**Lidija Čehulić Vukadinović[[1]](#footnote-1)**

**Western Balkans’ Countries and their accession to NATO and EU**

By fall-apart of the bi-polar international relations the political, security and economic determination of the South Eastern Europe was also redefined. The *status quo* of the Cold War era has been replaced by policies towards European integration. Different level of political inclusion of post-socialist countries of this region into the mainstream institutional forms of Euro-Atlantic and European integration (NATO and EU) has resulted in emergence of a new political term *Western Balkans*. By applying the formula “former Yugoslavia, minus Slovenia, plus Albania” first the EU, and later NATO as well, have extracted a group of countries from this region - Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, FR Yugoslavia (today Montenegro, Kosovo, and Serbia), Macedonia and Albania – which were falling behind in implementing the necessary transitional reforms. Author is arguing that within the existing regional programs each of the Western Balkans countries is being assessed and rewarded individually, and that path towards Euro-Atlantic and European integration is a two-way process in which both sides (countries of the Western Balkans on one and NATO and EU, respectively, on the other) have significant benefits. Comparing these benefits for NATO and EU author finds that in a long term NATO has benefited from this dynamic process more than the EU. Current slow-down in further enlargement of both NATO and EU (due to economic crisis, new crisis spots beyond European space, as well as due to growing differences between the NATO members and EU members on various issues of the contemporary world) does not mean that their doors for new members from Western Balkans are being permanently closed. Author predicts that the tempo of integration of the “narrower” Western Balkans (after Croatia becomes the EU member) will in future increasingly depend on interests of the national political elites and overall internal situation in particular country, rather than on NATO or EU members insisting on the enlargement of their respective organizations.

Syntagm *Western Balkans* has been entered into the political discourse during the European Union summit in Zagreb in 2000 for the territories of the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, minus Slovenia, plus Albania, i.e. Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the then FR Yugoslavia[[2]](#footnote-2), Macedonia, and Albania. The newly adopted term is primarily a political syntagm used for identifying this group of countries that were at that time on a similar level of internal development, judged by the state of their overall post-socialist transition processes, level of their integration into Euro-Atlantic and European structures (or lack of it), and by direct or indirect consequences of military and ethnic conflicts in this region. Geographically Western Balkans stretches far beyond the most westerly country of this region (Albania). However, the psychological desire to move as far away from the traditional notion of Balkans (mostly connected with negative connotations: underdevelopment, corruption, unemployment, illiteracy, lack of order, frequent armed conflicts, etc.) lead to a sort of compromise between the international community (EU, USA, NATO) and Balkan countries which accepted the term Balkans under the condition that a prefix “Western” be added to it.

***Western Balkans as a Sub-Region of South Eastern Europe***

In early 90s of the 20th Century, immediately after disappearance of bi-polar relations and in the midst of a search for new structure of European and World order, post-socialist countries of the South Eastern Europe, including those that emerged after the disintegration of the SFRY, have expressed their desire to pursue political, economic and security integration within the so called “Western way of life”. And in institutional sense this also meant integration with NATO and EU.

Disappearance of bi-polar relations led to abandoning of security and economic *status quo* in the South Eastern Europe. Greece and Turkey, countries that were already institutionally integrated into the Western bloc on the levels of security (NATO) and economy (EC) have preserved these ties and Turkey has even deepened them by starting negotiations on EU membership in 2005. Two members that were part of socialist security bloc (Warsaw Pact) have immediately started radical post-socialist reforms. They became NATO members in 2005, and have joined EU in 2007.

Bloody disintegration of Yugoslavia has slowed down the much needed transition of countries emerging after the fall apart of the former federation and at the same time it has determined their paths to integration into both NATO and EU. The only exception was Slovenia which became a NATO member in 2004, and one year later an EU member. Slovenia was the most advanced federal state within the former SFR Yugoslavia, it was spared large scale war destruction, and being a small but well organized country it managed to implement the needed reforms quickly and succesfully. The rest of the former SFR Yugoslavia was not as successful. In territories of Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina the wars were raging till 1995, and in 1999 Serbia was bombed by NATO. Presence of international forces was preventing ethnic conflicts in Macedonia. Albania, which was a part of socialist world, but at the same time was pursuing a policy of neutrality and isolationism in relation to security and economy integrations of the socialist world (Warsaw Pact and COMECON) also managed to protect its territorial integrity after the fall of the bi-polar world, albeit with much assistance from the international community (especially the USA and NATO). Therefore it is understandable why did the European Union, within a range of its regional approaches to post-socialist countries[[3]](#footnote-3), group these countries under the term Western Balkans and adopt a specific program for assisting them on their paths towards integration with EU. Namely, on the same EU Zagreb summit in 2000 where the term Western Balkans was launched the Stabilization and Accession Agreement as an important mechanism for accession of these countries closer to the EU was also adopted. For other European post-socialist countries that were aspiring to EU membership EU had a different mechanism – Accession Agreement. Naturally, due to specific problems caused by the war and other soft challenges to security that countries of the Western Balkans needed to address, the EU primarily insisted on stabilization, and only after that on accession. It must be noted that NATO, although not taking over the term Western Balkans in it official documents, also insisted on political stabilization of these countries – through its Partnership for Peace program – and only then on reforms of their defense systems. In analyzing the requested reforms one can see that the so called “first set” of these pre-conditions set forth by both NATO and EU is almost identical. It refers to political conditions – regional cooperation, full cooperation with the ICTY, return of refugees, strengthening the rule of law, fight against corruption, and democratization of all aspects of society. In other words, by applying the “stick and carrot” policy NATO and EU were trying to guide these countries to full membership in both organizations.

Since early 1990s situation in all these countries, as well as the one in NATO and EU, has considerably changed. Besides bilateral relations between a country aspiring for membership and the respective organization, relations on international scene have also changed. All this further complicated integration of the Western Balkans countries into Euro-Atlantic and European structures. However, all countries of the region (with the exception of Serbia, which refuses to join NATO) continue to strive to full NATO and EU membership. But within their regional approaches to this region both NATO and EU were consistently evaluating and rewarding these countries on their individual achievements. Therefore today, in spite of the still present and used term Western Balkans, each of these countries has different level of institutional links with NATO and EU, respectively.

***Institutional links of the Western Balkans with NATO and EU***

Analyzing the enlargement process of NATO and EC/EU it can be noticed that all “new democracies”, including the post-socialist ones, have first become members of NATO and only then of EC/EU. It was evident that Euro-Atlantic allies have maintained this principle for the countries of the Western Balkans as well. In reviewing their institutional bilateral connections it can be concluded that NATO made the first steps towards a particular country, and EU followed.

***Croatia***

Military aggression in which one third of Croatia’s territory was occupied, fight for physical liberation of the country, and Croatia’s involvement in armed conflicts in Bosnia and Herzegovina have all stopped Croatian progress towards NATO. Almost to the very end of the 20th century Croatia was, along with FR Yugoslavia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, one of the most isolated SEE countries by international community. In spite of the fact that NATO forces, as well as the EU member states and the USA, were assisting Croatian fight in various ways, due to this war that was forced upon it Croatia was left out of any NATO institutional ties and programs designed for post-socialist countries.[[4]](#footnote-4)

Croatia’s progress towards NATO began after democratic presidential and parliamentary elections in 2000, when Croatia, almost overnight, became a member of Partnership for Peace. Soon after this Croatia starts to participate in NATO’s Membership Action Plan. Along with Albania and Former Yugoslav Republic Macedonia Washington includes Croatia into program for adjusting to the standards of the Alliance – the so called Adriatic Charter. This all led to Croatia being recognized as a country deserving invitation to full NATO membership during the NATO summit in Bucharest in 2008. Croatia became the NATO member in 2009 on NATO summit in Strasbourg and Cologne.[[5]](#footnote-5) Since then Croatia actively participates in numerous political, humanitarian, civilian and military missions conducted under the auspices of the UN or NATO.[[6]](#footnote-6) At the same, time the percentage of public support to NATO and Croatian membership in it has never exceeded 55 percent.[[7]](#footnote-7)

Simultaneously with approach to NATO, Croatia has established institutional ties with the EU.

With exception of a short period of time when it was included into the EU PHARE program, until January 2001 Croatia was actually only entitled to annual trade preferences in trade with EU.[[8]](#footnote-8) The negotiations between the EU and Republic of Croatia on Stabilization and Accession Agreement (SAA) have officially begun at the margins of the 2000 EU summit in Zagreb. By signing the SAA and the Temporary Agreement, which was to be implemented until the effectiveness of the SAA, Croatia has for the first time established formal relations with the EU. This was the most important formal step within the process of Croatian accession to EU before the official request for full membership status (in 2003) and acquiring the candidate status (in 2004). A year later Croatia commences the accession negotiations which will eventually result in its full membership on July 1, 2013, providing all EU member states ratify this in their parliaments. Of all post-socialist countries Croatia’s negotiations were the longest ones and the most substantive ones. This was a result of internal political situation, certain “enlargement fatigue” that was felt within some EU member states, as well as a result of positions of some neighboring countries towards Croatia’s membership in EU (Slovenia). Once Croatia becomes the twenty-eighth member of the EU it will politically also leave the Western Balkans region and enter into the world of Western Europe. However, all problems of this “narrower” Western Balkans (without Croatia) will continue to have effect on overall situation in Croatia. For this reason Croatian political elites should use the membership in EU for further strengthening the cooperation both in Western Balkans region and in a wider Mediterranean area. Croatia should use its NATO and EU memberships to finally, within the existing regional programs of these organizations, define its policies towards the wider Mediterranean region.

***Bosnia and Herzegovina***

Country that suffered the longest and bloodiest war after the break-up of former Yugoslavia can be grateful to NATO and US administration under President Clinton for stopping the armed conflict. But the very same international community has also forced a protectorate status upon Bosnia and Herzegovina and a political system that very few of the citizens of this country supports – the Dayton Agreement. Regardless of all advantages or disadvantages of its functioning in accordance with the Dayton model, integration of this country into European and Euro-Atlantic space is more of a symbolic character than expression of will of its citizen or realistic possibilities. NATO and EU have simultaneously started their respective aid programs aimed at assisting this country in strengthening logistical infrastructure needed for independent development of mechanisms needed for closer integration to these two organizations.

Bosnia and Herzegovina was accepted to Partnership for Peace program in 2006. It was also conditionally offered participation in the Action Plan for NATO membership in 2010 (however, the underlying issue of military property remains unsolved). Soldiers from Bosnia and Herzegovina participate in peace missions and other joint activities of the Alliance. On the other hand EU has, through Stabilization and Accession Agreement (2008), initiated reforms in Bosnia and Herzegovina but due to poor functioning of the Bosnia and Herzegovina as a unique state little has been achieved on closer accession to EU.

Emergence of a “state within the state” – the Republic of Srpska – in combination with deeply rooted national divisions prevent this country from further accession to Euro-Atlantic integrations. Formal progress achieved on the path towards NATO membership is not equally well accepted in two entities,[[9]](#footnote-9) while recent Progress Report issued by the EU reveals that there is not much progress in functioning of the state. Lack of readiness by local players to invest joint efforts on solving the concrete, daily hardships and to unanimously declare their joint interest for membership in NATO EU respresent sufficient reasons for international community to be dissatisfied with the present situation. Global crisis and numerous problems throughout the world and in Europe are additionally decreasing the level of interest of both Europe and international community for Bosnia and Herzegovina. In turn, this results in a situation where almost complete development within the country is left to certain political inertia.

***Serbia***

Similar to the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia is both institutionally and psychologically still far away from NATO and European Union. Differing from Bosnia and Herzegovina where NATO was crucial in stopping the bloody war, Serbia is still viewing NATO as an enemy that has attacked Serbian sovereignty in 1999 (action in Kosovo followed by NATO air strikes on strategically significant targets in Belgrade and Novi Sad). By applying the “stick and carrot” policy NATO and EU are trying to get closer to Belgrade and are awarding every, even the slightest democratic progress in the country. Serbia was admitted to Partnership for Peace (Riga, 2006), but it was clear that without the democratization of the whole Serbian society and forming of a stable pro-Western government there will be no further integration of Serbia into NATO. In the post-Cold War times Serbia was defeated in all wars it led (Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo), and its territory has shrunk with the secession of Montenegro and Kosovo. But still, Serbia has not experienced internal social catharsis and is constantly facing dangerous remains from the recent past in various segments of its social development. Within such context all positively assessed reforms and transformations of the military forces are being offset by internal political instability and weaknesses of the society. Thesis offered by some segments of Serbian political elites that Serbia may enter the EU without NATO membership, and comparisons with neutral status of Austria or Switzerland are not very realistic.

However, in spite of this stalling in institutional relations with NATO, the European Union is continuing with the “stick and carrot” strategy. Serbia has the Stabilization and Accession Agreement, and as a reward for Serbian willingness to talk with Prishtina after the incidents on Serbian-Kosovo border it even received a candidate status.

The so called Independence Declaration of 2009 was intended to point to Serbian desire to separate the Euro-Atlantic process and to stay outside of NATO - i.e. to remain neutral – while still aspiring for EU membership. Although the Declaration was primarily a declaratory response to court judgement on Kosovo, it was obvious that Tadić’s administration did not wish to alienate itself from Europe.

But, following the presidential elections and raise to power of the new coalition with president Nikolić, statements that Serbia will “never abandon its Southern province” and that “choice between Kosovo and Europe” is not an option are gaining on strength and frequency in Serbia. Due to its unwillingness to make a positive step towards opening negotiations with Kosovo Serbia will probably not receive a date for opening negotiations with the EU during this year. At the same time readiness to implement the agreements reached with Kosovo during the previous administration will not be enough since Serbia was already rewarded for that by receiving the EU candidate status.

Based on this it can be expected that Serbian cooperation with NATO will continue within the framework of Partnership for Peace, for which interest exists primarily within the Serbian military establishment, while any attempts on conditioning further Serbian accession to EU by postitive developments in Serbia – Kosovo relations will be firmly rejected. On one hand, this was a political rhetorical question on which the parties of the present coalition have won the elections. On the other, current crisis in the EU makes beliefs that Serbian accession to EU could have immediate tangible positive impacts on Serbian society rather unrealistic. Especially since this would be a process that could probably not be completed before 2020.

***Montenegro***

Besides Kosovo, Montenegro was the last country of the former SFR Yugoslavia to gain its independence in 2006, and has immediately made a solid start in implementing reforms needed for accession to NATO and EU. Namely, as during the so called Community of Serbia and Montenegro defense and security issues were under the realm of the joint state, with its independence Montenegro had to start from the scratch in these areas. Ranging from legal regulation to establishment of operational security forces, everything that was done in this small country on these issues was done in accordance with NATO standards and principles.[[10]](#footnote-10)

NATO recognized this and admitted Montenegro into Partnership for Peace immediately after the independence (2006). This was a clear advantage for Montenegrin armed forces, as well as for the whole society. Later Montenegro fell as collateral victim of NATO politics when due to conflicts in Georgia it was not admitted to Membership Action Plan. Montenegro had to wait until 2009 to enter this program. Again, as a collateral victim of NATO’s internal crisis it was not admitted to NATO membership during the Chicago summit and now must wait for the fourth wave of NATO enlargement. If it continues with successful reforms and activities within the existing NATO programs there is no reason for Montenegro not to become the next NATO member from the Western Balkans region as soon as the Alliance decides on the new enlargement.

Montenegro’s path towards the EU was similarly successful. After signing the Stabilization and Accession Agreement (2007) Montenegro has bravely requested EU membership. The fact that it was given the candidate status, as well as the date for beginning the negotiations, additionally encourages political elites, as well as citizens of the country, to persist on Euro-Atlantic and European path.[[11]](#footnote-11)

Institutional accession of Montenegro to NATO and EU gives favorable winds to political elites who were, because of that, able to solve some dilemmas of their own, as well as dilemmas expressed by the public opinion in Montenegro. Namely, every time a slow-down in this path towards the West is being sensed Montenegro calls upon its traditional connections with Russia. Some radical advocates of this Russian-Montenegro ties attempt even to substitute European path with closer relations with Russia. Montenegro may be taken as an example by all remaining Western Balkans countries, as well as any other country aspiring to NATO and EU membership, as a positive example of modern, globally interlinked international community. And since NATO and EU have well established relations with Russia, membership in these organizations does not have to mean automatic break-up of connections and relations with Russia.

***Kosovo***

Kosovo as an independent state is the project of the United States of America.[[12]](#footnote-12) Although United States are the most powerful member of the Alliance, to Kosovo’s regret this fact did not help in all members recognizing Kosovo’s independence. In the post-Cold War times Kosovo lies within NATO’s sphere of interest not only because of the first out-of-area action conducted there in 1999, but also due to extended presence of large contingent of NATO forces in that country.[[13]](#footnote-13) However, in Brussels potential membership of Kosovo is not being officially mentioned for the time being, for it is waiting for all members of the Alliance to recognize the newly independent state. The same may be said for the relation between the EU and Kosovo. As long as all member states do not recognize Kosovo as a sovereign state EU may not even consider strengthening institutional relations with that country. Still, there are ways in which NATO and EU members are cooperating with Kosovo, not to mention the fact that EU, NATO and UN forces are physically present in Kosovo. Based on this it might be said that Kosovo is in a rather specific situation, because it is simultaneously a subject, and an object of contemporary international relations.

***Albania***

The post-Cold War Albanian desire to join NATO was a proof of newly elected government that it will put an end to long lasting Albanian policy of isolationism and its specific type of neutralism. Situation in the region (not only the armed conflicts in the territories of the former Yugoslavia, but also continuing crisis over ethnic, religious and territorial issues in the neighborhood) has contributed to the fact that public opinion in Albania was constantly expressing the highest level of support to integration of their country to the Alliance. Even in times of stabilization in the South Eastern Europe and objective hardships that Albanian population was suffering during the transition and painful internal reforms, this support was not falling below eighty percent. Albania was among the first countries that joined NATO cooperation programs, such as North Atlantic Cooperation Council, Partnership for Peace, Membership Action Plan, within which it was developing various political, military and civil activities with the member states. Signing of the Adriatic Charter was in a way American recognition and reward for Albanian loyalty and cooperation with NATO, while call to join the Alliance together with Croatia, extended on NATO summit in Bucharest in 2008, was the icing on a cake of all Albanian efforts. For Albanian government this was certainly a reward, but also an obligation to start addressing Albanian internal problems (mostly connected to soft security challenges such as drug trafficking, crime, corruption) with more firmness and commitment.

European Union insists on the very same criteria. Albania has signed the Stabilization and Association Agreement (in 2006) but mostly due to insufficient reforms towards democracy and rule of law it did not achieve a stronger institutional integration with European Union.

***Macedonia***

Macedonia was not exposed to bloody armed conflicts after the fall-apart of the former Yugoslavia. However, in its post-socialist development it was not exempted from internal ethnic conflicts (including the us of armed forces) caused by dissatisfaction of Albanian population with its status in the new state. Religious and territorial problems gradually followed ethnic ones. The Ohrid Agreement has legally regulated status of unsatisfied national minorities but its implementation was facing numerous problems of objective and subjective nature. Military presence of international community is Macedonian reality for some time now. Internal instabilities that can easily spread over Macedonian borders in combination with Greek–Macedonian dispute over the name of the new state (among other) resulted in a strong orientation of Skopje towards the West, inclusive of NATO and its strongest member, the USA. Same as Albania, Macedonia was also intensifying its cooperation and partnerships through all existing NATO programs available to post-socialist countries. Together with Albania and Croatia it was contributing to international peace through activities within the Adriatic Charter. Level of public support to NATO membership in those times was never below sixty percent, while in times of intensified internal crisis it was rising up to eighty percent. Membership in the Alliance was primarily seen as a guarantee for lasting internal peace, stability and prosperity of the country. Thus the fact that Macedonia was not invited to join NATO with other two members of Adriatic Charter in 2008 resulted with deep disappointment in Skopje. Even more so due to the fact that first hints of such negative outcome started only at the eve of the Bucharest summit and during the summit itself. Greece as full member of the Alliance has used the fact that Alliance decides with unanimous vote and by voting against has effectively blocked Macedonian membership. NATO leadership has expressed regret over such development and reinstated that NATO doors remain open for all potential members that fulfill the criteria. However, there will be no additional screening for Macedonia. Namely, Macedonia has met all the criteria and it will be admitted to membership as soon as it solves its bilateral disputes over the name with Greece. But the situation has significantly changed since these optimistic and comforting statements at the Bucharest summit. In spite of Macedonian active cooperation with NATO within the Partnership for Peace and Membership Action Plan, disappointment after the Bucharest summit has resulted in slow down of implementation of necessary reforms in Macedonia. At the same time its accession to European Union is also in a stall-mate. After signing the Stabilization and Accession Agreement (2001) and acquiring the status of candidate country (2005) Skopje was warning that Macedonia is tired of waiting for the date to begin negotiations. In the meantime the Ohrid Agreement is not yielding expected results, ethnic differences are growing stronger, same as the numbers of Albanian population. In the long run this *status quo* that NATO and EU are maintaining towards this country can’t be good, neither for Macedonia, nor for Western Balkans. It will be very difficult for Macedonia to resist internal pressures without external assistance.

***Co-relation of NATO and EU with Western Balkans***

Integration of Western Balkans countries into NATO and EU is a two-way process. On one side it depends on the country aspiring for membership, and on the other on the organization that is opening its doors to new members. It must be accented again that the manner in which SFR Yugoslavia has disintegrated has had a major impact not only on the tempo of integration of this region with Europe, but also on conditions under which these countries may enter NATO and EU. In almost all countries of the region citizens are frustrated with the length and complexity of this process. And this makes it even more difficult for political leaderships in these countries to continue with deep and sometimes painful reforms.

In sum, the following may be concluded:

1. From the point of Western Balkans countries:
2. Post-socialist states of the region find themselves in different institutional status in regards to progress towards a full membership in NATO and EU. This confirms that although both organizations have a regional approach towards the region each and every country is being assessed individually.
3. Although it is nowhere written that NATO membership must precede EU membership, history of the post-Cold War enlargement of the EU shows that all new democracies that emerged after the bi-polar era had actually undergone exactly this path – NATO membership first, and EU membership after that. Also, if one analyzes criteria for membership of the so called “new democracies” in these two organizations (criteria are strictly defined for each candidate in relevant final summit declarations) it is clear that primary criteria are almost identical, regardless of the country in question. They are aimed at political stability, creation of conditions for functional regional cooperation, and level of democracy (human rights, rule of law, and suppression of various forms of crime). NATO membership is a signal to European Union that candidate country is a politically serious and democratically stable state ready and capable to intensify implementation of specific additional reforms in particular segments of its society.
4. Western Balkans is no longer a “black pit” of the Old Continent. This is a region where “unstable stability” still prevails, but challenges to security are no longer primarily military ones. They have been replaced by a wide array of the so called soft-security challenges (ethnic, religious, national, border issues, drugs, prostitution and human trafficking, other types of crimes, ecological issues, economic stagnation, terrorism, and similar).
5. In early 1990s when post-bipolar structures of the international community started to emerge Western Balkans was primarily turned to the West. Today, after twenty years of transition, conditions for easier penetration of other players into this area were created. Russia and Turkey are increasingly important partners on which countries of the Western Balkans may count, along with the West.
6. From the point of NATO and European Union
7. The open door policy, or enlargement to post-socialist countries was a distinct feature of these two organizations after the disappearance of bi-polar order. However, following the first rounds of enlargement it became apparent that inclusion of new members that have been developing for half a century on a very different political, economic and security foundations was not the ideal solution for NATO and EU. And while NATO coped with this problem in a relatively easier way, in EU, after the “big bang” of 2004 and especially after integration of Bulgaria and Romania in 2007, the “enlargement fatigue” is increasingly being felt. It is openly being said that after Croatia there will be no new admissions to EU membership for quite some time. Enlargement remains as official policy of both NATO and EU, but today stronger accent is put on enlargement out of NATO and EU, than within it. In comparing enlargement policy of the two organizations with their other internal policies it can be said that enlargement was the most successful NATO’s policy since disappearance of the bi-polarism, while EU in total had to face more challenges than benefits from this process.
8. In the Western Balkans region NATO has conducted its first out-of-area post-bipolar actions (Goražde, Kosovo) and has started with operationalizing its new peace keeping and peace building missions. This has turned Western Balkans into a training field for concrete implementation, training and improving the new forms of NATO activities within the new global order. These actions have demonstrated NATO’s new operational and institutional value (and have subsequently became NATO’s standard approach to solving crisis worldwide) and have been used by all those arguing that within the changed international circumstances (disintegration of the USSR, dissolving of Warsaw Pact, fall apart of socialism in Europe) NATO still has an important role to play.
9. European Union has failed to benefit from its role and presence in the Western Balkans in a similar manner. Within its efforts on developing a more independent joint foreign and security policy, including creation of forces for its concrete implementation, Brussels did not succeed in using the Western Balkans as a “case study” for strengthening its integration processes and in acting as unified player on international scene – by solving the situation in its own backyard, in Western Balkans. In allowing NATO to take the lead in this situation EU has lost the credibility of a player which must be taken into consideration in cases of regional or global crisis. For this reason increasing number of authors today use the term *“The New West”* which is led by the USA, without mentioning EU.[[14]](#footnote-14)
10. Western Balkans is the only part of Europe where NATO and EU have their forces present as guarantors of peace and stability (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo). This also represents a sort of security that both organizations will remain present in the region.

Finally, it must be said that from the point of Euro-Atlantism, and especially if viewed globally, Western Balkans is no longer a region holding top positions of the world politics due to its problems and unsolved issues. Stabilization and integration of this region will continue gradually, with insistence on stronger engagement of local players.

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2. Today these are: Srbija, Montenegro, and Kosovo. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. For more on EU regional approaches to South Easter Europe see in: R. Vukadinović, L. Čehulić Vukadinović, Politika europskih integracija, Zagreb, 2011, pp. 330-35. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. During her visit to Croatia in late May 1997, the US Secretary of State Madelaine Albright insisted on the following: Croatian support to and consistent implementation of the Dayton Agreement; return of refugees and displaced persons to Croatia; cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal in the Hague. A year later in his article *Croatia's Roadmap to Partnership for Peace* the US Ambassador to Croatia William T. Montgomery has higlighted the principal guideliness for Croatian participation in Partnership for Peace. American ambassador recommends Croatia to invest efforts in: reconciliation process; creating conditions for free return, life and work of all refugees from Croatia; consistent implementation of the Dayton Accords; democratization of the society with special accent on freedom of media, change of electoral legislation, and free and fair elections. See in: Lidija Čehulić: „Clintonova administracija i ulazak Hrvatske u Partnerstvo za mir“, Politička misao, vol. 37, no.3, 2000, p. 277. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. The Head of Defense Policy Office within Croatian Ministry of Defense at the time, Mr. Pjer Šimunović, stated after the final operational meeting at which Croatian officers presented to their NATO colleagues the Report on achieved progress in adopting NATO standards by Croatian armed forces that „Croatia is entering NATO as one of the countries with highest readiness for membership ever“. Vjesnik, 18 and 19 October 2008. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. See in: Marta Nakić-Vojnović: „Contribution of Croatia to International Peacekeeping Missions“, in L. Čehulić (ed Yearbook Šipan 2006, Zagreb, 2007, pp. 82-91. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. For more on public opinion in regards to NATO membership see in: Zlatko Gareljić: „Croatia and NATO“, in L. Čehulić (ed.): Yearbook Šipan 2006, Zagreb, 2007, pp. 115-24. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Between 1992 and 2001 the Council of Ministers was determining the content of trade preferences for Croatia at the beginning of each calendar year. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. For more see Miloš Šolaja, „…. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. For more on development of security and defense systems in Montenegro, see Mehmedin Tahirović, „Montenegro and Partnership for Peace“, Međunarodne studije, vol. 8, no. 2, 2008, p. 53-70. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. On reforms undertaken in Montenegro on this path, see in: Gordana Đurović (ed.) „Crna Gora u XXI stoljeću – u eri kompetitivnosti: integracija u evropske i evroatlantske strukture“, Montenegro Academy of Sciences and Arts, vol. 73, no. 4, Podgorica 2010. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. See in Radovan Vukadinović: „Američka politika i stvaranje kosovske države“, Međunarodne studije, vol. 8, No. 1, 2008, pp.. 5-19. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Besford Rreecaj: „Konačno rješenje statusa Kosova: procesi i perspektive“, Međunarodne studije, vol. 8, no. 1, 2008, pp. 20-42. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Charles A. Kupchan: No One's World. The West, the Rising Rest and the Coming Global Turn, Oxford, 2011; Walter Laquer: After the Fall. The end of the European Dream and the Decline of a Continent, London, 2011; Zbigniew Brzezinski: Strategic Vision. America and the Crisis of Global Power, New york, 2012. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)