Russian and EU Interests and Perceptions in the Western Balkans: The Case of North Macedonia

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Abstract

Global pressing issues such as the 2008 Global Financial Crisis, the 2015 Migration Crisis, Brexit, and the rise of the far right across Europe have shifted the EU's focus away from the integration of the Western Balkans into the European Union. At the same time, Russia has been trying to reaffirm its position in the global political arena while providing the Western Balkan states with an alternative to the Euro-Atlantic model of liberal democracy. Examining Russian and EU foreign policies in the region on the political, economic and cultural levels and what their interests and activities are in North Macedonia, this research looks at the EU's and Russia's role in the Western Balkans and in North Macedonia as norm promoters. By assessing both EU's and Russia's strategies and approaches in the Western Balkans and in particular in North Macedonia in the light of the ratification of the Greek-Macedonian name deal, this thesis argues that the Western Balkans is a battlefield between Russia and the West where both powers try to exert their influence through norm promotion.

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Introduction

The Western Balkans, a term created by the European Union bureaucrats in the early 2000s, refers to the countries located in the Southeastern region which aspire to join the EU in the future. Originally, the Western Balkan countries consisted of seven nations- Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, North Macedonia[1] and Montenegro. The region experienced severe conflicts that had profound effects on their political and economic levels. In 2003, during the Thessaloniki Summit, the Western Balkan countries were ascribed as candidate members with the prospect of joining the Union by the end of the 2000s. In fact, during the 2003 Thessaloniki Council, the countries had showed willingness and determination for further political, economic and cultural integration with the EU. However, expect from Croatia, the region has not yet integrated with the Union and its integration prospects remain uncertain.

The slow-down of the region's integration with the EU is due to several reasons. The 2008 global financial crisis followed by the European crisis, slowed down the EU's focus on the region towards internal problems such as migration, terrorism, and the rise of nationalism in Eastern Europe. At the same time, the number of domestic political and economic internal issues in the countries of the Western Balkans including political unwillingness to implement necessary reforms in connection to corruption, increasing tensions and ethnic divisions have slowed down the region's accession. Although all Western Balkan countries remain rhetorically committed to the EU and integrate within the Euro-Atlantic organizations, the shift of EU's attention in the region has led to increasing intensification of third parties who provide an alternative integration. Since

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[1] For the purpose of this thesis, I use the new name 'North Macedonia' and not the previous name 'the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), nor the commonly used name 'Macedonia', which is frequently used in the academic literature.

2009, Russia through expanding its political, economic and cultural influence in the region proposes alternative integration.

In fact, in the last decade, Russia's role as a global actor has been increasing. The Western Balkans is of geostrategic importance for Russia for several reasons. The most important is the region's key role as a major energy and transportation hub used for supplying gas and oil to European countries strengthening Russia's energy foreign policy. Russia's activities in the Western Balkans have mainly focused on Serbia and Montenegro however its influence in other countries such as North Macedonia is also expanding. Russia claims that it shares significant religious and cultural links with North Macedonia.[2]

Russia exerts its influence in the region through various methods. This includes Russia's involvement in the domestic political, economic and cultural realms of the Western Balkan countries. As mentioned in the 2013 'Concept of Foreign Policy' of the Russian Federation: "Russia aims to establish comprehensive pragmatic and equal cooperation with Southeast European countries. It pays a crucial strategic attention to the Balkans, including its role as a major transportation and infrastructure hub for supplying oil and gas to the European region".[3] In the case of North Macedonia, Russia is expanding its influence in the domestic political realm through the opposition party VMRO-DPMNE and wishes to transform the country into a regional energy hub. It has also expanded its influence in the cultural realm by maintaining numerous cultural centers in various Northern Macedonian cities promoting Orthodox links.

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[2] Russia in the Balkans (2019)." РСМД. Accessed May 9, 2019. https://russiancouncil.ru/en/russia-balkans#2.
[3] "THE FOREIGN POLICY CONCEPT OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION." President of Russia. Accessed May 09, 2019. http://en.kremlin.ru/supplement/4116.

Additionally, the EU has been increasingly expanding its influence in the Western Balkan region through various methods. This includes EU's involvement in the domestic political, economic and cultural realms of the Western Balkan countries. The High Representative/Vice-President Mogherini argues "if we invest in the Balkans, we invest in the security and strategy of the whole EU".[4] The same point is argued by American diplomat and the UN Special Representative for the Greek-Macedonian Name Dispute Matthew Nimitz who argued that "for the EU the Western Balkans is a geostrategic investment".[5] Lehne argues that after the 2015 Migration Crisis, stability in the Western Balkans is essential for the survival of the EU.[6] In the case of North Macedonia, relations with the EU have been consistently good as outlined in the 2018 Progress Report, a relationship which is likely to remain so in light of the formalization of the process of the country's accession to NATO as a full-fledged member state.

Beyond political, economic and cultural means, both EU and Russia exert their influence in the region through norms and principles. The constructivist theory in international relations looks at norms, ideas, rules and discourses.[7] Constructivism as a specific logic of the study of international relations is about the social, which is to say the intersubjective, construction of international politics.[8] From this definition follows the focus on the co-constitution of agent and structure, "since only through a recognition of co-constitution can the researcher address both the social aspect (existent norms and discourses matter) and the constructed aspect (it is agency, rather

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[4] ''Remarks by High Representative/Vice-President Federica Mogherini upon Arrival to the Informal Leaders' Meeting in Sibiu." EEAS. May 9, 2019. Accessed May 19, 2019. https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/62099/remarks-high-representativevice-president-federica-mogherini-upon-arrival-informal-leaders'_en.
[5] Interview with Matthew Nimetz (14th May 2019).
[6] Stefan Lehne. "How the Refugee Crisis Will Reshape the EU." Carnegie Europe. February 4, 2016. Accessed May 15, 2019. https://carnegieeurope.eu/2016/02/04/how-refugee-crisis-will-reshape-eu-pub-62650.
[7] Samuel J. Barkin. Realist Constructivism: Rethinking International Relations Theory. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011.
[8] Ibid, p. 157

than, say, system structure or biology that create these norms and discourses)".[9] Therefore, the constructivist approach in International Relations has enhanced readers' understanding of the power of ideational phenomena such as ideas, norms and identity in the world politics.[10] This approach has paved the way for debates on normative power and norm transfer, which have proved to provide valuable insights into EU's normative power and the EU's identity as an international actor. Ian Manners in his work "Normative Power: A Contradiction in Terms"[11] identifies the EU's normative basis. More specifically, he identifies five core norms such as peace, liberty, democracy, human rights and the rule of law all of which may be found in numerous EU treaties such as the TEC of 1957 or the TEU of 1991. At the same time, these core norms are expressed in the Copenhagen membership criteria for EU accession. In addition to these core norms, other minor norms include social solidarity, anti-discrimination, sustainable development and good governance.

Manners also explores the ways that these norms are distributed. Contagion is the first and it is the "unintentional diffusion of ideas from the EU to other political actors".[12] In addition, informational diffusion ranges from strategic communications to declaratory ones or includes initiatives from the Commission's President. Procedural diffusion includes regional cooperation agreements between the EU and other countries or enlargement. Furthermore, transference includes the spreading of goods, trade, aid or technical assistance with third countries through various financial means. An additional way is overt diffusion which includes EU representations' or delegations and missions in foreign countries. The final way is cultural filter which includes the

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[9] Ibid, p.158
[10] Ian, Manners. Normative Power Europe: A Contradiction in Terms? Cph.: Copenhagen Peace Research Institute, 2000.
[11] Ibid, p. 244
[12] Ibid, p. 245

distribution of "international norms and political learning in third states and organizations leading to learning, adaption or rejection of norms".[13] Examples of cultural filter include the democratic norms in China or the promotion of human rights in Turkey.

Regarding EU's normativity in the Western Balkans, the EU employs various instruments to exert its influence. It has employed initiatives such as the Stability Pact for Southeastern Europe and the Stabilization and Association Process (SAP) which led to considerable changes in the Western Balkan countries. Furthermore, the EU has launched civilian and military missions in the Western Balkans under the European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP). The EU still maintains six missions, four civilian and two military operations while the three of them are still ongoing.[14] Other instruments include economic and trade means such as the Community Assistance for Reconstruction, Development and Stabilization (CARDS) which are an integral part of the EU's approach towards the region.

Beyond the EU, Russia also exerts its normative influence in the region. In fact, while Russia also embraces some of the same norms outlined in the NPE such as democratic principles, rule of law and democracy, it criticizes the EU for not qualifying as a normative power. In fact, the central position of the 'normative power' concept is that of the 'power' of ideas, whose attractiveness is considered beyond the concept of material stimuli. This is the major difference between 'normative power' and its predecessor- 'civil power'- which suggested a connection between the material and non-material sources of power. Although this assumption did not initially appear in the first article presenting the concept, in a later 2009 work, Manners emphasized that,

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[13] Erik Jørgensen, Knud. The SAGE Handbook of European Foreign Policy. London: SAGE, 2015.
[14] "Regional Cooperation in the Western Balkans A Policy Priority" Accessed May 18, 2019. https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/pdf/nf5703249enc_web_en.pdf.

"in practice 'normative power' was often used alongside material stimuli or physical coercion".[15] This assumption questions the internal cohesion and originality of the whole concept. Overall, the concept of Normative Power Europe demonstrates significant weaknesses and only exerts the EU's interests. As Romanova argues "Russia represents a different cultural model compared to the EU and develops an alternative interpretation of norms".[16] However, compared to the EU, Russia does not employ specific tools or instruments to exert its influence. Moscow's ultimate goal is to ensure equality with key global players.

There is considerably less scholarly literature on Russia's continuous intensification in the Western Balkans than there is on the topic of EU enlargement into the region. Scholars mostly agree that Russia's involvement in the domestic politics of the Western Balkan countries suggests that Moscow only aims on gaining more influence in the future. Grabbe explores EU's conditionality in the Western Balkans and argues that in the future some of the states will be turning more into Russia since there is no conditionality imposed by Russia.[17] Marku goes even further arguing that Russia has already under its influence Serbia, Republika Srpska and North Macedonia and aims at diverting these countries away from their Europeanization process but also exercise its renewed strength and show the West it should be treated as an equal player in the global political arena.[18] Similarly, Rohan argues that the Western Balkan countries have been

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[15] Manners (2002)

[16] Tatiana Romanova "Russian Challenge to the EU's Normative Power: Change and Continuity." Taylor & Francis. May 3, 2016. Accessed May 17, 2019. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09668136.2016.1155696.

[17] Heather Grabbe, "Europeanization Goes East: Power and Uncertainty in the EU Accession Process." The Politics of Europeanization, 2003, 303-28.

[18] Donika Marku, "Security, Berlin Process: An Additional Mile Toward EU Membership?" Kosovo Center for Security Studies. Accessed May 16, 2019. http://www.qkss.org/repository/docs/Berlin-Proces-2018-eng_398062.pdf.

transformed into a political battlefield between the West and Russia with both powers asserting their authorities.[19]

Most of the EU studies literature devoted to the enlargement of the Western Balkans deal with EU-Russia relations in the region leaving apart both the EU's and Russia's foreign policies and strategies. At the same time, there is also inadequate literature on the effects of the Russian and EU foreign policies in the region analyzing their normativity and their sphere of influence. In the intersection of these two literatures, lies the gap that has not been addressed with a comprehensive study which could analyze both the EU's and Russia's foreign policies in the Western Balkans while assessing their normative influence.

Taking this into consideration, this final dissertation aims to examine both the EU's and Russia's foreign policies in the region in the economic, political and cultural realms. It is particularly focused on the influence of Russia's and EU's interests and activities in North Macedonia, since Skopje maintains on the one hand, close links with Russia but on the other its current government ratified the 'Prespes Agreement' (the Agreement resolving the three-decade name dispute with Greece) to ensure the country's EU integration. After examining both Russia's and EU's foreign policies and strategies the third chapter looks at the EU and Russia as norm promoters in the Western Balkans. The questions this study sets to answer are: 'What are both Russia's and EU's foreign policies in the Western Balkans and in particular in North Macedonia?' while the second 'Through what norms and actions Russia and the EU may be considered as norm promoters in the region'? This research looks at the interdependence between domestic and foreign policies meaning how domestic politics and policies interact. This research aims to provide a more

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[19] Albert Rohan, "Kosovo's Path to Independence." ECFR. February 02, 2018. Accessed May 12, 2019. https://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_kosovos_path_to_independence

comprehensive approach to both the EU's and Russia's role in the Balkans in the middle of the enlargement fatigue and the ongoing rivalry between the West and Russia.

Having identified the existing literature, the research questions and goals, the rest of this thesis is organized as following. The first chapter looks at Russia's foreign policy in the Western Balkans and its involvement in the domestic political, cultural and economic realms of North Macedonia. It will also explore the shift in Russia's foreign policy in the Balkans since 2013 when the Russian Federation first included the Western Balkans in its Foreign Policy Concept. The second chapter will explore EU's foreign policy under the Lisbon treaty and its overall foreign policy and strategy in the Balkans after 2009 and will assess its influence in the domestic political, cultural and economic realms in North Macedonia. The final chapter will look at the Russia's and EU's normativity in the region and explore under which actions and tools both powers assert their influence. The final part will conclude the analysis and provide insights for future research.

Chapter 1: Russia's Policy and Strategy in the Western Balkans

The intensification of Russia's activities towards the Western Balkans dates to 2008. Russia was becoming more determined to regain its power in the region which it had lost after the disintegration of the USSR, due to its weakness. Since 2006, with the strengthening of the Russian economy, Moscow pursues more assertive foreign policy in the Western Balkans and other regions that are not in its immediate neighborhood. Russia's actions are becoming more effective in the recent period in proposing alternative integration in the region which finds fertile ground. This is due to several causes. Russia's strategy and policies have been successful because of the unstable political climate and high levels of corruption combined with weak public administration and media propaganda. These factors provide, in the post-2008 period (with the weakening of the EU), continuing intensification of Russia's activities. As a result, the West and Russia battle for influence in the Balkan region.

This chapter seeks to explore and assess Russia's strategy and foreign policy in the Balkans since the 1990s in the political, economic and cultural domains. A shift in the Russian Federation's foreign policy will be looked at. Next, the chapter explores Russia's interests and activities on the same domains in North Macedonia since the country's independence in 1991.

1.1 Russian Foreign Policy

'The Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation' is a "systemic description of basic principles, priorities, goals and objectives of Russian foreign policy".[20] It is based on the Constitution of the Russian Federation, its federal laws and international principles and rules of international law where Russia's Federation foreign policy is based.[21] Russia's foreign policy was established after the collapse of the USSR and was significantly developed at the beginning of the 2000s. Although Russia's Foreign Policy started to shift before the 1990s and the disintegration of the USSR, it was not until 2001, when the Russian government under Putin adopted a new Concept of Foreign Policy. Under the new Concept, Russia needs to be an active player in the post-Cold war area. Its aim is to increase its influence both in Europe and in the world and increase its participation in the UN Security Council.[22] It stresses Putin's determination to re-establish his country as a great power and "succeed in forming a multi-polar system of international relations".[23]

According to Andrey Kortunov, President of the Russian International Affairs Council (RIAC) in Moscow, there are three geopolitical imperatives that have shaped Russian Foreign Policy: ''Russia is a great nuclear superpower, a great power in all facets of international relations, and the political, military and economic leader of its region".[24] In fact, these imperatives are apparent in the Foreign Policy Concept of 2010 which mentions that the Western world order continues to diminish. The global power is now shifting towards the Asia-Pacific Region and to

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[20] "THE FOREIGN POLICY CONCEPT OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION." President Of Russia. Accessed May 09, 2019. http://en.kremlin.ru/supplement/4116.

[21] Ibid

[22] Ibid

[23] "Russia in Global Affairs." Andrey Kortunov "Why the World Is Not Becoming Multipolar. " / Russia in Global Affairs. Foreign Policy Research Foundation. Accessed May 9, 2019. https://eng.globalaffairs.ru/book/Why-the-World-is-Not-Becoming-Multipolar-19642.

[24] Aron Leon, "The Putin Doctrine." Foreign Affairs. December 30, 2016. Accessed May 9, 2019. https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russian-federation/2013-03-08/putin-doctrine.

the countries of Eastern Asia.[25] However, not all Foreign Policy Concepts include the same imperatives. Compared to the 2001 Concept, the 2010 one no longer states Russia's need to re-emerge as a global power and play an active role in the global arena. Instead, it is stated that Russia has recovered from its transition, and it is a key player together with the US in global politics. Similarly, the 2016 Concept also highlights the necessity for Russia's global power to be increased. In fact, all Foreign Concepts indicate Moscow's shifting role in international politics. As a result, Russia's foreign policy and relation with external actors such as the Western Balkans is also shifting.

The shift of Russian foreign policy brought the shift of its approach to the Western Balkans. Although Russia's interests and activities in the region has been expanding since 2006, the first time the Western Balkans was mentioned in the Foreign Concept was only in 2013. More specifically, Provision 66 states: "Russia aims to establish comprehensive pragmatic and equal cooperation with Southeast European countries. Russia pays a crucial strategic attention to the Balkans, including its role as a major transportation and infrastructure hub for supplying oil and gas to the European region".[26] In fact, Russia's foreign policy in the Balkans is based on the principle of employing the minimum required resources to maintain "a working atmosphere at the inter-country level and prevent the loss of existing tangible assets".[27]

The next part explains Russia's foreign policy in the Balkans by reviewing both positive and negative factors that influence it while also analyzing the strategic importance the Balkans play for Russia.

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[25] Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation (2010)
[26] Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation (2013)
[27] "Russia in the Balkans (2019)

1.11.2   Positive and Negative Factors Influencing Russia's Foreign Policy in the Balkans

Russia views the European Union's (EU) role in the Balkans as negative to the region's development. As Ekaterina Entina argues, the EU does not facilitate development in the region, instead it sets territorial and political disputes- for instance, in the case between Kosovo and Serbia or forces countries to change their names.[28] In addition, the EU also forces the modernization of the political systems in the region's countries by setting economic and political conditionality for the countries' accession to the EU. However, this creates impediments for economic development, social stability and prosperity. In contrast, Russia does not set political or economic conditionality, instead it employs "successful foreign political policies".[29] For instance, the political steps taken during the Ukrainian crisis or the military operation in Syria create the image of Russia in the Balkans as a great power[30]. In addition, "its special mechanisms for interaction with Turkey, Iran, China and the BRICS countries also portray Russia as a 'global alternative' that defends the principles of multi-polarity in international relations".[31] Furthermore, the EU portrays Russia in the Balkans as a scapegoat to the region's negative developments. Although these political developments need to be reframed, paradoxically, they motivated some political forces in the region by "using Russia-related symbols and motifs of friendship with Russia in their political campaigns".[32] Therefore, these developments have positively influenced Russia's public image in

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[28] Ibid

[29] Dmitri Trenin, "It's Time to Rethink Russia's Foreign Policy Strategy." Carnegie Moscow Center. Accessed May 9, 2019. https://carnegie.ru/commentary/78990.

[30] Ibid

[31] Ibid

[32] Russia in the Balkans (2019)

the Balkans. In addition, close religious links and the strong influence of the Russian Orthodox Church in the region is also a crucial factor since the Balkan-Orthodox communities are traditionally sympathetic to Russia. Overall, these factors have positively influenced Russia's Foreign Policy and it seems that through its policies and activities in the region, Moscow succeeds in maintaining a positive public image and exerts its influence.

However, there are also negative factors that at the same time counterbalance its power. The most crucial negative factor is NATO's expansion to the region and Russia's inability to counterbalance it. Moscow has already condemned the decision of the Montenegrin government to become a NATO member. Regarding North Macedonia, after being forced to "make radical changes to its statehood",[33] Skopje will be the next NATO member despite its political will. Similarly, Serbia although it has not yet received a formal invitation, its membership is under negotiation[34]. Additionally, Moscow's true intentions in the Balkans are misunderstood since both the US and the EU both label Russia as a 'spoiler'.[35] On the one hand, this image is convenient for Moscow, as it permits the Kremlin to offer an alternative to EU integration.[36] On the other hand, EU and US policies do not facilitate the establishment of a common strategy towards the Balkans and instead this cultivates negative bilateral relations.[37] In fact, the EU has been pressuring the Balkan countries to reject a Russian path and follow a Western path. Although the interests and activities of these countries significantly differ, their common position is to counterbalance

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[33] Ibid

[34] Vesko Garcevic "NATO's Intervention Changed Western-Russian Relations Forever." Balkan Insight. March 25, 2019. Accessed May 9, 2019. https://balkaninsight.com/2019/03/22/natos-intervention-changed-western-russian-relations-forever/.

[35] Russia in the Balkans (2019)

[36] Anton Shekhovtsov. "Russia and the Western Far Right: Introduction." Russia and the Western Far Right: Tango Noir. September 18, 2017. Accessed May 9, 2019. https://www.tango-noir.com/introduction/.

[37] Ibid

Russia's influence and presence in the region.[38] This does not leave further opportunity for Russia to discuss and pursue alternative integration. Therefore, politically, the region is only assessed as an integral part of the Euro-Atlantic space leaving Russia out of the region's developments.

1.21.3 The Importance of the Western Balkans for Russia

The Balkan region plays a significant geostrategic role for Russia. Moscow abandoning its interests in the Western Balkans will significantly worsen its strategic position in Europe. If the region ultimately moves into the Euro-Atlantic realm of influence, this will open new opportunities for the European Union to expand eastward limiting Russian influence. In addition, it will change the balance in the Russia-Turkey and Russia-China relations as all regions pursue their own interests in the region. It will also significantly complicate the issue of Russia restoring relations with Greece and Montenegro. Therefore, Russia's withdrawal from the Balkans means a loss of standing in Southeast Europe, which will decrease Russia's interest and activities in the Mediterranean. That will result in the EU and NATO exerting greater pressure on Moldova and Belarus. Russia's position in its talks with China will also weaken since Beijing and Moscow are collaborating on a New Silk Road. Finally, Russia will lose a key area resulting in shrinking its strategic role in the region. Ultimately, as Russia does not wish to lose its influence in the region, it employs energy and cultural policies to enhance its status. The following section of this chapter explores the policies that facilitate Russia's interests and activities in the region.

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[38] William McHenry "Neglected Backwater: Russia's Growing Influence in the Balkans." Geopolitical Monitor. May 10, 2018. Accessed May 10, 2019. https://www.geopoliticalmonitor.com/neglected-backwater-russias-growing-influence-in-the-balkans/.

1.31.4   Russia and the Western Balkans

To address this topic, several components need to be examined: the basis of Russian energy policy, connections with the Foreign Policy Concepts, and Russia's National Security Strategy.

1.3.11.4.1   Russian Foreign Energy Policy in the Balkans

The 'Energy Strategy of Russia for the Period of Up to 2025' adopted in 2005 provides an analysis of the contemporary Russian energy policies.[39] According to the document, Russia "possesses great energy resources: its territory contains 1/4 of the world's natural resources, 1/10 of gas reserves, 12 percent of uranium reserves and 1/6 of oil reserves".[40] The energy policy is of strategic importance as it makes Russia a global supplier on the global market. This enhances Moscow's energy security and ensures its role as a partner in Europe and in the world. More specifically, the document identifies European and Asian markets as the most profitable for Russian companies and it also stresses that "the Russian government will advance the participation of Russian enterprises in development and construction of international transport projects for gas, oil and energy in both East and the West".[41] Likewise, the 2008 Foreign Policy Concept states: "Strengthen strategic partnership with the leading producers of energy sources, develop active dialogue with consuming countries and transit countries".[42] The importance Russia pays to its energy sector is crucial and through its expansion to international markets, Russia strives to exert its power and influence in the global arena.

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[39] Susanne Oxenstierna and Veli-Pekka Tynkkynen. Russian Energy and Security up to 2030. London: Routledge, 2016.
[40] Ibid, p. 3
[41] Ibid, p. 6
[42] Ibid, p. 8

Additionally, the 2015 National Security Strategy also mentions that energy is of strategic importance to Russia's national interests and foreign policy.[43] In the document, energy possesses a prominent role, with regards to resources and security matters.[44] It is portrayed as a strong power tool which enhances Russia's role in international affairs and reserves resources for strategic defense.[45] As President Putin stated in the National Security Council in 2006 "energy is the most important force of world economic progress. It always was and will be for a long time".[46] Furthermore, the document also portrays Gazprom as the most important tool of Russian foreign energy policy. It is a state-led company and it has not been privatized compared to the Russian oil industry. Apart from operating in Russia, it also operates in Ukraine, Belarus and in the Western Balkans. It consists of 70% of Russian gas reserves and the entire gas infrastructure.[47] It is one of the country's most important businesses, indicating that energy is a political business and a tool of influence for Russian foreign policy.

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[43] Olga Oliker "Unpacking Russia's New National Security Strategy." | Center for Strategic and International Studies. April 23, 2019. Accessed May 11, 2019. https://www.csis.org/analysis/unpacking-russias-new-national-security-strategy.
[44] Ibid
[45] Ibid
[46] "Annual Address to the Federal Assembly." President Of Russia. May 10, 2006. Accessed May 11, 2019. http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/23577.
[47] Ibid

Russia's energy presence in the Balkans is conducted primarily through the Russian giant oil firm 'Lukoil' which operates in all Western Balkan countries.[48] Regarding the gas transports, Russia in 2009, initiated the South Stream gas pipeline project which was ultimately cancelled in 2014 due to EU sanctions against Russia's invasion in Crimea. Yet, its geostrategic importance for Russia was crucial as it would cross the Central and Eastern European countries. Beyond the South Stream project, Russia proposed an additional pipeline which would transport Russian and Caspian oil from the Bulgarian Black Sea port to Greece through crossing the Turkish coast line. However, Bulgaria has recently rejected this project based on environmental grounds.[49] Furthermore, Russia is also interested in expanding its activities and influence in the electricity sector. More specifically, the most crucial project in this area is the "synchronization of the energy systems of Western, Central and Southern Europe with the energy systems of the former USSR and the Baltics".[50]

Russia's main focus in the energy sector in the region focuses on the establishment of the Balkan region into a strategic hub and "a preferential entry point to the Western economic zone".[51] Russia always had 'zero-sum equations' in its approach towards the Balkans and specifically after the NATO and EU enlargement eastward, the unresolved Kosovo question and the political instability in Bosnia after the Dayton agreement[52]. Lo Bobo argues that "this policy has been driven by 'kto kogo' (who wins over who) style resulting in the fact that for every winner there must be a loser".[53] In

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[48] Sergey Sutyrin, Olga Trofimenko. "Russian Investments in the Balkans: Expectations and Realities – the Special Case of Lukoil." Taylor and Francis Online. Accessed May 11, 2019. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/10669868.2018.1467844?needAccess=true.

[49] Bartosz Bieliszczuk. "Prospects of Energy Cooperation between Russia and Bulgaria." The Polish Institute of International Affairs. August 18, 2018. Accessed May 05, 2019. http://pism.pl/publications/bulletin/no-112-1183.

[50] Ibid

[51] Muhidin Mulalic. "The Western Balkans Geopolitics and Russian Energy Politics." December 11, 2014. Accessed May 07, 2019. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/283497357_The_Western_Balkans_Geopolitics_and_Russian_Energy_Politics.

[52] Ibid, p. 10

[53] Ibid, p. 12

addition, the Kremlin views the Balkans as its prominent and most crucial sphere of influence where Russian economic and geopolitical strategies are given a priority over the EU and the US.

Therefore, in Russian foreign policy, the Western Balkans is seen as a traditional sphere of influence. In addition, Russia and the Western Balkans have a close geographic proximity, which permits the realization of common economic projects. As a result, Russia will continue to exert its influence in the region. Finally, the increasing economic importance the Balkans play for Russia is reflected both in the energy and in the oil sectors which enable Russia through investments in the Western Balkan countries to achieve profitable terms of cooperation for their national companies. Beyond the energy and oil sector, Russia has also expanded its role in a variety of industries in the Western Balkans such as the sectors of metallurgy, chemical, agriculture and military.[54] Russia has heavily invested in Serbia and in Bosnia Herzegovina in these sectors although there are no available financial data. Russia's investments in these areas consolidate the position and role of Russia in the whole Balkan region.

1.3.21.4.2 Russian Foreign Cultural Policy in the Balkans

In the post-Cold war era, cultural policy plays a strategic role in Russia's foreign policy. In recent years, Russia has been deploying soft power tools to achieve its foreign policy goals in the region. The methods that have been used in the Balkans, besides already mentioned involvement in the energy sector, includes extensive cooperation in religious affairs, as well as expansion of popular culture.

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[54] Ibid

Elena Eltc argues that the Balkans have an important geostrategic position for Russia as it is a crossroad between Europe and Asia.[55] As stated in the 2013 Foreign Policy Concept "cultural exchange between Russia and the Balkans is one of the top priorities of Russia's foreign cultural policy".[56] Russian-Western Balkan cultural relations may be considered as successful. Both sides strive to improve the respective images of the countries in each other's textbooks and media and promote student exchanges. Cultural relations between Russia-Western Balkans are being maintained under the framework of multilateral, bilateral and regional cooperation.[57] Russia promotes its culture at the regional level as one of its key priorities of its own foreign cultural policy strategy. It supports initiatives such as the International Festival "Balkan Theatre Space" which takes place annually in Belgrade and aims to promote Russian theatre plays in Serbia.

Furthermore, in 2009, the Russian government sponsored the opening of the first Russian center in Barna, Bulgaria and since then it strengthens the cultural links between Russia and Bulgaria. Bulgarian Deputy Minister of Education Vanya Dobreva argued that the opening of the Russian cultural center facilitates relations between Bulgaria and Russia and strengthens Orthodox Unity.[58] This statement also reveals another dimension of Balkan-Russian cooperation which is the strengthening of Orthodox links. This dimension is institutionalized through conferences, and in the activities organized by the Unity of International Foundation for the Unity of Orthodox Christian Nations (IFUOCN). In fact, the IFUOCN awards prizes annually to the heads of states, governments and parliaments for their contribution to the strengthening of Orthodox Christian traditions.

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[55] Elena Etlc "Balkans and Russian Foreign Cultural Policy." Balkans and Russian Foreign Cultural Policy - Cultural Diplomacy. January 12, 2015. Accessed May 11, 2019. http://www.i-c-d.de/index.php/Balkans_and_Russian_Foreign_cultural_policy.
[56] Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation (2013)
[57] Etlc (2015)
[58] Ibid

Additionally, in 2007, the Ruskiy Mir Foundation was established by President Putin to "promote the Russian heritage, language and culture".[59] The Foundation maintains ten cultural centers in the Western Balkans. Its main activities correspond to the protection of the rights of the Russian communities living in these countries and to preserve the ethnic and cultural identity of the Russian diaspora. Furthermore, the Foundation also engages in religious activities: In 2010, the Foundation in collaboration with Gazprom donated three million euros to the Serbian government for the restoration of the Saint Sava's Cathedral[60]. This also reveals an additional dimension of how Russian cultural centers exert Russian influence in the Balkans through religious links. Given Russia's strong intensification in the Balkans, the following section explores Russia's influence in North Macedonia.

1.41.5   Russia and North Macedonia

Relations between Republic of North Macedonia and Russia have positive upward trend. Russia's main interest in the country is to halt NATO and EU expansion and offer the possibility of an alternative integration. The main methods being used in North Macedonia are similar to the overall Russian strategy for the Western Balkans and focus on politics, economics and soft power. In 2012, Russia and North Macedonia signed an agreement on visa-free regime strengthening political relations between the two countries[61]. In the economics realm, Russian investment rose and reached 13 million dollars in 2013 mostly in the energy sector. Additional economic field of investments Russia wishes to invest is agriculture and light industry. Given the country's prime location in the Southern Balkans

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[59] The Russkiy Mir Foundation. "Education Activities." The Russkiy Mir Foundation. Accessed May 9, 2019. https://russkiymir.ru/en/education/.

[60] "Gazprom Neft Supporting Restoration of St Savva Cathedral, Belgrade." PJSC Gazprom Neft. Accessed May 11, 2019. https://www.gazprom-neft.com/press-center/news/1112100/.

[61] Republic of North Macedonia| Ministry of Foreign Affairs. "Diplomatic Relations with Russian Federation.". Accessed May 10, 2019. http://mfa.gov.mk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=257&Itemid=398&lang=en

close to Italy and in the Mediterranean, the development of air hub or railway in Skopje seems viable[62].

Regarding the religious realm, Russia has been expanding its religious activities in the country.

1.4.11.5.1 Political Interests in North Macedonia

Russia's main political interest in North Macedonia is to prevent NATO's expansion in the Balkan region and provide an alternative integration for the region. Russia maintains good bilateral relations with North Macedonia. Russia exerts its political influence in the country through the pro-Russian VMRO-DPMNE. While there were no official meetings and visits of high officials of North Macedonia and Russia prior to the country's independence, bilateral relations started to increase after the VMRO-DPMNE party (led by Nikola Gruevski) won the parliamentary election in 2011. In 2013, there have been two visits to Moscow by two Presidents of North Macedonia and in 2014, one of the Minister of Foreign Affairs.[63] Even though of different kinds, most of the visits essentially served the intent of strengthening political and economic connections and creating a more fertile ground for cooperation between the two countries. Then President Gjorge Ivanov's visit in 2013 was marked by the main objective of strengthening mutual relations. These visits created openings for North Macedonia to try to combine two significant foreign policy aspirations: membership in the EU and partnership with Russia. Russia claims that its strong relationship in North Macedonia is based on shared history and religious ties, and in the country's deep commitment to strengthen bilateral relations.

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[62] Ibid
[63] Ibid

1.4.21.5.2   Economic Interests and Activities in Macedonia

Russia pursues its own economic interests in North Macedonia mostly based on trade and economic links and the energy sector. Former Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski expanded Macedonian ties with Russia through engaging not only in the national, but also in the regional energy sectors.[64] Russia's core economic interest in North Macedonia is transforming the country into a natural gas transit center since the country is fully dependent on Russian gas.[65] This was facilitated through Gruevski who approved two large-scale Russian-led gas pipeline projects: South Stream and its replacement Turkish stream.

In addition, Russia's economic activities have been growing steadily over the past decade and have been expanding after Gruevski's election. In 2019, there were 80 companies registered in the country with at least 24% owned by Russian entities or individuals. The revenues of Russian companies operating in the country rose from EUR 62 million in 2006 to EUR 212 million in 2015.[66] Russia is one of the biggest investors in the country. In fact, the Russian corporate footprint in Macedonia is currently channeled through third countries. One example is the Russian mining company Solvay, which operates a lead, zinc, and copper mine in Macedonia but is registered in Switzerland.[67] Another is TKG, "a Russian power plant operator, which owns a joint-venture, through a Cypriot offshore intermediary".[68] In addition, the North Macedonian gas market is fully dependent

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[64] Center for the Study of Democracy. "Assessing Russia's Economic Footprint in Macedonia." January 15, 2018. Accessed May 9, 2019. http://old.csd.bg/fileSrc.php?id=23329.
[65] Ibid
[66] Center for the Study of Democracy (2018)
[67] Ibid
[68] Ibid

on imports from Gazprom via the Trans Balkan pipeline, which also crosses Ukraine, Romania and Bulgaria.[69] Russian direct investment (FDI) in the country is currently 32EUR million.[70]

1.4.31.5.3   Cultural Interests and Activities in North Macedonia

Russia's cultural interest in North Macedonia is to fulfill its foreign policy goals in the Balkans which is to prevent NATO and EU expansion in North Macedonia. The main cultural methods it employs, besides political and economic intensification at the highest level, are the spread of religious links and expansion of Russian media outlets in the country.

Regarding its activities, there are currently over 30 Russian-Macedonian cultural associations, a Russian cultural center in Skopje and two consulates in Ohrid and Bitola. Their activities focus on the promotion of the Russian culture in the country through organizing festivals, conferences and student activities. In addition, a Rossotrudnichestvo office opened in the country in 2016 following the 2013 intergovernmental agreement envisioned the founding of a Russian cultural and science center in the country[71]. The Kremlin has also financed the construction of a Russian Orthodox Church next to Skopje airport. In addition, regarding the media sector, the Sputnik office maintains an office in Skopje which follows political events and monitors the country's foreign policy and EU's influence in the country.

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[69] ICIS. "Russia Unlikely to Stop Trans-Balkan Pipeline Transit in 2020, Sources." ICIS. March 14, 2019. Accessed May 10, 2019. https://www.icis.com/explore/resources/news/2019/03/14/10332904/russia-unlikely-to-stop-trans-balkan-pipeline-transit-in-2020-sources/.
[70] Center for the Study of Democracy (2018)
[71] Invest in Macedonia. "Russian Cultural Center Opened in Skopje.". June 11, 2016. Accessed May 10, 2019. http://www.investinmacedonia.com/documents.

Chapter 2: EU's Policy and Strategy in the Western Balkans

In the 1990s, the Western Balkans suffered from severe conflicts, which were terminated after the intervention by NATO and UN forces and with the promise of accession to the EU. The prospect of joining the EU brought significant economic recovery in the Balkans and boosted economic and institutional reforms. However, the global financial crisis of 2007-9 and the European crisis of 2010-13 slowed the pace of economic recovery and the implementation of reforms for EU accession. Despite that, in 2018, the European Commission set an indicative deadline (2025) for admission to the EU. This could incentivize all Western Balkan countries, including those candidates that have not yet started membership negotiations (such as Albania and North Macedonia) and those waiting for candidate status (Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo) to facilitate reforms, overcome domestic political obstacles to EU accession and resolve disputes with neighbors. Furthermore, the EU and its member states cannot overlook the strategic importance of the region. Geographically, Western Balkan countries form a land bridge and the shortest transit route between South and Central Europe. The importance of this route was demonstrated during the 2015-16 refugee crisis. In addition, Western Balkan economies are closely associated with the EU[72]. The EU is their largest trade partner, a substantial source of foreign direct investment and the main destination for outward migration.

This chapter seeks to explore and assess EU's strategy and foreign policy in the Balkans since the 1990s in the political, socio-economic and cultural domains. A shift in the EU's foreign policy after

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[72] Christopher Bickerton ''European Union Foreign Policy: From Effectiveness to Functionality''. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.

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the Lisbon Treaty will be looked at. Next, the chapter explores EU's interests and activities in the same domains in North Macedonia since the country's independence.

2.1 EU's Foreign Policy under the Treaty of Lisbon

Between 2002-2007, the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) was undoubtedly one of the most contested topics during the EU's 'constitutional' process.[73] Its final outcome still remains unclear despite the entry into force after the Treaty of Lisbon on December 1, 2009.[74] Although the new treaty presents significant changes and new provisions, their scope is limited. This chapter defines the position of the new CFSP within the framework of EU policies. It then focuses on the new provisions in the CFSP and explores the EU's approach in the Western Balkans, following the Treaty of Lisbon.

2.1.1 The Substantial CFSP Innovations under the Lisbon Treaty

Regarding the functioning of the CFSP, the Lisbon Treaty maintains most of the institutional innovations mentioned in the Constitutional Treaty. The most important additional innovation is the new position 'High Representative for Foreign Security and Defense' (HR). The HR is nominated by the European Council by qualified majority voting, with the approval of the president of the European Commission. The responsibilities and powers of the HR vary depending on whether he or she is acting in matters related to EU external relations (previously part of the first pillar) or in matters that fall under the CFSP framework (the former second pillar). In the first

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[73]Ibid

[74] Official Journal of the European Union. "Consolidated Version of the Treaty of European Union.". Accessed May 12, 2019. https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:2bf140bf-a3f8-4ab2-b506-fd71826e6da6.0023.02/DOC_1&format=PDF.

case, the HR acts under the European Commission and in the second acts as an agent of the European Council. Furthermore, the HR is responsible for EU foreign policy and is assisted by the European External Action Service (EEAS), which consists of staff from the European Council's Secretariat and the European Commission and national diplomatic services personnel. [75] The EEAS is vital for the success of the high representative's mission.

Additionally, regarding decision-making procedures, the Lisbon Treaty introduces two sets of innovations concerning extension of qualified majority voting and enhanced cooperation. In the case of the CFSP, the same general provision applies, which permits the European Council to unanimously decide whether to adopt qualified majority voting in areas where unanimity is needed.[76] Furthermore, a special provision is needed for the CSFP, according to which the European Council may unanimously adopt a decision stipulating that the council act by qualified majority in cases other than those referred to in paragraph 2 of Article 31 of the TEU.[77] Therefore, in the case the member states decide to use this special provision, the qualified majority would be introduced not for the whole CFSP but only to specific types of decision.

In addition, concerning the second set of procedural innovations introduced by the Lisbon Treaty, one of the goals of the constitution was to streamline as much as possible the three enhanced cooperation procedures (one for each pillar) provided for by the old treaties. This goal has not been fully achieved yet. On the other hand, the Lisbon Treaty "cuts some corners and makes enhanced cooperation in the field of CFSP easier".[78] Yet, the difference with the ordinary

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[75] "Organization Chart of the EEAS." EEAS. Accessed May 14, 2019.
https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/3602/organisation-chart-of-the-eeas_en.
[76] "TREATY ESTABLISHING A CONSTITUTION FOR EUROPE" (2004)
[77] Ibid
[78] Ioannis Vrailas. "European Defence in the Wake of the Lisbon Treaty on JSTOR." May 5, 2012. Accessed May 16, 2019. https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep06673.

enhanced cooperation procedure remains. For example, authorizing a particular enhanced cooperation in the field of the CFSP takes a unanimous vote of the Council of Ministers, even though for the ordinary policies a vote by qualified majority is adequate.[79] This does not signify there are no positive developments: the 2007 Intergovernmental Conference confirmed the right of the members of an enhanced cooperation (any kind of cooperation, including the CFSP) to adopt by unanimity a decision stipulating that the qualified majority voting rule apply where the provisions of the treaties applicable in the context of that specific enhanced cooperation mandate unanimity. Similarly, where the provisions of the treaties that may be applied in the context of enhanced cooperation impose a special legislative procedure, "the members of the cooperation can switch to the ordinary legislative procedure".[80] This however, does not apply to military or defense matters.

2.2 The EU's Foreign Policy to the Western Balkans (under the Lisbon Treaty)

In the first part, I explore the historical context of relations between the EU and the countries in the Western Balkans. In the second part, I summarize the bilateral issues that determine the EU's foreign policy to the region.

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[79] "Report on the Implementation of the Treaty Provisions concerning Enhanced Cooperation." Europarl.europa.eu. Accessed May 12, 2019. http://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-8-2019-0038_EN.html.
[80] Constitutional Treaty (Article 333, new TEU)

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2.2.1 The Politics of Conditionality

'Western Balkans' is a regional label that was initially forged by the European Commission in 1996 under the framework of the Union's conditionality in the region.[81] In May 1996, the Commission submitted a proposal for the establishment of a Stabilization and Association Process (SAP) for the countries of Southeastern Europe.[82] In the last decades, the SAP developed into the general framework of cooperation between the EU and the Western Balkan states. Its main normative anchors are the criteria for EU membership as defined by the Copenhagen European Council of 1993 and the conditionality principles as defined by the Council conclusions of April 29, 1997, June 21 and June 23, 1999, the final declaration of the Zagreb Summit of November 24, 2000 and the Thessaloniki Agenda of 2003.[83]

Conditionality is the one of the core parts of the Stabilization and Association Process, which included not just the contractual relationships between the EU and countries in the region, but also a series of mandatory political commitments. More specifically, the SAP "comprised autonomous trade measures and other economic and trade relations, economic and financial tools, assistance for democratization and civil society, humanitarian aid for refugees, returnees,

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[81] "Report on the Commission Communication to the Council and the European Parliament on the Wise Use and Conservation of Wetlands - Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Consumer Protection - A4-0238/1996." European Parliament. Accessed May 14, 2019. http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT%20REPORT%20A4-1996-0238%200%20DOC%20XML%20V0//EN.

[82] "European Commission - PRESS RELEASES - Commission Proposes a Stabilisation and Association Process for Countries of South-Eastern Europe." European Commission. Accessed May 14, 2019. http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-99-350_en.htm?locale=en.

[83] "European Commission - Press Release - Thessaloniki European Council 19 and 20 June 2003 Presidency Conclusions." European Commission. Accessed May 14, 2019. http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_DOC-03-3_en.htm.

cooperation in justice and home affairs, and the development of political dialogue".[84] The conditionality policy is based on compliance with democratic principles, human rights and the rule of law, respect for and protection of minorities, market economy reforms, regional cooperation, and compliance with obligations under international peace agreements. Their territorial scope extends to Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, North Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia. According to the Commission, the creation of the SAP was a "historic turning point in the relations between the Western Balkans countries and the EU"[85] by offering them the possibility to integrate in the EU family.

2.2.32.2.2   Bilateral Issues

The SAP, which paves the way to EU membership for the Western Balkan countries, was initiated by the European Commission and by the Council. However, several bilateral issues had to be solved, for instance controversies between a candidate country and an EU member state (vertical) or disputes among candidate countries themselves (horizontal). On the one hand, in vertical situations, member states may act on their own behalf (on bilateral issues), or on behalf of the European Union (on EU-wide issues). The former situation is exemplified by the Slovenian veto in the Council, which initially blocked Croatia's negotiation chapters. Ultimately, the lift of the veto was conditioned on the settlement of a border dispute in the northern Adriatic. Another

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[84] "European Commission - Press Release - 2003rd Council Meeting - GENERAL AFFAIRS - Luxembourg, 29/30 April 1997." European Commission. Accessed May 13, 2019. http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_PRES-97-129_en.htm.
[85] Ibid

example is the Greek-Macedonian name dispute. Greece in 2008, blocked the country from opening EU membership negotiations and from becoming a member of NATO.

Additionally, vertical issues take place within the process of negotiations, while horizontal issues may be subject to regional cooperation conditionality.[86] In both cases, since the progress of candidate countries is determined by unanimity in the Council, any member state can block a candidate country on its progress toward membership. In addition, membership negotiations concern primarily a vertical relationship between individual states and a candidate country, while the Commission acts only as an evaluator. During the process, "each member can act as a proxy for EU interests and unilaterally enforce conditionality criteria during the process of ratification".[87] For instance, ratification of Croatia's SAA took three years, with Austria ratifying the treaty first in 2002 and the UK last in 2005. In addition, horizontal issues can be settled outside or within the EU context. For instance, genocide claims, submitted to the International Court of Justice by Croatia and Serbia against each other,[88] are not to be resolved by the EU. Similarly, the denial of Serbia to recognize Kosovo remains a horizontal issue.[89]

However, regional cooperation and good neighborly relations are part of the SAAs and are a primary concern for the SAP.[90] Regional cooperation is defined as one objective of the SAAs and as a part of political dialogue with the countries of the Western Balkans. It is also made part of the consultation mechanism according to which a potential candidate state needs to consult with its member states to reinforce regional cooperation. Even though there is no legal requirement of

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[86] Grabbe Heather (2003)
[87] Ibid, p. 312
[88] "Article I." Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide: A Commentary.
[89] Rohan Albert (2019)
[90] "Frequently Asked Questions on the Stabilization and Association Agreements." European Commission - Press Release - Frequently Asked Questions on the Stabilization and Association Agreements. Accessed May 15, 2019. http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-07-240_en.htm.

regional cooperation, progress towards membership in the EU is possible only subject to a positive report of the Commission. Since most of the horizontal relationships are also reflected at the EU level it is complicated to draw a line between horizontal issues that are outside the scope of EU action and those that remain within it. To convert a horizontal issue into a vertical one, an EU interest must be resolved, that will be when a horizontal issue has to do with the fulfillment of conditionality measures. For instance, a horizontal issue between Serbia and Kosovo resulted in strong German opposition to setting a date for the commencement of membership negotiations with Serbia and delaying approval of its status as a candidate country. On the EU level this was mirrored by the European Commission. Negotiations with Serbia temporarily froze but ultimately re-started in 2012. From this example, "horizontal issues involving conditionality measures tend to collapse into vertical (EU-wide) issues, while those that are entrusted by mechanisms envisaged by international law, remain horizontal".[91]

Additionally, on horizontal issues between the countries of the Western Balkans, both member states and the EU are powerful actors. The main channel of influence on the side of the EU is regional and human rights conditionality policy, which has been built into all political and legal instruments applicable to the region since 1996. By monitoring regional cooperation and neighborly relations the Commission can control the pace of progress. No less important, member states are able to bring horizontal issues to the attention of the Council and to put the process of integration on hold. However, not every horizontal issue will be of EU concern.

Finally, the success of conditionality policy also depends on the balance of political forces in each of the Western Balkan states. In the absence of a wide political consensus the European

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[91] Grabbe (2003)

commitment to conditionality may remain difficult. Successful Slovenia and Croatia progress toward EU membership were based on a broad political consensus whereas this consensus is absent from the other Western Balkan countries.[92] The Stabilization and Association Process and its conditionality policy can be effective only if they promote EU-wide and not individual member state's interests.

2.3   EU and the Western Balkans

In an interview with American diplomat and the United Nations Special Representative for the Greek-Macedonian Name Dispute, Mr. Matthew Nimetz, he argued that the EU's foreign policy in the Western Balkans -the acceleration of the European integration in the Western Balkans- is in the EU's economic and security interests.[93] The EU wishes to ensure stability in the neighborhood and to prevent migration and terrorist organizations entering Europe through the Balkan route. The Western Balkans enlargement is a geostrategic investment. This chapter will explore the EU's foreign policy and activities in the Western Balkans in the socio-economic and cultural realms.

2.3.1 Socio-Economic Policies and Activities

The Berlin Process of the Western Balkans was created to establish a new era of cooperation between the EU and the Western Balkans. Launched in 2014 by Germany, one of the strongest supporters of EU enlargement in the Balkans, it was also soon supported by Austria, Italy and France.[94] The process seeks to keep the EU perspective in the region on the table while

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[92] Ibid
[93] Interview with Mathew Nimetz (May 14th, 2019)
[94] Marku (2019)

ensuring that the countries implement the required measures for EU integration. Therefore, the EU acts as mentor to ensure that the region will be eligible for accession. The process advocates economic reforms and economic cooperation between the EU and the candidate countries. This Process signifies a strong message in the middle of the enlargement fatigue felt in all EU member states and the slow reforms in the candidate states. The Processes' economic dimension ensures that the EU remains a primary actor and as a strategic partner for the candidate countries of the Western Balkans.

As argued by Florent Marciacq, "the Berlin process de-encapsulates this understanding of regional cooperation by replacing it at the core of dynamic of European integration so that it permeates most sectoral policy fields, with a major emphasis on economic matters".[95] The Berlin Process has positive effects in the region: it has led to the expansion of regional economic meetings between the leaders of the Western Balkan countries which in turn signifies the building of trust and cooperation (especially between Serbia and Kosovo). In addition, it has also increased political and economic interaction between the Western Balkan countries and key EU members including with states that are not candidates (such as Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo). The Process has also facilitated the development of regional economic reports and has ensured the EU's monitoring of the economic reforms in the region thus focusing on the countries' progress and assisting with their implementation. More generally, the Berlin Process "is deemed to provide better foundations for 'real reconciliation' in the region".[96]

Beyond the Berlin Process and its economic significance, the EU supports the socio-economic development of the Western Balkans through numerous economic activities. The Western Balkans

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[95] "Florent Marciacq."The EU and the Western Balkans After the Berlin Process" June 1, 2017. Accessed May 17, 2019. http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/sarajevo/13948.pdf.
[96] Ibid, p. 10

Investment Framework is one of the EU's main economic activities. It will be expanded to further attract and coordinate bilateral donors' and International Financial Institutions' investment.[97] Additional funding will be in the economic fields of energy, transport and private sector development. To link socio-economic development in the region to the Union's investment priorities, the Commission targets significantly boosting the provision of guarantees under the Western Balkan Investment Framework to "crowd in private investment in the region, in full complementarity with existing initiatives".[98] In addition, the Regional Economic Area is a necessary step for enhancing economic integration between the EU and the Western Balkans and strengthening the economies of these countries. The Commission wishes to enhance the development of the intraregional economic integration, "including by mobilizing its expertise to assist with the implementation of Regional Economic Area action plan, in particular in areas covered by the acquis".[99] Trade between the EU and the Western Balkans was over 42 EUR billion in 2017, yet, there is significant further growth potential. To realize this potential, the Commission will further facilitate EU-Western Balkans trade. This will include developing mutual recognition activities based on the 'Central European Free Trade Area' and 'Regional Economic Area'. Finally, membership to the World Trade Organization is a mandatory step for the Western Balkan countries to integrate with the EU.[100]

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[97] "Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions " Accessed May 14, 2019. https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:8a8ef5e8-99a0-11e5-b3b7-01aa75ed71a1.0012.02/DOC_1&format=PDF.
[98] Ibid
[99] MEMORANDUM BY THE EUROPEAN UNION. Accessed May 15, 2019. https://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/er/Memo.eng.htm.
[100] "Advocacy Strategy for the EU Integration of the Western Balkans" Accessed May 15, 2019. https://cens.ceu.edu/sites/cens.ceu.edu/files/attachment/event/674/aswb-guidelines-full-version-za-web.pdf.

2.3.2 Cultural Policies and Activities

The European Union aims to enhance the effectiveness and impact of its foreign policy by "integrating international cultural relations in the range of its foreign policy instruments"[101], while recognizing the necessity for "a cross-cutting approach to culture".[102] This is a further acknowledgment of the new EU cultural policy and the outcome of an awareness process initiated in 2016 following the 'Communication towards an EU strategy in international cultural relations'. Similarly, the 'New Agenda for Culture' of 2018 aims to increase Europe's shared, diverse heritage and to make use of the full potential of culture in building a more inclusive and just Union.[103]

As candidate countries and potential candidates, the Western Balkans (and Turkey) have a special place and importance in EU external policies. EU policies in the field of culture are part of the 'EU acquis' that candidates need to implement under negotiating Chapter 26 on Education and Culture.[104] For the implementation of the required EU policies, the region receives financial support through the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA). The EU has long supported the implementation of various cultural programs in all Western Balkan countries to promote inter-cultural dialogue, reconciliation and socio-economic development. Through the 'Ljubljana Process I and II', a programme conducted by both the European Commission and the Council of Europe, significant resources were invested in preserving cultural heritage in the region.[105]

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[101] "JOINT COMMUNICATION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL Towards an EU Strategy for International Cultural Policy." European Commission. June 8, 2016. Accessed May 15, 2019. https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52016JC0029&from=EN.

[102] Ibid, p. 4

[103] Annelies Stalpaert, "Commission Proposes Ambitious New European Agenda for Culture." Culture - European Commission. July 24, 2018. Accessed May 15, 2019. https://ec.europa.eu/culture/news/new-european-agenda-culture_en.

[104] Towards an EU Strategy for International Cultural Policy (2016), p.5

[105] Ibid

Cultural institutions in the region benefit from EU policy cooperation to expand their activities, as well as from participating in the Culture and Creative Europe programs.[106] The Western Balkans region are currently facing new challenges, including the integration of newly arrived migrants, where intercultural dialogue may enhance reconciliation, counter radicalization and contribute to the building of democratic societies. Finally, as outlined in the 'EU Strategy for International Cultural Policy': the EU should continue working closely with the Western Balkans region to ensure protection of their cultural heritage, enhance the development of their cultural and creative industries and cultivate the participation in existing EU cultural activities.[107]

2.4 EU and North Macedonia

Relations between the EU (led by Germany) and North Macedonia show a positive upward trend. The EU's main interest in the country is to ensure the country's EU and Western path, halt Russian influence, prevent illegal migration to the EU and ensure the overall stability of the region. The main methods used in North Macedonia are similar to the overall EU strategy in the Western Balkans and focus on economics, politics and soft power. In the political realm, North Macedonia- along with the other Balkan countries- became a candidate country in the 2003 Thessaloniki Summit and its Stabilization and Association Agreement came into force in 2004. Since October 2009, the Commission recommended to open accession negotiations with the country, however this did not occur. In its June 2018 conclusions, the Council recommended the re-opening of the accession negotiations depending on progress made in key areas such as

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[106] "Eligibility of Organizations from Non-EU Countries - EACEA - European Commission." EACEA. May 03, 2019. Accessed May 15, 2019. https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/creative-europe/library/eligibility-organisations-non-eu-countries_en.
[107] Towards a Strategy for International Cultural Policy (2016), p. 6

judicial reforms, corruption and public administration. In the economics realm, EU investments in the country rose from 41 per cent of all foreign investments in 2000, 57 per cent in 2008, 67 per cent in 2013 and 71 per cent in 2016.[108] Regarding soft power, the EU and more specifically individual countries such as Italy, Germany and Austria have been expanding their cultural influence and activities in the country.

2.4.1 EU's Political Interests and Activities in North Macedonia

The EU's main political interest in North Macedonia is to *enhance* EU integration and NATO expansion in the Balkan region, prevent migration and halt Russian influence. The EU maintains good bilateral relations with North Macedonia. The EU has found an ally through the pro-EU Social Democratic Union party.[109] While there were no official meetings and visits of high officials of North Macedonia and the EU prior to the country's independence, bilateral relations started to increase after the Social Democratic Union party (led by Zoran Zaev) won the parliamentary election in 2017. In 2018, there was one visit to Skopje by Angela Merkel to support the country's referendum to change its name deal[110] and in 2019, Zaev visited Berlin for the Western Balkans Summit led by the German Chancellor.[111] Both visits served the intent of strengthening political and economic links and establishing a more fertile ground for cooperation between the two countries. These visits also created

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[108] "European Union Releases New 72.3 EUR Million for Supporting the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia." EEAS. Accessed May 17, 2019. https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/37564/european-union-rel.

[109] Gordana Knezevic, "Macedonia's Social Democrats Look to Deliver On European Promise." RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty. October 18, 2017. Accessed May 18, 2019. https://www.rferl.org/a/macedonia-social-democrats-look-deliver-european-promise/28800206.html.

[110] Naser Pajaziti, "North Macedonia's Zaev Comments the Berlin Summit." Independent Balkan News Agency. April 30, 2019. Accessed May 17, 2019. https://balkaneu.com/north-macedonias-zaev-comments-the-berlin-summit/.

[111] Deutsche Welle. "Angela Merkel Backs 'Macedonia' Renaming Referendum | DW | 08.09.2018." DW.COM. September 8, 2019. Accessed May 17, 2019. https://www.dw.com/en/angela-merkel-backs-macedonia-renaming-referendum/a-45409477.

openings for North Macedonia to try to combine two significant foreign policy aspirations: membership in the EU and maintain good relations with Russia. The EU claims that its strong relationship in North Macedonia is based on shared history and cultural ties, and in the country's deep commitment to follow an EU path.

2.4.2 EU's Economic Interests and Activities in North Macedonia

Individual EU member states pursue their own economic interests and activities in the country. In fact, Italy and Germany are the country's largest trade partners. Due to the country's political, geographic and cultural similarities, Skopje is of strategic priority for both the German and the Italian foreign policies. The strategic interests of both countries are to ensure the country's EU path. Both countries' economic interests in North Macedonia is to enhance their trade and economic links while ensuring the country implements the necessary reforms outlined in the SAP for EU accession.

On the one hand, Germany is the country's most important trading partner.[112] Germany has largely invested in the country's textile and car industries. In 2016, bilateral trade was worth 3 billion dollars, with German exports to the country totaling approximately 890 million euros, and German imports from the country around 1 billion euros. This resulted in a remarkable trade surplus for Skopje, resulting "mainly from contract-processing work in the vehicle components sector".[113] In addition, there has been a Delegate Office of German Industry and Commerce in Skopje since 2007. More than 150 companies with German capital operate in the country. These firms employ more than 14,000

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[112] Amt, Auswärtiges. "Federal Foreign Office - North Macedonia: Bilateral Relations to Germany." German Federal Foreign Office. Accessed May 20, 2019. https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/en/aussenpolitik/laenderinformationen/mazedonien-node/north-macedonia/228106.
[113] Ibid

employees while the bilateral business association has 200 members, making it the largest of its kind in the country.[114]

Apart from Germany, Italy is also one of the country's main partners in foreign trade and investments.[115] The overall exchange in 2013 amounted to over 210 million euros.[116] The main areas of Italian investment in the country include textiles, footwear, cars, energy production and distribution, while at the same time the country maintains the presence of major Italian banks throughout the country. Italy wishes to expand its economic activities in the region, especially in the field of woodworking and furniture manufacturing industry, plastics and the automobile industry.[117]

2.4.3 EU's Cultural Interests and Activities in North Macedonia

Among the EU countries, Germany and Austria maintain the largest cultural influence in the country. Both countries' main interest in North Macedonia is to expand their influence and ensure the country chooses an EU path. The main methods used are the establishment of German language schools, film festivals and cultural organizations.

On the one hand, the Goethe-Institute supports the cultural programme work for cultural societies in Skopje, Bitola and Tetovo.[118] In 2015, it initiated its own language courses and examinations. The German Reading room at the country's National Library has been operating since the country's independence. For the last fifteen years, the German embassy has organized various film festivals and has supported the exchange of German artists, exhibitions and concerts. Similarly, with Germany,

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[114] Ibid

[115] "Italy - Balkans Bilateral Relations - Esteri.it." Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. March 1, 2016. Accessed May 17, 2019. https://www.esteri.it/mae/en/politica_estera/aree_geografiche/europa/balcani/.

[116] Ibid

[117] Ibid

[118] German Federal Foreign Office (2019)

Austria has financed various film festivals throughout the country such as the 'Manaki Brothers Film Festival' since 2017 and has implemented the regional project 'Entrepreneurship Learning' in teacher training, including the development of training materials for German language teachers.[119]

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[119] "Action Plan - Bmeia.gv.at." Austrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Accessed May 18, 2019. https://www.bmeia.gv.at/fileadmin/user_upload/Zentrale/Aussendungen/2016/Austria_Macedonia_English.pdf.

Chapter 3: EU and Russia as Norm Promoters in the Western Balkans

Relations between the EU and the Western Balkans are represented by the membership perspective that has been confirmed at the Feira European Council in 2000. Therefore, the assessment of EU's normative influence in the region should also consider the process of enlargement to convey a complete analysis. The EU has included the Western Balkan countries in the list of potential candidate countries for membership and has employed certain means such as civilian and military missions, political and economic conditionalities, democratic measures and the rule of law and respect for human and minority rights and cooperation with the International Criminal Court for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY). Through these norms, the EU exerts its influence in the region and assists the countries of the Western Balkans to implement these reforms for EU accession.

However, Russian criticism of the normative power Europe concept and the EU's normative influence in the Western Balkans has evolved. Initially, Russia insisted that NPE arguments covered realpolitik.[120] However, two new approaches have emerged in Russian reporting on human rights in the EU and specifically in the case of the Western Balkans. The first is the statement that the EU does not qualify as a normative power. The second concerning the Western Balkans, is the development of an alternative interpretation of human rights while its main interest is to provide an alternative to the EU integration in the region.

In this chapter, I will use the concept of normative power and assess the normativity (the spread of norms, behaviors and principles in a third country) of the European Union and Russia in

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[120] Romanova (2016)

the Western Balkans. I will first explore the concept of Normative Power Europe in the Western Balkans and then specifically to North Macedonia. Then I explore the instruments both powers use to assert their authorities in the region. The next part explores Russia's criticism to the normative power Europe concept and analyze which normative principles it uses for its sphere of influence in the Western Balkans.

3.1 EU Normative Power in the Western Balkans

Ian Manners identifies nine norms which represent the concept of normative power Europe. The core norms are peace, liberty, rule of law and respect for human rights which are identified in the constitutive documents of the EU. However, in this chapter, I will be focusing on three norms namely democratic principle, human rights and the rule of law. The norms define the EU's strategy in the Western Balkans. The importance of the first two norms is highlighted at the Stabilization and Association Process (SAP) and the Stability Pact for Southeastern Europe, as mandatory provisions for the stability and security in the region[121]. In addition, European Commission's Progress reports and the Stability and Association Agreements (SAAs) identify human rights, democracy and rule of law as prerequisites for stability in the region[122]. At the same time, since 2002, the European Commission has prioritized the promotion of democracy and human rights in all its policies and strategies. In addition, other declarations such as the Sarajevo Summit Declaration which launched the Stability Pact in 1999 endorsed the same as the core principles

[121] Stefania Panebianco, "EU Attempts to Export Norms of Good Governance to the Mediterranean and Western Balkan Countries." Jean Monnet Centre EuroMed Department of Political Studies - University of Catania. October 1, 2014. Accessed May 19, 2019. http://aei.pitt.edu/6109/1/jmwp53.pdf.
[122] Ibid

these countries need to accomplish.[123] Similarly, the 2000 Zagreb European Council payed specific attention to human rights in the areas of migration and protection of refugees as a prerequisite for further cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY).[124] In the SAP it is clearly specified that, that only the adoption of the human rights principle may lead to regional cooperation between the EU and the Western Balkan countries.[125] The intended objectives of these norms were clearly related to the aftermath of the Yugoslav crisis and the EU's wish to ensure stability in the region.

3.1.1 Instruments

The instruments employed by the EU for the promotion of human rights, democracy and rule of law are comparable. In fact, the European Union employs conditionality, aid and diplomatic means, as well as civilian and military missions to promote the norms. The Copenhagen Criteria included in conditionality principle for the Western Balkans is an effective instrument for the promotion of these norms. An important aspect of the effectiveness of the conditionality principle is represented by the "references to political values and economic norms"[126] of the European Union. Therefore, for the EU to promote these norms in the region, "the strategies represented by the SAP and the SAAs, together with the Community Assistance for Reconstruction, Development

[123] "Sarajevo Summit Declaration." Consilium. Accessed May 20, 2019.
https://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/er/ACF1EC.htm.
[124] Zagreb Summit." European Commission. Accessed May 18, 2019.
https://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/en/er/Declang4.doc.html.
[125] "Stabilization and Association Agreement Western Balkans." European Parliament. Accessed May 16, 2019.
http://www.europarl.europa.eu/ftu/pdf/en/FTU_5.5.2.pdf.
[126] Karen Smith, "EU Foreign Policy in 2008 - Cidob.org." Anuario Internacional CIDOB. January 1, 2009. Accessed May 21, 2019. https://www.cidob.org/es/content/download/15735/116440/file/103_smith_eng.pdf.

and Stabilization (CARDS) and the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) as core tools to sustain their implementation."[127]

3.1.2 Conditionality Principle in the Western Balkans

The 2003 Copenhagen Criteria outline the basic accession criteria. These criteria outline the fulfillment of three elements, namely stable and democratic institutions that guarantee democracy, rule of law, human rights and a competitive market economy.[128] Therefore, by applying these norms to the accession process, the EU has established a powerful tool for promoting its norms and ensures that these countries will make substantial efforts to adopt them.

Beyond the enlargement process, the conditionality principle is also included in other strategies for the Western Balkan countries. Prior to the 2003 Thessaloniki Summit-where these countries were recognized as potential candidates- the region also benefited by other initiatives such as the Royaumont Process and the Regional Approach. Their objective was to resolve the severe conflicts and provide a new framework for future peaceful and regional cooperation with these countries. On the one hand, the Royaumont Process was established in 1996 aiming to support the execution of the Dayton Peace Agreement, whereas the Regional Approach was launched two years later and imposed political and economic conditionality comprising conditions regarding the respect of human rights, rule of law and democracy. Apart from political instruments, the EU has also employed an economic instrument-the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) as an essential part of the conditionality principle. The European Union finances various

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[127] Center for EU Enlargement Studies. "USING IPA AND OTHER EU FUNDS TO ACCELERATE CONVERGENCE IN THE WESTERN BALKANS" Accessed May 21, 2019. http://web.ceu.hu/cens/assets/files/IPA.pdf.

[128] "Conditions for Membership." European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations - European Commission. December 06, 2016. Accessed May 20, 2019. https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/policy/conditions-membership_en.

programs in these countries for the implementation of human rights and democratic projects for establishing the necessary framework to sustain these principles.[129]

Additionally, the turbulent past of the Western Balkans and the disintegration of the region in the 1990s made the EU to include one more specific requirement for this region concerning the human rights principle. This condition is to cooperate with the international Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY), which is included both in the SAP and in the SAAs. Bringing into justice the war criminals of the Yugoslav war was considered as a crucial step for establishing peace in the region and strengthen the implementation of democratic and fair societies based on human rights and peace. Initially, all Western Balkan countries were reluctant in this prospect which led to a temporary suspension of the negotiations[130] however, the prospect of joining the EU seemed a strong incentive to ultimately comply.[131]

3.1.3 Military Instruments

Beyond political and economic instruments, the EU has as its disposal a wide range of instruments, along with military ones especially in the light of the creation of the EU's European Security and Defense Policy. Pejic argues that "in the framework of the dichotomy between the soft and hard instruments, as there are cases, such as the crisis of Yugoslavia, when the use of force may be crucial to be considered as a normative power".[132]

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[129] Conditions for Membership (2016)

[130] Margit Feischmidt, "Human Rights and EU Conditionality in the Western Balkans." December 15, 2017. Accessed May 20, 2019. http://intersections.tk.mta.hu/index.php/intersections/article/view/377/156.

[131] Ibid

[132] Rok Zupančič, and Nina Pejič. "Limits to the European Union's Normative Power in a Post-conflict Society - EULEX and Peacebuilding in Kosovo | Springer. January 5, 2018. Accessed May 24, 2019. https://www.springer.com/gp/book/9783319778235.

The establishment of six civilian and military operations in the Western Balkans, signified an important stage in the development of the EU's foreign policy and capabilities. Manners has identified the dangers this dimension poses to the normative power, "but only if it is developed in an uncritical manner".[133] In addition, Paterson, who employs a more realist approach, considers that military power may be used as an instrument for the promotion of norms and presents the EU as both "normative and powerful" in the global arena.[134] He also argues that the spread of human rights principles and conflict prevention have been also distributed through peace operations such as Concordia and EUPAT in North Macedonia.[135]

However, taking into consideration these interventions in North Macedonia, as well as the EUPOL Proxima mission, they show that the EU's normative role needs to involve these military dimensions, "especially due to the country involvement in which the EU intervened".[136] For instance, analyzing EUFOR Athlea- the EU's military mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina- Juncos argues that this operation did not weaken EU's normative power as it enjoyed legitimacy both internationally, by UN and other actors, as well as internal, by the Bosnian people.[137] Furthermore, human rights considerations have been included in other civilian and military operations as was the case of the EUPOL Proxima in North Macedonia and the EUPM in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the norms of democracy especially in rule of law missions, such as EULEX in Kosovo.[138]

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[133] Manners (2002)

[134] Whitman, Richard G. Normative Power Europe: Empirical and Theoretical Perspectives. Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.

[135] Ibid

[136] Andrea Ciambra, "Normative Power' Europe: Theory and Practice of EU Norms. The Case of Macedonia." Https://www.academia.edu/726932/Normative_power_Europe_theory_and_practice_of_EU_norms._The_case_of_Macedonia. July 1, 2008. Accessed May 20, 2019. https://www.academia.edu/726932/Normative_power_Europe_theory_and_practice_of_EU_norms._The_case_of_Macedonia.

[137] Ana Juncos, ''Power Discourse and Power Practices: The EU's Role as Normative Power in Bosnia", in *Normative Power Europe: Empirical and Theoretical Perspectives,* ed. Richard G. Whitman, Palgrace Macmillan, 2011

[138] Smith Karen (2008)

Therefore, the EU's military dimension especially in the cases of the Western Balkans has sparked considerable debate of the EU and its normative role. It is clear that the defense and security policy for the European Union should be taken into consideration when examining the effect on its normativity on the global scene. The next part explores the EU's police missions in North Macedonia and the promotion of its norms.

3.1.3.1   EU Police Missions in North Macedonia

Ioannides argues that the "EU claims that it has drawn significant lessons from the lengthy Balkan experience in crisis management which has helped the Union to establish a full range of civilian and military crisis management capabilities, institutions and instruments in the European Commission and the Council".[139] In the case of North Macedonia, the expression of the EU's continuing commitment to support its peace prospects and bring it closer to the Union is expressed through the establishment of both the Commission's and the Council's capabilities in reforming the Macedonian institutions. The Macedonian case is presented by EU officials as its big success in the Balkans and as having provided a useful testing ground for future crisis management. At the same time, the Macedonian authorities have disclosed that the EU's assistance in reforming its police system has led to the establishment of an accountable, transparent, effective and based on rule of law police system[140]. The EU through the Council monitors and observes the country's security reforms under the 'Ohrid-EU Agreement Framework'[141] which apart from imposing reforms on the country's security system it also facilitates the country's EU integration.

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[139] Isabel Ioannides. "Police Mission in Macedonia." Centre for European Policy Studies. July 2, 2017. Accessed May 20, 2019. http://aei.pitt.edu/32601/1/40._Evaluating_EU_Crisis_Missions_in_the_Balkans.pdf.

[140] Ibid, p. 85

[141] "Ohrid Framework Agreement." OSCE. Accessed May 18, 2019. https://www.osce.org/skopje/100622.

3.2 Russian Challenge to the EU's Normative Power in the Western Balkans

In the last decade, European studies have primarily focused on the EU's international position in the global arena. When analyzing how the EU exerts its influence globally, it is worth taking into consideration its structural and conceptual features distinguishing the EU from Westphalian states.[142] Despite the EU's position that it is a global power, the Union remains an alliance of nations that "voluntarily transferred part of their sovereignty to the supranational level".[143] The Lisbon Treaty did not resolve the problem of unity and harmony-an increase in the number of actors shaping the Union's foreign policy complicated the negotiation processes "necessitating harmonization of positions not only between member states and supranational institutions, but also between the latter".[144] "This circumstance limits the EU's possibility to project itself as a power. In addition, in view of the complications faced by the EU when amending the founding EU treaties (such as the Constitution of Europe) it is not likely that the European Union will gain sufficient strength and political will in the near future to use the most radical tools of 'hard power'".[145] This leads to a question of the nature of power of the European Union, whose choice of tools to influence world politics is rather limited.

International authors have coined a series of terms to identify the EU as an international actor and to describe its 'power' and in fact 'normative power' or 'trade and market power'. A common characteristic of these concepts is the perception of the EU as an actor. This characteristic

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[142] Elena Savorskaya, "The Concept of the European Union's Normative Power." August 05, 2015. Accessed May 21, 2019. https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/the-concept-of-the-european-union-s-normative-power.
[143] Ibid
[144] Ibid
[145] Ibid

has certain limitations. It is worth highlighting that most studies are somewhat of a hypothesis or an invitation to discuss the role of the EU in the international arena, which is indicative of the need to identify the Union's position in the current world political system noting, at the same time, its unique character. The most important concept is the 'normative power' indicating that the EU aims to exert influence on other international actors (primarily states wishing to integrate to the EU), in terms of the values and behavior in domestic politics and in the international arena. As well as with other political concepts, 'normative power' "is a product of its time"[146]. In 2002, in response to the criticism of Francois Duchene's concept of 'civil power' by the Australian realist Hedley Bull, political scientist Ian Manners used the concept of 'normative power' which interprets the 'power' of the EU as an ability to develop the idea of 'norm' in international relations.[147] The author highlighted that the changes sustained by global politics since the 1990s called for a revision of the 'civilian and military power' since the basic principles underlying these notions became obsolete with the end of the Cold War.[148] Therefore, "the concept of 'normative power' formulated within the liberal-idealistic paradigm is underlain by renunciation of totalitarian and state-centered doctrines of traditional approaches, therefore the Union's 'power' cannot be reduced to economic or military elements, being expressed through ideas, opinions, and conscience".[149]

Additionally, Moscow provides an alternative to the EU's normative power in the Western Balkans. The reports on the situation concerning human rights in the Western Balkans[150] provided Moscow with the opportunity to provide an alternative interpretation regarding the protection of

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[146] Ibid
[147] Manners (2002)
[148] Ibid
[149] Savorskaya (2005)
[150] Romanova (2016)

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human rights. Several priorities may be identified in the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MID) reports.

Regarding the construction of democratic and just societies in the Western Balkans, Russia highlights its experience in constructing a multi-ethnic and multi-confessional society, which it can share to help both the EU and the Western Balkans to deal with the problems of ethnic minorities, xenophobia and racism. In fact, Vladimir Chizhvov, argued that Russia was ready to share "its unique tradition of good neighborhood coexistence of representatives of various cultures and religions, based on tolerance at socio-political and interpersonal levels".[151] In 2014, the Kremlin published a declaration against Christianophobia in the UN and OSCE stressing that for other religions similar declarations have been made.[152]This indicates the defense of Christian values and of the Russian turn to conservatism.

In addition, Russia is also currently preoccupied with the rights and freedoms of the Russian population minorities in the Western Balkans namely in Serbia and Montenegro. It stresses their deprivation, lack of access to various institutions, limited political rights as well as lack of education in their native language.[153] Defending the rights of these minorities, Russia has promoted the principle of 'non-selectivity' in the human rights' agenda, meaning the necessity to respect all categories of human rights. Furthermore, in the 2013 MID report Kremlin accused the EU to enforce on these countries to accept homosexuality and same-sex marriages as a norm of life and some kind of a natural social phenomenon that deserves state support.[154] Therefore, Russia is

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[151] Ibid

[152] MID (2013) 'Report on the Human Rights Situation in the European Union' Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, available at:
http://www.mid.ru/bdomp/ndgpch.nsf/03c344d01162d351442579510044415b/44257b100055de8444257c60004a6491!OpenDocument Accessed 18th May 2019

[153] Romanova Tatiana (2016)

[154] MID (2013)

increasingly condemning the West of its promotion of liberal values and in the cases of the Western Balkans it proposes an alternative to it. This has allowed Russia to condemn the EU's normative approach in the Western Balkans and that the concept of Normative Power Europe has its limits.

3.3 EU and Russian Normative Influence in North Macedonia

EU's normative influence in the country may be considered successful. In an interview with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Skopje, it was argued that:

> The current government is actively engaged on a reform agenda, which includes public administration reform, the fight against corruption, judicial reform and reform in intelligence service. Such activities and policies are aimed at both accomplishing key EU conditionality requirements that would enable the country to start and make progress in our negotiations for accession in the EU, but also at improving the overall domestic situation in terms of the rule of law, democratic governance, functional and fair institutions. Another backbone between North Macedonia and the EU is formed by the current government's international and regional policies. In the past 2 years Skopje has made a diplomatic push to present the country's new face, to repair its international standing and to improve its neighborly relations. The first breakthrough came with the landmark Friendship Agreement with Bulgaria -signed on August 1st, 2017. This was a historic opportunity, which paved the way for a similarly open, conciliatory and a proactive approach in the relations with Greece. Following a year marked by confidence building and intensive negotiations, an Agreement was also signed on the decades-old name issue in June 2018. Both agreements serve the purpose of unblocking the Euro-Atlantic integration processes; in the process creating the conditions for economic prosperity, security and stability for all North Macedonian citizens. In addition, in the 2018 Progress Report, the European Commission recommended that the Council decides that accession negotiations be opened with our country in light of the progress achieved and in view of the sustained reform momentum, maintaining and deepening the current reform momentum.[155]

On the other hand, and compared with the EU, Russia does not have a specific strategy in exerting its normative influence on the country. Yet, considering its high involvement in the Western Balkan region reveals its desire to have a great-power style 'sphere of influences' in which no outsider may intervene without its consent.[156] As argued by Liik "in establishing this sphere,

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[155] Interview with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of North Macedonia (22nd May 2019).
[156] Kadrik, Liik. "Winning the Normative War with Russia: An EU-Russia Power Audit." ECFR.EU. May 21, 2018. Accessed May 20, 2019.

Moscow often relies on the elite-centric model it has at home".[157] This approach clashes with Europe's standards of democracy, human rights and rule of governance.

Conclusion

This thesis' main objective was to shed a light on both Russia's and EU's interests and activities in the Western Balkans while also assessing both Russia's and EU's normative influence in the region. On the one hand, Russia's influence in the Balkans has been expanding in recent years and Russia focuses on its main economic and cultural tools namely the promotion of Orthodox links and energy. In the case of North Macedonia, Russia wishes to transform the country into a regional energy hub while ensuring that its EU accession process is slowing down.

However, at the same time, EU's influence in the country is also expanding. The EU's main interest in the region is to ensure the region's integration while ensuring stability and prevent migration through the Balkan route. In the case of North Macedonia, the EU has found a useful ally through the current government (VMRO-DPMNE). In terms of EU-North Macedonia relations, in April of last year in the 2018 Progress Report, the European Commission recommended that the Council decides that accession negotiations be opened with Skopje "in light of the progress achieved and in view of the sustained reform momentum, maintaining and deepening the current reform momentum".[158] This ensures the country's Western path. Yet, the extent to which Russia's political, economic and cultural involvement in the Balkans could shift

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https://www.ecfr.eu/publications/summary/winning_the_normative_war_with_russia_an_eu_russia_power_audit#.

[157] Ibid

[158] "Key Findings of the 2018 Report on the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia." European Commission - Press Release. April 17, 2018. Accessed May 20, 2019. http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-18-3405_en.htm.

away the region from the EU path was not systematically discussed, which in itself leaves space for further development.

On the other hand, to provide a full amount of both the EU's and Russia's normative role in the Western Balkans, I analyzed both powers' normative influence in the region. In the case of the EU, in this thesis I explored three of the EU norms them, namely democracy, human rights and the rule of law to analyze EU's role in the region. These three norms are highlighted in the various Progress reports and in the Stabilization and Association Agreements. It may be argued that the European Union has been consistent in its promotion of these norms over time and across its various programs designed for the Western Balkans. However, concerning Russia's role, Moscow criticizes the normative power Europe concept and stresses its weaknesses while also providing an alternative to it. Russia primarily argues that the EU has not been building societies based on democratic principles and in the cases of Russian minorities in Montenegro and Serbia it does not promote their rights. Russia is increasingly condemning the West for the promotion of illiberal values and norms. Lastly, further research in this issue, could potentially explore Russia's criticism of the EU's strategy in the Western Balkans.

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