European Union's security policies in the Western Balkans after the 1990s. Case study: Kosovo

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Abstract

This article aims to analyze the European Union as a security actor in the Western Balkans region after 1990—a period in which many imbalances in the security architecture challenged the capabilities of the European Union. The Kosovo case would be a perfect example in which the European Union demonstrated significant progress, transitioning from a passive actor in the 1990s to an essential actor with the will to improve its security presence in Kosovo and the Western Balkans region.

The European Union's security actorness in the Western Balkans after 1990 will be analyzed under two aspects: vertical and horizontal. The first aspect is the "Vertical Aspect," which considers the European Union as a security actor in the Western Balkan region and the Western Balkans countries as security consumers. Meanwhile, the second aspect is the "Horizontal Aspect," which involves examining the bilateral relations between the European Union and Western Balkans countries as partners and security providers,with a double-sided interaction.

Keywords: security policies, stability Western Balkans, regional stability, European Union.

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Introduction

The European continent, throughout history, has faced different challenges. However, the 20th century became the most difficult and crucial period when regional and international balances changed dramatically, with consequences that are still present today. Humanity experienced the bloodiest and most disastrous war, which brought radical changes to domestic and foreign policymaking, creating space for new non-traditional international actors. The European Union represents a particular example of such a non-traditional actor (Bretherton, C. 1999), created from a community of states with the central ideology of establishing a peaceful European community, where national interests are firmly connected with political and economic interoperability. This endeavor has had a positive impact on relations in various sectors and has contributed to peacemaking (Blackmans, S. 2013). This statecraft resulted from changing the representation method using different mechanisms and institutions within the European Union.

Developing relations between the European Union and other partner countries and organizations serves as a diplomatic network, facilitating meetings and talks among nations while minimizing debates and conflictual situations in cases of disagreements. The European Union has played an essential role as a civilian and normative power by promoting values such as democracy and human rights (Manners, 2002:239; Manners, 2008). These values make Europe an actor that employs soft power through political interaction and peaceful methods. While these methods have been successful, they remain incomplete due to Europe's passivity in security and defense policies. Europe's inertia was reflected during the 1990s through wars and conflicts in the Western Balkans, highlighting its incapability to prevent regional security issues and resolve them alone.

This general analysis related to the European Union's security actorness in the Western Balkans after 1990 will be analyzed under two aspects: vertical and horizontal. The first aspect is the "Vertical Aspect," which considers the European Union as a security actor in the Western Balkan region and the Western Balkans countries as security consumers. Meanwhile, the second aspect is the "Horizontal Aspect," which involves examining the bilateral relations between the European Union and Western Balkans countries as partners and security providers, with a double-sided interaction (Michael et. Al. 2007).

In the first aspect, where the European Union is in the security actor position, we will describe the period after the Cold War, especially the 1990s. This period is crucial because the dissolution of Yugoslavia started at the end of the Cold War, leading to ethnic wars in countries like Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo (River, 2018; Rogel, 2004).

Another crisis, albeit not at the level of war, can be seen in the internal instabilities in Albania and North Macedonia. In the horizontal aspect, we observe the relationship between the European Union and the Western Balkans, focusing on cooperation in the security field since the 20th century. European Union security policies are among the most important political, economic, cultural, and judicial procedures that the Western Balkans must adopt to become member countries of the Union. Compared to other approaches, mirroring the European Union's security policies and cooperation among the countries has been relatively easy to adopt within each domestic institution.

After the post-conflictual period of the 1990s, the European Union has made significant effortsto assist the Western Balkans countries in achieving membership in regional and international security organizations. At the same time, there is a strong willingness from the Western Balkans countries to be part of global platforms, standing alongside allies and making their modest contributions to security policies and initiatives. Notable organizations in this context include the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), Common Security and Defense Policies (CSDP), European Battle groups, European Defense Agency (EDA), and NATO (The EU and the Western Balkans: towards a common future: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/eu-and-western-balkans-towards-common-future_en)

The 1990s were a period during which the European Union recognized that the Western Balkans were a permanent part of Europe and should be considered a region with political and economic potential, playing an essential role in regional stability. This viewpoint marked a turning point for the Western Balkans countries, making them the primary focus for implementing European standards and reforms in their political and administrative systems. This initiative by the European Union emerged as part of a new vision for Europe's future.

The interactions among the Western Balkans countries can be observed in various aspects and different fields, but our focus will be on the security field. The security field is crucial because without stability and security, there can be no development or adherence to norms and rules, which are criteria for being considered a democratic and European state.

Vertical Dimension

In the Vertical Dimension, we will analyze the European Union as a security actor (Larsen, 2019; Renard, 2014) and the Western Balkans countries as security consumers. The status of security actorness entails many complex challenges, particularly for the European Union. These difficulties arise as consequences of

the unique and non-traditional nature of theEuropean Union, where multiple member countries interact with each other. However, incorporating the interests of member states into a standardized policy-making framework, especially in matters of foreign policy, makes it more challenging to react swiftly andeffectively during crises and conflicts.

Bosnia and Herzegovina War

The war in Bosnia and Herzegovina was the first major event after the Cold War that disruptedthe security and regional security balance in the Western Balkans. This war effectively showcased the defense mechanisms created by organizations such as the United Nations and NATO to address such situations. It not only demonstrated the capabilities developed by theseorganizations but also highlighted the effectiveness of many European countries and the European Union as a security actor. This approach provides a clearer understanding of the shortcomings in security policies and reforms that the Union should have implemented as soonas possible, expanding beyond its soft power scope.

In 1992, the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina began as an ethnic conflict but later took on a religious dimension due to the involvement of supporting actors. This war left a negative markon the history of the United Nations, as peacekeeping forces failed to react effectively. Simultaneously, Serbian troops conducted one of the most horrific ethnic cleansings in the Western Balkans region and in Europe's history. During the ethnic cleansing, 8,000 Bosnian men and children were murdered in July 1995 (source: https://www.dw.com)

The failure of the United Nations mission compelled NATO to carry out intensive military air operations, particularly following the Srebrenica massacre. These air attacks played a crucial role in pressuring both parties to engage in diplomatic talks in Dayton. The resulting Dayton Accords may not have been ideal, but they were the only way to bring an end to the war that had escalated to its worst scenario.

In 2004, the European Union undertook a significant mission called "Operation Althea," whichaimed to monitor the progress of obligations and conditions outlined in the Dayton Agreement. This operation, conducted under the scope of the European Union Force (EUFOR), replaced all previous military missions of NATO. (source: http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/doc/1101) The transfer of authority from NATO to the European Union coincided with the establishmentof the Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP) initiative. The establishment of CSDP served as a crucial starting point not only for member countries but also for other regional countries considered strategic actors with the future goal of joining the European Union. The strategic actor status was a positive outcome for the Western Balkan

countries at the Thessaloniki Summit between the European Union and the non-member Western Balkan countries.

1997 riots in Albania

Regarding Albania, in the vertical dimension, we can mention the 1997 riots that placed the country in a security consumer status (Pettifer, Vickers, 2006). These riots stemmed from numerous social and economic issues that necessitated the intervention of partner countries to restore stability and ensure democratic elections. The European Union and OSCE considered intervening in Albania to stabilize the situation. This policy was finalized with the Italian initiative to undertake Operation "ALBA," based on United Nations Security Council Resolution 1101 (source: http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/doc/1101), with the objective of restoring stability in Albania, which would have an impact on the regional security balance. Once given the green light, an Italian-led multinational security force consisting of 7,000 troops entered Albania (Marchio, 2012). After the situation stabilized, the international forces withdrew from Albanian territory.

Armed conflict in North Macedonia

The conflict between the North Macedonian armed forces and Albanian rebels brought about another destabilizing situation in North Macedonia (Marusic, 2021) It began in 2001 and concluded in the same year with the signing of the Ohrid Agreement. In this case, we can observe NATO's involvement as the primary security actor that assisted in the rebel disarmament process and safeguarded North Macedonia's stability between 2001 and 2003. It was a crucial period for the European Union's missions in the Western Balkans.

After 2003, the first European Union missions were launched under the framework of the European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP), later renamed as the Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP) with the Lisbon Treaty. The initial mission was EUFOR CONCORDIA in North Macedonia, which replaced a previous NATO mission. This mission aimed to monitor the implementation of the Ohrid Agreement and ensure peace and stability in North Macedonia (source: https://eeas.europa.eu)

Serbia in the 1990s

Compared with other regional countries, Serbia is the only country that has been a security consumer by being the main culprit for the crises in the Balkans region in the 1990s. This situation resulted from the Bosnia and Herzegovina War and

Kosovo War when Yugoslavia dissolved, and its nationalistic Serbian politics was declared the main factor that escalated thesituation.

Horizontal Dimension

Unlike the vertical dimension, in this one, we can observe the Western Balkans countries as security providers and the influence of the European Union on this process. As mentioned before, in relation to security actorness, in addition to its role in crisis management, conflict prevention, and intervention, the European Union should serve as an example and model for the candidate countries, increasing the level of cooperation and leading them towards Europeansecurity structures and institutions. The European Union has embraced a new vision that includes non-member countries in its institutions and policies. The partner country's status has allowed them to participate in numerous humanitarian operations. Through the integration process, the European Union has been able to standardize the political strategies and domesticinstitutions of these countries, ensuring long-lasting peace and stability. This new security reality has transformed the Western Balkans into a crucial region for Europe's future.

It is worth mentioning that the Western Balkans have a history of destabilization due to authoritarian and hybrid regimes, and their struggling economy has not facilitated their journey towards becoming security actors. The transition from being security consumers to security providers has been the result of progress in the relations between the European Union and the Western Balkans countries. In 1999, the European Union adopted a new political process calledthe Stabilization and Association Process, which aimed to facilitate the implementation of Union criteria for these countries to be considered candidates. Over the following decade, these countries fulfilled the requirements of the process. This initiative continued with the Thessaloniki Summit, held in 2003 between the European Union and the Western Balkans countries. The Thessaloniki Summit marked a milestone in the cooperation between both parties in various fields. One of these fields was the Common Foreign and Security Policies (CFSP), which served as the starting point for the regional countries to transition from being security consumers to security providers. It is worth mentioning the "spillover" effect, which is defined in the framework of international relations as the impact between two countries or non-traditional actors, such as organizations, cooperating in economic, energy, transportation,and other sectors, creating opportunities for additional agreements or changes in other fields as a result of the cooperation.

Based on our analysis, we can conclude that the European Union's agreements with the WesternBalkans countries to achieve higher standards in economic and

legislative aspects have had a spillover effect on the security field. This is because an open market and stable democracy cannot be achieved when a country is unable to ensure stability for itself and the region. For example, Western Balkans countries cooperate with other Union member countries in political and economic aspects due to their strength and participation in European defense mechanisms as partner countries.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

The war between 1992 – 1995 brought consequences for Bosnia and Herzegovina. The "FragilePeace" reached by a standard agreement between both parties wouldn't be the perfect peace because of the political structures of Bosnia and Herzegovina. We can easily understand that Bosnia and Herzegovina are still far from becoming a security provider. Compared with other regional countries, it is still a security consumer, hosting international missions of NATO and the European Union. The EUFOR mission aims to support Bosnia and Herzegovina in military aspects to become a security provider and not to continue as a security consumer (Zeherovic, 2022).

Montenegro

Compared to other regional countries, Montenegro is the only country that has not hosted an international intervention to prevent, resolve, or end any domestic crisis. This positioning maybe a result of the fact that Montenegro was part of an agreement with Serbia until 2006 when it gained independence. Undoubtedly, the European Union did not intervene militarily but hashad a significant impact as a civilian and normative actor, leading to the opening of negotiationswith Montenegro in 2012 (http://www.eeas.europa.eu/montenegro).

Concerning its status as a security provider, Montenegro has experienced ups and downs due to foreign factors that influence its domestic politics. What matters most is its accession as a member country to NATO, which demonstrates its willingness to be part of Western organizations. As for the European Union, we can confirm the same points that position the Union as an actor that serves as an important example for Montenegro to follow in order to become a member. Montenegro is also part of different defense mechanisms like the OSCE and European Union international missions such as EUNAVFOR Atalanta in Somalia, aimed at preventing armed pirate attacks on commercial ships (https://eunavfor.eu/mission).

North Macedonia

Another Western Balkans country is North Macedonia. Surely that North Macedonia is still having a long and challenging journey toward European institutions and other organizations. The path to becoming a security provider passes from international organizations like NATO and the European Union. North Macedonia became part of the military alliance NATO in 2020 and formally opened the negotiation with the European Union in 2022. As mentioned before, North Macedonia has had its struggle, most of the time diplomatic issues. The main problemshave been with Greece and Bulgaria. Greece has used its Veto right at every opportunity to put under political pressure North Macedonia to reach its diplomatic objectives, like the name change from Macedonia to North Macedonia. Regarding North Macedonia's contribution to the Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP), it has participated in EUFOR ALTHEA inBosnia and Herzegovina.

Serbia

As mentioned before, Serbia is among those countries that serve as security providers based onits relations with other European security mechanisms. We can observe a significant change compared to the period when Serbia used to be a security consumer, causing instability in the region. When comparing Serbia to other regional countries, we can note that the European institutions have imposed limitations on Serbia, while other countries have managed to join NATO. Serbia's potential NATO membership depends on various historical and currentfactors.

If we analyze the historical aspects, we must consider the Bosnia and Herzegovina War and the Kosovo War, both of which concluded with international political pressure and NATO military intervention. The military intervention involved air operations led by the United Statesagainst Serbian army bases, forcing Serbia to come to the negotiation table. The strained past relations with NATO would not positively influence Serbian policies regarding NATO membership.

Another crucial factor is the partnership between Serbia and Russia. This factor can be categorized as both historical and current. The historical roots have fostered close collaboration between Serbia and Russia, which has grown stronger in recent decades. This partnership stemsfrom the shifting political and economic balances in the region. The primary source of this partnership lies in the shared interests of both countries in the Western Balkans region. Serbiaseeks a strong ally like Russia, which holds decision-making power in the United Nations Security Council and can influence the security and political balances of the region.

Serbia contributes to European Union mechanisms through its engagement in Europeanmembership chapters that it needs to fulfill to become a member country of the Union. As stated on the official website of the Serbian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Serbia participatesin European Union missions such as EUTM Somalia, Operation Atalanta, and EUTM RCA (https://www.mfa.gov.rs). Additionally, Serbia is a part of the European Defense Agency, which aims to enhance the standards of member countries' armies and includes partner countries as part of European Battle Groups. This affects Serbia's security cooperation with other regional allies.

Albania

Albania's status as a security provider is a positive outcome of fruitful cooperation with the European Union and its member countries in security organizations such as NATO, the United Nations, and European institutions. A historical overview reveals Albania's significant contribution alongside its allies in various military missions. This assistance has been provided in countries like Iraq and Afghanistan in the Middle East, as well as in African countries like Mali, Chad, and South Sudan. Additionally, Albania's contribution to countries like Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, and Latvia in the European region is of great importance (https://www.mod.gov.al). These contributions have resulted in positive outcomes, including expertise, modernization, and increased standards, positioning Albania at a considerable levelto be part of NATO.

In 2009, Albania became a member of NATO, becoming the first Western Balkans country to join the organization, followed by North Macedonia and Montenegro. NATO membership has had an impact on the increase in defense investments and Albania's participation in military missions and European security mechanisms. One of Albania's notable achievements in the security field is its leadership position in the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. This role has provided new opportunitiesfor a small country like Albania to have a meaningful impact on the continuity of policies aimedat ensuring stability on the European continent. Another achievement of Albania's status as a security actor is its temporary membership in theUnited Nations Security Council for 2022-2023 (https://punetejashtme.gov.al). While the temporary membership status in the Security Council differs from the five permanent membership statuses, Albania can vote on any drafted resolution. However, it does not possessthe privilege of veto, which can be used to oppose decisions against its national interest or contradictory to international values and norms. Albania can play a crucial role in a voting mechanism where no veto is used.

A significant development is the start of membership negotiations between the European Union and Albania. In addition to Albania's positive journey as a security provider, membership negotiations bring new possibilities for this strategic Western Balkans country to become part of European security and defense institutions. Up until now, Albania has participated in European Union missions abroad, but the membership status will further integrate Albania into security institutions by improving its defense and security policies.

Kosovo Case

As mentioned before, this writing focuses on the role of the European Union as a security actor in Kosovo. In the 1990s, Kosovo, Bosnia, and Herzegovina experienced the worst war consequences, followed by humanitarian actions. Compared to Bosnia and Herzegovina, which had an easier journey with recognition from European Union countries and other international organizations like NATO and the United Nations, Kosovo is a contested country in the eyes of many other influential actors in international politics. Within the European Union, there are Greece, Spain, Slovakia, Romania, and Cyprus, all of which are member countries of NATO except for Cyprus. Furthermore, some significant global actors, such as China and Russia, who are part of the United Nations Security Council with the veto right, do not recognize Kosovo as an independent country. This creates complexities for Kosovo's international position and makes it a perfect example for analyzing the European Union's security actorness.

The dissolution of Yugoslavia triggered an independence wave for member countries, while Kosovo was an autonomous territory. The nationalist politics that led to the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina also caused conflict in Kosovo. These politics resulted in a new conflict in the Western Balkans, which required the involvement of international actors, including the United Nations, NATO, and the European Union, supported by individual initiatives from certain countries. The Kosovo War took place between 1998 and 1999. Like the previous war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbian troops committed genocide by attacking the civilian population, leading to a second humanitarian crisis in the Western Balkans. This war ultimately ended due to the United States-led NATO air operation, which set aside critics and focused on finding an efficient solution to manage and end the war.

Vertical Dimension

The Kosovo War became the second challenge for the European Union, testing its capacities and efficiency as a security actor on the continent. The period between

the two wars was three years, which was a short time to create the necessary conditions for the European Union to implement different security policies. Once again, NATO, led by the United States of America, intervened in this war through air operations, hoping to bring an end to the conflict. This further demonstrated the limitations of the European Union and the need for significant steps toward improving security policies. This approach is reflected in new initiatives that represent a new vision of foreign policies with a focus on security issues. It is worth mentioning the European Union's role after 2008 when Kosovo declared its independence and became a free country in the Western Balkans.

Prior to the European Union taking its largest civilian mission under the scope of the Common Security and Defense Policies, Kosovo was under the presence of UNMIK. UNMIK is a United Nations mission established in 1999, with political and legislative authority over Kosovo's territory and people. This mission exercised its power until the declaration of independence. Following independence, its competencies and authority were limited since Kosovo had become an independent state. After independence, the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX) was established as the largest civilian mission, representing the backbone of the European Union's efforts to become a state-building actor. The mission aimed to provide necessary support to the political and legislative structures of Kosovo.

In addition, the European Union has undertaken the role of mediator in the Kosovo-Serbia dialogue. This process aims to normalize relations between the two countries, facilitating mutual recognition and addressing any potential conflicts in the future. While the European Union has not achieved all these objectives; it has taken positive steps in the mediation process. The Union's reputation as a normative actor lends credibility to its rational and unbiased actions. In this dimension of the European Union as a security actor and Kosovo as a security consumer, we can conclude that the policies implemented under the state-building framework have directly influenced the Union's potential as a security actor. Despite criticism and contestations regarding the European Union's security role in Kosovo, we can affirm that the EULEX mission has successfully fulfilled its objectives by establishing political and legislative structures that enhance stability. As a civilian mission, EULEX has facilitated the Kosovo-Serbia political dialogue, contributing to peace and stability in the Western Balkans region and serving as an example of how a civilian mission can strengthen the European Union's position as a security actor. The European Union's commitment to peaceful mediation underscores the understanding that both Kosovo and Serbia, geographically and politically, are part of Europe and potentially future member countries of the European Union. Any political actions that distance Serbia from the European path would lead to a political crisis, which is not welcomed by countries and actors who support stability in the European region.

Horizontal Dimension

We only have a few points to address regarding Kosovo in the horizontal dimension. The main reason is that Kosovo still requires international recognition, particularly from certain European Union member countries. As a security actor, Kosovo's status should entail regional security and participation in security organizations such as the United Nations, NATO, and other European security mechanisms. The European Union has played a crucial role in Kosovo's pursuit of stability and state consolidation, but it has not reached the level of becoming a security actor. Within the United Nations, acceptance as a candidate country relies on approval from the Security Council, where countries like Russia and China possess veto power. These countries maintain close relations with Serbia and therefore do not vote in favor of recognizing Kosovo as an independent nation. Recognition from both Russia and China would facilitate Kosovo's path to the United Nations and broader international recognition.

NATO membership entails a long diplomatic process fraught with barriers, and we can identify three main obstacles. The first is the status of being a non-member country within the United Nations. The second barrier lies in the non-recognition by four NATO member countries: Greece, Spain, Slovakia, and Romania. The final barrier pertains to the status of the Kosovo Security Force, which is still in its early stages of transformation into an Armed Forces and being categorized alongside other national armies.

Regarding the European Union, Kosovo requires recognition from Greece, Cyprus, Slovakia, Spain, and Romania. The decision to accept a candidate country into organizations like the European Union and NATO is subject to unanimity voting, where all member countries must agree to admit a new member. It is worth noting the efforts made by European institutions to persuade member countries that have yet to recognize Kosovo to do so. Additionally, domestic

factors within those countries hinder the recognition of Kosovo. These countries' policies are sensitive when it comes to recognizing an independent nation that was previously an ethnic group within another country. Spain's situation with Catalonia, Slovakia and Romania's ethnic groups, and Greece and Cyprus' concerns and limitations regarding the "de facto" Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, which lacks international recognition, all contribute to these countries' hesitations. These examples further complicate Kosovo's integration process into regional and global institutions.

Potential and Limits of European Union: Kosovo Case

Same as in other conflicts and post-conflict situations, the European Union in Kosovo has exhibited both potential and limitations. The first example that highlights a factor positively impacting the European Union's mediator role is the Principle of Conditionality. Following the Kosovo war, the situation between Kosovo and Serbia evolved into a frozen conflict. In response, the European Union employed the Principle of Conditionality against Serbia, making recognition of Kosovo a condition for Serbia's inclusion in the Union. This fact was also mentioned in the speeches of various European leaders, such as German Chancellor Olaf Scholz. This standpoint aimed to prevent a repeat of the scenario in Cyprus, where Greek Cyprus remains in a frozen conflict with the Turkish Cypriot part. Disagreements among countries should not be considered inconsequential as they pose a significant risk to the European Union's credibility, which can impact its future. Through this principle, the European Union has ensured progress in the Kosovo case, as exemplified by the signing of the Brussels Agreement in 2013 between Kosovo and Serbia, which aims to normalize relations between the neighboring countries. This agreement serves as a milestone in the negotiation process between the two countries and has paved the way for new initiatives such as recently agreed- upon free movement between them.

The second factor influencing the progress of the European Union's aims and objectives in Kosovo is the example set by European institutions. The European Union's role as a civilian and normative actor over the years has established reliability in resolving issues related to domestic policies by showcasing the expertise gained through experience. Regarding the European Union's limitations in the Kosovo case, three factors can be identified. The first is the geographical factor. The precise geographical position in relation to other Union member countries made intervention and engagement more challenging during the war years. In comparison to the United States of America, the European Union was cautious in selecting intervention methods and engagement approaches during the war to shape the future of the Western Balkans. Geographical factors influenced the European Union's approach, as it aimed to foster a strong and positive relationship with these countries in the post-war period. Meanwhile, for the United States, military intervention was a key component of its doctrines and policies to achieve peace and stability. Another factor is the presence of other superpowers on the continent, which makes the Kosovo-Serbia diplomatic dialogue challenging for all countries and organizations involved. While the United States emphasizes finding a solution, there is Russia, whose actions raise concerns for Serbia, reflecting the political dynamics of the West. Additionally, the Kosovo case can be used to justify

Russia's actions in the Crimean Peninsula, drawing parallels between these two situations. The last factor is the lack of recognition of Kosovo as an independent country by five European Union members. Overcoming this situation would enhance Kosovo's position at the negotiation table with Serbiaand pave the way for its candidate country status within the European Union.

Future Scenarios: Kosovo Case

After providing an overview and analysis of the Kosovo case, it is necessary to analyze potential scenarios that could significantly impact Kosovo's future (RIDEA & BPRG, 2018). The first scenario, which is the least desirable for regional security, involves Kosovo remainingin the Status Quo. This frozen conflict poses risks to the security balance in the Western Balkans and Europe. The failure of reciprocal recognition between Serbia and Kosovo would have long-term consequences, as it would keep Kosovo in a contested state. The Russia- Ukraine war serves as an example of how a conflict in the region can raise tensions and insecurity about the future of the Western Balkans, with the fear of a possible escalation of war in the Balkans. This perception is based on the reality of the influence of actors like Russia, China, and Turkey, who have the potential to significantly impact the regional security balance.In this case, the European Union needs to exert political pressure on the governments of Serbiaand Kosovo to achieve significant progress toward a peaceful solution.

The second scenario, which is also undesirable, involves the reemergence of armed conflict between Kosovo and Serbia. This conflict could arise from the historical conflicts between the two states, with the north side of Kosovo, where Serbian ethnic groups reside, becoming a focalpoint. Serbia may intervene, citing the "right to intervene" to protect Serbs living in Kosovo. In the event of such a military intervention, the European Union must make urgent decisions vital for its continuity as a security actor in the Western Balkans.

The last scenario, which is more favorable compared to the other two mentioned above, entailsthe reciprocal recognition of Kosovo's independence by Serbia and Kosovo. Mutual recognition is highly desired by Western countries, as regional stability depends on resolving the conflict with consensus from both sides. The European Union plays a crucial role as the primary mediator between the two countries in this lengthy and complex process. Reciprocal recognition would yield positive outcomes for Serbia, advancing its European path, while also offering Kosovo the possibility of becoming part of the United Nations, NATO, and potentiallythe European Union in the future.

Conclusion

The non-traditional nature of an actor can pose many challenges, which is why the European Union faces criticism regarding its security actorness. However, this position does not render its efforts useless in shaping and maintaining security and stability in the Western Balkans.

After analyzing the European Union's security actorness in two dimensions, we can conclude that despite the limitations in the last two decades, there has been a significant commitment at higher levels to enhance security standards in the Western Balkans region. These facts are easily proven by examining the current situation, where stability is an outcome of intense meetings, agreements, international pressure, and the European Union's role as a consolidatedactor with new security initiatives. The European Union has had a profound impact on how a civilian mission like EULEX directly affects the regional security balance, adding value and significance to the Union's security actorness.

Compared to the 1990s, developing security capacities and protecting regional stability in the Western Balkans countries would bring considerable benefits. One of the most important benefits is the positive image and perception of the central Western Balkans countries as security providers rather than security consumers, as it was at the end of the 20th century. The integration mechanism has helped the European Union become an actor that enables candidate countries to develop their defense capacities and alleviate the Union's burden in threat prevention by involving those countries in the regional security equation. Being a security actor entails engaging in a country's development reforms, policies, and initiatives, especially whena country has experienced destabilization, crisis, and wars. In our case, European Union countries should pave the way for the Western Balkans countries to have a better political, economic, and secure future, which also affects the Union itself.

Indeed, this security journey does not end here. Continuous threats, such as the Russia-Ukraine war in the European continent, have triggered a series of actions where countries have begun reorganizing their defense and security policies by aligning with European Union initiatives and standards. No regional or international actor can address these threats alone, and the European Union has the ideal opportunity to implement new policies. Improvements such as increasing military personnel, defense investments, establishing new security platforms, and undertaking defense projects would be essential for an actor like the European Union to enhance its regional security.

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