrastructure was established in the member-states. After the breakup of the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact (1991) and the foundation of the EU (1993) until Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, the NATO did not consider the question of military mobility nor did it have precise data about the routes for transporting forces from the west to the east in the shortest period of time. Furthermore, the branched network of roads and railways in the territory of Europe did not offer a larger number of options for efficient transport of military forces, but it additionally aggravated the existing situation. On the other hand, transport in many directions bears the risk of the people, main military means and equipment not reaching the given target in a timely or simultaneous manner, for the sake of efficiently connecting the forces.

Unlike the EU, whose battle groups ever since their foundation have never realized any movement in the territory of Europe, the NATO and the USA continually maintain their significant military presence in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania and Bulgaria, while regularly conducting large-scale exercises intended exactly for fast transfer of

Transport of military equipment by water using US Vehicle Carrier ENDURANCE, port of Bremerhaven in Germany, military exercise DEFENDER- Europe 20, February 2020.
Photo: NATO.

substantial military forces from the USA to Europe. In that respect, the complex of the US military exercises *Defender Europe* is seen as the greatest activity whose scenario involves transferring the American forces from the USA to Europe and military force mobility in the territory of Europe. At the same time, there is also the assessment that the efficient defence of Europe depends on the speed of transferring and grouping the NATO forces. Therefore, the need arose for establishing efficient routes from the West European countries to the NATO's eastern wing (Chihaia, 2024). However, the 2014 annexation of Crimea and the assessment that in the previous decade Russia conducted exercises at great distances from the peacetime unit bases, in the territory of Belarus and in the vicinity of the border with the Baltic countries (Facon, 2019), made the EU and the NATO begin collecting data about the condition and usability of passenger and railway traffic for military needs in the territory of the member-states, particularly Germany.

It is the organized movement of military staff, weapons and equipment in the existing traffic network, including crossing the borders between the countries by using different modes of transport – by land, water and air.

In November, the European Commission and the EU's European External Affairs Service, (EEAS) issued the Joint Communication "Improvement of military mobility in the European Union" (European Commission, 2017). Relying on it, in March 2018 the Commission announced its first action plan on military mobility (European Commission, 2018) which included the following: 1) harmonization of military needs; 2) assessment of the transport infrastructure for military purposes; 3) harmonization of military regulations with the EU regulations; 4) precise definition of customs duties and value added tax, and 5) facilitation of cross-border movement of military forces (European Court of Auditors, 2025). After the first three actions, the Union undertook measures for harmonizing military requirements with customs regulations and permits for cross-border movement. A digital form was created to be used by the forces of both the EU and the NATO, as a substitute for the EU "302" form and the NATO "302" form, for crossing the border between the stats (European Commission, 2021). The last action – facilitation of cross-border movement of military forces – was realized by the EU through the "Military Mobility" project within the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO).

The European Union and the NATO try to establish the conditions for unobstructed military force mobility in the land territory of Europe, such as the NATO's Rapid Air Mobility initiative (RAM). It functions by the model where by activating RAM, the NATO's airplanes are given a unique call sign "OAN" to be recognized as a priority by the European aviation system and to remove any restrictions of the capacities of the military air space for specific-purpose flights. Although this question has been dedicated significant attention since 2018, the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, which drastically escalated in 2022, clearly pointed to all the problems on the example of the transport of weapons and military equipment from the European countries to Ukraine. For example, the delivery of tanks from Spain, France or the Netherlands to Ukraine involves

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transport of vehicles weighting 65 tons and more across the territory of Germany. Just as any commercial transport company, the armed forces of the EU and the NATO members faced the reality of the application of regulations in the German federal system, e.g., timely submission of the requests for permits for heavy-weight transport, finding suitable passenger and railway routes with adequate capacity and condition of bridges and tunnels, receiving time frames for transport on a congested railway network and lengthy border procedures (police and customs).

In line with the above-mentioned, we can define five main challenges to military force mobility in Europe, primarily Germany: 1) condition of the transport infrastructure; 2) administrative obstacles; 3) restricted capacities for transport; 4) protection and deficiencies of communication systems, and 5) mutual relations of the EU, the USA and the NATO.

The role of Germany regarding military mobility is extremely important because of its comprehensive role in modern political processes within
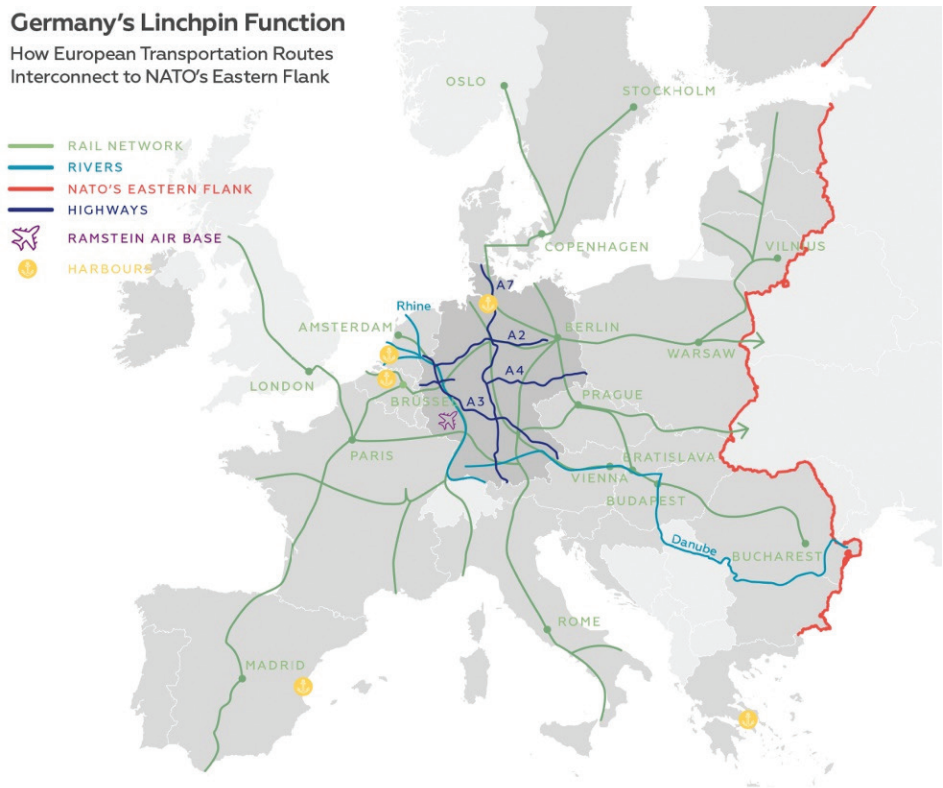
Map 1. European military transportation routes
Source: Hartmann, 2024, p. 4

the EU, as well as the NATO. Germany is considered one of the most important US allies in Europe and its territory is seen as the key transit zone. Due to its geographical position, Germany has the key position in Europe and borders nine countries, seven of which are members of the NATO.

Moreover, apart from the fact that the largest number of the US military forces in Europe are stationed in Germany, that the U.S. European Command (EUCOM) and the U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) are situated in Stuttgart, while the seat of the Allied Air Command is in Ramstein, Germany is, in the context of military mobility questions, the leading member of the NATO in terms of logistics due to the seat of the Joint Support Enabling Command, (JSEC) in Ulm, which is intended exactly for enabling fast relocation of military forces across the national borders in Europe. Therefore, Germany can successfully respond to all requirements and needs of the alliance, with additional efforts though, because, despite technological and industrial develo9pment, the railway network and a large number of existing railway and passenger bridges are outdated or even unusable for military transport.

During the Cold War, German military and transport infrastructure was in much better condition than today. In practical terms, after the collapse of the Warsaw Pact and the Soviet Union and the unification of Germany, military signs were removed from highways, and important information about the condition and load-bearing capacity of the existing roads and bridges was lost. Furthermore, new highways, bridges and tunnels were not built in line with military needs and requirements, and that is why their today's usability is debatable.

The transport network in Germany covers 13,000 km of highways and approximately 40,000 km of railroads, including numerous east-west connections of essential importance for the movement across the continent (Hartmann, 2024, p. 2). The waterways such as the Rhine, Mein and Danube Rivers are of vital importance for heavy-weight transport, connecting industrial regions with the ports in the Netherlands and Belgium, as well as in East and South Europe.

After the analysis of the collected data, it was concluded that in Germany there was a rather limited number of the NATO's infrastructural facilities from the Cold War period which could still be used for large military convoys, while in other NATO members there was not a single facility like that (Hartmann, 2024, p. 6). The above-mentioned is considered a huge problem because the route to the Baltic countries takes across several large rivers and canals. Within the analysis, three main components of the traffic infrastructure were examined: roads, railroads and navigable rivers/canals. The advantages of railway transport cannot be compensated for by road, water or air transport because of the weight and quantity of most frequently transported weapons and military equipment. That is exactly why Germany's railway network has the greatest significance for the NATO's military force mobility. The condition of 33,000 km of railroads was assessed, including tunnels, bridges and other key components, and the results showed that 23% of German railway was in poor condition. German railway underwent drastic changes at the beginning of the 21st century due to the reduced investments in less profitable routes and the closure of 5,400 km of railroads or

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16% of the whole network. In the period between 1994 and 2018, only 1,700 km of railroads were built or renovated. In contrast to railway, 247,000 km of the road network were built during the same period. However, its condition is only negligibly better because 4.500 of 40,000 bridges in Germany are in poor condition and inadequate to support the transport of heavy military vehicles (Hartmann, 2024, pp. 4–6). As a consequence, military transports are forced to go around for hundreds of kilometres, which causes delays and, accordingly, increased costs. The infrastructure on navigable canals and rivers is also sensitive and requires investments since, due to faulty locks, whole segments of waterways may be closed, while there are no alternative routes.

Another challenge for military mobility is posed by administrative obstacles both between the EU and the NATO member-states and within them, which is contrary to the free movement of the EU citizens and goods enjoyed in the Schengen zone. This is caused by the absence of standardization because each European country has its own national regulations and documentation necessary for transporting military forces across its borders. Therefore, for example, the NATO's military convoy in Germany and Slovakia must be registered 10 business days before the arrival, between 4 and 14 business days in Romania, or as many as 14 business days in the Czech Republic (Weaver, 2022). Furthermore, if transport is announced in a timely manner, the border customs can control weapons, military equipment, staff and complete accompanying documentation. According to Cokelaere, the paradox lies in the fact illustrated by American General Hodges – "that it is necessary to make the NATO's

military forces move across Europe at the speed of a truck with apples travelling from Poland to Lisbon" (Cokelaere, 2022). Having in mind that convoys are used in the organization of military transports, it can be concluded that, without the accompanying infrastructure, transport of the NATO's forces is much slower than commercial transport. The second circle of administrative obstacles refers to the procedures existing within the member-states. In relation to the already mentioned example of Germany, the state's federal structure creates additional obstacles in transport of other countries' military forces because it requires further approvals for crossing the borders between German federal states. Moreover, military transports must often be conducted only at night so as not to disturb regular traffic and cause congestions, and to avoid the zones with the prescribed lower level of permitted traffic noise. Of course, the above-listed restrictions may be put out of force, but in that case, it is first necessary to declare an emergency situation (Hartmann, 2024, p. 7).

If is particularly important to consider the third challenge to mobility – restricted capacities for railway transport – because the railway system plays the key role in transport of heavy weapons and military equipment, especially tanks, infantry combat vehicles, self-propelled howitzers, missile systems and other weapons For transporting these combat systems, time frames are defined in advance for using railways and railway companies (train engines and cars), equipment for loading/unloading and transport, as well as necessary accompanying staff. Moreover, the number of flat-body freight cars for transporting armoured and other combat and non-combat vehicles has drastically dropped since

the end of the Cold War, and without their sufficient number, it would be impossible to quickly transport a large number of armoured combat vehicles.

The fourth challenge, i.e., protection of transport infrastructure, pertaining communications and logistics, is an inseparable element of improving military force mobility. For example, the attack on the internal communication system of German railway in October 2022, when two cables were cut on two separate locations (in the vicinity of Berlin and in the Ruhr region), cut both the main and the reserve communication systems, leading to hours-long suspension of traffic (ABC News, 2022).

Finally, the fifth challenge, playing one of the most important roles in the sphere of military force mobility in Europe, refers to mutual relations of the EU, the USA and the NATO. This challenge exists because large-scale military transport is realized to the greatest extent by the USA across the EU territory for the NATO's needs, while most countries (23) on the European continent are members both of the EU and the NATO.
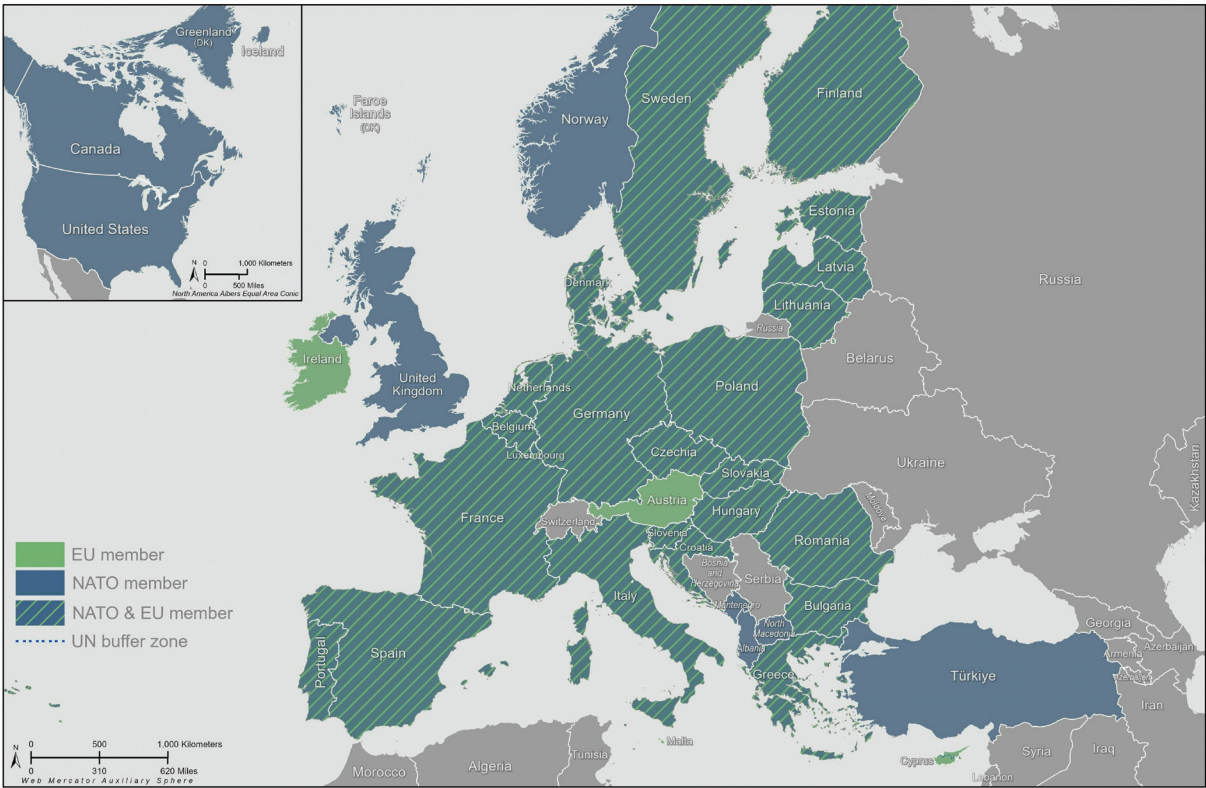
Map 2. Member-states of the EU and the NATO
Source: NATO HQ SITCEN, Geospatial Section, August 2024

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However, their mutual relations are rather complex because for improving of military force mobility, the EU uses its own capacities and defence initiatives which for years have not been open for the participation of the "third countries", including the USA and the European members of the NATO which are not EU member-states at the same time. Nevertheless, due to their interdependence and mutual needs, as well as the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian conflict, military force mobility in Europe is one of the few areas in which there is no fierce rivalry between the EU and the NATO, but, on the contrary, a significant level of cooperation (Håkansson, 2023, p. 445).

Importance of the European Union's defence initiatives for improving military force mobility

Planning defence, also including the development of capabilities, is a process of creating military forces, weapons, equipment and other capacities found necessary by a state or a federation of the states for achieving goals or for countering threats. In that respect, there are three main processes of developing capabilities within the EU: 1) national planning by each member-state; 2) the NATO's defence planning process, when applicable, and 3) planning at the EU level, which has gradually developed since the 1999 meeting of the Council of Europe in Helsinki and consists of a large number of different processes.

The process of the EU's capability development is neither cyclical nor linear and it simultaneously includes a large number of participants. The idea of setting up the European agency for the development of defence capabilities, research, acquisition

and weapons was presented in 2002, and the following year the Capability Development Mechanism (CDM) was established, which is particularly mentioned in the Treaty on European Union (TEU) and is exclusively within the jurisdiction of military structures (Official Journal of the European Union, 2016). With the aim of 1) improving defence the EU's capacities and capabilities in crisis management, 2) encouraging cooperation in the sphere of defence at the European level, and 3) strengthening the foundations of Europe's specific-purpose industry and technology, in July 2024, the EU member-states established the European Defence Agency (EDA) (EU Council, 2004).

The process of the EU's capability development for which the member-states delegated the EDA follows the order from defining and separating needs at the strategic level (ambition level) to determining needs at the operational level (capabilities), which will subsequently be turned into so-called industrial decisions (capacities). To efficiently encounter long-term challenges of the EU security and defence, in 2008 EDA began preparing capability development plans (CDPs) which rely on the CDM process (Clapp, 2024).

By adopting the 2016 Global Strategy, the EU once again tried to define its global role under the idea of strategic autonomy in the sphere of defence, setting a new level of ambitions in the sphere of security and defence and the basis for further development and improvement of the CSDP (EEAS, 2016). To achieve the new level of ambitions and strengthening European cooperation in the sphere of defence through improvement of joint planning, development, acquisition of weapons and military equipment and the development of capabilities of,

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inter alia, military force mobility, a number of new initiatives was created, such as the Coordinated Annual Review on Defence (CARD), the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) and the European Defence Fund (EDF). The key role in implementing the above-listed defence initiatives of the EU is played by the EDA which, together with the EEAS, including the EU Military Headquarters, acts as the Secretariat of the CARD and the PESCO.

The Strategic Compass for the EU's security and defence policy (Council of the European Union, 2022), which was adopted in March 2022, included the goal that the EU member-states should significantly improve and invest in military force mobility. This was followed, on 10 November 2022, by the announcement of the new action plan on military mobility, Action Plan 2.0 (European Commission, 2022). Building on the results of the first action plan, Action Plan 2.0 cover the period 2022–2026 and includes 38 actions – 29 at the EU level and 9 directed towards the member-states, categorized into four main pillars: 1) multimodal corridors and network of logistic centres (investing in dual-purpose transport infrastructure– *TEN-T* etc.); 2) administrative support measures (digitization of administrative processes); 3) resilience and preparedness (measures for protecting transport infrastructure), and 4) partnership: strengthening the cooperation with the NATO, key strategic partners such as the USA, Canada and Norway, as well as promotion of connectedness and dialogue with other partners, e.g., Ukraine, Moldova and the West Balkan countries (European Court of Auditors, 2025).

The Coordinated Annual Review on Defence (CARD) was initiated in May 2017 with the aim of encouraging gradual synchronization and mutual adjustment of national cycles of defence planning and capability development for the purpose of developing joint (European) capabilities – namely, the connection between defence planning at the national level and the EU's priorities. It is the key instrument in improving the development of the EU's capacities and ensuring support to the member-states in their efforts to implement jointly the agreed development priorities of the EU's capabilities, providing them with the full overview and analysis of the EU's defence architecture and the recommendations for cooperation in the development of capabilities and initiation of new projects in the sphere of defence. It is a two-year cycle synchronized with the PESCO and the NATO Defence Planning Process (NDPP) (EDA, 2025). In that respect, the CARD identified the advancement of military mobility as one of six fields in which the participating countries should prioritize their development efforts (European Court of Auditors, 2025).

The Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) in the sphere of security and defence was established by the decision of the EU Council in December 2017 (EU Council Decision, 2017) and constitutes a framework and a structured process for the gradual deepening of cooperation in the sphere of defence in order to ensure necessary capabilities. The initiative is based on the legal framework for joint planning and investment in joint projects of capability development, as well as the improvement of operational capabilities and contribution of the EU member-states' armed forces. The key difference between the PESCO and other forms of cooperation is that the obligations assumed by the member-states in this initiative are

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legally binding, while each member-state decides about participating in the PESCO on a voluntary basis. Since March 2018, as many as 83 projects have been initiated (75 of them are active) in the fields such as training, land, seafaring, cyber, space, aviation and strategic support (EDA, 2025), including the above-mentioned project "Military Mobility", as well as the "Network of Logistic Hubs in Europe and Support to Operations" (Kozioł, 2023) The project "Military Mobility", coordinated by the Netherlands, supports the member-states in the simplification and standardization of procedures of cross-order transport of military staff, weapons and equipment within the EU borders, colloquially called "Military Schengen Zone". In 2021/2022, expanding the reach and importance of the project, the European Union allowed the participation of the "third" countries in this project – Norway, Canada, the USA and the UK (Council of the EU, 2021). The finalization of the project is expected by the end of 2025. The final goal of the project is reflected in the member-states developing and implementing national military mobility plans, in harmonizing national plans between the member-states and with the EU Action Plan on military mobility (EEAS EUMS EDA, 2024).

One of the key efforts undertaken by the European Commission in the sphere of the EU's defence capability development was the establishment of the European Defence Fund (EDF) in 2017. The Fund had the budget of eight billion euros within the EU's Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) for the period 2021–2027, in order to encourage joint research and innovation in the sphere of defence and co-financing joint European projects in the domains of defence research and capability de-

velopment (Chihaia, 2024). The EU's budget (MFF) covers the costs of military mobility within Pillar 1 (dual-purpose transport infrastructure) in the amount of about 1.5–1.7 billion euros, provided via the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) instrument (Official Journal of the European Union, 2021), and Pillar 2 (administrative support measures) of Action Plan 2.0, in the amount of about 9 million euros, while no financial funds have been stipulated within the EU's budget for Pillar 3 (resilience and preparedness) and Pillar 4 (partnership) (European Court of Auditors, 2025).

Almost simultaneously with the complete establishment of the EU's new defence initiatives– CARD, PESCO and EDF – the Capability Development Plan (CDP) was revised as the central reference for defence planning in the EU and the basis for all defence initiatives of the EU. The last revision of the CDP from 2023 resulted in the definition of 22 priorities of the EU's capability development, aligned at the level of the member-states' ministries of defence. These priorities cover a whole range of EU's military capabilities, fourteen of which belong to five domains (land, air, sea, space and cyberspace) and eight priorities categorized under strategic support, including military mobility (EDA, 2023).

Most importantly, the EU's defence initiatives complement and/or support one another. Their connectedness and orientation towards harmonized priorities of the EU's capability development, including, *inter alia*, the improvement of military mobility, is crucial for directing the question of the EU's defence towards coherent European architecture of defence capabilities and the package of forces which may be used for conducting full-spectrum military operations and mission.

Conclusion

Military force mobility in Europe, without complex and long-lasting border procedures, is a matter of strategic importance for the EU (and the NATO) and is at the top of the political agenda. This is proved by the importance of improving military mobility, as well as the establishment of the EU's Rapid Deployment Capacity (RDC), which was also emphasized I the EU's Strategic Compass adopted in March 2022, as well as the decision of the leaders at the NATO summit held in Madrid in 2022 to establish the New Force Model, or the Allied Reaction Force (ARF) in order to replace the existing NATO Response Force (NRF).

In the light of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, the EU's Strategic Compass pointed to the urgency of developing military mobility on the European continent by strengthening dual-purpose transport infrastructure within the trans-European transport network, by accelerating and harmonizing cross-border procedures and increasing the resilience of transport infrastructure (Council of the European Union, 2022). The EU member-states committed to reduce the time necessary for approving border crossing to the NATO forces, while the European Commission considered the possibility of additional investments in dual-purpose transport infrastructure across the trans-European transport network (Official Journal of the European Union, 2024) which would be used both for commercial and military needs. Moreover, the existing transport infrastructure in Germany needs substantial financial investments, and the estimate is that during the following ten years as many as 457 billion euros will be necessary – which is equivalent to the total annual federal budget (Hartmann, 2024).

Having in mind that the process of improving military force mobility in Europe is long-lasting and demanding, during 2024 certain progress was made by forming two NATO military transport corridors, which shows how national regulations may be efficiently harmonized among neighbouring EU member-states. First, on 31 January 2024, an agreement was signed by the Netherlands, Germany and Poland. (Chihaia, 2024), and then, on 11 July of the same year, an agreement was signed by Romania, Bulgaria and Greece (Reuters, 2024).

Moreover, the White Paper for European Defence – Readiness 2030, published in March 2025, confirms progress achieved in the development of military mobility, but also emphasizes that the EU is still facing old challenges: administration, non-harmonized procedures between the member-states, lack of dual-purpose infrastructure and limited availability of a larger number of routes and modes of transport. Military mobility has been given significant attention in the White Paper as a priority sphere of capabilities, crucial for the construction of a strong deterrent element and achievement of a high level of defence on the European continent (European Commission, 2025).

Having the above-mentioned in mind, it can be concluded that the EU, despite slow progress in the field, has achieved success in improving military mobility on the European continent, in terms of identifying bottlenecks, designing strategies, setting new priorities, as well as placing military mobility in the core of the debate about the improvement of European defence. The EU's defence initiatives – CARD, PESCO and EDF, are designed with the aim of gradually overcoming the problems of planning defence and the development of the

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EU's capabilities from the previous period, have largely contributed to the improvement of military force mobility in Europe. They represent growing coherence in the EU's approach to challenges arising in the neighbourhood, despite frequent lack of harmonization between the EU member-states. Finally, they will lead to joint projects as well as concrete results that truly correspond to the member-states' priorities, and contribute to the removal of the existing critical deficiencies in the EU's defence capabilities and enable unobstructed engagement and practical application of both new concepts of response forces, the NATO's ARF and the EU's RDC.

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International cooperation in disaster risk reduction in the region of South Eastern Europe[2]

Abstract: Different kinds of natural and anthropogenic disasters are increasingly numerous in modern "risk society", while their consequences are larger and larger, often exceeding the possibilities of responding to them not only at the local, but also at the national level. All this calls for various forms of international cooperation in disaster risk reduction and emergency management. Apart from global organizations, an important role in disaster risk reduction is also played by institutional organizational forms in the EU and some of its regions. In the region of South Eastern Europe, generally prone to crises, there is only one regional initiative – Disaster Preparedness and Prevention Initiative (DPPI) and International Sava River Basin Commission (Sava Commission). It is certainly both necessary and possible to improve the existing institutional arrangements and to devise other ones to raise the capacities of these countries

Keywords: disasters, international cooperation, region of South Eastern Europe, DPPI, Sava Commission

1. Introduction

In the literature on crisis management it is often emphasized, in line with Benjamin Franklin's statement, that crises and disasters are inevitable just as taxes and death.[3] It is certainly confirmed on a large scale by entire human history, which may be seen and followed as history of various crises and disasters. In that respect, modern post-industrialist information society is not an exception in the progress of human knowledge and technology (practically power) unprecedented in

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[2]   The paper was written within the research on the project FP 7 funded by the European Commission FP7-SEC-2011-1 No 284678 ANVIL – Analysis of Civil Security Systems in Europe.

[3]   The original statement ascribed to US statesman Benjamin Franklin is: "In this world nothing can be said to be certain, except death and taxes". Available at: https://www.drsanders.com/two-things-are-certain-in-life-death-and-taxes/

history so far. The threat of crises and disasters is not smaller nowadays; on the contrary, it may be said that crises are becoming more and more numerous and diverse by their nature. Today we witness increasingly frequent natural disasters (floods, droughts, extreme weather conditions, pandemics etc.)[4], the consequences of which are larger and more destructive. According to the data for the two-decade period (1985–2005), on average more than 200 million people worldwide were affected by disasters on an annual basis. According to national and regional reports about the application of the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005–2015,[2] during those 10 years disasters continued to produce grave consequences all over the world: more than 700,000 people lost lives, more than 1.4 million people were injured, while about 23 million people lost their homes. In addition, from 2008 to 2012, about 144 million people were subject to relocation due to disasters (Milosavljević, 2015, p. 52).

Modern crisis management requires international cooperation, particularly having in mind the types of threats we encounter, which go beyond borders, escalate rapidly and travel through interconnected infrastructures and, thus, call for cooperative responses. Regardless of the robust resources of individual countries, certain types of crises will exceed national capacities and test different collective arrangements at national and regional

levels for the common prevention, preparation, response and recovery (Barzanje, Ekengren, and Rhinard, 2018).

2. Global efforts in disaster risk reduction

In the above-mentioned context, the Organization of United Nations globally dedicates special attention to crisis and disaster management.[5] The UN and its specialized agencies play a significant role in the prevention, as well as reaction to serious natural crises and disasters (civil emergencies), as well as in the recovery after these events. Within the UN, there are 14 specialized agencies and a large number of special program and fund offices. Of particular importance for risk reduction in disaster management are, first of all:

- WFP – The World Food Programme is aimed at combating worldwide hunger permanently accompanying crises and natural disasters;
- WHO – The World Health Organization plays a key role in the event of health crises, such as epidemics of dangerous diseases, and follows global health trends and transnational threats to human health;
- UNHCR – The UN Refugee Agency helps to take care of refugees since the waves of

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[4]   Although they are manifested as natural disasters, they partly have an anthropogenic cause, i.e., they are caused by the man's exploitative approach to the nature which existed and has remained in the basis of the capitalist order, as well as the Western/Europe-centric view of the world and nature, in which the human being has an ontological priority of the master of the nature (from the Bible to Marx and Engels).

[5]   On this occasion we will not deal with the UN role in social crises, i.e., in peace-making and peace-keeping.

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refugees are always accompanied by different types of crises;

- UNICEF – Unite for Children, the UN Agency dedicated to the protection of children in general, and particularly in crisis situations;
- OCHA – The UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs is in charge of international humanitarian aid;
- IAEA – The International Atomic Energy Agency is aimed at safe and secure nuclear technology and its use for peaceful purposes. The Agency helps countries to improve their nuclear security and to prepare for responding to emergency situations;
- WMO – The World Meteorological Organization monitors the state and changes in the Earth's atmosphere, its interaction with the oceans, the climate etc. Under its leadership, a contribution has been made to the protection of lives and material goods in the event of natural disasters, the preservation of man's environment and improvement of economic and social welfare

Berkasovo, Serbia, October 2015.
Photo: Shutterstock

of all sectors of society in the fields such as food and water resource safety (Kešetović, 2008).[6]

Moreover, the UN organized three world conferences in Japan on disaster risk reduction, focusing on disaster and climate risk management in the context of sustainable development – in Yokohama in 1994, in Kobe in 2005, and in Sendai in 2015.[7] These conferences gathered officials and other stakeholders (NGOs, civil society organizations, local authorities and representatives of the private sector) from the whole world to speak about how to strengthen the sustainability of development by disaster and climate change risk management. The Third World Conference adopted the applicable Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030.

3. Cooperation in risk reduction within the European Union

The UN allots great significance to the matters of disaster prevention and protection ever since the very beginning of its activities since the European countries have been subject to various types of natural disasters, such as earthquakes, avalanches, floods, forest fires etc., as well as disasters caused by human action. That is why EU member-states pay special attention to the preparations for protection, rescuing and providing help in disasters. The starting premises of the cooperation within the European Union in the field of civil protection were determined in Rome in May 1985, at the First Ministerial Meeting on Cooperation in the field of civil protection within the EU, when the framework was made for activities covering the preparedness of civil protection participants in 15 member states and help in interventions in case of disasters. All initiatives in the field of civil protection at the EU level were implemented by the subsidiary principle, based on the treaty signed in Maastricht, with the aim of supporting and uniting civil protection efforts at national, regional and local levels and creating conditions for action of all participants (governmental and non-governmental) in the protection and rescue and mutual cooperation of the member-states. In that respect, in the field of civil protection 10 resolutions, 4 decisions of the EU Council and 1 directive of the European Parliament and EU Council were made, including many regulations in the field of protection from industrial disasters and sea pollution (Kešetović, 2008).

In the last decades, a wide range of negative events occurred in the EU, causing devastation of human lives, property, environment and cultural heritage. From 1980 to 2020, natural disasters

[6]   For more details, see: Mlađan, 2012.

[7]   The conferences in Kobe and Sendai were, at the request of the UN General Assembly, coordinated by the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR), established in 1999 to ensure the implementation of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction. UNDRR is led by a special representative of the UN Secretary General (SRSG) for disaster risk reduction and has more than 100 employees in its seat in Geneva and five regional offices. UNDRR coordinates international efforts for disaster risk reduction and reports about the implementation of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction. It holds biannual Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction.

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struck almost 50 million people in the EU and sot the member-states on average 12 billion Euros per year. In addition, the EU is expected to undergo even more extreme events with increased exposure and vulnerability to disasters because climate change brings more extreme weather conditions, the sea level rise and changes in the geographical distribution of some contagious diseases. Continued urbanization and development in dangerous regions threatens an increasing number of people and material goods. Urban environment increases risks of disasters, e.g., floods, heat waves or epidemics. Environmental degradation in Europe also reduces globally the eco-system capacities of protecting us from the effect of disasters. In the past years, increasing instability in the neighbourhood, geopolitical tensions and diversification of enemy groups have been recorded, which has led to increased security threats such as terrorism, cyber and hybrid threats. In that complex context, it is crucial to have arrangements for efficient disaster prevention, alleviation, preparedness, response and recovery. The EU develops policies in different fields focusing on the prevention and reduction of disaster risks with the aim of reducing the effect of harmful events while putting an emphasis on increasing the resilience of the EU's infrastructure, eco-system, society and economy.

> The key role in disaster risk reduction and emergency management is played by the EU Civil Protection Mechanism as a unique system framework which connects European civil protection in the segment of the prevention, preparedness and response to large-scale crisis events and emergency situations.

In the EU, protection of people, property, environment and cultural heritage from multiple threats is primarily national responsibility. However, the EU complements, supports and coordinates national actions and promotes cross-border cooperation related to these matters. The EU has a wide range of policies and funds aimed at strengthening collective safety and resilience to harmful events.

The European Commission and the EU member-states have devised the following five goals of disaster resilience in order to direct work towards the prevention of disasters and preparedness:

1. *Anticipation.* – Improve risk assessment, anticipation, and disaster risk management planning. Complexity and interdependence of risks encountered by the EU give importance to the identification of vulnerability in critical sectors and anticipation of dangers and threats.

2. *Preparedness.* – Increase risk awareness and preparedness among the population for reducing disaster risks.

3. *Alerting.* – Enhance early warning systems so that messages about the oncoming danger at the national, regional and local levels should promptly reach the right people.

4. *Responding.* – Strengthen the EU Civil Protection Mechanism's response capacity so that the EU can offer larger help in filling critical gaps and avoiding further worsening of the situation when the capacities of a country are overburdened.

5. *Security.* – Ensure a robust civil protection system that functions with no disruptions during and after disasters, when it is most needed. Further actions cover updating plans and procedures for continuity of work and ensuring coordination and exchange of information among sectors, including providers of critical infrastructure.[8]

The key role in disaster risk reduction and emergency management is played by the EU Civil Protection Mechanism[9] as a unique system framework which connects European civil protection in the segment of the prevention, preparedness and response to large-scale crisis events and emergency situations. The Mechanism is based on the Treaty of Lisbon, Articles 196 and 214, in which the EU commits to provide help to all victims of natural disasters or catastrophes caused by human action all over the world, but also to develop and coordinates the civil protection systems of the member-states. It was established in October 2001 according to 2001/792/ EC Council Decision with the aim of ensuring coordinated action of the member-states and other states in joint disaster prevention, disaster risk reduction, acting on the protection of people, material goods, cultural values and critical infrastructural facilities and removal of disaster consequences.[10]

Moreover, apart from the efforts in risk management, at the EU level there is also a whole series of regional security arrangements within which the countries in some European regions unite for the sake of managing disaster risks jointly, e.g., the Višegrad Group, the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS), the Helsinki Commission (HELCOM), the Baltic Sea Maritime Cooperation and the Danube Commission.

Here we will also mention the NATO as the North Atlantic military alliance whose functions include crisis management, i.e., "civil emergency planning" and which gathers most EU member-states.

4. International cooperation in disaster risk reduction in the region of South Eastern Europe

In the West Balkan region, despite the fact that the countries making it are exposed to numerous risks,[11] with limited capacities for managing them, there is practically only one organization which includes all the countries in the region and one international commission dealing with certain security aspects related to the Sava as an international river. Moreover, besides these two organizations, there is also a number of bilateral arrangements and treaties on cooperation between certain countries of the region in the field of emergency situations.

[8]   For more details see: https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/what/civil-protection/european-disaster-risk-management_en

[9]   Visit the Mechanism's website at: https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/what/civil-protection/eu-civil-protection-mechanism_en

[10]   For more details about the Mechanism, see: Mlađan, 2012; Dragišić & Novaković, 2022.

[11]   The main risks are floods, fires, earthquakes and hazardous materials. Special Co-ordinator of the Stability Pact for SEE Europe (2001)

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4.1. Disaster Preparedness and Prevention Initiative for South Eastern Europe – DPPI SEE

In November 2000, the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe launched the Disaster Preparedness and Prevention Initiative for South Eastern Europe (DPPI SEE) in an attempt to contribute to the development of a cohesive regional strategy for disaster preparedness and prevention. In 2008, DPPI SEE was developed within the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) as a regional intergovernmental organization to facilitate cooperation and coordination of the SEE countries in preventing and responding to natural disasters and disasters caused by human factor, particularly when they have cross-border effects. The Disaster Preparedness and Prevention Initiative for South Eastern Europe is devised as a regionally-owned initiative which tries to provide the framework for the South Eastern European countries[12] so as to develop programmes and projects that lead to the strengthening of capacities for the prevention and response to natural and technological disasters. The Initiative also gathers the donor countries and international governmental and non-governmental organizations for the purpose of coordinating current and future activities and identifying unfulfilled needs in order to improve efficiency of the national disaster management systems within regional cooperation. The comprehensive goal of DPPI SEE is to encourage regional cooperation and coordination in disaster preparedness and the prevention of natural disasters and disasters caused by human

action, or technological disasters in South Eastern Europe, without creating new structures or levels of bureaucracy.

The main activities of DPPI refer to the building of the member-states' capacities through organizing training, exercises, conferences and the implementation of various joint projects aimed at improving preparedness and prevention within disaster management.

Important achievements refer to help in project preparation, while related activities are aimed at supporting the SEE countries to prepare feasible project proposals and strengthen regional cooperation by ensuring a coordination platform and current international methodology through training for the project management cycle.

Support to the region's capacities has several forms through the activities of DPPI SEE. It is necessary to mention the following project and trainings:

- "Development of DPPI capacities for disaster risk reduction in South Eastern Europe". This project is aimed at creating sustainable capacities in risk reduction and developing a multiplication effect by initiating groups of trainers from the region who are capable of long-term monitoring of the project's goals and results.
- The Disaster Management Training Programme (DMTP) consists of workshops, seminars, courses, trainings and conferences. Events take place in many countries of South Eastern Europe; the organization is voluntary, while funding activities is usu-

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[12]   The members of the Initiative are Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Romania, Serbia, Slovenia and Turkey, while its seat is in Sarajevo.

ally divided between the host country and the DPPI SEE budget. The project is aimed at improving disaster preparedness and prevention through education and training on disaster management, as well as through training and practising disaster responses with the aim of strengthening cooperation of all participants in the activities of protection and rescuing, harmonization of the participants' activities for the purpose of eliminating potential failures and promoting the understanding of national and international principles related to disaster management.

- Through the "Project to support the establishment of joint flood emergency response units in SEE", the participating countries with their operational capacities establish regional cooperation and coordination in disaster preparedness and prevention for regular exchange of information about water and flood management. The participating countries, supported by donors and RCC, establish, equip and train flood emergency response units in the SEE region.

- *Trilateral border crossing protocols/procedures* were developed between Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Montenegro. The main goal of the project is initiating preparations for ensuring a legal and operational framework to be used for quick border crossing in joint interventions and providing mutual assistance in emergencies, including forest fires.

- The general goal of the project entitled "Joint fire brigades between Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Montenegro" is the improvement of preparedness, prevention and response to open fires in the coastal region, regardless of the state borders, with the jointly exercised quick response to fire extinguishing by advanced fire-rescue units of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Montenegro. Within the project, eight teams for emergencies have been formed and 72 firefighters have been trained and equipped.

- The main technical goals of the "Seismic Map Project" are the preparation of adequate integrated seismological and seismic-tectonic data bases and the production of seismic hazard maps for the region, aligned with the European standards, as well as the realization of the programmes of technical and scientific training of young scientific personnel in the national seismological centres in the region.

- The project "Capacity for disaster risk reduction through regional cooperation and cooperation in South Eastern Europe" is aimed at disaster risk reduction related to natural hazards in the Western Balkans and Turkey, in line with the Hyogo Framework for Action, building capacities of national and local authorities and promotion of a coordinated approach in disaster risk reduction. The specific goal of the project is enhancing regional cooperation in disaster risk reduction in the Western Balkans and Turkey and promotion of aligning their disaster risk reduction methodologies, plans and strategies to open the road

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for potential preparation of a harmonized and mutually accepted regional disaster risk reduction strategy in South Eastern Europe.

- The programme entitled The DPPI SEE and UNISDR/CADRI (the United Nations Capacity for Disaster Reduction Initiative / Human capital development in training for disaster risk reduction) is aimed at supporting the development of capacities for disaster risk reduction at all levels within the governments in the region of South Eastern Europe and organizations in order to improve their ability to understand better and manage different disasters facing the region nowadays. The programme is also aimed at creating a group of professional trainers of attendees who will function as the main resources for training on disaster risk reduction in the region.

DPPI has developed into an efficient consultative and coordination mechanism which improves disaster preparedness and prevention in the event of natural disasters and disasters caused by human factor in South Eastern Europe. It has proved to be a relatively applicable tool for regional cooperation, particularly regarding prevention and preparedness in the field of disaster management and, in that respect, it has been recognized and appreciated by the international community and international organizations (EC, UN), which constitutes the foundation for further strengthening of regional cooperation through the implementation of different projects aimed at building the member-states' capacities in disaster management. The role of DPPI SEE in emergency management should be reflected in internal coordination between the member-states of DPPI SEE and international donors. DPPI SEE encourages the existing cooperation with the NATO, the UN and other internationally recognized organizations as a key partner for successful implementation of own activities in the region and today is considered a reliable regional partner dealing with cross-border affairs and problems. The DPPI SEE member-states also recognize this fact and try to further promote the values of the initiative. Through various projects and activities, DPPI SEE is promoted not only at the national, but also at the regional level as a desirable form of multilateral cooperation (Kešetović and Samardžija, 2014).

4.2. International Sava River Basin Commission / Sava Commission

The International Sava River Basin Commission (ISBRC) or the Sava Commission[13] is an international organization[14] founded for implementing the Framework Agreement on the Sava River Basin (FASRB)[15] in order to fulfil the following goals: establishing an international regime for navigating

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[13]   Visit the Commission's official website at: https://www.savacommission.org/default.aspx?id=1719

[14]   The member-states are Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Serbia, the seat of the Commission is in Zagreb, and its official language is English.

[15]   After the breakup of the SFRY, the Sava became an international river and four countries through which it flows began negotiations for establishing a suitable framework for cross-border cooperation in order to ensure sustainable use,

the Sava River, establishing sustainable water management and undertaking measures for preventing dangers and their consequences, including dangers from floods, ice, droughts and accidents involving hazardous materials.

After the Framework Agreement came into force on 29 December 2004, the first founding session of the Sava Commission was held on 27 June 2005, while the Sava Commission's permanent secretariat began operating in January 2006. The Sava Commission serves as a permanent work body in charge of implementing the Framework Agreement, the preparation of the Action Plan for the Sava River basin and the adoption of necessary legal documents and accompanying protocols. Although initially it was not founded for solving security matters and crisis management, some of its functions and activities are related to these issues.

In the field of civil security, the Sava Commission's activities are mainly related to the exchange of information and data between the signatory countries, including the activities on making the foundation for the application of the EU Directive on floods. The Commission's activities are chiefly related to preventive and preparatory aspects of crisis management. The focus is on environmental threats, including the prevention of floods, droughts and hazards from ice, as well as accidents involving water pollution by hazardous materials and reduction of negative consequences of these events.

Having in mind that the Sava Commission is the first international/cross-border system for cooperation in that region, its activities mainly involve the exchange of information and data collection, as well as the activities aimed at creating and preparing the foundation for the implementation of the EU Directive on floods. However, the Sava Commission has no operational role in crisis management. So far, its activities in the field of civil security and/ or flood management, accident prevention and control etc. have been primarily focused on the aspects of prevention and preparedness in crisis cycle management. This includes the establishment of the Geographic Information System (GIS), hydro-meteorological data and information exchange systems, the development of integrated systems for flood forecasting and early warning, and the preparation of the Crisis Management Plan in the event of water pollution. In fact, the participating sides are already connected through the Accident Emergency Warning System (AEWS), including the Danube Basin Alarm Model (DBAM) and the alert mechanism that connects civil protection institutions/bodies (Principal International Alert Centers (PIAC), developed within the Danube Commission.[16]

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protection and management of the water resources in the Sava River basin, as well as to improve the standard of living in the region. As the key turning point in this process, the Framework Agreement on the Sava River Basin (FASRB) was signed as the first development-oriented multilateral agreement in the post-conflict period after the Dayton Agreement and the Agreement on Succession Issues.

[16]   The International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR). For more details about the Commission, see: https://www.icpdr.org/

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All activities of the Sava Commission are performed by the civilian personnel. Cooperation has been established with the member-states' institutions in charge of the implementation of the Framework Agreement, as well as with other national institutions, i.e., agencies, offices, services, institutes and universities. Since the Sava Commission has no operational role in crisis management, it has no own means for responding to crises and it does not use the member-states' civil and/or military means.

The Sava Commission has a cohesive character and with its activities contributes to the efficient approach of the member-states to the question of certain challenges and successful realization of joint projects. The Sava Commission is primarily a platform for information exchange, reporting and building of the member-states' capacities (Kešetović, Samardžija and Skazlić, 2014).

Final notes

Despite the fact that in recent history they have encountered a large number of crises and disasters which exceeded state borders, the countries of South Eastern Europe have, first of all, based on the external (European) initiative, managed to establish only one regional supranational organization aimed at reducing disaster risks, improving preparedness and better coordination, cooperation and response in cases of grave threats posed by natural and anthropogenic activities. Unlike the countries in this region, some others, such as the Baltic region, established a whole series of regional organizations aimed at preventing and managing different types of crises. One of the probable reasons for this state is also the fact that the SFR dissolved in the civil war and that there is still distrust between some of its members, i.e., no reconciliation has been achieved as in some other regions worldwide after armed conflicts. However, the experience with the floods in 2014 shows that there are both empathy and solidarity between former Yugoslav countries, as well as readiness and inventiveness to find extra-institutional forms of cooperation and to relatively quickly make *ad hoc* arrangements for crossing state borders and delivering relief. In any case, political decision-makers had better think about establishing new and improving the existing supranational arrangements for disaster risk reduction and emergency management, primarily because all projections indicate that the oncoming time will be full of different security challenges, risks and threats.

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Geopolitical features of the position of Serbia and Serbian nation in modern international relations

Abstract: In this paper, the author analyzes geopolitical features of the position of Serbia and Serbian nation in the context of current international circumstances, with a focus on the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. Geopolitical features which will be the subject of the analysis are: knottiness, borderliness and fragmentation, since these are the paradigmatic features of the Balkan territory. Having this in mind, in this paper we will define the above-listed features so as to be able to analyze them further in the given contexts. We will analyze in particular how the former and the latter affect the conflict and, accordingly, make a synthesis and show how their consequences are reflected on the position of Serbia and Serbian nation. In addition to the description, analysis and synthesis methods, we will also use the geopolitical method for the purpose of understanding a strong cause-and-effect relationship between the political and the spatial in the current context. It is assumed that the ongoing conflicts complicate the geopolitical features of the position of Serbia and Serbian nation and aggravate the international position between the East and the West.

Keywords: geopolitics, Serbia, Serbian nation, Russian-Ukrainian conflict, international relations

Introduction

Current international relations are characterized by geopolitical dynamics caused by direct and/or indirect conflicts in different regions along, as coded by Nicholas Spykman, the zone of the Inner Crescent or the Rimland, which eventually leads to the transformation of the international order from unipolarity to multipolarity. Bearing in mind that Serbia and Serbian nation are in the Rimland zone, and that current events leave geopolitical consequences on our position, dealing with this topic is justified both from the scientific and the social aspects. The 2022-2025 time frame directs us to the most current

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conflicts, primarily the Russian-Ukrainian war, enabling us to analyze, in a precisely given period, the geopolitical features that paradigmatically determine the position of the Serbian nation in the Balkans. Geopolitical knottiness, borderliness and fragmentation are the features in the focus of analyzing the position of Serbia and Serbian nation, with the aim of showing its complexity.

The research subject will be analysed at two levels – strategic and tactical. The first, strategic level entails the knowledge of geopolitical theories and the constant of global and regional powers, especially those projecting their interests towards the Balkans. The second, tactical level of the analysis focuses on current events, which are temporally and spatially determined and contextualized. Therefore, the contextual analysis is an inevitable part. In that manner, we reach the analysis of current events and their reflection on other regions and countries. We will use the geopolitical method to perceive "theoretical and practical cause-and-effect permeation of the geographical and the political, from the perspective of different interests, within the boundaries of specific territorial segments and in the context of certain sections on the chronological scale" (Stepić, 2016, p. 48).

## Geopolitical features of the position of Serbia and Serbian nation

To determine the geopolitical position of a country, it is necessary to understand the geopolitical identity, which is defined as "an identification of geopolitical self-awareness and continuity in time and space" of a nation, as its "geopolitical idiosyncrasy" (Stepić, 2019, p. 8) and, as "relatively objectifying identity-geographical properties of a national or religious group, in relation to its determined spatial, cultural-civilizational, religious-confessional and political-state form of existence" (Despotović, 2025, p. 301). Therefore, the geopolitical identity is determined by the geographical position and physical-geographical characteristics, regional and international contexts, internal political developments, foreign policy factors, military-strategic position of the country, and specific religious-confessional, cultural and civilizational features (Glišin, 2024).

Knottiness is a geopolitical feature that adequately reflects the state of affairs in the Balkans in the past few centuries. A geopolitical knot in this territory emerges due to the intersection and interweaving of the vectors of geopolitical appearance of global and regional powers in different periods throughout history (Glišin, 2024; Despotović, 2025). The German vector is projected from the northwest to the southeast. The Islamic vector is projected in the opposite direction, from the southeast to the northwest, and that is exactly where intersection occurred in the territory of the Balkans (Davutoglu, 2014). The Russian vector is projected from the northeast to the southwest. The Atlanticist vector, led by the United States of America, is projected in multiple directions, particularly if taking into account Nicholas Spykman's theory of the Rimland and the position of the Balkans in that context (Spykman, 1942). We will emphasize the southwest-northeast direction which intersects with the Russian vector. The vector projected by the Vatican is directed from the west to the east and it is essentially a policy of

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proselytism, i.e., of spreading Roman Catholicism towards the east, which affects Serbia and Serbian nation (Deschner, 2021). The Chinese vector is directed from the east to the west, which is reflected in the "Belt and Road" project and Initiative 17 + 1. Their activities in the Balkans are more than evident, particularly if we take into consideration diplomatic, economic and trade activities (Stekić,

2023). Therefore, knottiness is a rather complex geopolitical feature which shows the intertwined various political, geopolitical, economic, military, geostrategic, trade and other interests in the Balkans. We believe that it is not superfluous to speak about this territory as *Catena mundi*, or Chain of the World, since the geographical position led to such importance.
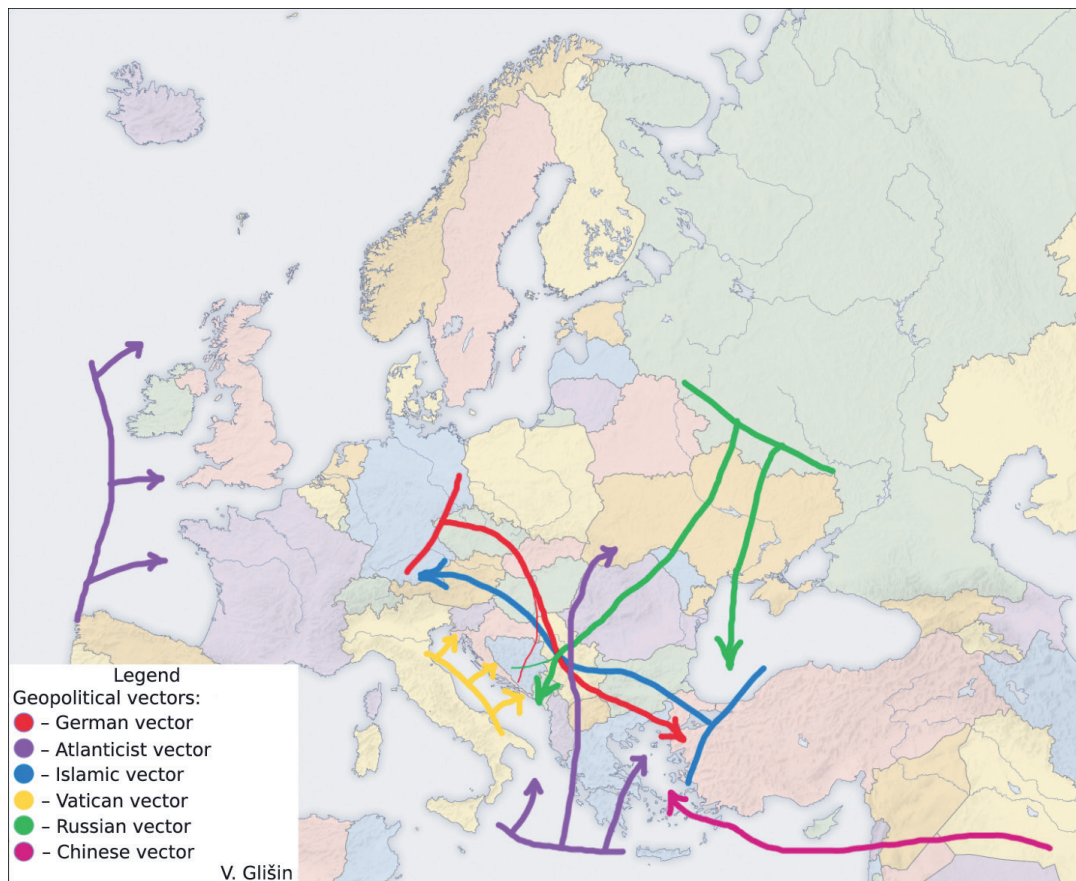
Map 1. Geopolitical vectors of global and regional powers – knottiness
Source: prepared by the author

Borderliness is a geopolitical feature recorded ever since the period of Roman Limes in the Balkans, when divisions existed most often along the rivers (e.g., the Roman Danube Limes) between the opposed sides. The military border (frontier) or *Terra Militaris*, was also drawn in other historical periods, when great powers clashed in the territory of the Balkans, for example, the conflict of Austro-Hungary and the Ottoman Empire. Knottiness is reflected in it as shown in Map 1. The above-mentioned historical circumstances developed the *Frontier spirit* among the Serbs. Apart from its military borders, the Balkans is the place where religious-confessional and civilizational borders were drawn, which largely affected the political circumstances during the past centuries (Glišin, 2024). The actual consequences of the religious-confessional division is proved by the events in the Serbian medieval state, when Saint Sava tried to fight for Serbian national interests between Rome and Constantinople (Despotović, 2025). Having this in mind, Professor Despotović writes about the geopolitics of Saint Sava's Orthodoxy "as a rational synthesis of cultural and political influences of the East and the West", in which "the responsible national and religious politics of the Nemanjić dynasty is contained and, in particular, of Saint Sava, whose priority was the Serbian national interest" (Despotović, 2025, p. 22). Based on the religious-confessional differences, in his book *The Clash of Civilizations*, Samuel Huntington makes a civilizational division which is largely reflected on the Balkans, where we locate the Western, Christian Orthodox and Islamic civilizations (Huntington, 2000). Taking into account that Huntington wrote that civilizational borders are bloody borders (Huntington, 2000), it is clear

why we believe that the division negatively affects the Balkans as an "area of multi-ethnic cocktail" (Brzeziński, 2001). Hence, Professor Mitrović says that "throughout history and in contemporaneity, volcanic contradictions thunder across the Balkans, trying to dismember it and divide it froth externally and internally" (Mitrović, 2006, p. 21). Speaking of borderliness, we can conclude that in this territory borders are drawn between the opposed, i.e., opposing sides, either for political, military, national or religious reasons, which inevitably leaves consequences on the functioning and existence of the Balkan states and nations.

Fragmentation (or disintegration, fracturing) as a geopolitical feature emerged through "a combination of numerous historical processes which destructed the state sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Serbian people" (Glišin, 2024, p. 279). It has been recorded for centuries since, due to invasions of conquerors, borders changed within which the Serbian people lived, and that led to the territorial compression towards the central part of the Balkans. In the course of the 20th and the 21st centuries, these processes were invasions of conquerors most pronounced especially after the world wars and the wars of the 1990s (Novak, 2015). For almost four decades we have witnessed the continuation of the aggressive suppression of the Serbian people from the territories where it has lived for centuries and these processes have not been completed yet. That is why the concept "Serbian lands" is quite significant because it includes all territories in which the Serbs lived and live, but, due to different aggressive processes, have been reduced to a minimum or no longer live there. The aim is to suppress the Serbs to the interior of the Balkans, i.e., towards the Serbian

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motherland, and to reduce the territory of the Serbian lands to the territory of the Republic of Serbia and to prevent its access to the Adriatic that the Serbian people used to have for centuries. If we just mention the processes from the beginning of the 21st century, we will understand how the geopolitical feature of fragmentation functions in practice, i.e., as a "destabilizing factor" (Despotović, 2025). Accordingly, in the south, the status of Kosovo and Metohija is one of the burning questions because of the open separatism of Albanian politicians and the unhidden project of forming "natural Albania". Since 2008 we have faced the unilateral declaration of independence of so-called Kosovo and numerous problems in that context that might also pour into other parts of the territory of the Republic of Serbia, such as Bujanovac-Preševo and Raška regions (Glišin, 2022). Furthermore, fragmentation is also seen in the example of Montenegro's leaving the state union of Serbia and Montenegro in 2006, when Serbia lost its access to the sea and found itself in an insular, territorially locked position (Despotović & Glišin, 2023). The deep divide between the Serbian and Montenegrin nations is a destabilizing factor in Montenegro which may be activated by foreign political actors if necessary (Leposavić, 2021). In addition, the status of Republic Srpska and the Dayton Agreement as its guarantor often brings into question the Bosniak leadership in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and that is why we believe that there is potential for the destabilization and fragmentation process in the final outcome (Kecmanović, 2017). The above-mentioned calls for the consideration and analysis of security and geopolitical aspects of the position of Republic Srpska and the Serbian people in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the current

international circumstances, as well as the preparation for potential challenges and risks.

Current international events and consequences to the geopolitical features of the position of Serbia and Serbian nation

In the previous part of the paper, we focused on the elements necessary for the analysis, first at the strategic, and then the tactical level, since we will also address them in the context of current international events. Namely, at the strategic level of the analysis, we have pointed to the geopolitical constants and paradigmatic features of the position of Serbia and Serbian nation, and in the following lines we will perform the analysis at the tactical level, i.e., in the current context, in order to reach consequences to the above-listed geopolitical features. In several past decades, we could observe numerous direct and/or indirect conflicts in the Rimland zone, which, although rarely of local character, had regional and global consequences (Halliday, 2005; Ozili, 2025; Schmidt, 2018; Despotović & Glišin, 2023).

The Rimland has been the most dynamic conflict zone since the end of the Second World War because that is where conflicting interests of thalassocratic and tellurocratic forces encounter, i.e., of Atlanticism (the USA) and Eurasianism (Russia), which affects the regions starting from the east of Europe, via the Balkans and the Middle East, to the Far East. Having in mind that the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian conflict takes place in the Rimland zone, northeast of the Balkan region, we believe that there are geopolitical consequences to this territory,

which we will show in line with the previously described geopolitical features.

Russian-Ukrainian conflict and consequences to geopolitical features

Antagonism between maritime powers and land powers in the Rimland zone is also reflected on smaller states such as the Republic of Serbia, both in the past and nowadays. An example of the NATO's expansion towards Europe's east and southeast actually shows the geopolitical expansion of Atlanticism, which is directly opposed to the interests of Eurasianism and that is why, *inter alia*, there has been an escalation in Ukraine. Moreover, in the

context of the NATO's expansion, we can see that the position of the Republic of Serbia is "insular", which means that the country is surrounded by the member-states of one military and/or political alliance and that is why it faces the problem of limited manoeuvring space (Glišin, 2024). The series of historical processes of suppressing the Serbian people inland led to the territorial reduction and loss of maritime participation, or to today's insular position. In that context, we will also analyze the geopolitical features of Serbia's position, starting from the assumption that the Russian-Ukrainian conflict is reflected on them.

The Russian-Ukrainian conflict, although lasting much longer, officially began on 24 February

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2022, when decades-long intolerance culminated. Russia and Ukraine were primarily involved in the conflict, but with the indirect participation of other countries that support one or the other side, which shows the divide at the world level. That is why it is not surprising that one spatially limited conflict causes global consequences and accelerates numerous processes in international relations, in the spheres of politics, economy, trade, military industry etc. Division appears in that context as well, especially when speaking about the EU and the NATO on one side and the BRICS and the CSTO on the other side. It should be taken into account that, according to the National Security Strategy from 2019, "European integrations and the EU membership are the national interest and strategic orientation of the Republic of Serbia", including military neutrality, which is not an obstacle in the development of the cooperation with the NATO and the CSTO (National Security Strategy, 2019). Moreover, the Strategy also stipulates the continuation of cooperation with the key international factors – the USA, Russia and China (National Security Strategy, 2019, p. 39). In this way, the multi-vector foreign policy of the Republic of Serbia is shown, which in the current context of the position in the geopolitical knot is rather complex.

As we have already stated, after 24 February 2022, a pronounced divide emerged in international relations into "pro-Ukrainian" and "pro-Russian" side, and such classification has become a model by which countries should be guided or they have to do it because of the pressures for aligning with the politics of international organizations they belong to or would like to join. The above-mentioned indicates that international circumstances in which countries need to create their foreign policy are much more complex than in the period before the beginning of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, particularly if they are situated in geopolitically vulnerable zones, on the imaginary line of the conflict of two geopolitical concepts. Therefore, we need to understand the geopolitical features explained in the previous part of the paper because they depict the geopolitical position of the Republic of Serbia and serve for the analysis in the current context.

Since the beginning of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, we have witnessed numerous foreign political pressures suffered by the holders of power in the Republic of Serbia, which is expected, having in mind the so-called side-taking model in international relations. First, we bear witness to the European Union pressurizing Serbia to impose sanctions to Russia and to align its foreign policy with the EU's policy. As stated in the E EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), "the continuation of Serbia's EU accession process is conditioned by its alignment with the sanctions against Russia and making significant progress in the reforms related to the EU" (*Politika*, 2024). Therefore, if the official attitude is that European integrations are Serbia's strategic orientation, it is clear that pressures and messages from the EU are not favourable in that respect. Although more than three years have passed since the beginning of the conflict, the EU is announcing the 18th package of sanctions against Russia, with the emphasis on the Russian energy sector and the suspension of the sources of Russian financing (*Politika*, 2025a). The above-mentioned

confirms that foreign political circumstances in which the Republic of Serbia has been for more than three years are not favourable. The policy of balancing between the West and the East is also reflected in voting at the UN General Assembly, where Serbia condemned Russia's attack against Ukraine, but did not support sanctions against it. "Serbia's principled position against sanctions as a wrong instrument for achieving foreign political goals (since it also suffered years-long sanctions at the end of the 20th century) was not met with understanding in the West" (Gajić, 2023, p. 64). Persistence regarding the non-imposition of sanctions to Russia is of national interest having in mind Russian support in the UN Security Council to the territorial integrity of the Republic of Serbia and the position of Kosovo and Metohija. In addition, the relations of the two countries are also important for several other reasons: historical, religious-confessional, political, economic, trade, geo-energetic and military (Despotović, Glišin, 2024). Therefore, imposing sanctions on Russia would also have a negative effect on the geopolitical position of the state, as well as on the political position of the ruling party because, according to surveys, the majority of the people is in favour of maintaining good relations with the Russian Federation. The research conducted within the project "National interests of the Republic of Serbia: from contestation to legitimation" shows that 81% of the surveyed citizens of Serbia are against introducing sanctions to Russia, while 91% of the respondents believe that maintaining security of the Serbs in Kosovo and Metohija is a national interest (*Novi standard*, 2022). Other studies also show pronounced opposition to the sanctions

against Russia; namely, according to the "Henry Jackson Society" survey. 78.7% of the surveyed citizens of Serbia are against the imposition of sanctions on Russia (Ivanov & Laruelle, 2023, p. 27). Taking this into account, the worsening of bilateral relations with Russia is not a good option.

Looking from a different perspective, Serbia's strategic orientation towards European integrations raises new issues which were not in such a focus before the beginning of the conflict. In fact, Chapter 31 regarding common foreign and security policy is now much more important to the EU officials and this is exactly the question in relation to which Serbia has been largely criticized and found to regress in that chapter (Trailović, Rapaić, 2023). Colleague Aleksandar Matić points to four reasons why Serbia is not coming closer to the EU. Those are: "Chapter 23 about the rule of law, Chapters 31 and 35 about Kosovo and Metohija, and fatigue from the EU's expansion" (RTS, 2025). Therefore, if the country does not harmonize its foreign policy with the EU's policy and fails to impose sanctions on Russia because of the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, the European integrations road will be uncertain. According to colleague Aleksandar Gajić, "Serbia's Euro-integration prospect (except for the rhetoric level) by starting a 'new cold war' with the conflict in Ukraine becomes extremely out of place, while the strategy of neutral, balancing avoidance, although aggravated and like 'tightrope walking' is turning into Serbia's life imperative" (Gajić, 2023, p. 69).

The previously-mentioned can be explained in the following manner. If Serbia imposed sanctions on Russia, the question arises as to the negotiating position of the state regarding Kosovo and Metohi-

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ja, Republic Srpska, Srebrenica etc., since most EU member-states support the independence of Kosovo, participates in the destabilization of Republic Srpska and supports the Resolution on Srebrenica, in which the Serbs are labelled as a genocidal nation. At the UN General Assembly held on 23 May 2024, the Resolution on Srebrenica was adopted, which, according to Russian representative Vasily Nebenzya, further deepens the divides (RTS, 2024). Speaking of the pressures on Republic Srpska, Secretary of the Security Council Sergei Shoigu points out that Russia is oriented towards "providing any possible help to its development based on the observance of the Dayton principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity, equality of three state-building nations and two entities with broad constitutional authorities" (Politika, 2025b). Russian ambassador Aleksandar Bocan-Kharchenko has emphasized many times that Russia supports the territorial integrity of Serbia regarding the status of Kosovo and Metohija (Tanjug, 2025). Therefore, Russia expresses a clear attitude and supports diplomatic tools regarding all sensitive matters of importance to the Serbian people, and that is why maintaining good relations is indispensable. Moreover, the attempt to maintain good relations with the Russian Federation is reflected in the fact that Serbia has not suspended either direct air transport or Russian media, e.g., Sputnik and RT.

The third perspective requires taking into account the insular position of the Republic of Serbia since, in the event of global turbulences, the country might become isolated, with no possibility of implementing a multi-vector and balancing foreign policy. Since the beginning of the conflict, all the neighbouring countries have harmonized their respective foreign policies with the Atlanticist pole of power and joined the anti-Russian sanctions. Moreover, the neighbouring countries are exerting pressure on Serbia to impose sanctions on Russia, "insinuating that Serbia is a 'Russian player' and Trojan horse in the Balkans whose foreign policy threatens regional stability and security" (Gajić, 2023, p. 65). In the past few years, messages have been sent many times about "Serbia being Russia's Trojan horse in Europe" (Cohn-Bendit, Garton Ash, Karolewski & Leggewie, 2022), which is a stereotype used throughout history to justify different hostile activities against Serbia and Serbian nation (Ekmečić, 2021). What does it actually mean? As we could see many times in history, great powers determined their followers in the Balkans through which they controlled and restrained the Serbian factor, seized Serbian lands and expelled and killed Serbian people. In this fragmentation as a feature is reflected, which in the newly-emerging circumstances can be seen as more and more pronounced in the territory of Kosovo and Metohija, but also in the pressures exerted on Republic Srpska. At the same time, the conflict potential expressed in borderliness as a geopolitical feature may be activated. Since the neighbouring countries accepted the Atlanticist concept which is, globally speaking, anti-Russian and, at the regional level, anti-Serbian, there is no doubt that the goal is to continue pressurizing the insular position of Serbia and Serbian national interests. Therefore, since the beginning of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, "Serbia undoubtedly has the narrower action space for keeping the former direction [...] and the balanced relationship towards all four pillars of its foreign policy (the EU, the USA, Russia and China)" (Gajić, 2023, p. 66).

Conclusion

Geopolitical features paradigmatically show the position of Serbia and Serbian nation in centuries-long continuity, and that is why it is a justified starting point for the analysis in the context of the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian conflict. The effects of the conflict soon became global, which inevitably led to the acceleration of processes in international relations, placing the countries on two opposed sides, like the Cold War division. Serbia has found itself on the line of divisions due both to the multi-vector foreign policy and the interests and influences of foreign political actors which are intertwined in this territory. That is why knottiness as a geopolitical feature is unavoidable when speaking about the position of the Republic of Serbia in the current international context.

In addition, fragmentation as a new destabilization factor is a specific tool with the aid of which it is possible to exert pressure on Serbia and Serbian nation, which has been evident particularly in the past few months, in the examples of Kosovo and Metohija and Republic Srpska. The Atlanticist West exerts pressure on the Serbian leadership in the most sensitive spots of national interests both directly and indirectly, through the neighbouring countries. This is built upon by borderliness as a geopolitical feature, or political division by religious-confessional and civilizational affiliation, which has been used throughout history with the aim of destabilizing the Balkans. It is exactly on the lines of division that the conflict potential has been created and the state of permanent instability has been kept which, if necessary, could turn into an open conflict.

Therefore, since 24 February 2022, the Republic of Serbia has, unlike many countries that took either the "pro-Ukrainian" or the "pro-Russian" side, has been in an unenviable and complex geopolitical position, which affects the internal political state and foreign political positioning. Currently it is impossible to see the benefits of taking either one or the other side because of the previously stated facts about the geopolitical position of Serbia, and that is why persistence in the policy of balancing between the West and the East is justified, even in the narrowed manoeuvring space. Geopolitical circumstances in the future will undoubtedly depend on the outcome of the war in Ukraine and, concurrently with the balancing politics, different scenarios and potential positioning of Serbia in the forthcoming circumstances should be projected. In that respect, we will list four potential scenarios of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict and the effects on the position of the Republic of Serbia, as a basis for further comprehensive and detailed research and analyses. We would like to emphasize that each of the scenarios has several layers and aspects, and that is why it is impossible to draw comprehensive and thorough conclusions in only several passages.

The first scenario implies the success of the Russian Federation or, conditionally speaking, victory in the ongoing conflict. That would mean Russia's stronger positioning in the international order, particularly in relation to the Atlanticist West as a geopolitical opponent to Eurasianism. According to this scenario, the position of the Republic of Serbia would become more stable and important in the region since it has not imposed

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sanctions on Russia. A more favourable strategic position would provide a broader manoeuvring space for resolving questions of national importance, primarily the question of the status of Kosovo and Metohija. Furthermore, the position of Republic Srpska and the Serbian people in the region would be more favourable, particularly with the strengthening ties with the Serbian motherland. As for the internal political situation, there is a risk of Serbia encountering the EU's political, economic, institutional and other pressures exactly because of one of the priorities of its foreign policy – the European integrations road. We believe that Russia's potential success in the conflict will lead to the establishment of a multipolar international order, which we see as more favourable circumstances for the long-term positioning of Serbia. At the same time, we have in mind the insular position of Serbia in the EU/NATO surroundings, which continues to limit the state's diplomatic manoeuvring position and further complicates the analysis of the first scenario. Accordingly, we believe that it is necessary to follow actively all aspects of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, as well as the roles of different actors in the conflict in order to make political decisions on the basis of timely analyses.

The second scenario implies *a frozen conflict* with no clarified outcome of the conflict, with the continuation of the "cold" geopolitical confrontation of the East and the West. Such a context would substantially complicate the position of Serbia, whose balancing strategy would become more difficult and less sustainable. Foreign po-

litical pressures would be intensified, European integrations would be uncertain, while Russia's support would be reduced. The newly-emerging circumstances might call for taking one of the opposed sides. Fragmentation as a geopolitical feature may be an active instrument of the West's pressure on Serbia, especially in the regions such as Kosovo and Metohija, Bujanovac-Preševo region, Raška region, Vojvodina, but also Republic Srpska and the territory in the region populated by the Serbs. Apart from foreign political pressures, pronounced polarization would occur at the internal political level, into the pro-Western and pro-Russian sides. Moreover, the economic situation and cooperation with foreign partners would be uncertain, which would threaten economic growth.

The third scenario implies the end of the conflict at the negotiation table and the division of Ukraine in line with the state in the field. Namely, with the mediation of great powers, the proposal would be made that would be accepted by both warring sides. Such an outcome would lead to the de-escalation of global tensions and relaxation of pressures on the countries such as Serbia, particularly in terms of taking one of the two warring sides. By abolishing the forced side-taking model, it would be possible to continue the multi-vector foreign policy and the neutral military position, although we would like to emphasize that, in this context, the negotiations and cooperation with foreign political actors should continue from the aspect of Serbian national interests. It means that diplomatic tools should be activated for solving the status of Kosovo and Metohija and for more

favourable positioning of Serbia in international relations.

The fourth scenario implies the success of Ukraine, i.e., the West, or, conditionally speaking, victory in the conflict. In such circumstances, Russia would suffer a political and military defeat, and its international position would be undermined. Accordingly, Serbia would be forced to distance itself from Russia and fully align its foreign policy with the EU's policy. With the loss of its key ally in the UN Security Council, Serbia's international negotiating position would be substantially weaker and further political decisions would be brought into question. It would be reflected on the status of Kosovo and Metohija, which would in further steps cause a domino effect in other geopolitical hotspots in the territory of Serbia. The European integration road might assume a new dimension, i.e., the demands for rigorous conditions and reforms in all segments. Because of Serbia's internal political polarization into pro-Western and pro-Russian sides, social tensions and conflicts might occur.

Potential scenarios are the basis for multidisciplinary research and analyses, which is also necessary in dynamic international relations we are witnessing.

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Book Reviews

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When history falls silent, geopolitics starts speaking

Photo: Archives of Vojvodina

Review of the monograph *Eurasian Geopolitics of Security* by Aleksandar Gajić and Nikola Rajić, Novi Sad, Archives of Vojvodina, and Belgrade: Institute of European Studies, 2025

Geopolitical considerations of Aleksandar Gajić and Nikola Rajić, collected in the monograph *Eurasian Geopolitics of Security,* in a comprehensive, concise and reasoned manner, reveal dark corridors of power located in this part of the planet. A broad, inclusive and conceptually close interpretative framework offers readers a number of sharp-witted, astute and analytical texts, theoretically substantiated by series of relevant historical sources, diplomatic documents, intelligence data and political stratagems. Their sum should not be

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measured by the number of pages (310) but by the true depth of the meanings that pointe to the continuity of geopolitical projections and clashes of different interest spheres in the relatively unstable ethnic, religious, economic, ideological, historical, cultural and security region. This is a "strategic crossroads and security-vital territory" in Mackinder-like understanding of the importance of this region in struggles for world domination: "Who rules the Heartland commands the World-Island; who rules the World-Island commands the world" (Mackinder, 2009). Each chapter makes part of the synthetized, unique and functionally shaped thematic edition of separate texts which, in a layered and planned fashion, reveal the complexity and organization of geopolitical projecting in the era of cyber conflicts and weighing of technological supremacy.

The book *Eurasian Geopolitics of Security* consists of 11 thematic segments which structurally connect the complex architecture of problematic international activities in this part of the world. At the very beginning the authors consider the relationship between the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), the NATO and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), particularly in relation to acting in the Eurasian region. Terrorism, separatism and religious extremism make the axis of evil characteristic of these territories, while the role of Western powers' security services in organizing a series of "colour revolutions" (from 2005, in Ukraine, and then in Kirgizstan and Uzbekistan...) has never been clarified. Russia, China, India and Pakistan are not only the countries competing for economic leadership; they are also nuclear powers with a high potential in possible war confrontations,

which always draws sufficient attention of cautions strategists.

The surges of radical Islamism in which Afghanistan is still an active training base threatens with the infiltration of religious extremists and the opening of new crises, which must not be underestimated at all. The chapter about Turkish foreign policy historically in detail reveals hidden mechanisms of inherited instructions ever since the epoch of the Ottoman Empire and unexpected geopolitical alliances aimed at preserving and reviving the empire, which explains many political decisions of this country nowadays. The authors gradually and in a theoretically supported manner mark the moment of the secular state's transition into the role of "the blocker of the Sea of Marmara strait", whereas the specific alliance with the United States of America ensures the unhidden role in the processes of border alteration management in the Caspian region. The idea of the "Turkish realm from the Adriatic to the Chinese Wall" initiated the educational-cultural offensive towards the Caucasus and Central Asia, while the road of the active military cooperation was simultaneously paved by numerous bilateral agreements on economic cooperation. Ethno-linguistic and religious closeness, as well as growing Neo-Ottomanism, are the pillars of the "strategic depth", but still insufficient for more efficient implementation of decades-long US interests in that region.

The future readers of this book will probably find interesting the comparison of the conflict paradigms regarding Nagorno-Karabakh and the Serbian province of Kosovo and Metohija. Analyzing the "frozen conflict" and the concepts of their interpretations in the inter-ethnic environ-

ment through the history of disputes and clashes of the confronted sides, Aleksandar Gajić and Nikola Rajić list numerous similarities and differences, emphasizing the geostrategic importance of controlling the region for Atlanticist, Oriental, Central European and Eurasian powers. What is pointed out on a smaller scale in geopolitical analyses is the religious dimension of conflicts because the oppressed are Christian nations (Serbs as Orthodox Christians, Armenians as Monophysites), while the oppressors are Muslim (Sunni Albanians and Shiite Azeris). The world public turned a blind eye to the destruction of 117 Serbian churches and monasteries, pretending not to hear the cries of the ethnically expelled population and pogroms it suffers every day in practice.

The research attention is also focused on the complex geostrategic frameworks of Russian-Iranian relations, which have been constantly in the stage of mutual understanding and harmony since the beginning of the 21st century. Former Persia has lost its crumbles of historical glory, but in the territory of the Middle East (West Asia), Iran is still "the key culturally and strategically dominant country". The turbulent past of the century-long mutual conflicts has been replaced by increasing ideological closeness and cooperation at the military and energy levels, whereas with the implementation of the "Primakov's doctrine", Putin's administration used the weaknesses of the geopolitical position of Teheran to offer a number of concessions in order to exit its international isolation. The two countries richest in gas worldwide rapidly transferred the cooperation in the field of energy into the military complex as well, including the controversial field of nuclear cooperation, which is particularly concerning to the West. Energy geopolitics is constantly on the rise, while the territories of Central Asia need to be analyzed through an interwoven interest relationship between the Russian-Chinese condominium to the hub of multipolarity that may easily turn into a powder keg on the verge of explosion. There small step between partnership relations and a strategic alliance is easily taken in conflict situations, as indicated by the authors.

The spiral of geostrategic projections, tactical turns and unexpected changes of orientations points to the disturbance and vagueness of political-diplomatic communication, as well as the deep instability of the region that is of essential importance to the global peace. Gajić and Rajić explore the narrow manoeuvre space left to big players on the chessboard, aware that playing with identities, ideologies and geography may easily become a trigger for changes in international relations. A surplus of history, with numerous layers of religion, politics, economy, propaganda and culture, makes the framework of interests in the future of the strategically important regions of the South Caucasian and Central Asia, while both the East and the West are equally involved in considering the possibilities of their own influence and interest expansion. Behind declarative messages about partnership and cooperation, there is a hidden series of dynamic and precisely configured security procedures and plans with potential regional conflicts and escalation processes. Illusions of dialogue and hope regarding possible forms of cooperation are masked by the clouds of radicalization in the function of acknowledging military supremacy, with increasing technological investments in cyber weapons.

The book presented here is quite interesting from the aspect of the development of the new multipolar world. The observer's keen eye cannot overlook the fact that the Eurasian region is slowly freeing itself from the US influence, which China and Russia are skilfully using to expand the range of their own ambitions and initiatives. Asymmetry can be seen in the nuances of their respective influences – while China is financially stronger, Russia is more influential in diplomatic and historical aspects. It is also possible to see a gradual geostrategic change in the Turkey's orientation in foreign affairs, in which this regional power skilfully manoeuvres the consequences of dosed conflicts and legitimizes itself as a desirable ally without which there are no global geopolitical events. The "feeling of exceptionality" is increasing, but it is not sufficient to be established in the eyes of own public – it also seeks international recognition of the new reality. This is a special virtue of this text: creative interpretation in the spirit of Mackinder-Spykman tradition, whereas foreign policies of big players on the chess table are analysed rationally, in the spirit of modern neoclassical realism.

This short review points to the theoretical foundation and empirical basis of the monograph offered by the authors. The credit also goes to the publishers – the Archives of Vojvodina from Novi Sad, which has in the past years become a respectable player substantially helping to bring books like this to our academic community, as well as the Institute of European Studies, whose target is the promotion of such current works. The dynamics of political power distribution in the modern world is changing every moment, but to those readers who are more interested in the Eurasian territory, the recommended book is the right choice.

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Art, science and politics

Зоран Аврамовић

СРПСКИ УМЕТНИЦИ И НАУЧНИЦИ У ПОЛИТИЦИ

ИК „ФИЛИП ВИШЊИЋ"

Photo: Zoran Avramović

Zoran Avramović: *Serbian Artists and Scientists in Politics*, IK Filip Višnjić, Belgrade, 2024, 250 pages

The latest book by our well-known intellectual and political activist Zoran Avramović brings various contributions divided into two segments: "Serbian artists in Politics" and "Serbian scientists and professors self-govern in politics" – with the "Final word" and the accompanying note about the author, completed with the list of his publications. The largest number of his works so far belongs to sociology of culture and literature, and sociology of education and politics. Some of his considerations can at the same time be seen as related to sociology of knowledge, as it is evident

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in this publication as well. Namely, the author emphasizes that the merit of one of the classical figures of sociology of knowledge, Karl Mannheim, is in "highlighting the element of irrationality that essentially exists in politics", whereas "the direction of thought in politics if often and unconsciously determined by collective actions or desired perceptions hiding parts of reality". Yet, this thesis, also accepted by the author, might be considered unilateral, because political opinion may also be rationally determined, primarily in terms of "objective-means rationality", while the starting value premises can be problematized. Moreover, they frequently prove to be difficult to accept, which is also evident in Avramović's specific observations throughout the book.

Speaking of the theses by eminent sociologists, this book takes into account the view of M. Weber, T, B. Bottomore, K. Mannheim, C. W. Mills, as well as of political scientists A. Tocqueville, J. Keane, and S. Woodworth. He is right in paying most attention to Max Weber's classical views of the nature of science and "politics as a vocation". The author's starting question is "how politically engaged Serbian artists, scientists and professors, thing ad act collectively" in the period 1990-2024. It is "intellectualized politics" at work, the characteristics of which is that the artist, the scientist and the professor cover their public acting by the authority of the profession, "thus making the impression of authority in the society's public sphere".

As far as writers are concerned, the author establishes that they entered the public life in two ways – by the content of their artistic works and their own socio-political engagement, whereas

"Certain values, interests and needs motivate the artist to become involved in politics; of course, each artist in a specific manner". In that context, the author mentions, first of all, Crnjanski, Ćosić, Andrić, and then Vidosav Stevanović, Bora Ćosić, Dragan Velikić, Ljubomir Simović, Svetislav Basara, Milisav Savić, Dušan Kovačević... In his further considerations, the author particularly focuses on our artists' political engagement during the war breakup of the SFRY and the Serbian people's suffering in the period 1990–2000 and later. As a matter of fact, deeper ideological-political differences proved to exist among Serbian writers. They were not guided by "practical wisdom, but by experience, impression, easy and hard words and a quick, exclusive attitude". It was a way of learning about the reality which was marked by Oswald Spengler as "experiential knowledge" of society and man whose roots are in emotions, intuition and will. The author completes his observations by analysing the acting of Serbian musical and visual artists, film and theatre directors and actors, documenting his artistic and civic engagement. Just as in the case of writers, the presentation is also individualized here through listing the names of this type of artists, their statements and ways of acting.

The second part of the performed analyses refers to Serbian scientists and professors. He notices that the "participation of scientists in politics does not guarantee either better political solutions or practical success. He also asks the question as to "how to explain that a substantial number of Serbian scientists observers, when stepping into the reality, incorrectly observe facts, rely on the impression and not on the reasons and causes, understand

practical life and political skills, or "unconsciously allow their personal intolerance and hatred to over-master the mind". The author reminds that Scheler and Pareto established that urges, feelings, wishes and interests participated in knowledge of society and politics, which is also reflected in the acting of our scientists and professors. Among them, Avramović particularly draws attention to Vesna Pešić, Čedomir Čupić, Nikola Samardžić, Vladimir Goati, Božidar Jakšić etc. The author establishes the central deficit in their action by stating that there are few examples in European political culture "of political actors not respecting the rights of their own nations and of advocating more for the inter-ests of others", which then leads to self-humiliation and disrespect of own nation and state.

In contrast, Avramović points out the follow-ing: "Involved in political struggles, the scientist, if he is truly a scientist, will not abandon the ideal of truthful knowledge in altered social circumstances". Moreover, the author notices that social sciences should "(1) analyse public events and processes, (2) observe structural tendencies of social life, and (3) point to the consequences of public decisions". This is a clear and sensible determination to which very little may be added.

Finally, the author also looks at the self-gov-ernment understanding of the university and its autonomy. His central thesis is: "In Serbia, for 70 years already, there has been a self-government organization of the university, which means that the state as the founder has been excluded from the governing functions of the faculties and uni-versities. This position of the university has no ex-ternal control of legitimacy and professional ethics;

The author of the book "Serbian Artists and Scientists in Politics", Professor Zoran Avramović, PhD, and political philosopher Dragoljub Kojčić at the promotion of the book, House of King Peter the First, Belgrade, in November 2024.
Photo: private archive

social processes emotionally, use empty concepts, and draw wrong conclusions from right premises". He states the lack of responsibility for the public performance of "professors and scientists in their cabinets" who do not possess any knowledge of

there are given to professors and students, while the state's duty is to provide financial funds", which can then lead to the "political instrumentalization" of a the faculties and institutes. It is a relevant topic worthy of consideration, which has particular currency in the present socio-political circumstances.

Just as the author's previous works, this one also shows his clear critical-political opinion, specific observations and assessments with which the reader does not need to agree in every detail, but which are in many aspects inspirational and showing respectable openness. Overall considerations in this attention-worthy edition are in compliance with the former emphasis by Milan Kangrga, a famous Yugoslav ethicist, that the intellectual who remains silent about society's important open issues is in fact not an intellectual. Apart from its theoretical value, this book also has a document value, due to the factual registration of the attitudes and engagement of Serbian artists and professors in the period from the 1990s to date. That is why it additionally deserves attention of the broader public.

References

Avramović, Z. (2024). *Serbian Artists and Scientists in Politics*. Beograd: IK Filip Višnjić [In Serbian]