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# POLITICAL, ECONOMIC AND SECURITY ASPECT OF THE EU WESTERN BALKANS STRATEGY

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**Abstract:** *Following the admission of Croatia to the European Union (2013), there was a delay in its expansion, which was called the "fatigue of enlargement". Outside the Union are other countries of the Western Balkans and Turkey. Due to overcrowding of its own problems, the EU has laid down the Western Balkans, which has led to the impact of global and regional powers in the region, primarily Russia, the US, China and Turkey. Regarding the fact that Great Britain has begun the process of abandoning the EU, the Union is turning to the Western Balkans and adopting the Strategy for the Western Balkans. This paper analyzes this strategy from the political, economic and security aspects and contributions, both for the EU and for the countries of the Western Balkans. The basic methods used in the research are content analysis and scientific explanation.*

**Keywords:** *EU enlargement, Western Balkans, Strategy, Politics, Economy, Security.*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Since its establishment (Maastricht 1992) until 2013, the EU has had four enlargements. First, in 1995, when Austria, Finland and Sweden were "expressly" received. Secondly, the boom of enlargement, when 10 countries were received (Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovenia, Malta and Cyprus). The third enlargement, in 2007, included Bulgaria and Romania, which were in the "package" for 2004. The last, fourth enlargement of the EU, was in 2013, when Croatia was admitted.

Even before Croatia joins its membership, the Union faces significant problems of its own development, characterized by: crisis of identity, financial crisis, migrant crisis, involvement of individual member states in the war in northern Africa, especially in Syria and

conflict with Russia due to Crimea annexation. [Forca, 2016]. All these problems are compounded by the announcement of Britain's withdrawal from the EU, following a referendum in 2016, known by the name BREXIT.

The term Western Balkans has launched the EU, including the formerly new states of the former SFR Yugoslavia, without Slovenia, plus Albania. After the provisional authorities in Kosovo and Metohija unilaterally declared independence (2008), and Croatia was admitted to the EU, the term Western Balkans is symbolically designated as WB6 or WB 5 + 1. In addition, Croatia is not implied under this term, and its place has occupied the territory of Kosovo.

Tackling the previously mentioned own problems, the EU has "neglected" the Western Balkans. This evasion of the Western Balkans under the focus of the Union is used by other global and regional powers, primarily Russia, the United States, China and Turkey. These forces are endeavoring to create a different level of influence in certain Western Balkan countries, which in these countries is fueling the conflicts of the 1990s. In this way, the Western Balkans remains a key area of possible new conflicts of wider scale.

In order to compensate for Britain's withdrawal from the EU, preventing the spread of the influence of other powers in the Western Balkans, as well as pre-empting new conflicts in the region, the Union is "returning" to the Western Balkans and adopting the Enlargement Strategy, conditionally related to 2025. year, for Serbia and Montenegro.

## 2. THE GENESIS OF THE EU RELATIONSHIP TO THE WESTERN BALKANS

In the series of the aforementioned EU enlargements from 1995 to 2013, different criteria have been established for candidate countries for membership of the Union. The first group of these criteria is known as the *Copenhagen Criteria*, which were established in 1993. The second group of criteria, which concerned the 12 countries received in 2004 and 2007, was named *Copenhagen plus*. With the intention to show their affiliation to the "West" and to pursue their "return to Europe", the 12 countries of Central and Eastern Europe signed the so-called *European agreements with the European Union*. European agreements were bilateral agreements between the EU and potential candidates for the first time institutionalized political dialogue in a legally binding way. Agreements with these countries signed between 1991 and 1996. At the summit in Luxembourg, it was decided to start negotiations with Hungary, Poland, Estonia, the Czech Republic, Slovenia and Cyprus, so that three years later, at the Helsinki Summit, a decision was made to start negotiations with the remaining six countries in Latvia, Lithuania, Bulgaria, Romania, Malta and Slovakia. Negotiations were conducted within 31 areas which in fact represent the Community acquis. These agreements have been successfully concluded with 10 of 12 countries (except Bulgaria and Romania) in the period up to 2003, so that in June, they will officially become EU member states.

In April 1997, the General Council of the European Union adopted the so- Regional Policy for the Western Balkan countries. The policy of the regional approach has set the political and economic conditions for the start of bilateral cooperation with these countries. The substantiated approach was complemented by an initiative that emerged three years ago

(May 1999), later when the European Commission came out with a project that called the *Stabilization and Association Process*.

The *Stabilization and Association Process* (SAP) has in many respects reminiscent of the European agreements that represented the modus operandi in joining the Union of countries Central and Eastern Europe. The SAP, however, is distinguished by significant differences in relation to the rights and obligations of States Parties and the EU itself arising from the European Agreements. The Western Balkan countries have taken on the obligation to cooperate on a regional basis, which should ensure the long-term stability of the region (the country can not progress in integration with the EU faster than in the integration with countries in the region), while the European Union will open its markets and give financial aid. The formula was clear: the association - yes, but simultaneously / necessarily accompanied by the stabilization of the region!

The SAP had a significantly accentuated conditional nature. In addition to completing the Copenhagen Criteria, the Western Balkan countries are required to strictly respect the Dayton Agreement and international obligations to the International Criminal Tribunal in The Hague. Observed on the other hand, the very suitable sides of this process for the countries of the Western Balkans are numerous; the perspective of potential membership gives great impetus to the implementation of reforms, the emphasis on regional co-operation as a prerequisite for future membership in the Union will greatly contribute to the stability of the region and, how much, push the avenues of the past. Despite the emphasized regional character, the Union has applied a flexible approach to each of the countries when it comes to their performance in the achieved reforms, fulfillment of the set conditions and, ultimately, the EU's approach to the Stabilization and Association Process.

The Thessaloniki Summit in 2003 reaffirmed once again the conviction and the position of the highest leaders of the Union to SAP lead membership in the EU. In the first half of 2003, the SAP was complemented by the *European Partnership*. Regardless of the stage in which an individual country is in the SAP, it will have a contract on the *European Partnership*. The *European Partnership* implied the realization of the obligations of the countries of the Western Balkans and the European Union. Unlike the previous phase, when only the instructions that reforms are needed to bring the region closer to the EU, short-term and mid-term measures are now required to be implemented. The *European Partnership*, designed for each of the countries of the Western Balkans, according to their needs, should accelerate and accelerate the construction of legal, institutional foundations and administrative capacities for the adoption of European standards and rules. The EU is also introducing new instruments to support this process, which implied its greater technical and financial engagement to encourage and speed up integration processes in the region.

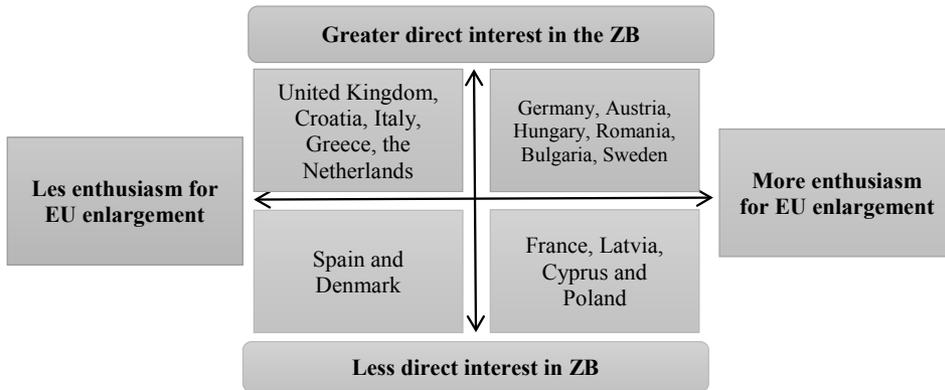
The conclusion of the *Stabilization and Association Agreement* (SAA) begins the institutionalization of relations with the EU. Bearing in mind the length of the process of conclusion (and ratification) of the agreement, the EU Commission envisaged the possibility of creating joint ad hoc working bodies, which are primarily responsible for preparing the negotiations, as well as monitoring the process of harmonization of the Western Balkan countries with EU regulations.

The first of the countries of the then-Western Balkans concept - Croatia, according to EU procedures, is signing the SAA in 2001, and in 2005 it becomes a candidate for membership. With the strong support of some of the leading EU countries and lobbying, Croatia

becomes the 28th member of the Union in 2013. Thus, the Western Balkans coin loses one member. Its place replaces the territory of Kosovo, whose provisional authorities declared independence in relation to Serbia in 2008. This independence is recognized by 23 of the 28 members of the Union. Thus, the Western Balkans is figuratively marked with the symbol **WB6** or **WB 5 + 1**.

After receiving Croatia from the EU, the attitude of “enlargement fatigue” is getting stronger. Such an attitude has had different interpretations in the European public. European Commissioner for Neighborhood Policy Johannes Hahn, on December 31, 2014, tried to explain what this attitude means: “We already went to Croatia, and now, with the candidates, we are going to take an extra step further. At the moment, the EU population has the feeling that each new member is a financial burden. In the future, it must be clear that accession brings profits to all parties”. [[http://www.rts.rs/sr\\_lat/politika/eu-umor-od-sirenja-potrebna-i-ekonomska-zrelost\\_553514.html](http://www.rts.rs/sr_lat/politika/eu-umor-od-sirenja-potrebna-i-ekonomska-zrelost_553514.html)]. However, even before Croatian admission to the EU, the scientific and professional public concerned the issue of enlargement of the Union to the countries of the Western Balkans, as well as possible projections of that process.

One of the reasons for the “fatigue of enlargement”, according to some research, is in the relationship of EU members towards enlargement in the Western Balkans observed in relations: 1) the interest of individual members towards the region, and 2) enthusiasm for the enlargement of the Union (Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** *The attitude of some EU member states towards enlargement to the Western Balkans*

(Source: Hadziristic Tea, 2015)

Another approach to the EU enlargement to the Western Balkans published in 2010, researchers from the *Center for European Policy* from Belgrade said. In the Project entitled “The Future of European Union Extension: the Western Balkans Case”, the research team has specifically analyzed the factors that influence the EU’s enlargement policy towards the Western Balkans, as well as the determination of a sustainable scenario of joining and joining the EU region. [Božović, D., et al., 2010].

As key factors influencing the EU’s enlargement policy towards the Western Balkans,

the following are identified: (1) “fatigue of enlargement” and (2) “EU absorption capacity”. The “fatigue of enlargement” is understood as: “... the political state, or political feeling, is skeptical of the future enlargement; as a political feeling: after a period of rest in which the effects of the previous enlargement can be carried out. “ Although widely used in public discourse, the term “fatigue of enlargement” has not been officially adopted in the Union. The notion of “EU absorption capacity”, although not clearly defined, and the notion of defining the “final frontiers of Europe” came into the EU’s official document. Although not officially defined, the term fatigue of enlargement refers to four sets of issues: (1) the experiences of the last wave of enlargement, (2) the institutional and political crisis in the EU, (3) the consequences of the global economic crisis, and (4) open political issues in the Western Balkan. The EU’s absorption capacity is determined by the following parameters: (1) the capacity of the goods and services market, (2) the capacity of the labor market to absorb new members, (3) EU funding capacities for the absorption of new members, (4) the capacity of EU institutions to function with a new Member States, (5) the capacity of the society to absorb new member states, and (6) the capacity of the EU to ensure its strategic security. The assessment of the research team that the EU can absorb new members by all parameters, except for parameter 4 - the capacity of the society, which refers to the views of the public opinion according to the EU enlargement to the countries of the Western Balkans. Namely, the assessment of EU officials is that public opinion has a perception of the Western Balkans, primarily the former Yugoslavia, as a space of wars, conflicts and other negative parameters. Thus, in 2010, around 53% of the EU population had a negative attitude towards EU enlargement to the Western Balkan countries. [Božović, D., et al., 2010].

On the basis of a comprehensive analysis, the Research Team concluded that there are three variants of the Western Balkans’ admission to the EU: 1) **Regatta**, admission to one country, in line with their progress in overwork, 2) **Convoy**, admission of all Western Balkan countries, and 3) **Small regatta - more convoys**, the accession of the countries of the Western Balkans in groups, with the first group consisting of Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia, and the other - Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo. [Božović, D., et al., 2010].

The third illustrative approach to the EU’s enlargement to the Western Balkans was given by researchers from the *European Fund for the Balkans* and the *South East Europe Research Center* from Graz, under the title “The unsuccessful promise of EU enlargement in the Balkans”, presenting four scenarios.

[<http://www.naslovi.net/tema/633828>].

**The first scenario**, called the “Standard Approach”, is to continue the gradual and slow accession of the countries of the Western Balkans to the EU, which meant tough conditions for membership, which many countries are unable to respond to, as well as continued tolerance bilateral reasons for blocking an eurointegration in some countries. “The region is facing ever more difficult conditions for EU membership, for which it was not ready and may not be ready yet, and this approach does not have the ability to help some countries that are completely blocked, such as B&H, Macedonia or Kosovo. Leads to a wall and does not allow them to progress, “explained Marko Kmezic, a researcher from the Center for Research of South-East Europe from Graz. **The second scenario**, called “Turkey’s Stages”, means continuing the negotiation process, but without significant shifts, which would also make it clear to political elites in the region and citizens that the possibility of joining the EU membership is very low. However, unlike Turkey, which, by turning itself, managed to develop a

self-sustaining economy, the countries of the Western Balkans would be condemned to such a situation. **The third scenario** implied the abandonment of EU enlargement and the creation of new uncertainties in the Western Balkans, and the authors of the analysis call it the Ukrainian scenario. Continuing crises in the EU and resistance to further expansion would, according to this scenario, lead to the engagement of other global actors in the region, such as Russia or Turkey, which would make the Balkans a collateral victim of competition on the global political scene. Only the **fourth scenario** envisages a new dynamics of EU enlargement to the Western Balkans, but it is unlikely, without a change in Brussels policy, that at the time it will be a shortcut for new members. According to this scenario, all the countries of the Western Balkans that have the ambition to become EU members were urgently open accession negotiations, and political and other difficult conditions should be transferred from the beginning of the negotiations to the end. "The crisis in Ukraine is a chance for the Western Balkans, and it is preferable that the lessons learned from the example of Ukraine are applied in the Western Balkans. This approach would avoid the creation of new borders in the Western Balkans," said Kmezic. [<http://www.naslovi.net/tema/633828>].

The fourth example of the relationship towards the EU enlargement to the Western Balkans was given by Professor of History at the University of Regensburg (Germany), Ulf Braunberger at the EU-Western Balkans Summit, held in August 2014. In an interview with Deutsche Welle, Braunberger said that the Union had no strategy for joining the Western Balkans and said, "I think we can say failure on both sides. On the one hand, the European Union, or more precisely its major powers like Germany, have not done enough in the past few years to bring the Western Balkan countries closer to the EU or, ideally, to bring them into the Union. There seems to be some fatigue from the enlargement. On the other hand, governments in the Western Balkan countries failed to push through the necessary reforms with the necessary force. My feeling is that at this moment neither Brussels nor the most influential countries of the European Union have any particular strategy towards the Western Balkans" [Deutsche Welle, August 28, 2014].

Professor Braunberger's views are a key issue - why did the EU have no strategy for enlargement to the Western Balkans after Croatia's accession? The answer to this question is not only on one side, but also in the processes in the countries of the Western Balkans, but also in the corpus of problems that the EU has faced since 2008.

After the break-up of the former SFR Yugoslavia, and especially after the dissolution of Serbia and Montenegro (2006), evidently, all the countries of the Western Balkans declaratively and essentially seek membership in the EU. In accordance with the established PSP, imposed on the Western Balkans by the Union, the status of individual countries of the region on the path to the EU is given in Table 1.

The key problems of the countries of the Western Balkans towards the EU are identified differently in various analyzes. Basically, these problems come from the Western Balkans themselves, on the one hand, and from the EU, on the other.

The problems of the countries of the Western Balkans, as an obstacle on the road to the EU, can be classified into common (for all countries) and specific (for each country in particular). According to Professor Teokarević, the common problems of the countries of the Western Balkans, according to Professor Teokarević, are: 1) Lack of or insufficient level of the rule of law (there are no guarantees for human rights and freedoms, ineffective from the policy dependent of the judiciary, unsuccessful fight against organized crime and the stale-

mate of democracy) economic crisis (foreign indebtedness, budget deficit, high unemployment rate). [Teokarević et al., 2016]. Starting from the difficult legacy of the disintegration of the former SFRY and the war conflicts of the nineties of the past century, as two key specific issues in the Western Balkans, Tekarevich sees: 1) The unresolved status of Kosovo and 2) The contested official name of Macedonia. [Teokarević et al., 2016].

**Table 1.** *Way of countries of the Western Balkans and the territory of Kosovo to the Europe Union*

COUNTRY / territory	Signed SAA	SAA came into force	Beginning of negotiations	NOTE
ALBANIA	June 2006	April 2009		Candidate
BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA	June 2008	June 2015		Potenc. candidate
BJRM	April 2001	April 2004		Candidate
SERBIA	April 2008	Sept. 2013	21.01.2014	Opened 12 and temporarily seized 2 chapters
MONTE NEGRO	October 2007	May 2010	29.06.2012	Opened 30 chapters 3 closed
Kosovo*	October 2015	January 2016		Potenc. candidate

Source: Author

When it comes to problems in the EU itself, which have an impact on the attitude towards enlargement to the Western Balkans, Professor Teokarević points out the following: 1) A deep crisis within the EU that manifests itself as an economic and institutional crisis and issues of one's own identity, demographic deficit and political leadership. This crisis has led to fatigue from the enlargement, on the one hand, and the mainstreaming of EU policies, on the other. The nationalization of EU policies is reflected in the fact that the admission of the Western Balkan countries is increasingly being asked by the EU Member States individually, imposing constant demands and additional conditions; 2) The immigrant crisis that is reflected in the opposing views of the EU member states on its resolution, as well as the lack of solidarity and joint action; 3) radically worsening relations between the West and Russia due to the crisis in Ukraine; 4) Strengthening the influence of Turkey and Russia in certain countries of the Western Balkans; and 5) The EU's interference in the internal political issues of certain Western Balkan countries (Bi Hi Macedonia). [Teokarević et al., 2016].

Certainly, the analysis of Professor Teokarević on the problems that Western Balkan countries have on the road to the EU can be added by others, which are not included in this analysis. First of all, this refers to the mutual relations of the countries of the Western Balkans, as well as their relations with the neighbors of the EU members, which are a direct and indirect consequence of the disintegration of the former SFRY. Also, when it comes to problems coming from the EU itself, it is not possible to circumvent the process of UK leaving the

Union, the engagement of certain EU members in the war in Syria, the attitude towards the EU's common defense and the EU-NATO relationship, as well as the misunderstandings of the leading Union members and the US administration (president of Tramp) for individual economic (protectionism) and political issues.

In this situation, European Commission 06.02.2018. published an EU Strategy for the Western Balkans.

### 3. ASPECTS OF THE EU WESTERN BALKANS STRATEGY

The full name of the Strategy is A CREDIBLE ENLARGEMENT PERSPECTIVE FOR AND ENHANCED EU ENGAGEMENT WITH THE WESTERN BALKANS. [western\_balkans\_strategy\_en.pdf]. The 18-page document, in addition to introductory remarks, has been operationalized in four chapters (Table 2).

**Table 2.** *Chapters of the EU Strategy for the Western Balkans*

CHAPTER	NAME OF CHAPTER	KEY STRATEGY DEFINITIONS
I Chapter	Credible perspectives of enlargement - credible efforts and reforms in the Western Balkans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- no country meets the conditions for admission</li> <li>- the rule of law</li> <li>- Competitiveness of the economy - Providing support</li> <li>- bilateral disputes</li> <li>- application of EU rules and standards</li> <li>- the next steps of the EU countries' countries of the EU (illustration of the examples of Montenegro and Serbia)</li> </ul>
II Chapter	Credible extension perspectives - credible EU support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Enhanced support for the rule of law</li> <li>- Strengthening security and migration engagement</li> <li>- support to socio-economic development</li> <li>- increasing connectivity</li> <li>- launching the Digital Agenda for the Western Balkans</li> <li>- support for reconciliation and good neighborly relations</li> </ul>
III Chapter	Preparing the EU to welcome new members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- institutional issues</li> <li>- securing funds for successful accession</li> <li>- communication (strategic)</li> </ul>

IV Chapter	Conclusions	Six main initiatives that will include the Action Plan for the Implementation of the Strategy (referred to in the preceding headings): <b>The rule of law</b> <b>Security and migration</b> <b>Socioeconomic development</b> <b>Transport and energy connectivity</b> <b>Digital agenda</b> <b>Reconciliation and good neighborly relations</b>
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Source: Author

In the Strategic Conclusions, explicitly, it is pointed out that its application has a political, economic and security interest in the EU, and that enlargement policy is part of a larger strategy of strengthening the Union by 2025. In this respect, taking into account the strategy written, as well as the factual “situation on the ground”, it is possible to analyze three key aspects of the strategy - political, security and security. The mentioned aspects of the strategy can be analyzed from the perspective of the EU and the perspective of the countries of the Western Balkans.

### 3.1 Political aspect

The basic message of EU designers, from the formation of the first European integration (the Coal and Steel Community), was that Europe can not be kept only on economic integration, but must grow into a strong political influence. A strong political influence on the global level is a conflict between the economic and military factors. It is unequivocal that the EU has evolved over the past 60 years into one of the most powerful economies in the world, and this is also shown by the fact [Forca, 2018].

1) 28 Member States occupy a space of about 4.5 million km<sup>2</sup> (2.9 of the surface area of the world’s land), with some 508 million inhabitants (about 7% of the world’s population), which places the EU among the major state entities (integration) and a large common market,

2) The Union is the most developed region of the world with around 24% of the world’s GDP (2015), and about 20% of the total investment in world investment is invested in the EU; the unemployment rate in the EU (2015) was around 9%,

3) The EU has a leading role in creating a world trading system with 2.145 billion euros of exports and about 2.188 billion euros of imports (2016); In doing so, the EU invests in development cooperation more than the rest of the world together.

In reinforcing the sophisticated military force, as an important lever of political power, the EU has taken a number of measures, among which the [Forca, 2018] stand out:

1) with some 200 billion euros in defense budget expenditures, the EU is second (behind the US) by military spending in the world; In doing so, the EU has about 17 civil and military missions and operations around the world,

2) Although the Lisbon Treaty (2007/2009) annulled the so-called “ the pillars of the EU, the Common Foreign and Security Policy (the former second pillar) remained a policy of politics. An integral part of the Common Foreign and Security Policy, under the Lisbon Treaty, has become the EU’s Common Security and Defense Policy. One of the means of

defense of the EU remained an independent defense when a decision was taken by the European Commission.

The development of the second component of global political power - the military force - had no consensus on the views of EU members, primarily on the relations between Germany and France, on the one hand, and on Great Britain, on the other. The main disagreements among the leading EU member states were in terms of EU-NATO relations and the formation of their own armed forces. Germany and France have been advocating strengthening the defense of the Union and reducing the influence of NATO, as well as for the formation of the EU armed forces. This was strongly opposed by Great Britain, believing that NATO was quite enough to defend the Union and that the formation of the EU military was not taken into account. [Forca, 2017].

This basic factor of strengthening the political power of the EU (military force and independent defense) should be added to the following questions: 1) The EU is more actively engaged in Western Balkans, in order to replace Britain's withdrawal from the Union, 2) enhanced EU engagement in the Western Balkans is aimed at eliminating or reducing other influences in the region, primarily Russia, China, the United States and Turkey, 3) the EU is striving to receive its membership The Western Balkans was perceived as the periphery of the Union in order to increase its influence in the region on the long road of unification of Europe, and 4) the Union imposed itself as the main actor in resolving the crisis over Kosovo and Metohija.

When it comes to the countries of the Western Balkans, the key political aspect of the EU Strategy is contained in the following issues: 1) rule of law, 2) reconciliation in the region and strengthening of bilateral cooperation, 3) adoption of the legal framework and common foreign policy of the EU in the countries of the Western Balkans, 4) resolving the dispute between Macedonia and Greece on the name of Macedonia, and 5) resolving the status of Kosovo and Metohija.

### **3.2 Economic aspect**

Only some indicators of the EU's economic strength are listed. The fact is that leaving the UK out of the EU also has a weakening of the economic and financial capacities of the Union. Although the Western Balkans' accession will not be able to replace the economic losses caused by the outbreak of the UK, however, the expansion of the common market and the consolidation of economic opportunities in the region is one of the economic factors of the strategy. Some economic and financial indicators of the UK substitution in the Western Balkan countries are given in Table 3 [Forca, 2018].

The countries of the Western Balkans are at the same time the economically poorest countries in Europe. Therefore, the economic aspect of the EU Strategy for the Western Balkans should also be viewed in a wider sense, and not only in the EU's intangible economic interest. Therefore, as explicitly stated in the document itself, the EU will strive to strengthen the competitiveness of the economies of the Western Balkans, which also means additional financial investments in the region, which, again, has a strategic interest for both the EU and the countries of the Western Balkans.

**Table 3.** *Economic and financial indicators of the UK's exit from the EU and receipt of Western Balkans*

	<b>EFFECT ON NUMBER OF STAYERS (Consumers)</b>	<b>THE EFFECT ON THE TERRITORY AREA (common market)</b>	<b>IMPACT ON EU GDP</b>
<b>EXIT OF UNITED KINGDOM FROM THE EU</b>	Reducing the population by 13% (from 508 to 434 million)	Reducing the surface area of the EU by 6%	Decrease of EU GDP by 13% (2,222, 4 billion euros)
<b>RECEPTION OF THE WESTERN BALKANS IN THE EU</b>	With 26 million inhabitants, the WB replaces about 50% of the loss by leaving the UK	With 263.21km <sup>2</sup> the WB bravely completely loses the territory created by the exit of the UK	The total GDP of the WB countries is around 70 billion euros, which is 1/30 of the GDP of the UK

Source: Author

### 3.3 Security aspect

Security has long ceased to relate only to military issues, ie it has been expanded to a political, economic, societal and ecological plane. With the careful handling of the EU Strategy for the Western Balkans, it can be concluded that security issues are prevalent in the document, which are explicitly listed as *[western\_balkans\_strategy\_en.pdf]*:

- the rule of law (breaking the link between government and organized crime, reducing corruption, independent judiciary),
- resolving bilateral disputes (good neighborly relations, respect for international arbitration),
- Without the normalization of relations between Belgrade and Pristina, there can be no stability in the region
- overcoming the heritage of the past,
- transitional justice process (International Court of Kosovo, fate of missing persons, refugees and displaced persons, detection and removal of remaining mines),
- Improving strategic and operational security cooperation through founder agencies (fight against terrorism and radicalization, fight against organized crime, build cyber security capabilities and fight cyber criminals, improve strategic and operational cooperation in the field of migration and border management) and
- support for reconciliation and good neighborly relations.

Obviously, the security issues of the EU Strategy for the Western Balkans presented here are significant, but it is an incomplete picture of the security challenges that burden the region, and which are not explicitly listed in the strategy. The key security problems that burden the region of the Western Balkans are: 1) the uncovered ambitions of Albania towards the territories of other Western Balkan countries, or the return of the idea of a "Greater Albania," 2) the overhaul of security forces in Kosovo and Metohia to the armed forces of Kosovo, some Western countries, which is opposed by Serbia, 3) unregulated issues of demarcation between certain countries in the region, in particular between Serbia and Cro-

atia, 4) strengthening NATO's influence in relation to the EU and the problems of relations that may arise in B&H (the Federation is for membership in NATO, the Republic of Srpska is saddled); 5) requests for revision of the Dayton Agreement for B&H, which mainly come from the Bosniak side, 6) social unrest where the process of resolving the issues between Greece and FYROM regarding names Macedonia, 7) strengthening Wahhabism in B&H, as well as the impact of returnees from the Syrian war in Kosovo and BiH. So, a set of security issues in the Western Balkans are broad, reminiscent of the nineties of the last century and the region is again returning the epithet of the potentially biggest focal point of the conflict - *a boom barre*.

The Strategy explicitly states that without the normalization of the relations between Belgrade and Pristina, there can be no stability in the region. The fact that no one has a clear picture of what the normalization of these essentially means, the security aspect of the EU Strategy for the Western Balkans is the biggest problem and a possible key stumbling block. This and regardless of the fact that the European Commission is explicit in the claims that Montenegro and Serbia have gone the longest way on the road to the Union and which, as the date of their accession to the EU, determined them in 2025.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The European Union remains firmly in place to grow in the power of global proportions, which, in addition to its economic strength, requires the strengthening of military effects to create a significant plutonium effect. This is the strategic commitment of the Union since its formation to date. This commitment was temporarily blocked by a strong crisis in the EU in the second decade of this century, and the direct consequence of which is the withdrawal of Great Britain from the Union. Worried about its own problems, the EU has neglected the region of the Western Balkans.

The Western Balkans is burdened with a number of problems further and closer to the past, and neglected by the EU has become a sphere of influence of world and regional powers, primarily Russia, the United States, China and Turkey. These influences have fueled antagonisms in the Western Balkans and strengthened some unrealistic ambitions of individual countries in the region, making the region the most urgent point of Europe and the potential arena of the 1990s conflicts.

In an effort to replace Britain's withdrawal from the EU, reduce the influence of world and regional powers in the Western Balkans, but also to counter possible conflicts in the region, the European Commission has published an EU Strategy for the Western Balkans, due to be adopted in April this year. Strategy, as a document, is explicitly defined in terms of the EU's political, economic and security interests and as part of a major strategy for strengthening the Union d 2025. Therefore, the EU Strategy primarily sees the interests of the Union.

The political, economic and security aspects of the EU Strategy for the Western Balkans are given in a general form, which is relevant to such documents. On the other hand, the Strategy notes that an Action Plan will be adopted to operationalize these aspects in six main initiatives. By analyzing the document, it can be concluded that the security aspect is a key aspect of the Strategy.

The key issue of all, and especially the security aspect of the Strategy, is the normalization of the relations between Belgrade and Pristina. Considering that in the Strategy, but in

no other act of the Union, it is not clear what this normalization of relations means, it only makes the Strategy one more than one of the formal, but not essential, acts of the Union. The fact is that the EU is not ready or has the capacity to contribute to the normalization of Belgrade-Pristina relations, as a key issue of the Western Balkans Strategy. Thus, the EU Strategy for the Western Balkans itself remains a document in which, for which time, it knows a lot of politics, and a little strategy, when the Union is in question.

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