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## GEOPOLITICAL DETERMINANTS OF MACEDONIA AS PART OF THE BALKAN INSTABILITY

### OUTLINE OF THE PROBLEM

**ABSTRACT** Geopolitics is a relatively new scientific discipline that studies the relationship between the geographical and historical factors influencing the formation and functioning of the states (centres of power). The aim of this paper is to present geopolitical and geostrategic determinants of Macedonia. The author examines the question: Does the territory of Macedonia have the character of destabilizing the political situation in the Balkans, by typing in the paradigm of Balkan instability? The author has relied on the analysis of the Balkan scientists, mostly Serbian and Greek. It is essential to mention: Andrej Mitrović, Miloljub Sretenović, Milenko Tešić, Radovan Pavić, Slavoljub B. Šušić, Alexander Demajo and Greek balkanist – Dimitri Poulakos. The author depicts the geopolitical significance of Macedonia throughout the ages, and geostrategic importance of Macedonia in order to conclude that contemporary Macedonia faces numerous problems of economic, ethnic, legal and international nature. However, it seems that the Albanian ethnic factor as well as bi-ethnicity of Macedonia are the most unstable elements in the current geopolitical situation of this territory.

**Key-words:** geopolitics, geostrategy, fragmentation, geopolitical actors, strategic directions, transbalkan, interbalkan, military-geographical classification, the paradigm of Balkan instability

## GEOPOLITICAL AND GEOSTRATEGIC DETERMINANTS OF THE BALKANS

*Geopolitics* is a relatively new scientific discipline pioneered by the Swedish scientist, Rudolf Kjellen (Kjellén), who first used the term in 1899 in the journal *Ymer* in 'Studier över Sverigers politiska gränser'. *Geopolitics* is an interdisciplinary science that studies the relationship between the geographical and historical factors influencing the formation and functioning of the states (centres of power). For the geopolitics the most important are the spatial relationships, as well as the impact of the geographical environment on the political structures. The very introduction of this term was accompanied by a number of controversies related to the fact that it was significantly involved in the current political discourse, combining a way of thinking about politics with the particular category of analysis. At the end of the Cold War geopolitics began to refer to specific events in their global dimension, attempting to discover the rules that govern the behaviour of the countries – players in the international relations, taking into account geographical criteria in order to answer the question of how geography shapes politics.<sup>1</sup>

Subsequently, geostrategy is a sub-discipline of geopolitics, which explores military problems in geopolitical terms. The research field of this discipline includes the analysis of the discipline of military clash between the centres of power, as well as the military aspects of the rivalry for global leadership.<sup>2</sup>

For the first time the issues of geopolitics and geostrategy of the Balkans have been raised by the prominent Serbian geographer Jovan Cvijić who highlighted the three main features of this area: the Euroasian character, the properties of combining and penetration, insulation properties (*izolovanja*) and separation (*odvajanja*)<sup>3</sup>, which generally should be interpreted as a tendency to fragmentation of the territory in this part of The Old Continent.

According to another Serbian scientist – Andrej Mitrović – one can distinguish three major components that determine the history of the Balkans: fundamental phases in the history, diversity resulting from the division of East and West of Europe, occurring in this territory, the formation of small nations, diversified in terms of ethnicity, divided by three religions.<sup>4</sup>

Dimitri Poulakos presented five permanent geopolitical factors that influence the history of the Balkans:

1. The intersection of the north coast of Dalmatia of major ethno-cultural trends in Europe: Slavic, Latin and German.

<sup>1</sup> A. Dybczyński (ed.), *Geopolityka*, Warszawa 2013, pp. 20-28.

<sup>2</sup> L. Sykulski, *Geopolityka. Słownik terminologiczny*, Warszawa 2009, pp. 31-32.

<sup>3</sup> J. Cvijić, *Balkansko poluostrvo i južnoslovenske zemlje. Osnovi antropogeografije*, Beograd 1966, pp. 8-9.

<sup>4</sup> A. Mitrović, *Istorijska iskustva o opasnostima za opstanak, slobodu i nezavisan razvoj naroda i narodnosti SFRJ*, Beograd 1980, pp. 4-5.

2. The existence of the east and west Balkan Muslim minority, consisting of Sunni militant and Shiite element.
3. The relationship of these minorities with the Afroasian religions and ethnic movements that are foreign to the Orthodox.
4. Impact of the central part of the Balkan Peninsula on the strategic stability of the region, from which results the geopolitical importance of Eastern Europe as geopolitical pivot between the West and Eurasia.
5. Geostrategic necessity of controlling the two ends of the Eurasian space – the Balkans and Central Asia, in order to take control of the space between them.<sup>5</sup>

Global geopolitical position of the Balkans can be presented using two models of geo-strategic concepts: *Rimland* and *Heartland*.

*Rimland* concept, developed by Nicholas John Spykman says that whoever rules the *Rimland* (the strip of coastal land, The Peninsular and Insular Belt that encircles Eurasian continental mass) commands Eurasia. Whoever rules Eurasia – controls the world<sup>6</sup>. Commanding the Balkans according to the concept of *Rimland* is therefore necessary to take control of Eurasia.

However, the concept of *Heartland*, by Halford John Mackinder, indicates that the geographical centre of the world (axis) is Eurasia, which he defined as *the Heartland*. Therefore, he created the most well-known geopolitical concept, claiming that “who rules East Europe commands *the Heartland*; who rules *the Heartland*, commands the World-Island; who rules the World-Island, controls the World”<sup>7</sup>. In this theory, the Balkans (together with Central and Eastern Europe) act as the gateway to take control of the Eurasian continent, which results in their important geopolitical position.

In accordance with the views of American scholars Louis J. Cantori and Steven L. Spiegel<sup>8</sup> – the Balkans must be seen as a subordinate system, whereas the Balkans were never presented as a dominant system. In different historical periods this region played a different role, which was dependent on external factors. This confirms the thesis that international relations in the Balkans can be understood as a function of the system of international relations in the broad sense, therefore, the state of stability in the Balkans depends on this system, while the decline in international tension strengthens the tendency to pursue a more independent policy by the various Balkan states.<sup>9</sup> At the same time it should be noted that in the historical perspective in the Balkans there has been a constant state of tension, which is not conducive to the creation of nation-states, but the subordination of the Balkan nations to stronger *political players*.

<sup>5</sup> D. Poulakos, ‘Permanent Factors in Balkan History’ in *Balkan posle drugog svetskog rata*, Beograd 1996, pp. 180-181 (*Posebna Izdanja*).

<sup>6</sup> Z. Lach, J. Skrzyp, *Geopolityka i geostrategia*, Warszawa 2007, p. 32.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 30.

<sup>8</sup> Vide: L.J. Cantori, S.L. Spiegel, *The International Politics of Regions. A Comparative Approach*, Englewood Cliffs 1970.

<sup>9</sup> F. Golemski, *Balkany. Determinanty stabilności*, Warszawa 1982, pp. 147-148 (*Biblioteka Spraw Międzynarodowych*, 79).

According to the analysts from the *Military Review* for centuries the Balkans constituted the territory, where clashes of the army of the world occurred. In fact the Huns, Avars, Tatars, Turks, Russians were approaching from the East; the Crusaders, Venetians, the the British from the West; Hungarians and Germans from the North.<sup>10</sup> It must be agreed with the Huey L. Kostanick that historically the Balkans were considered as an unstable region, where there were tensions and conquests, which act as a consequence of interrelations between geography and history during the Turkish occupation – from the 14<sup>th</sup> century to the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>11</sup> At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the Balkans became the archetype of the territory characterised by primitive savagery, rapes, nationalisms, which were leading to conflicts and wars.

According to the French researcher – Michel Sivignon – the Balkans – are a *sui generis* territorial phenomenon, whose specificity lies in the necessity of mutual cooperation of hostile communities in the confined space. A kind of laboratory where *in vivo* you can observe religious conflicts, ethnic diversity and the scars left behind by history (dating back to antiquity).<sup>12</sup>

According to Vladimir Dedijer, the geographical and geostrategic position of the Balkans as well as the interests of the powers led to a permanent struggle for a sphere of influence in this region, so the sphere of interests division policy was a regular phenomenon in the Balkans. Historically, one needs to pay attention to the division of the Ottoman heritage between the powers, notably Austria-Hungary together with Russia, which made a number of alliances in order to change the political system in the disruption of the powers' balance in the Balkans.<sup>13</sup>

After the end of the Cold War, according to the experts from the Serbian Ministry of Defence, there was a fundamental change in the geopolitics of this region. Miloljub Sretenović said that the conditions that emerged in the Balkans could be characterised as “the geopolitical earthquake”, the epicentre of which took place in the former Yugoslavia. The country became a testing ground and laboratory of the powers, whose influence led to the establishment of new six countries in the Balkans, with the possibility of further fragmentation. Moreover, this part of Europe was given a new name – the Western Balkans.<sup>14</sup> Thus, as the Serbian analyst underlined, an artificial name was

<sup>10</sup> S.N. Bjelajac, E.R. Wainhouse, ‘The Balkans in European Military Strategy’, *Military Review*, Vol. 37, No. 7 (1957), p. 30.

<sup>11</sup> H.L. Kostanick, ‘The Geopolitics of the Balkans’ in Ch. Jelavich, B. Jelavich (eds.), *The Balkans in Transition. Essays on the Development of Balkan Life and Politics since the Eighteenth Century*, Berkely 1963, pp. 1–3 (*Russian and East European Studies*). Recent history confirms the lack of stability in the region, whose territory is the intersection of civilization and the emerging countries are affected by the syndrome of the “shock of the past” and a kind of narcissism, which makes that after the Cold War the threat of wars and conflicts still exists. L.R. Mitrović, *Balkan – granica i most među narodima*, Beograd 2000, pp. 9, 12–13 et *passim*.

<sup>12</sup> M. Sivignon, *Les Balkans. Une géopolitique de la violence*, Paris 2009, pp. 10–11 (*Mappemonde*).

<sup>13</sup> V. Dedijer, *Interesne sfere. Istorija interesnih sfera i tajne diplomatije uopšte, a posebno Jugoslavije u drugom svetskom ratu*, Beograd 1980, pp. 60–66 et *passim*.

<sup>14</sup> Artificially created Western Balkans include the territory of the former Yugoslavia – without Slovenia,

coined by euro politicians from Brussels for the designatum, territory which is specific in geopolitical terms, unstable, undertaking the transition period. This term was, however, not used by the eminent Serbian geographer Jovan Cvijić. It was not also created by the will of the Serbs, as Serbia has the central position in the Balkans. However, according to the rules of geography in the west of the Balkans there are: Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Albania and possibly Montenegro.<sup>15</sup>

In the geopolitical studies of this region essential remains the fact that in the so-called Western Balkans important transport hubs intersect, which for centuries have had fundamental meaning for Europe and Asia. Morawsko-wardarski, Maricki together with direction: Drac – Tirana – Skopje – Sofia – The Black Sea.<sup>16</sup>

Radovan Pavić stressed that the paramount importance for the Balkans had – particularly sensitive to security issues – the zone between the Adriatic Sea and the Strait of Otranto as well as the Black Sea. In this zone there are territories burdened with the most important problems in the region, which include ethnic conflicts related to the Macedonian–Greek, Macedonian-Bulgarian, Albanian-Serb and Albanian-Greek relations. If in this territory ethnic conflicts escalated, the Balkans would enter into the third phase of its political development, that is after the period of instability as a “powder keg” in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, followed by relative stability since the mid-50s to the 80s 20<sup>th</sup> century would have had to start the third phase – re-characterized as – instability.<sup>17</sup>

## THE GEOPOLITICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF MACEDONIA THROUGHOUT THE AGES

The geopolitical position of Macedonia are fully characterized by the words of Serbian analyst, Alexander Demajo, who stated that “In the historical perspective, geographically centrally located in the Balkans, Macedonia constituted the subject of bargaining, secret conventions and false illusions”.<sup>18</sup>

Due to its central location Macedonia gained a significant geopolitical and geostrategic role. The territory of Macedonia constitutes a well-protected valley surrounded by three mountain ranges: the Dinaric Alps, Šar Planina and The Rhodopes,<sup>19</sup> where as

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but with Albania. In this way, the Western Balkans make a specific geopolitical region in the South-East Europe.

<sup>15</sup> M. Sretenović, ‘Geopolitički položaj Zapadnog Balkana’, *Vojno Delo*, Vol. 62, No. 1 (2010), pp. 54-56 et *passim*.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> R. Pavić, ‘Problemi Balkana i rubnih mora (teze)’ in *Balkan krajem 80-ih godina*, Beograd 1987, p. 118.

<sup>18</sup> A. Demajo, ‘Problemi odnosa među balkanskim zemljama i putevi njihovog prevazilaženja’ in *Balkan krajem 80 godina...*, p. 162.

<sup>19</sup> One of the oldest transportation routes leads through the Rhodopes Massif, bonding the Western Europe and Asia Minor.

prof. Irena Stawowy-Kawka underlines, the main transportation and trade routes between Europe and the Middle East have crossed for centuries. Macedonia is the central point of the main communication routes intersection running from the North, that is the Western and Central Europe to the South – to the port of Thessaloniki.<sup>20</sup> In Macedonia too, regional communication routes are divided into east and west directions – to Istanbul and the Albanian Adriatic coast, and from there – to southern Italy. The most important communication route of the Balkans, based on so-called Vardar-Moravian Corridor runs through the territory of Macedonia, too.<sup>21</sup> Through this corridor the Balkan conquest by the Ottoman Porte took place in the 14<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>22</sup> The corridor running through Vardar and Morava valleys forms the axis connecting the Danube plains of the Mediterranean Sea. Morava-Vardar axis enables also crossing from Pannonian Valley towards Aegean Sea and Asia Minor. It branches off to a place called *Kosovo Gateway*, which is natural depression, which was followed by extensive Albanian settlements.<sup>23</sup>

Through the territory of Macedonia the famous ancient Roman Empire communication route *Via Egnatia* was running also, from Dürres on the Adriatic coast, through Egnatia (Thessaloniki) to Istanbul. During Turkish invasions of Europe line – from the Sava and the Danube Rivers – was defined as a bulwark of Christianity, setting the strategic importance of the region. An important strategic direction – the so-called *Bosnian road*, connecting Skopje with Kosovo and Sarajevo passes through Macedonia.

J. Cvijić underlines that the Vardar transport routes in the Balkans have always been important, especially *Via Egnatia*, reaching the valley of Vardar.<sup>24</sup> It has become crucial that “anyone who ruled Macedonia, played a decisive role on the Balkan’s stage”.<sup>25</sup> After the conquest by the Turks in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, Macedonia had vague administrative boundaries. At the beginning of the last century it covered the following Turkish Provinces: Thessaloniki (Sandžaks: Thessaloniki, Serres, Drama), longitudinally stretched Kosovo Province (with Sandžaks: Skopje, Priština, Prizren, Peć, Novi Pazar), and some part of Monastir Province (Bitola), covering five Sandžaks: Dibra, Elbasan, Korca, Ohrid and Servia.<sup>26</sup>

For at least a few decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Macedonia was a major part of the political game, which the Balkan states were fighting. Due to its location the neighbour-

<sup>20</sup> D. Mitrany, *The Effect of the War in South Eastern Europe*, New York 1973, pp. 6-7.

<sup>21</sup> Y. Lacoste, *Geopolityka Śródziemnomorza*, trans. by R. Stryjewski, Warszawa 2010, p. 288.

<sup>22</sup> D. Topalović, ‘Neki istorijski i savremeni aspekti geopolitičkog položaja Balkana’ in *Balkan krajem 80 godina...*, p. 152.

<sup>23</sup> The expansion of the Albanians in Macedonia began in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century and the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when Albanians mass occupied towns and villages abandoned by the Orthodox population, retreating to the north along with the Austrian army in 1689, after a popular uprising led by Karpos. I. Stawowy-Kawka, ‘Mniejszości narodowe w Republice Macedonii – współczesne problemy’ in eadem (ed.), *Miejsce Macedonii na Bałkanach. Historia, polityka, kultura, nauka*, Kraków 2005, p. 85.

<sup>24</sup> J. Cvijić, *Balkansko poluostrvo...*, p. 46.

<sup>25</sup> I. Stawowy-Kawka, *Historia Macedonii*, Wrocław 2000, p. 5.

<sup>26</sup> E. Weibel, *Histoire et géopolitique des Balkans de 1800 à nos jours*, Paris 2002, p. 224 (*L'Orient Politique*).



ing countries acknowledged as their substantial interest to include Macedonia in its borders. Macedonia had (and still has) the strategic importance especially for Bulgaria, Serbia and Greece, and to a lesser extent – Montenegro and Romania.

The important geopolitical role of Macedonia dates back to the Balkan Wars (1912–1913), when it became a subject of contention between Serbia, Bulgaria and Greece. The area could certainly be regarded as a detonator, causing the outbreak of the Second Balkan War, as well as ruthless rivalry between the members of the Balkan alliance aimed at the destruction of the opponent. Analyzing the extent of the territorial aspirations of the Balkan countries, it must be concluded that the main area of dispute was Macedonian lands.<sup>27</sup>

In the interwar period – Vardar Macedonia was certainly a flashpoint of the southern Slavs' state and the Macedonian terrorists' (WMRO) activity led to the assassination of King Alexander (in 1934). In the system of Balkan instability it is necessary to indicate the Macedonian conflict still exists, which after World War II linked three Balkan countries (Bulgaria, Yugoslavia and Greece). During the Cold War antagonisms were seemingly suppressed and contradictions overcome, however the Macedonian issue remained an important factor in the Greek-Yugoslav and Bulgarian-Yugoslav relations.

The modern Macedonia is still best characterized by the term: fragmentation, since it was formed in 1991, Macedonia – covers only one third of the historic area of the territory, that is Vardar Macedonia. The other parts of it – namely Pyrinska Macedonia mostly situated in Bulgaria and Aegean Macedonia – which is part of Greece, determine the geopolitical importance of Macedonia which only at the beginning of its independence (which is characteristic – peacefully got out of the Civil War connected with the break-up of Yugoslavia) could be considered as a candidate for the rapid Euro-Atlantic integration. However, the relations with neighbours, Greece, Bulgaria and Kosovo made from Macedonia a specific part of the Balkan instability and destruction – also in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>28</sup>

The dispute with Greece over the name effectively blocked Skopje's Euro-Atlantic ambitions, bringing to veto towards the invitation of Macedonia to the North Atlantic

<sup>27</sup> It is worth remembering that the rivalry for that province lasted for a long time. Back in the 1820s, the Greeks had the greatest influence on this territory. This condition resulted from a privileged position, which won the Greek Patriarchate in the Ottoman state, and the subordination of the religious authority of Bulgaria and Serbia in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. A. Giza, 'Sytuacja polityczno-gospodarcza na ziemiach macedońskich pod koniec XIX w.' in idem (ed.), *Rosja – Polska – Bałkany w XVIII-XX w.*, Szczecin 1995, pp. 201-203. In the area of Macedonia aspirations of other Balkan countries who cared only for their substantial interests, building the foundations of a new conflict clashed. Bulgarians, in addition to the arguments relating to ethnic, religious and linguistic ties to the area, all the time were mindful of the Treaty of San Stefano and drawn Bulgarian boundaries covering the territory of Macedonia. The creation of the Great Bulgaria would be the fulfillment of their national aspirations and dreams of their own country. Serbs put forward claims related to the historical and religious issues. While the Greeks were apparently a separate national group in Macedonia, but their weaknesses were due to being geographically dispersed. T. Wituch, *Tureckie przemiany. Dzieje Turcji 1878-1923*, Warszawa 1980, p. 91.

<sup>28</sup> Ł. Reszczyński, 'Geopolityka Macedonii – przyczynek', Geopolityka.pl, 13 April 2012, at <<http://geopolityka.org/analizy/1414-geopolityka-macedonii-przyczynek>>, 23 July 2013.

Alliance at the NATO summit in 2008. The genesis of the dispute dates back to the beginnings of independent Macedonia, founded after the Cold War, when Athens protested against its name – *The Republic of Macedonia*. Greece objected against Macedonian unlawful usage of Hellenic symbols, especially the 16-pointed Sun of Vergina originating from the tomb of Philip II of Macedon.<sup>29</sup>

M. Sivignon rightly drew attention to the fact that from the geographical point of view – Macedonia finds itself in relationship of dependency on Greece where there are the Vardar river basin axis<sup>30</sup> and strategically important for Macedonia – Thessaloniki port, nowadays the trans Balkan motorway junction situated on the territory of Greece. It should also be noted that primarily Greece is a major foreign investor in Macedonia.<sup>31</sup>

On the contrary, Bulgaria, which has been tightening its policy towards Macedonia still seeks to challenge the creation of the Macedonian national identity. Since 2012 Bulgaria has been pursuing the so-called *red line policy* towards Macedonia. Apart of the Bulgarian elite and its political environment questions the existence of the Macedonian nation and language, claiming that they are Bulgarians, who speak a Bulgarian dialect. *Red line policy* – first of all means paying attention to the Bulgarian government's attitude towards the history and cultural heritage of Macedonia.<sup>32</sup>

After the Cold War Albania became a new geopolitical actor important for Macedonia, with the concept of *Greater Albania*, raising the issue of the inclusion of the lands inhabited by the Albanian minority in Macedonia.

Regression in the transformation system in Macedonia, manifesting itself in suppression of the reform process, restriction on freedom of speech and increase of autocratic tendencies within the ruling elites, strengthens the destructive power of geopolitical factors. Furthermore powers such as: Russia, the U.S. and Turkey are increasingly trying to protect their geopolitical interests in this territory.

Recently Ankara has been a particularly active player in the territory of the Balkans – since 2009 Turkish foreign policy has been defined as *strategic depth*. *Strategic depth*

<sup>29</sup> To force Macedonians to make concessions, the Greeks laid upon the country an economic embargo and they sealed the borders. The situation had become so complicated that Macedonia had to ask for UN intervention. Finally, the Greek sanctions were revoked in 1995 after signing of the agreement by which Macedonia committed to use the new name – *the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia* (FYROM), but the dispute over the name of the country continues to be the axis of the modern Greek-Macedonian conflict. 'Główne problemy transformacji w Republice Macedonii. (1991-2000)' in T. Godlewski, A. Koseski, K.A. Wojtaszczyk (eds.), *Transformacja systemowa w krajach Europy Środkowej, Wschodniej i Południowej 1989-2002. Wybrane problemy*, Bydgoszcz–Pułtusk 2003, p. 153 et passim; E. Weibel, *Histoire et géopolitique des Balkans...*, p. 589.

<sup>30</sup> Vardar flows into the Aegean Sea, a few miles west from Thessaloniki.

<sup>31</sup> M. Sivignon, *Les Balkans...*, p. 188. In the last two decades Greek investments in Macedonia exceeded 1 billion euro. In the country there are about 300 Greek enterprises that operate in almost every sector of the economy. Their development is conducive to favorable government policy, which basically is the result of investors paying lower taxes than in Greece.

<sup>32</sup> 'Bulgaria ogłasza wobec Macedonii politykę "czerwonej linii"', WP.pl, 7 September 2012, at <<http://konflikty.wp.pl/kat,1020385,title,Bulgaria-oglasza-wobec-Macedonii-polityke-czerwonej-linii,wid,14907217,wiadomosc.html?ticaid=110b11>>, 23 July 2013.



which is an increase of political activity in the territory of the former Turkish Ottoman Empire: the Middle East, the Western Balkans, Central Asia, The Caucasus and North Africa. According to this doctrine, Turkey should take advantage of the achievements of the Ottoman Empire, as well as its geopolitical position to form a multi-vector foreign policy. The Turkish authorities recognize the Balkan countries as neighbours. Due to geographical location of Turkey, historical, cultural, economic ties and people-to-people contacts the Balkans are the priority in the Turkish foreign policy. This policy – in many Balkanists' evaluations, especially Serbians, but also Croatians – is a danger associated with the development of the neo-Ottomanism phenomenon, whose expansive character threatens the security and interests of the Balkan countries (especially Orthodox). There is a potential danger to build a bloc of Islamic states, hostile towards the West on the territory of Turkey's former Ottoman Empire, in accordance with the geopolitical paradigm of the so-called *Green Corridor*, which predicts the formation of a chain of Islamic countries (particular *Islamic state*) from Istanbul to Bosnia and Herzegovina, including Albania, Sandžak and Kosovo. Lately we have had to deal with the phenomenon of Muslim ethnic and religious assertiveness strengthening in the Balkans, where Turkey has appointed itself as a legal guardian.<sup>33</sup>

## GEOSTRATEGIC IMPORTANCE OF MACEDONIA

From the Balkans geostrategy perspective one may distinguish two types of strategic directions: transbalkan<sup>34</sup> and interbalkan.

The territory of Macedonia has the major value for interbalkan directions. They are situated in the largest part in the territory of the former Yugoslavia. They tie Pannonian lowlands with the Adriatic and the Aegean Sea. Generally they are placed longitudinally. Direction axis – is the Great Morava with the continuation of the Niš valley. There, the direction divides into the valley of Maritsa (nišavsko-maricki direction), valley of southern Moravia in the Preševo direction, the valley of Vardar (Moravian-Vardar direction) and Kosovo in northern Albania (Kosovo-Drinski direction). It is true that interbalkan directions are less important than transbalkan, as they are situated mainly in valleys, along the high mountains, but in military-geographical classification they have purely geo-operational or operational-strategic character.

Reigning over the territory of Macedonia allows to control the Moravian-Vardar corridor, and thus ensures the safety of Kosovo and Metohija. It also allows the access to the port of Thessaloniki. During the Balkan Wars getting the control of this area – in the case of not having access to the sea until 1918 – was the only window to the world for Serbia. However, Macedonia, after the victory over Bulgaria in 1913, became the

<sup>33</sup> S. Trifković, 'Turkey as Regional Power: Neo-ottomanism in Action', *Politeja*, No. 2 (2011), pp. 89-91.

<sup>34</sup> The most important are transbalkan geo-strategic directions: Padska-Pannonian and Donje Podunavlje-Bosphorus-Dardanelles. M. Tešić, 'Geostrategijski položaj balkana (položaj Jugoslavije na Mediteranu)' in *Balkan krajem 80-ih godina...*, pp. 81-82.

only informal bridge guaranteeing the Serbs to get direct help from the western allies. It was also an area where the main defence line of Triple Entente was formed between 1916–1918. Defence and control of Macedonian section guaranteed security of southern flank fronts of World War I to the Germans and their allies.

With the development of advanced military technology Balkans were still significant in terms of strategic importance to the European powers. During World War II, for Hitler, in his plan *Drang nach Osten* this area had a cardinal role. After the war, Russia intensified its Greek project (trying to get the position towards the Mediterranean Sea), which was a continuation of the plans of Catherine the Great and her successors. It was derailed during the civil war in Greece in the period 1946-1949, which was a great defeat for the Kremlin strategists, as the territory of Greece, remained in the Western sphere of influence.<sup>35</sup>

During the Cold War, in the territory of the Balkans five key strategic directions relevant to the southern theater of war were defined, in case of an alleged conflict between the forces of NATO and the Warsaw Pact. One of them ran through Macedonia and it was an *Albanian-Bulgarian strategic direction*, including Albania, Montenegro, Kosovo and Macedonia, southern and south-eastern Serbia and northern Greece. This direction was connected with other operational and strategic directions that were directed from Greece to Macedonia and southern Serbia. It moved on from Sicily and Calabria to the coast of the Black Sea in Bulgaria, where it joined the Aegean-Bosphorus strategic direction. The axis and the depth of the direction covered Bar-Nis-Sofia and Varna. This strategic direction provided high operational capabilities in terms of land forces, backed by air force together with the navy in the Mediterranean basin.<sup>36</sup>

Moreover, during the Cold War strategists predicted that the territory of Macedonia could be used by the Warsaw Pact countries in order to move from the South to the North (the Mediterranean coast) or by the NATO countries to prevent breaking through the enemy forces from the North, or alternatively from the South in the conduct leading to achieving the objectives in central Europe.<sup>37</sup>

It should be noted that today's geo-strategic position of the Republic of Macedonia is the least favorable in comparison with other countries formed after the break-up of Yugoslavia. The strategic depth of the territory of Macedonia, amounting from the East to the West – 150 km, has a significant role in the conduct of the defense war. However, it is not sufficient for the development of land operations in the event of defensive war in modern battlefield conditions, therefore geographical determinants do not contribute to maintaining of the security of the state.

The area of Macedonia has a significant role in transferring military conflicts from Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina. There is a danger that Macedonia can-

<sup>35</sup> S.N. Bjelajac, E.R. Wainhouse, 'The Balkans...', p. 30.

<sup>36</sup> S. Šušić, *Balkanski geopolitički košmar*, Beograd 1995, p. 38 (*Redakcija izdavačke delatnosti "Vojna knjiga"*, 1068).

<sup>37</sup> M. Tešić, 'Geostrategijski položaj balkana...', pp. 81-82.

not avoid being involved in the conflicts by the powers that will pursue their particular objectives in the Balkans.<sup>38</sup> During the attack of NATO forces in Yugoslavia in 1999, the United Kingdom with a view to carrying out land operations, proposed the installation in Kosovo 12 thousand NATO troops from stationing in Macedonia international peacekeeping forces (UNPREDEP – United Nations Preventive Deployment Forces).<sup>39</sup> However, during this conflict the president of Macedonia, Kiro Gligorov, objected to the NATO proposition towards the usage of Macedonian military bases at the end of 1998, when the preparations to armed intervention were taking place.

After the start of the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia the Macedonian border was crossed by the armed terrorist troops of Kosovo Liberation Army (UÇK), who probably had joined the troops formed in Albania – Army of National Liberation.<sup>40</sup> After the war in Kosovo in 1999, the aspirations of Albanians increased significantly.<sup>41</sup> Indeed, they began to demand equal status of people in Macedonia, and even accession of border regions to Albania. In 2001 the National Liberation Army began the armed struggle with Macedonian power, using the slogan of fighting for equal rights for Albanian minority in Macedonia.<sup>42</sup> In fact, it was to undermine the idea of unity of the Macedonian state since the Albanians decided that the fight for the territory, inhabited by the Albanian minority in Macedonia, is their duty. Already in 2000, the Macedonian fraction of the Kosovo Liberation Army provoked some incidents on the borders of Macedonia and Kosovo. The rebellion of the National Liberation Army took place in spring of 2001. 15 March 2001 Albanians attacked Tetovo. The Macedonian army offensive led to the withdrawal of the separatists in the border regions, but the fighting stopped only as a result of the diplomatic intervention of the West.<sup>43</sup> Negotiations conducted under pressure from the EU and the U.S. led to an agreement in Ohrid. Albanians obtained inter alia the ability to use the Albanian language in communities, where they constitute at least 20%, and during the proceedings of the parliament. After the fighting the

<sup>38</sup> S. Šušić, *Balkanski...*, p. 285.

<sup>39</sup> J. Stańczyk, 'NATO w Kosowie: kontrowersje i implikacje', *Kwartalnik Bellona*, No. 3 (2009), p. 92.

<sup>40</sup> The refugees from Kosovo were moving to the territory of Macedonia on a massive scale. According to M. Sivignon there supposed to have been 800 thousand of them. The French scientist emphasized that they became the victims of the Serbian cleansing inscribed in applying in the West discourse that only Serbs were guilty of all evil in the Balkans. M. Sivignon, *Les Balkans...*, p. 165. It should be remembered that the cause of the humanitarian disaster, which took place in Kosovo in 1999, was largely due to NATO air strikes against Yugoslavia, the ethnic cleansing was carried out also by the Albanians and Serbians were among their victims. It is difficult to find the objectivity among many Western scholars who are obliged by political correctness and fidelity only to one view, according to which NATO and the U.S. – acting militarily to settle conflicts around the globe – are guided exclusively by the principles of promoting peace and democracy.

<sup>41</sup> Many researchers indicate that after the air raids in 1999 and the civil war in Kosovo the problems with the Macedonian authorities with Albanian minority, which began to claim their demands, escalated. E. Weibel, *Histoire et géopolitique des Balkans...*, p. 614.

<sup>42</sup> I. Stawowy-Kawka, 'Mniejszości narodowe...', p. 98.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 99.

Albanian-Macedonian conflict has been *asleep*, but that does not mean that there cannot be a new outbreak of it.<sup>44</sup>

The formation on a map of Europe of the new state – Kosovo in 2008, the existence of which is undermined by many scientists, laid the foundations for the next conflict, strengthening geopolitical instability of Macedonia, on which territory ethnic antagonisms can spread according to *the domino effect*.

In September 2007, following the news about the possibility of proclaiming Kosovo's independence, there were ethnic tensions in Macedonia, where the police clashed with Albanian militias.<sup>45</sup> Macedonia recognized Kosovo as a country on 9 October 2008, at the same time as Montenegro. The main supporters of the recognition of Kosovo were Albanian minority groups – comprising the governing coalition Democratic Union for Integration (DUI), and the opposition to the Cabinet of Nikola Grujevski Democratic Party of Albanians (DPA).<sup>46</sup>

In March 2012, there was the escalation of ethnic tensions in Macedonia, which turned into the largest anti-state riots against the Albanian minority since ten years of conflict. The violent demonstrations took place in Gostivar, which was attended by about 10 thousand people. The clashes, in which dozens of people were injured, took place after the killing of two Albanians by the Macedonian security forces.

However, the crisis of the modern Macedonian state is not only due to subversive activities of the Albanian minority, but also is a combination of a number of additional factors such as the economic crisis in the country (high unemployment rate), membership of Macedonia to the EU and NATO blocked by Greece, the growing trend of autocratic tendencies in the activity of Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski, which were reflected inter alia in the restriction of the freedom of speech and the independence of the judiciary.<sup>47</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS

Geopolitical studies carried out by Serbian researchers suggest that the territory of Macedonia is characterized by lack of stability, which is the thesis falling within the paradigm of Balkan instability in the broad sense, which is characteristic for this area

<sup>44</sup> A. Balcer, M. Kaczmarek, W. Stanisławski, *Kosowo – przed ostatecznym rozwiązaniem. Proces uregulowania statusu międzynarodowego – uwarunkowania polityczne i historyczne, perspektywy rozwoju sytuacji*, Warszawa 2008, p. 26 (*Prace OSW*).

<sup>45</sup> 'Macedonia: starcia policji z albańskimi demonstrantami', *Gazeta.pl*, 26 September 2007, at <<http://wiadomosci.gazeta.pl/Wiadomosci/1,80708,4522516.html>>, 23 July 2013.

<sup>46</sup> Ł. Kobeszko, 'Czarnogóra i Macedonia uznały niepodległość Kosowa', *Portal Spraw Zagranicznych*, 10 October 2008, at <[http://www.psz.pl/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&cid=14002](http://www.psz.pl/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&cid=14002)>, 23 July 2013.

<sup>47</sup> M. Szpala, 'Macedonia: Kryzys idei państwa wieloetnicznego', *OSW*, 14 March 2012, at <<http://www.osw.waw.pl/pl/publikacje/best/2012-03-14/macedonia-kryzys-idei-panstwa-wieloetnicznego>>, 23 July 2013.

on the basis of the historical and political circumstances. Furthermore, it is worth noting that the difficulties of the analysis of the political situation in the Balkans are related to the frequency and intensity of the changes taking place there. To determine the geo-political conditions in the Balkans the following terminology should be used: *changeability, instability, transformation, peripherality, fragmentation*, which terms are the most regular part of the political scene in the Balkan Peninsula.

Contemporary Macedonia faces numerous problems of economic, ethnic, legal and international nature. However, it seems that the Albanian ethnic factor as well as the bi-ethnicity of Macedonia are the most unstable elements in the current geopolitical situation of this territory. Internal problems and latent ethnic conflict between Albanians and Macedonians in the future may lead to the fact that Macedonia will become the focal point of the crisis in the regional, and even cross-regional dimension, particularly that the threat posed by the idea of the building of the Greater Albania is still valid and the concept of unification into a single state of all the lands inhabited by Albanians has been constantly present in the Albanian political discourse since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Devaluating its importance by contemporary Albanian politicians may be temporary and may be due to the necessity of taking the West into account. The situation in Kosovo has an impact not only on the radicalization of Serbs attitudes in Bosnia and Herzegovina, but it certainly stimulates the separatist tendencies of Macedonian Albanians.

Many politicians and experts divert from themselves the thought about the possibility of fighting resumption, which would cover areas of north-eastern and north-western Macedonia and south-eastern Serbia. On the contrary as the experience of the events of years 2000-2001 indicates, the Albanian revolt in the valley Preševo<sup>48</sup> and on the border between Kosovo and Macedonia – the plans of Albanian nationalists can be re-enacted, particularly that the Albanian political forces thanks to the concessions of the West managed to gain significant benefits, which were the result of several years of terrorist activities. The fear of the Western politicians therefore seems to be justified that Macedonia, the specifics of its territory, complex internal relations and lack of understanding of the historical and contemporary relations that occur there – may lead to conflict with a very high level of intensity. The geopolitical and geostrategic future of this country will depend on many factors – and, above all, on improving the economic situation in the country and on equal and conflict-free relations with its neighbours.

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<sup>48</sup> Preševo – in southern Serbia – situated close to the border with Macedonia, is an important strategic point due to the fact that the Albanian population entered into the valley of the Great Moravia, through which the significant communication link passes, with immense congestion, connecting Belgrade with Thessaloniki. M. Sivignon, *Les Balkans...*, p. 187.

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