



THE WESTERN BALKANS' SECURITY DILEMMA AND THE IMPACT
OF THE RUSSIAN INVASION OF UKRAINE

MASTER'S THESIS
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TIRANA, ALBANIA
June, 2022

THE WESTERN BALKANS' SECURITY DILEMMA AND THE IMPACT
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Thesis Submitted in Fulfillment of Requirement for the Degree of
Master of Science in Political Science and International Relations

EPOKA UNIVERSITY
2022

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THE WESTERN BALKANS' SECURITY DILEMMA AND THE IMPACT OF THE RUSSIAN INVASION OF UKRAINE

ABSTRACT

Due to Serbia's positive connections with Russia, the Western Balkan region is experiencing greater unease as a result of the just starting conflict in Ukraine and the Russian invasion. Therefore, the purpose of this paper will be to determine whether the conflict between Russia and Ukraine resulted in a security dilemma in the Western Balkans. In addition, it aims to determine how much the security dilemma might intensify ethnic tensions in the Western Balkans. The framework is primarily centered on realist theories of international relations and their subcategories, such as structural realism, which is further divided into offensive and defensive realism, as well as the security dilemma and its impact on regional conflicts. This paper adopts a qualitative methodology for its data collection, analysis, and justification. The crisis and conflict is between Ukraine and Russia nevertheless, the security dilemma is happening between Russia and NATO. The possibility of this conflict spreading and affecting the Western Balkans, which have a significant Russian influence, is not remote or unthinkable. Serbia is heavily affected by Russia, as evidenced by its posture and position in this conflict. The failure to impose sanctions against the Kremlin despite condemning the aggression is a clear sign of their relationship. Despite the present trend of cosmopolitanism and the establishment of strong international organizations to uphold peace and stability worldwide, the anarchic state of states are still clearly apparent today as seen by the now raging violent conflict. States that do not belong to strong military alliances and organizations find it easier to find themselves in a security dilemma that could quickly escalate into an active conflict.

Key words: *security dilemma, conflict, international organizations, Realism, ethnic tensions, influence, impact*

ABSTRAKT

Për shkak të lidhjeve pozitive të Serbisë me Rusinë, rajoni i Ballkanit Perëndimor po përjeton shqetësim më të madh si rezultat i konfliktit të sapofilluar në Ukrainë nga pushtimi Rus. Prandaj, qëllimi i këtij punimi do të jetë të përcaktojë nëse konflikti midis Rusisë dhe Ukrainës rezultoi në krijimin e një dilemë sigurie në Ballkanin Perëndimor. Për më tepër, ky punim synon të përcaktojë se sa dilema e sigurisë mund të intensifikojë tensionet etnike në Ballkanin Perëndimor. Korniza është e përqendruar kryesisht në teoritë realiste të marrëdhënieve ndërkombëtare dhe nënkategoritë e tyre, si realizmi strukturor, i cili më tej ndahet në realizëm sulmues dhe mbrojtës, si dhe në dilemën e sigurisë dhe ndikimin e saj në konfliktet rajonale. Ky punim miraton një metodologji cilësore për mbledhjen, analizën dhe justifikimin e të dhënave. Kriza dhe konflikti është mes Ukrainës dhe Rusisë, megjithatë, dilema e sigurisë po ndodh mes Rusisë dhe NATO-s. Mundësia që ky konflikt të përhapet dhe të prekë Ballkanin Perëndimor, i cili ka një ndikim të konsiderueshëm rus, nuk është e largët apo e paimagjinueshme. Serbia është shumë e ndikuar nga Rusia, siç dëshkohet nga qëndrimi dhe pozicioni i saj në këtë konflikt. Dështimi për të vendosur sanksione kundër Kremlinit pavarësisht dënimit të agresionit është një shenjë e qartë e marrëdhënies së tyre. Pavarësisht tendencës aktuale të kozmopolitizmit dhe krijimit të organizatave të forta ndërkombëtare për të mbështetur paqen dhe stabilitetin në mbarë botën, gjendja anarkike e shteteve është ende e dukshme sot, siç shihet nga konflikti i dhunshëm tashmë i ndezur. Shtetet që nuk i përkasin aleancave dhe organizatave të forta ushtarake e kanë më të lehtë të gjenden në një dilemë sigurie që mund të përshkallëzohet shpejt në një konflikt aktual.

Fjalët kyçe: *dilema e sigurisë, konflikt, organizata ndërkombëtare, realizëm, tensione etnike, ndikim, influencë*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to thank and convey my sincere gratitude to Dr. Reina Shehi, who served as my advisor, for assisting me in finishing this thesis. The results of this research would not have been as effective without her constant encouragement, support, and wisdom. Her insightful guidance and assistance with this project enabled its completion and concurrently taught me more than I could have ever learned on my own.

I would want to continue by thanking my family and friends for their encouragement and general support, which motivated me to write and finish this thesis and further complete my Master of Science degree.

Lastly, my deepest gratitude also go to my political science and international relations professors, from whom I learned a lot of the information I could use in this thesis. Their knowledge was a crucial component of my learning experience. Having said that, I also want to thank a handful of my classmates for their spiritual support as I worked on this project.

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this Thesis, titled "The impact of the Russia-Ukraine war on the Western Balkans and the Security Dilemma", is based on my original work except quotations and citations which have been duly acknowledged. I also declare that this thesis has not been previously or concurrently submitted for the award of any degree, at Epoka University, any other university or institution.

Kristian Pano

June 2022

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|------|-------------------------------------|
| UN | United Nations |
| EU | European Union |
| NATO | North Atlantic Treaty Organization |
| USSR | Union of Soviet Socialist Republics |
| WB | Western Balkans |
| IR | International Relations |
| BiH | Bosnia and Herzegovina |
| GFP | Global Firepower |
| KFOR | Kosovo Force |
| KSF | Kosovo Security Force |

1. INTRODUCTION

The Western Balkans is a region within the European continent which has been plagued by countless conflicts through the years, specifically after the end of the Cold War and the disintegration and fall of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Members of the federation were: Serbia, Kosovo, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, North Macedonia, and Slovenia. This dismemberment, together with a wave of nationalistic values and ideals trending at the time, resulted into some major violent conflicts and wars between the former member states who were declaring their independence and autonomy and their “Hegemon” (Serbia), who was trying to maintain the territory, values and former “glory” of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Even though these conflicts are in the past and over, there is still an uneasiness and it is a hot and sensitive topic to this day as there are countless aftermaths and disagreements between parties in the region.

However, the freshly started conflict in Ukraine and the Russian invasion has raised many questions and a deeper uneasiness is occurring in the Western Balkan region due to Serbia’s good relations with Russia. Having a similar historical, cultural and religious background Serbia has had close ties with Russia, especially after the Yugoslav disintegration in 1990. Russia rejected the proposed sanctions against Serbia during the 1990s Balkan wars, additionally opposing the NATO’s bombing of Serbia in 1999 and also rejecting Kosovo’s independence in 2008 and making Kosovo unable to join international organizations. Considering the aforementioned, Serbia backed the UN resolution that condemned Russia’s aggression but on the other hand rejected the sanctions and measures proposed against Russia as it is one of its main suppliers of energy and economic partners (Hajdari, 2022). Despite these factors though, the Serbian population when was asked through a survey in which foreign actor they trusted more for their national security, the most preferred one was Russia (Tzifakis et al., 2021) which in order would tremble and prevent the current Serbian government from taking any “anti-Russian” measure.

Returning to the Ukrainian and Russian conflict we have to look back to 2014 when Russia annexed in Crimea, a region within the Ukrainian territory which was also home to many Russian citizens and Russian speaking people. Russia launched military operations in order to as they claim, protect their citizens in the region. A referendum was upheld and the people residing in the region voted pro joining the Russian federation. Armed conflict escalated in the region between the Ukrainian army and Russian backed forces but however the Russian government denied any Russian military involvement. (Council on Foreign Relations, 2022). This situation could be similar to a degree to the Western Balkans. The dissolution of the Yugoslav federation created issues with diversity of ethnicities within regions and states and the same could be seen from the dissolution of the Soviet Union which Ukraine once was part of.

However, recent developments are a little different. In late February 2022, Russian government declared war and invaded Ukraine for a number of reasons. Partly they claim the need for such military special operations in order to protect and rescue Russian citizens and Russian speaking ones from the Ukrainian ‘Nazi fascist’ government and military. Previously, Ukraine was trying to side and get its place under the umbrella of Western powers and actors such as NATO and the European Union. This seemed unacceptable from Russia’s point of view as Ukraine being its larger “proper” border with the West and demanded for it to remain neutral (Kirby, 2022). To give meaning to this, relations between the West and the East must be explained.

After the WWII, a power vacuum was created. With Europe and Japan in ruins from the war, the only notable powers left in the international arena were the US and the Soviet Union which had their fair share later during the Cold War. With the end of the war and the dissolution of the Soviet Union, there is no need to mention that their relations were not that positive and rivalry pretty high, so each of the two actors kept “fighting” to spread their influence and gain more supporters. NATO’s most powerful member and actor is the US which could also be considered as a hegemon and in its order Russia did not want its rival so close to its border. However, Ukraine as a sovereign state, as long as fulfills the criteria for becoming a member of NATO, should face no other objections and should have the right to do so. A situation of security dilemma arose for Russia with having its rivals directly on their borders and found it proper to declare war to Ukraine and try to invade it in order to place a pro-Russian government with a result and end goal to prevent the

aforementioned situation from happening and maintain security within its borders.

Such a situation to happen nowadays though, caused “tremors” and shook the international arena as the conflict is not considered only as a Ukraine-Russia conflict but as a broader security crisis further worsening the relations between the East and the West (IMF, 2022).

Thus, this paper will seek to answer to what extent are the Western Balkan states in a security dilemma and how the Russian invasion of Ukraine intensified it.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Both Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union shared similar forms of governments and regimes according to history but with slight differences. Both socialist states and federations were trying to expand their ideology as much as they could but however the Soviets policies have tried to minimize the influence and impact Yugoslavia could have on other socialist states and even try to impact in changing Yugoslavia's regime itself. With efforts to diffuse Yugoslavia's style of socialism, the Soviet Union eventually, ended up having a large impact in causing changes within Yugoslavia even with minimal efforts. However, Yugoslavia had a keen interest on decentralizing and democratizing its structure meanwhile the Soviet Union was giving much attention and tried to influence such events from not happening. Despite such slight ideological differences, during the years and more specifically in 1985-1988, their relationship ties got closer and stronger and intergovernmental cooperation grew further.

A big factor on this would be that Yugoslavia was facing some big economic difficulties that persisted at the time and the thirtieth anniversary of the signing of the Belgrade Declaration was taking place. As diplomatic relationships grew between the two, so did the number of delegations and cooperation level between them mainly aiming to enhance economic and technological development, however, it is fair to point out that in doing so, the Soviets were still seeking to promote their ideals and values within the Yugoslav federation. Following the death of Tito in 1980, a couple of issues arose within Yugoslavia and within the system he so carefully "crafted". The high numbers of ethnic identities which were subjects to the system, accumulated with the arising wave of nationalism, caused a series of struggles and issues for the region that ended up having an national identity crisis and an even more economic one (Cichock, 1990).

Despite Stalin's economic blockade towards Tito, after the former's death, the following Soviet leader tried to reestablish economic and political relations with Yugoslavia and the Balkan Peninsula. By doing so, the Soviet government would regain influence in the region and strive it further away from Western actors and their counterpart influence. After realizing that bringing Yugoslavia back under Soviet control was impossible due to irreconcilable ideological differences and differing views on the nature of the international order, Khrushchev launched a second, more successful attempt at reconciliation with the country. However, Belgrade's growing links with the newly independent countries in Asia and Africa under the banner of the non-alignment movement would be of some assistance to Moscow at a time when it was trying to establish ties with these countries in order to gain an advantage over the Western powers. On the other hand, greater political ties with the Soviet Union were advantageous for Yugoslavia in terms of establishing a foreign policy stance that was evenly balanced between the two blocs. Additionally, rekindling political ties with Moscow offered the possibility of economic cooperation, which was viewed as vital at a time when Yugoslavia was concerned about the detrimental effects of the European Economic Community's gradual integration on its trade dynamics. By utilizing diplomatic endeavors, economic cooperation offers, and regional disarmament ideas, the Soviet Union was able to restore its battered relations with Turkey, Yugoslavia, and Greece—three crucial Balkan nations—as part of its new foreign policy direction and Yugoslavia became an important target of Soviet overtures because it had managed to maintain a similar political and economic structure to the Soviet Union, despite taking economic aid from the Western capitalist governments (Fatma Asli, 2018).

In Serbia in the early 90s, nationalist parties enjoyed a significant degree of support. During the conflicts in Croatia and Bosnia, the Socialist Party of Serbia used the nationalist card, and Milosevic won over many people. Thus, with such a nationalistic government and with the occurrence of the disintegration of the Yugoslav federation, newly self-declared states and their former 'hegemon' found themselves in a security dilemma situation which eventually led to all the violent conflicts in the region. Fear of loss of group identity, fear of repression, uncertainty about the future and fear of physical survival led all the parties involved to such an unpleasant outcome. Since the violent conflicts that occurred in the Western Balkans were between different ethnic groups, conflict-related attitudes such as ethnic intolerance and opinions toward the causes and resolutions of the conflicts are likely to be related to ethnicity and group identity. In such situations such as

the case of the Yugoslavia, where the central authority broke down, also regarding its diverse ethnic group environment, ethnic intolerance, ethnic polarization and even ethnic conflicts could arise as we see from the case at hand.

In the upcoming decades, establishing a stable security system in the Balkans is likely to remain a significant issue for Western countries. Since the conflict in Kosovo drew to a close, there have been a few of constructive developments, most notably the change of governments in Croatia and Serbia. However, as demonstrated by the ethnic unrest that occurred in Macedonia in 2001, there is still a high likelihood of unrest and disorder in the Balkans. Political stability in the area continues to be seriously threatened by structural issues such economic underdevelopment, inadequate civil societies, dissatisfied minorities, corruption, rising criminality, and a lack of solid democratic institutions. The already severe economic and social issues brought on by the economic and political instability in the Balkans over the past decades could be made even worse by more unrest in the region and as such more attention should be drawn to this problematic region of Europe (Lesser et al., 2001).

Rose argues and analyses the Serbian-Croatian conflict and the roots of it through the intense security dilemma that occurred. The main issue occurred when in two regions within the Croatian borders, in Krajina and Slavonia, the Serbian population from a minority became a majority in the first one and from less than 10 percent rose up to 40 percent on the second one. Together with internal politics and the decision to declare its independence from the Yugoslav federation and highly nationalistic parties being on the decision-making position, both parties were facing high security threats. However, such issues were more threatening for Croatia rather than Serbia, as at the time it was more powerful and could easily defend and repel any Croatian attacks. On the other hand, due to the political geographical position of these two regions, Serbian nationalists were threatened and were afraid of becoming subjects to the Croatian government and its offence and as a result any form of aiding and protecting their own population in Croatia, would technically result as being offensive operations by the Serbian army. The Croatian counterpart was troubled and afraid of losing these two regions to Serbia as they were geographically very important regions for its own well-being and broader economy.

The Croatia's claim for independence caused for the then president of Serbia Slobodan Milosevic to create anti-Croatian propaganda within his territory and any Croatian actions were perceived and labeled as hostile. Croats on the other hand, in order to seek and maintain their defensive security they considered an offensive approach at the situation. As a result it became noticeable that offensive and defensive approaches were indistinguishable for and from both parties (Rose, 2000).

Another relevant case which is now used by Melander, is regarding the dissolution of the Yugoslav federation. When Slovenia would leave the federation and declare its independence from it, due to its homogenous population, did not encounter much issues and a significant conflict did not occur when compared to the Bosnian, Croatian and Kosovo's war against Serbia. A decent amount of Serbs were residing in the Croatian republic and in Bosnia which led to such violent and bloody wars. They were conflicts influenced by the ethnic diversity that existed in those territories and all the parties were concerned about their territorial security and their population's well-being and security, with the later one being the main case for the Serbian part.

However, the Kosovo's case is a little more different than the rest. Kosovo was a province in Serbian territory which was almost homogenous with a vast majority of ethnic Albanians and a minority of Serbs. This province has been significantly autonomous within the former Yugoslav federation until 1989, however the situation drastically changed and the then Serbian leader Milosevic removed its autonomy and placed it under the control of the Serbian capital. Due to the majority of its population being ethnic Albanians and group identity, plenty of rebellions expectedly occurred and a violent conflict escalated (The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, 2018). Fanatic paramilitary bands arose from both sides but more notoriously from the Serbian part which ended up in genocides that drew the attention of 'outside' forces to intervene and forcefully stop such humanitarian crimes from continuing. However as argued before, such bands due to their unofficial status, create a "grey" area where the parties involved do not claim responsibility and do not want to be held accountable.

However, there are several major threats that might destabilize the region and bring about a recurrence of violent conflicts, including conventional responses, according to the security and national security documents of these countries. The risks of a political, nationalistic,

ethnic, and religious nature, those to statehood, and those posed by contentious, illimitable frontiers are among the most significant of these. In essence, despite the proper commitment of all Western Balkan countries to friendly relations with one another and to contribute to regional stability and security, there is still a noticeable level of anxiety among them as a result of a lack of clarity and confidence in some of the other states in the region's future actions. Four significant outcomes have come from NATO's involvement in the Western Balkans. First, the Western Balkans have changed from being a region with societies torn from violence and antagonistic neighborly relations to one that is relatively stable as a result of its military engagement as a repressive and regulating force. Second, NATO had a significant impact on altering the ideologies and solid balance structures of large armies based on territorial defense and disapproval. As a result, the national armed forces evolved into professional armies and their offensive combat capabilities against their neighbors significantly decreased. Third, the establishment of the distinctive borders in the region was made possible by NATO's expansion to the Western Balkans. Fourthly, the Partnership for Peace destroyed any chance of bilateral or regional opposing defense cooperation, channeling it solely through Brussels in exchange for membership fees (Terziev et al., 2018).

The Western Balkan region belongs to a cosmopolitan view and tendency due to its pro-European attitude and the liberal-democratic rationale of its regimes (Cupać, 2020). Additionally, Cupać argues that their nationalist, populist, and authoritarian instincts, however, drive it in the reverse direction, toward the communitarian perspective. This ambiguous position could be explained by four factors, the region's authoritarian history, ethno nationalism combined with state and nation-building initiatives, the quest for external credibility; and the EU's apparent alienation of the unbreakable link between peace and democracy. The current governments in the Western Balkans are also involved in the creation of regional anxiety problems that contribute to their place in the global anxiety problem and therefore create a situation of security dilemma in the region. Ontological security is defined as the confidence that most people have in the persistence of their sense of identity and in the stability of the social and material contexts around them. Individuals and groups who are ontologically secure feel as though they have always existed and won't change, and this feeling is bolstered by the environment's consistency and predictability. They can define and follow their interests, develop their networks, and act strategically because they have consistent cognitive and emotional frames. In other

words, people and groups that are ontologically secure are aware of their position in the world and how to behave within it. When a traumatic incident or a crisis occurs, it threatens the ontological security and as a result, causes and fuels anxiety. It essentially creates an unease about the nature of reality. It appears once the fundamental conviction that the social environment would replicate as predictions begins to fade. It causes a routine disruption, which evokes turbulence and a breach with what is identifiable, consistent, and understandable to the self. Individuals and organizations who are anxious find it difficult to perceive reality in a way that is both cognitively and emotionally comprehensible. Routines and "biographical storylines" that were formerly a part of their daily lives are no longer applicable, making it difficult for them to operate as their "old selves" would.

As also seen in Cupac's work and further argued, the diverse issues that have plagued the world and mainly the EU over the past ten years have impacted the Western Balkan states. The EU is currently experiencing "enlargement fatigue" as a result of the economic crisis and austerity measures, the migration issue, the emergence of Eurosceptic parties, the Brexit, and the authoritarian turn in Poland and Hungary. Although they are actively working towards it, the Western Balkan states are still invited to join the EU. Although they have moved more slowly than expected, their EU admission processes have never stalled. Late in 2019, a number of member countries, led by France, prevented Albania and North Macedonia from starting the EU accession process ("EU Blocks Albania and North Macedonia Membership Bids," 2019). The reasoning behind the judgment was that new potential candidate-countries must have properly undergone through a series of different successful reforms in order to begin formal accession talks before the EU's enlargement regulations can be applied. And in fact, in 2020, the EU's member states came to a political decision to finally begin negotiations with the two nations regarding their membership accession talks (European Commission, 2020). However, despite their efforts and claims of their progress towards such structural reforms, data shows otherwise. They demonstrate that despite the Western Balkan governments' willingness to join the EU and the EU's membership conditions, the region is not becoming more democratic. All of the Western Balkan states have seen a rise in the dominance of wealthy elites during the last ten years. They have put in place clientelist mechanisms that allow them to maintain their hold on political power as well as further their own economic personal interests. These elites are driven by powerful individuals who have no concerns about undermining the rule of law

and democratic values by using both formal and informal means (Cupać, 2020). Additionally, he claims that the governments of the Western Balkans are seen to heavily influence and intervene in the media. As a result they are classified and seen as either "failed democracies" in Serbia's case or "hybrid regimes" in Albania, Montenegro, Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina by the Economist Democracy Index. Such issues are heavy influencing factors together with the authoritarianism and nationalism when it comes to the stabilization of the region and they either fuel directly or indirectly the reoccurrence of the security dilemma in the region.

Despite the approach realist theorists take towards the anarchic status of international arena, they also argue that the security of a state could be also slightly influenced by its relations with powerful allies at the given time of a security dilemma or a potential conflict. Such an approach is explained and analyzed by the institutional philosophy. States can attain security through international organizations that can offer the tools for promoting interstate harmony and aiding in conflict resolution and facilitate diplomatic talks. International institutions bring order to the chaos and anarchic status of the global politics and international arena and encourage the use of diplomacy as a means of resolving inter-state conflicts as opposed to the use of violence and military might. Continuing with the North Macedonian case and its security dilemma we have to keep in mind that although North Macedonia's struggle for independence was not violent when compared to the rest of the cases of the Western Balkans, the threat coming from Belgrade was nevertheless deemed significant enough to justify the establishment of UNPREDEP operation, a preventive peacekeeping mission, in 1992 (Economides, 2003).

However, the possibility of Belgrade attacking with conquering purposes towards North Macedonia was excluded as a possibility and potential threatening scenario. Since it was feared that the failure to resolve the Kosovo crisis could further radicalize the Macedonian Albanians, the only significant threat that could have really constituted as a source of instability was Kosovo and its final status and as a result it may also help to explain Macedonia's stance on Kosovo's acknowledgment of its sovereignty. North Macedonia became a state that all of its neighbors sought and contested, bordering not only Serbia and Kosovo but also Albania on the southwest, Greece on the south, and Bulgaria on the east. Therefore North Macedonia is faced with a security dilemma and the fear of losing its ethnic group identity and make it concerned about its further physical survival. For a

variety of reasons, the majority of its neighbors took their time when it comes to recognizing the new state, and some even refused to do so. The ethnic Albanians that reside in North Macedonia were Albania's main concern with the country. As "support for the status of constituent nation sought by the Albanian minority," Macedonia's recognition was portrayed late by Albania. Generally speaking, the Albanian government has moderated the secessionist goals of the Albanian movement, however the North Macedonian government's stance and policy toward the ethnic Albanian minority continues to serve as a measurement indicator for ties between the two states. When it comes to its issues and disputes with the rest neighboring countries such as Greece, a different type of conflict occurs. Because of the open dispute with Greece about the history of using the name Macedonia, the name issue in the Macedonian case highlighted a threat to state security. Greece refused to recognize Macedonia by this name and opposed the possibility of a distinct non-Greek Macedonia. However, this debate and potential conflict was managed and brought to a closure with diplomatic agreements and Macedonia changing its name to North Macedonia. On the other hand, despite being the first nation to acknowledge the sovereignty of North Macedonia, Bulgaria refused to acknowledge it as a separate nationality. Proclaiming that Macedonian is a different variation and dialect of Bulgarian created by Tito in order to detach the region from Sofia's area of influence, Bulgaria sought to advance the recognition of Bulgarian as the only official language in Macedonia (Jano, 2009).

Due to their geopolitical location, strategic importance, and historical history, the countries of the Western Balkans have long played a significant role in regional affairs. The key transportation route for international trade and energy supply passes through this region, which connects the West and the East. Also due to a significant part of the region that shares historical, cultural, religious and linguistic ties with Russia which represents the aforementioned "East", the region is considered to be a "bridge" between the East and West superpowers. Due to the lack of stability, migration, and security concerns, this somewhat "neutral" area is now more important than ever. Particularly, Russia has important economic and political interests there. Thus, we can comprehend how Russia behaves as a defensive or offensive power, taking into account its own national interests and foreign policy instruments that are employed to attain goals. So, due to our theoretical framework of realism and the international anarchic arena where there is not a central authority to overview and dictate states, states seek to maximize their power and be as

powerful as they can in order to survive. Thus this power-seeking adventure comes to an end when hegemony is achieved however, states cannot be certain of one another's intentions in the present or the future despite their status or power level.

Many actors have expressed their interest in the Western Balkan region, mainly the EU and its Western allies, but on the other hand, in Russia's perspective, if multipolarity is able to reduce the power of the EU in this region, it will increase the strength of the Russian voice there and therefore its influence. Most of the Western Balkan countries (Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia) joining the Western military organization of NATO and becoming full members of it, poses a threat towards Russia's security as it will be discussed later on based on the strong oppositions and threats it expressed regarding this situation. However, the rest of the Western Balkans (Bosnia, Kosovo, Serbia) have not been able to join NATO yet. The most essential goal for Moscow is to obstruct NATO's expansion into Eastern Europe and therefore it justified its aggression on such allegations on its invasion of Ukraine in 2022. The predominance of one player, stopping Russian influence, might theoretically destabilize the power balance among regional powers in the region. As a result, Russia becomes aggressive and looks for ways to improve its position and power status in order to increase its security.

Additionally, to the aforementioned ties, the Balkan countries themselves rely heavily on Russian energy supplies. The ongoing trade relationship of Bosnia, North Macedonia, and Serbia share a common factor: energy trade. From 75 and 95 percent of the natural gas and crude oil imported by the three nations comes from Russia. There is a heated debate over Russian political goals as a result, and we may assume that from an economic perspective, Russia wants to increase its political power in the region by engaging in energy diplomacy. Serbia is Russia's primary ally in the Western Balkans and it is one of the main states that draw Russian further economic investments etc. In addition to corporate investment, Russia has increased its economic influence in Serbia by making direct loans towards the Serbian government and Serbia requested a loan from Moscow in order to support its budget during the 2012–2013 fiscal crisis happening in the country (Kobilov, 2020).

Due to the region's uncertainty towards their European integration and neither of the six Western Balkan states show clear indicators of joining the European Union in the near future, a similar project was proposed between these states to form their own form of union

called 'Open Balkan' or as previously called 'Mini Schengen'. Serbia, Albania and North Macedonia are the states proposing the creation of such an economic union including their civic societies and their free movement between them needing only a valid ID. Generally speaking, the idea alludes to regional cooperation, boosting trade, and enhancing bilateral ties between member states. The Mini-Schengen initiative was introduced by the leaders of Serbia, North Macedonia, and Albania in 2019 as an initiative to strengthen regional cooperation in the Balkans. Most people regard this as a running effort parallel to the Berlin Process, although it still lacks the EU's and most definitely the additional Western Balkan countries' support and approval. However, the rest three countries of the region still oppose the initiative and distance themselves (Kamberi, 2022). Although Montenegro and Bosnia participated in the last summit for the Open Balkan talks they did not show a clear indication for their support regarding the issue and consideration for joining yet. However at the latest summit held in early June 2022, the newly elected Prime Minister of Montenegro would consider and propose to his cabinet joining the initiative, while Bosnia claims that due to the difficulties in achieving a consensus, they cannot express a positive stance towards the initiative due to "political reasons" (Marusic, 2022).

3. METHODOLOGY

This chapter aims to describe the methodology used in order to study and analyze if and how the Russia- Ukraine conflict has caused a security dilemma in the Western Balkan region and to what extent this security dilemma contributes to the intensity of the ethnic disputes in the Western Balkan region. The framework is mainly focused in the realist approach of international relations theories and its subcategories like structural realism which is further divided in offensive and defensive realism, additionally with the security dilemma and its influence in regional conflicts.

This paper has a qualitative approach towards the data it has collected and the way they are being analyzed and argued. However, there are also some minor quantitative data through two conducted surveys from the Balkan Barometer in order to validate and argue some strong points found necessary during the analysis part. The data used mainly focused on the qualitative side are IR theory books in order to make the right approach and validate the arguments towards our research question. Official international organizations' publications and governmental publications are used to explain relationships between the actors that our research topic is interested in. They are further used to make an observation towards these actors' attitudes and potential of joining international organizations such as the EU and NATO and their posture towards the broader international arena. Additional literature was used to further analyze and argue the interactivity between actors internationally and domestically. Local news articles and journals were important in order to find the parties' perceptions and points of view on specific topics as the events are pretty recent and ongoing. Further news was analyzed to also pinpoint different leaders' approaches and tendencies towards their domestic and international issues. However, international media sources were also used in order to get more unbiased data to contribute in a somewhat objective outcome.

Considering all the data gathered and their analysis this paper also gives its own perception on the matter and includes its own opinions in the discussions section. Due to the subjectivity and data relevance on this specific topic, qualitative data research is necessary as its quantitative counterpart would not efficiently help towards a desired outcome and on point findings. However, all the data used in the paper are secondary data which are used in a discourse analysis.

The timeline of the research ranges from the start of the Yugoslav disintegration and wars during the 90s until nowadays' tensions in the Western Balkans and after the ignition of the Russia- Ukraine conflict. Reactions from the Western Balkan region are observed and analyzed until June 2022. It is important to note that the Russia- Ukraine conflict is ongoing and therefore the study is not conducted on the basis of a post-conflict timeframe.

This paper has also faced a few limitations. Limitation such as language barrier were noticeable when it came to analyzing data from media outlets mainly in English and Albanian language and therefore news and publications in other languages from the Western Balkan countries could not be brought in the population pool for a better subjective understanding. Therefore, paired with electoral and governmental decision making in other languages could not be used and further analyzed. Additionally, the scope of the research consists mainly of the security dilemma occurring in the region and between its members and therefore a broader research could be conducted by also using different IR theories as an approach towards the issue that might bring different outcomes.

4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

4.1. The nature of Anarchy

In order to further analyze this case and threat to security in the Western Balkans it needs to introduce some major and relevant international relations theories and literature. Starting with Realism and the basics of Realism in international relations theories, when considering the international arena, we observe a form and situation of anarchy occurring. There is not a form of solid power and authority above the state-level. Each sovereign state has the maximum power and authority when it comes to itself and one state could not dictate or have additional authority over another sovereign state. Of course, there are plenty of international organizations but their status and power is limited and they can only offer much as facilitating, forming diplomatic/political, economic or even military relationships, or even suggesting and proposing solutions to issues and conflicts that may occur between members or certain parties that might have an impact and a spillover effect on member states.

When we think of realism as an international relations theory, we have to mention the founding fathers that established the roots for the rest of the theorists to further develop their approach and theories. Starting with Thucydides' works, he demonstrates how an unchecked desire for more power results from power that is not restrained by moderation and a sense of justice. The size of an empire has no logical bounds. Following their conquest of Melos, the Athenians invade Sicily in an effort to gain glory and wealth. They ignore the Melian claim that taking justice into account will ultimately benefit everyone. Furthermore, the Athenians' self-serving reasoning shows to be incredibly shortsighted as they overestimate their power and ultimately lose the war (Finley et al., 1972).

Furthermore, Machiavelli with his work “Prince” establishes the grounds of modern politics. In both domestic and foreign affairs, Machiavellianism is a radical model of political realism. It is a doctrine that contends morality has no place in politics and justifies using both moral and immoral means to further one's political objectives. Even though Machiavelli never uses the phrase “ragione di stato” or its French equivalent, “raison d'état,” for him, what matters most is exactly that: whatever is best for the state, rather than ethical scruples or norms (Niccolò Machiavelli et al., 2006).

Decision makers within a state act accordingly and rationally towards their state's interests solely and therefore actions in the interest of the international arena that would make a state seem “weak and powerless” would be considered as irrational as a state should be presented as powerful and strong to survive in such a competitive arena. With such expectations, states acknowledge that they have only themselves to rely on as there is no such thing as a higher hierarchy and power to aid them or even protect them in times of conflict, aggression and war (Camisão & Antunes, 2018). As per Hobbes' perception on nature being anarchic, he considered individuals and governments being similarly to nature as individuals' behavior that might use force at any time and in order to confront and defend such an aggression, additional force would be required on the others' end. He continued arguing that when it comes to governments, there is no such thing as a moral restraint and they would do anything in order to compete and gain for their own interest which could also result into “invading” someone for your own safety when felt threatened. However, when it comes to individuals, private self-satisfaction as glory, power and reputation are also a big part of the equation in which someone seeks their own safety and security through ending up being the aggressor and showing dominance in order to survive (Korab-Karpowicz, 2018). Hans J. Morgenthau (1904–1980) similarly to Hobbes, places individuals as humans that are mainly driven by power-lust and selfishness and he argues that the desire to dominate is the main and strongest factor which results and forms conflicts. He further tries to explain how ethics and morality could be connected with realism even though there is a slight contradiction between them with: “*Universal moral principles...cannot be applied to the actions of states in their abstract universal formulation, but ...they must be filtered through the concrete circumstances of time and place*” (Korab-Karpowicz, 2018).

Kenneth Waltz reformulated realism in international relations in a new and distinctive way and is considered as the founder of neorealism. In his work *Theory of International Politics*, he responded to the liberal challenge by using his more scientific method to correct Morgenthau's flaws in his classical realism. He contends that states in the global economy share a fundamental interest in surviving, just like firms do in a national economy. The fact that some states prioritize survival over other short-term goals and act with comparatively efficient means to that end determines the international context of states' actions or the structure of their system. Insecurity and unequal gains are two factors Waltz describes as reasons why cooperation is limited by the anarchic international system. Each state in anarchy lacks confidence in the motives of its neighbors and fears that potential benefits from cooperation might benefit other states more than it, making it dependent on them (Waltz, 1979). "*States do not willingly place themselves in situations of increased dependence. In a self-help system, considerations of security subordinate economic gain to political interest.*" (Waltz 1979, 107).

4.2. Structural realism

Continuing with one of the main theories this paper will be using which is the Security Dilemma, it is appropriate and necessary to firstly explain and understand Structural realism. Mainly based and influenced by the Realism theories, Structural realism is divided into two subcategories: Defensive realism and Offensive realism. Offensive realists in common with classical realists assume that states driven by their human desires and hunger for power and dominance, want to expand and empower themselves as much as they can. As Thucydides mentions in "The Melian Dialogue": "*the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must.*" (Thucydides, 1982). So, in order to maintain your own state's national security, you have to be offensive towards any existing or possible threats to gain a status and enough power so you could not get threatened by other parties or actors that as a result would become or be small enough compared to you. This achieved through investing and building in a big and reliable military strength. As the commonly and widely known strategic saying: *offence is the best defence*. On the other hand, defensive realists see offensive realism as dangerous and controversial as with too much power, whether military or not, the international arena and in particular the other state actors would try to build and adapt themselves accordingly in order to balance themselves around it, which in

itself creates a situation of uneasiness and a vicious almost loop-like circle.

John Mearsheimer similarly with Kenneth Waltz, consider a situation in which two actors hold the majority of power and influence in the international arena as more stable and safe environment than an arena with more than two “superpowers”. Arguing that with only two superpowers there are fewer opportunities for conflicts and wars to happen, there would possibly be less imbalances between these two superpowers as compared to more superpowers which in their end result to more variables and more imbalances that could trigger any scenarios of conflict and lastly the great power miscalculation would be significantly lower (Johnson & Thayer, 2016).

On the other hand, defensive realists strongly oppose the offensive ones as they see the anarchic international arena as a mean in order to develop and encourage other more defensive and restrained strategies. In this approach, security is their top priority, minimizing loses and maintaining their power-level balance. However, conflict and wars could be unavoidable even with such a defensive approach if the conditions are met. Defensive realists’ view on aggression is that it would only provoke counter-balance and the confrontation would not be very efficient or even worth it as logically in most cases the defensive party has a noticeable variety of advantages to the offensive party. Rather than promoting such expansionistic and hegemonic values and ideals, the defensive realists strongly support cooperation in the international arena and encourage moderation but factors such dependency, cheating and vulnerability come along to create a barrier which is often hard to overcome from states in such an environment they are in (Lobell, 2017). In contrast with the offensive realism in which states seek security through the maximization of power and also differing from the classical realism in which security is sought through the balancing of powers seeking hegemony as the end goal, the defensive counterpart seeks security through power sufficiency in which they do not seek more power than they already possess. Instead, they concentrate more on maintaining that power-level balance in the anarchic arena.

4.3. Security Dilemma

The security dilemma falls slightly under the defensive realism's umbrella. It is one of the most important and relevant theories in international relations firstly developed as concepts by Herbert Butterfield, John Herz and Robert Jervis (Tang, 2009). Jervis argues that due to the absence of a higher hierarchical power, states are less likely to comply and cooperate towards a common goal and well-being. Such cooperation to be achieved, needs for all parties to trust each other to do respectively their tasks and maintain rules that might have been commonly agreed to but it is a very difficult thing to be achieved in such an anarchic environment where none can hold accountable or punish anyone who violates such issues (Jervis, 1978).

Jervis uses a hunting example but also the 'Prisoner's Dilemma' fits very well the situation he is explaining. This simplified example shows that how two rational individuals face a dilemma in which if they both comply rationally which in this case if both do not talk, they will get the most efficient and desired outcome. However, if one of them confesses, he condemns the other one but gets the desired result himself and if they both confess, they both get the worst outcome as a result (Kuhn, 2019). This simple scenario between two individuals creates a sense of distress and mistrust no matter how rationally someone would think it through. Taking this small example and blowing the proportions of it into bigger things "at stake" which would be whole states, we better understand how hard it is for such big governing bodies to trust and depend into each other without some form of hierarchy and a type of supervision from more powerful actors. The levels of uncertainty such situations create, "force" states to be selfish in order to maintain or gain their maximum security or benefits and not risk anything by trying to maintain the "common good". Cooperation between countries might fail even if they both find each other trustworthy. When it comes to such big actors as states, there is always a deep uncertainty, fear and suspicion. It creates a loop in which the one that finds the other certain, does not surely know that the other also consider them as certain and it creates the aforementioned issues to arise (Ramsay et al., 2013). This form of insecurity is too big for such actors to fully trust each other.

Returning to Jervis' perception on the security dilemma and the issues that arise, a significant increase of a state's security results in the decreased security for others. In other words, the more a state increases its security without any malign or conquering purposes and solely considering its own national security and territory, makes other state actors to feel their security "decreased" and weak which results into a state of concern and uneasiness regarding the situation and considering the mistrust. Such scenarios could potentially result into a conflict and even a full-scaled war (TANG, 2010). However, such misinterpretations no matter the rationality of a state, could also result into a broken trust and bad state relationships that even years or decades later could make impossible for such states to reconcile with each other. On the other hand, the state building up its security forces is hard to be understood from its adversaries whether it has greedy conquering purposes or solely defensive ones. However, it can be slightly understood by the type of military forces it is building up, whether they are efficient in defending their own territory or they are building up a surplus of military which logically would be too unnecessarily costlier and more efficient on offense. The later one could "tip-off" the adversaries into slightly understanding and evaluating this state's intentions in order to properly react, face or even prevent any possible scenarios that they can within their power. However, to have a positive cooperation between states, a lot of factors and variables come into play like: psychological state of the actors, political and bureaucratic biases and conditions they face. Additionally, actor states should also evaluate others in order to understand if the others are into a situation of security dilemma in order to prevent negative scenarios and enhance cooperation (Glaser, 1997).

4.3.1 Security Dilemma and Regional Conflicts

The French Revolution was the first "event" to put up and gather big armies for politically motivated reasons and goals. Additionally, after the fall of empires and the formation of nation-states, the strong national identity was seen and understood as the key tool in order to unify, motivate and gather mass armies for efficient combat especially in the offensive. This collective identity of belonging in the same ethnic, linguistic, religious and cultural group is considered as a more powerful and dangerous offensive military power. Technology was also considered as the main and more important factor which would affect the results of an armed conflict until the First World War. However, with the creation and

possession of nuclear weapons, this group solidarity loses its effectiveness and would not launch nuclear attacks or counterattacks because in the military's point of view, nuclear relationship is way more important than nationalism and nationalistic values (Posen, 1993).

Geography is also a huge factor and a very strong variable when it comes to offensive and defensive military capabilities. Some states thrive in the defensive part as their main security tool as their geographical conditions would make them impenetrable or would require countless of resources and effort for an aggressor to invade them that would result as inefficient and not worth for such a move to happen. On the other hand, there are such states whose geographical position makes it very hard to nearly impossible to properly maintain security through defending their territory and in order to do so they become offensive to prevent conflicts and wars from happening within their borders. However, despite the aforementioned factors, some states that are usually neutral when it comes to conflicts and issues in the international arena, have a tendency of structuring only a defensive army which would be mainly consisted of infantry rather than military vehicles, tanks, etc. which are considered more as the offensive ones. Examples of such states would be Switzerland, Sweden and Finland.

As also seen in Posen's work, a state would seek to maintain its own national security also by being offensive and attacking in cases which he mentions as "windows of opportunity". If a party presents more advantages and the counterparty is seen in a disadvantageous spot in a peculiar point in time that would not be present later, also considering that security would be achieved through offensive power, then political and military leaders are predisposed to attack as this form of preventive war would be more appealing. A similar case explaining this would be the Serbian behavior as they introduced the 'ethnic cleansing' term in order to create and grow their own homogenous population areas and to force other population groups to leave (Posen, 1993).

As mentioned above, in the conditions of anarchy, what a group does to ensure their security might threaten the security of another group. In an arena where two or more ethnic groups are competing with each other and when defensive and offensive military powers are indistinguishable from each other, together with the situation in which offense had the advantage over defense, the security dilemma gets very intense and could potentially result in major ethnic conflicts. However, in such ethnic conflicts there is a risk of fanatic and

highly nationalistic paramilitary bands to arise that create and fuel unarmed civilians with terror. Despite of such groups being small in numbers, their determination for their 'greater cause' could be very rough and act in such ways which would be morally unacceptable or even break several laws from international agreements and conventions. Their efficiency and them being unofficial, is usually benefitting the aggressor party as political officials could easily deny any responsibility for such groups and actions and as a result avoid being held accountable. The more the group solidarity and nationalism increases in an intermixed population environment, more violent paramilitary bands appear and in its order, more hostility and distress is created between a possibly new or old state and less security as a result (Rose, 2000).

Another standpoint and form of maintaining defensive security is also having good relations with a strong ally who would help in defending and provide protection in cases of receiving offensive attacks from other parties but this is a highly dependent on outside forces which kind of leaves the anarchic realist theory premises.

In many cases, considering a lot of perspectives, them having experience from past conflicts or just by rationalization or different literature, in such scenarios when there is an aggravating conflict between two parties and there is an existing potential into escalating into a war, the first blow is critically of importance. The first party to deploy an offensive attack has a lot of advantages over the defender. Such attacks might be unexpected and leave the defending party unable to properly react, confiscating arms and weapons, disabling the enemy military etc. However this case only applies when the two parties have nearly equal power or in the case where the big and stronger party attacks the smaller and weaker one. The vice-versa could not be applicable.

When it comes to regional conflicts, it is usually the case where Regional Ethnic Diversity exists, that meaning that there are more than one ethnic group in a single geographical territory and neither is numerically stronger and more dominant than the other, otherwise when the population of that area is consisted of a homogenous ethnicity or that one ethnic group is significantly stronger and more dominant than the other. The aforementioned first strike usually happens to the first category as it could actually impact the outcome of the conflict, dissimilarly with the second category in which such an action as argued before, could make little to no impact at all. Environments in which the ethnic diversity is

significant are more prone to resulting in ethnic conflicts in order to gain the control and the majority status of the area (Melander, 2009).

4.3.2 Societal Security Dilemma

Similarly to the security dilemma previously mentioned, the societal security dilemma is a situation where societies or better defined, different ethnic groups residing within the same territory find themselves as a threat to the existence of each other. The difference from the state security dilemma would be that the subjects that find themselves in such a dilemma are ethnic groups themselves and not whole states as an entity. It could be labeled as an intrastate phenomenon where the existence of an ethnic group could be threatening to another and even actions one ethnic group takes might be perceived as malicious and hostile to the other. Survival is a key concept in both state and societal security, where state security is focused on threats to sovereignty; if a state loses its sovereignty, it will not survive as a state. Similarly, if a society loses its identity, it will not survive as a society (ROE, 2002). By continuous application of repressive measures against the expression of identity, which may include forbidding the use of language, names, dress, through shutdown of places of education and religion, to the deportation or killing of members of the community, societal security concerns and threats may arise (Buzan, 2016).

Returning to Roe, he claims that military means can be used to protect societal identity. This is especially true if identity and geography are intertwined, as in the defense of the traditional "motherland." In this way, it stands to reason that an armed response will be required if the threat posed by one ethnic group to another is an armed one (such as an armed attack from a neighboring society). However, this kind of scenario does not work well when trying to formulate a specific societal security dilemma. Given the close relationship between societal identity and territorial integrity, it is likely that the dynamics of the concept will closely resemble those of its traditional (state) counterpart: societies will arm to defend their identity (territory), which will in turn cause the same spiral of arms races. However, it may be necessary to frequently defend societal security through non-military means. At the intrastate level, many groups may not be as vulnerable as they believe they are because of armed aggression, but rather because of political or demographic trends that aim to strip societies of traditions that are essential to the preservation of their cultures (ROE, 2002).

5. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

5.1 Kosovo

The Western Balkan wars are a product of the dissolution of the Yugoslav federation. With the end of the Cold War and more democratic values getting spread internationally together with the collapse of communism, the disintegration of the Yugoslav federation was inevitable. Due to the nature of the previous type of regime and governance, populations were ethnically mixed to some extent in many of these countries' territories. This transition happening in the region, together with the violent conflicts that escalated between most of the former Yugoslav members and Serbia left the region with big structural problems. Such problems would be political instability, economic underdevelopment, corruption, growing criminalization, discontented minority situations and democratic institutions not properly functional (Lesser et al., 2001). Many of these mentioned problems affect the region to this day and this instability could be seen as a threat for the European security and well-being. Many would argue that the stability of this region is one of the main challenges the European Union has to deal with and help further improve for their broader integration within the European institutions.

When it comes to the other member countries of the Western Balkans like Kosovo or Bosnia, the situation gets slightly more complicated. Both of these countries suffered from devastating wars against Serbia in the late 90s. In the case of Kosovo, the region has been consisted of a mainly homogenous population of ethnic Albanians and has been quite autonomous within the Yugoslav Federation. However, the then political leader of Serbia (Yugoslavia then) Milosevic waived any autonomy the region had and placed it under direct control of Belgrade. Ibrahim Rugova, who was the leader of the ethnic Albanians residing in the region mitigated a series of nonviolent protests against the situation but was harshly deflected and objected by the Serbian minority residing in the region and by Milosevic as they claimed that the region of Kosovo is of high historical and religious

importance for Serbia to be let to the ethnic Albanians. As a result tensions rose between the two ethnic groups and a violent conflict escalated resulting in countless of war crimes happening and even a genocide act from the Serbian part towards the ethnic Albanians. Worth mentioning is also the act of displacing hundreds of thousands ethnic Albanians from their homes and forcing them to find shelter in neighboring countries such as Albania, North Macedonia and Montenegro (The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, 2018).

The genocide and crimes against humanity that happened during the war, drew the attention of the West and through NATO, they felt the need for immediate intervention in the region in order to achieve stability. With NATO's intervention and attacks against Serbia, Kosovo regained its own autonomy and declared itself as an independent state in 2008. However, due to this day many do not approve and do not recognize it as a sovereign state which in its order makes Kosovo's approach in the international arena more complicated. Kosovo has yet to become a complete member of many political, security and economic international organizations such as the UN, NATO or EU. It cannot be fully admitted as UN member because only 109 UN members recognize its legal independence and plenty others do not. Members who do recognize it are countries like the US, most European states etc. meanwhile Serbia backed by Russia, strongly oppose such claims and others like China, India, South Africa also disagree when it comes to its international recognition (Newman & Visoka, 2016). Kosovo has also expressed its interest in joining the European Union and has partially done economic and other agreements with the Europe's largest and most impactful organization however, there are obstacles that do not allow the accession talks to take place and for it to start its accession path into the EU (Press and information team of the EU Office/EU Special Representative in Kosovo, 2021).

There are five current EU members that do not recognize Kosovo as an independent state and therefore the accession of Kosovo into the EU cannot be unanimously agreed upon. Despite many full filled EU criteria that Kosovo reflects, Spain, Greece, Cyprus, Slovakia and Romania are the obstructing EU members which in their perspective a normalization in diplomatic relationship between Kosovo and Serbia should take place first before such accession talks could happen. At first sight, such an attitude would seem out of place from countries that are not really Serbian and Russian allies, however when dug deeper, these

aforementioned countries have their own issues regarding such similar cases with minorities and different ethnicities within their territory (*Spain's Impact on Kosovo's Accession Process into the EU*, 2021). Spain for example does not want to give any legitimate grounds for the independence movement happening in its own province of Catalonia and therefore refused participation in the 2018 Western Balkan summit in Sofia. Cyprus's grounds of objection is that it deals with Turkey's one third occupation of the island which is the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus which was created after a coup in 1974. Therefore, Greece stands by Cyprus's position and they both continue to not recognize Kosovo's independence until an agreement between Prishtina and Belgrade takes place and validated by the UN. Slovakia's approach on the matter however is justified by looking at their historical past and border issues they faced, gaining territorial borders after the First World War and having ethnic Hungarian minorities within their territory who later on were demanding reunification with Hungary according to their old borders. Similarly, Romania has itself dealt with ethnic Hungarian minorities predominating a region which was always refused any sort of autonomy from any Romanian governments through the years (Turp-Balazs, 2021).

When it comes to the other dominant international organization in the West, NATO which has security and maintaining peace and stability in the international arena but mainly concerning its own member states, Kosovo despite having NATO peace-keeping and peace-building troops within its territory since the 1999 intervention to stop the war and the ethnic cleansing already happening, is yet to be accepted as a NATO member. Despite the interest shown from Kosovo's part to join the organization, four already members of NATO, also members of the EU: Greece, Romania, Slovakia and Spain, as mentioned previously do not yet recognize Kosovo as an independent and sovereign state and therefore due to the admission rules of unanimity it is impossible for it to join this Western alliance and participate in military partnership activities (Bami, 2021; NATO, 2018).

5.2 Bosnia and Herzegovina

Previous to the Kosovo's war and following the Croatian and Slovenian secessions from the Yugoslav federation that also resulted in violent conflicts, the Bosnian war was triggered also by its attempt to declare its independence from the Yugoslav federation in the early to mid-90s. The European Community after recognizing Croatia and Slovenia as

sovereign independent states, suggested the same thing to Bosnia and the later one held a referendum voting for independence. However, due to being ethnically mixed region with Bosnian-Muslims, Bosnian-Croats (Catholics) and Bosnian-Serbs (Orthodox) such a task was not an easy feat and was not positively received by all the parties involved. The Bosnian-Serbs obstructed the voting process and the Bosnian-Serbian political parties boycotted the referendum. However despite such instances, almost the whole electorate casted their vote towards independence. Soon enough, despite efforts of negotiation facilitated from the EC, the violent conflict begun with the Bosnian-Serbs and paramilitary groups attacking and sieging the eastern part of Bosnia followed and supported soon by Yugoslav military units leaving with almost two thirds of Bosnian territory under Serbian control. An agreement took place between the Bosnians and the Bosnian-Croats to face the Serbs and a joint federation was formed. On the other hand at the time, international actors such as the UN refused to intervene but later on it established some “safe areas” for humanitarian aid but failed to properly protect them and keep them as “safe” areas as it was intended. The biggest massacre and genocide occurred in Europe after the Second World War in Srebrenica where more than seven thousand Bosnian men were killed from the Bosnian Serbs and only then it drew the serious attention from Western forces such as NATO. The later one intervened after such a disastrous event and through a series of attacks towards the Bosnian Serbs negotiations were made possible and the Dayton Accords were endorsed and ended the conflict with Bosnia being a federation of which 51 percent of the territorial land would be governed by the Croat-Bosnian federation and 49 percent would become a Serb republic (Lampe, 2019).

The end result is Bosnia currently having one of the most complex and complicated governing systems in the world which make it even harder for it to join international organizations and compete in the international arena. However, this is not the only issue. Having tripartite presidency dealing with domestic and foreign issues could be arguably not very efficient and optimal. A big deal of internal issues such as corruption, unemployment, deficiency in institutional-body functioning etc. leaves the country behind when it comes to progression, democratization and European integration (Nardelli & Dzidic, 2014). Bosnia is recognized by the EU as a potential candidate however due to its numerous internal challenges had not met the EU’s criteria and finally applied for membership in 2016. However the EU suggested and implied that Bosnia still needed deep reforms in many of its sectors such as a functioning democracy, the rule of law,

fundamental rights and public administration (*Bosnia and Herzegovina*, 2020). Due to these many issues, Bosnia is considered and estimated to be the last in ranking towards the EU when compared to the rest of the Western Balkan region. Since NATO intervened in Bosnia to put an end to the violent conflict, Bosnia had a decent amount of cooperation when it comes to projects and participating in programmes with NATO (NATO, 2022).

When it comes to joining the trans-Atlantic security seeking military organization, Bosnia finds itself in an awkward spot. Meanwhile the support for joining NATO reaches to 82 percent within the federation, in the Republika Srpska is only 38 percent. Despite its progress towards the completion of the requirements imposed by NATO for its membership, the Republika Srpska refuses to abide and make any progress towards these requirements by not moving any defense properties and appealed to the State Court against it (Stiglmayer, 2015). This could be explained by looking back at the interactions between NATO and ethnic Serbs. NATO in order to seek the stabilization and security in the region resulted into attacking Serbia during the Kosovo war and Bosnian-Serbs during the Bosnian war. This has left a “bad taste” to the ethnic Serbian people and many would even consider the organization and the Western actors as their “enemy”. This could be seen by a survey made in Serbia in which 80 percent of the respondents would be against their country getting membership in NATO (EWB, 2020). However, such a phenomenon could be also explained through the strong relations Serbia has with Russia, which would be further analyzed later on.

5.3. North Macedonia

Contrasting the rest of the region, North Macedonia’s departure from the Yugoslav federation was peaceful without causing and triggering any sort of conflicts with Yugoslav hegemon, Serbia. North Macedonian citizens voted in 1991 for their independence and therefore North Macedonia declared its sovereignty and was considered as an independent state. However, following such events it faced some issues and challenges with other parties such as Greece and Albania. Due to its heterogeneous ethnic population mainly consisted of a majority ethnic North Macedonians (Orthodox) and ethnic Albanians (Muslims), who the later ones were estimated to make almost a fourth of the states’ whole population, issues rose regarding institutional and citizenship rights for the minority. A balance between preserving the national North Macedonian identity and giving full rights

to the ethnic Albanians became not an easy feat. The indigenous ethnic Albanians and the displaced ones from the Kosovo conflict within the territory, following the defeat of the Serbian nationalistic leader in the conflict in Kosovo, expressed their displeasure and protested against the unequal and unfair treatment they were getting as ‘secondary’ citizens. A more pluralist approach was needed when it came to the North Macedonian constitution and so it was remodeled in order to reflect on the Macedonian people and the rest residing within its territory such as Albanians, Turks, Vlachs, Serbian, Bosnians and Romany people (“North Macedonia - Independence | Britannica,” 2019).

There have been efforts by the parliament to try and pass laws making Albanian the second official language in the country but despite them being passed by a majority in the parliament, the president has refused twice to sign as he claims such a change would be against the constitution (EWB, 2019). As a result, Macedonian maintained its status as the only official language in the state, however, Albanian which until then was recognized as also an official language in areas where the minority consisted of at least 20 percent, would be used more under the legislation (RFE/RL, 2018).

The conflict with Greece was for its name as Greece claimed that the particular name belonged historically and geographically to them as the central-northern region of Greece is called Macedonia. From such a dispute, Greece has vetoed a decent amount of times North Macedonia’s integration and accession talks with the EU and NATO. In 2018, as a fruitful result of years of negotiations and compromise with Greece and an agreement was signed by both parties to slightly change the state’s name from Republic of Macedonia to Republic of North Macedonia. From such an agreement achieved for the sake of distinctions between the Greek province and the state of North Macedonia, Greece withdrew its veto against North Macedonia and cleared the path for the latter’s accession negotiations within the EU and NATO. The European Council decided to open accession negotiations for North Macedonia in 2020 considering its development and the aforementioned agreement (*North Macedonia*, 2020).

However, North Macedonia’s path towards the EU is later, again blocked and vetoed by another EU member, this time Bulgaria. Bulgarian officials claim that the two neighboring Balkan countries have strong historical and cultural ties and that the Macedonian language is nothing more but a different dialect of the Bulgarian language. They also refuse to

properly address and recognize North Macedonians as a different ethnic identity and it does not view it as a separate state from Bulgaria. Three main conditions were set for North Macedonia to fulfill in order for the veto to be lifted but the later one claimed and expressed that such ultimatums were against European principles and the right to self-determination. The current Bulgarian governing party lowered the conditions for North Macedonia to properly address and recognize the Bulgarian minority within its territory and constitution, giving them more rights as they make up for 0.19 percent of the population. However, such a decision was decision was condemned and angrily confronted by other Bulgarian political parties and even the Bulgarian electorate that later labeled it as “a National betrayal” (Welle (www.dw.com), 2022).

When it comes to North Macedonia’s relationship with NATO, the agreement on the name dispute with Greece was very positively considered and together with past cooperation and assistance the country showed in NATO-led missions in Afghanistan and Kosovo and NATO’s support when violence occurred in 2001 in North Macedonia between ethnic Albanian insurgents and security forces, accession negotiations started and soon enough North Macedonia gained its full membership into the military alliance in 2020 (NATO, 2020). It became the third NATO member in the region of the Western Balkans which also caused some unpleasanties from Russia’s part as its influence within the region is slowly declining further and more actors are seeking and striving for alliances with the West.

5.4. Montenegro

After the almost total dissolution of the Yugoslav federation, with Croatia, Slovenia, North Macedonia and Bosnia declaring independence and their secessions from the federation, Montenegro and Serbia were the only ones left under that name which could not be maintained anymore. Notably, Montenegro supported and joined Serbia during the wars in Croatia and Bosnia and therefore suffered and was impacted by the heavy sanctions imposed by the UN against Yugoslavia at the time. However, due to the improper power and economic balance between itself and Serbia, paired with disagreements during the Bosnian and Croatian wars, made Montenegro to withdraw its military units from the Yugoslav army. With agreements between the two parties, they renamed themselves from Yugoslavia federation to the country of Serbia and Montenegro, although three years later both parties held referendums in order to declare independence and withdraw from the

Union they formed. Montenegro's claim for independence was well-received from Serbia who recognized it as a sovereign state very soon after (Lampe, 2022).

Shortly after its declaration of independence from the Union with Serbia, Montenegro applied and sought its path towards European integration and joining the EU. With plenty of positive and favorable responses from different EU member states, Montenegro's accession negotiations started in 2012 and currently shares the candidate status together with Serbia (*Montenegro*, 2020). Notably, these two are the most progressed and integrated countries on the EU perspective and the only ones who are in the candidate status to being an EU member in the WB region. However, the latter one due to recent developments and its opposition to impose sanctions against the Russian aggression in the Ukrainian crisis, is facing a progress roll-back and raised skepticism when it comes to its European integration and becoming an EU member.

Montenegro is currently a full NATO member. In 2015 it was invited by the organization for accession talks and in 2017 its accession was successfully voted to officially join (NATO, 2017). Montenegro's government faced a few clash backs when it came for such a decision. The opposition, mainly pro-Russian was heavily protesting and rejecting such a decision. Assassination attempts and a coup attempt took place in order to overthrow the government and prevent the country from becoming a member of NATO and a western ally despite the opposition and threats it received from Russia which considered Montenegro as a historic Orthodox and Slav ally (Gadzo, 2019).

6. ANALYSIS

Before moving on into analyzing our data and the situations occurred, it is worth to make a distinction between the structural and state security dilemma that might occur between states regarding their military or structural bodies, and the societal security dilemma which occurs and impacts societies as an entity. Similarly to the state security dilemma, actions taken from a society for it to strengthen its own societal security and strengthen its identity might cause a reaction from a second society. As a result we might notice a similar outcome that a society's security strengthening might decrease the second one's or vice versa. However in such events, societal or even ethnic identity is mainly threatened and not sovereignty like in state security dilemmas.

Due to the anarchic state of the international arena, states and actors are responsible themselves for their own well-being and security. Some would argue that due to the globalization phenomenon occurring in the last years this would not be the case but on the other hand when it comes to self-security and the prevention of conflicts or aggressions between state-actors, it is indeed a mostly self-help system. However, this does not exclude the possibility for outside actors to mediate and intervene in extreme cases of violent conflicts. The lack of a central authority and a higher-level actor to regulate and maintain relations or even impose restrictions between states leave room for states to act accordingly and prioritize their self-interest and security even though that might negatively impact other states and societies. Such are the cases this paper discusses, of the Western Balkans.

6.1. Anarchy

There are two key and powerful institutions when it comes to the European continent in which the Western Balkans reside, the EU and NATO. Both being international organizations, the EU mainly an economic and political union between most of the European states and NATO through which many of the EU and some non EU states

residing mainly in the European region, together with the US and Canada cooperate militarily to enhance the security of their fellow member states and maintain peace and stability in the broader region. However, the later one strictly sets geographical priorities and deals with threats or potential threats towards the well-being of its members and NATO neighbors that might directly or indirectly impact its members in various ways. The EU as explained, being mainly an economic and political union, it lacks military capabilities and structures and in cases of conflict it can only exert acts of soft power and impose economic sanctions. However, due to its close ties and relationship with NATO, pleads a request to the latter which is already consisted of many mutual members, to intervene when it sees it as necessary. Despite this however, recent debates have sparked considering the EU to form a military or not. However, it is arguable that states that have highly developed economic relations and are strong economic partners with each other have fewer tendencies and less probability to find themselves in a security dilemma with each other. Therefore the EU with its structure and functionality lowers the possibilities for aggravated and hostile relations between its members. There is also the UN which is the largest international organization operating in various field and scopes which is consists of almost all the sovereign states in the world, however, due to its security council's structure and form of functioning makes it unable to properly act when it comes to conflicts and wars.

Therefore, when it comes to the Western Balkan wars, due to the high security dilemma that arose in the region and issues between ethnic identities that appeared, states or "states-to be" had to rely on themselves during the conflicts with Serbia or former Yugoslavia. Despite them being geographically between many EU and NATO member states, the organizations and mainly NATO acted to intervene and put an end to the conflicts. However, their attention was drawn only when a series of humanitarian crises and crimes against humanity were happening with the genocides and mass ethnic cleansing in Bosnia and Kosovo. Such conflicts were heavily destabilizing the region and broader impacting neighbor states and due to aforementioned crises, NATO had to intervene and stop further bloodshed from happening. Such an intervention some would call as positive and rescuing, some would call it as coming too late even though it had the power and possibility to prevent such tragedies from happening beforehand, and even some would condemn it which would most probably come from Serbia's part and its society because they suffered NATO's aggression and bombings in order for the conflict to stop and diplomatic

relationships to be established. Considering it as an act out of its “jurisdiction” as it was not threatening any of its members and refusing accountability on the humanitarian crimes however, this could be intensively argued and debated on and on. Additionally, such an intervention has left Serbia and its society to see NATO as their “antagonist and enemy” making it the sole country in the region to not show any interest and desire to join the military peacekeeping organization later on despite the both of them cooperating in some peace making and peacekeeping operations, possible and future membership is out of the picture.

All members of the Western Balkans aspire to potentially join the European Union but none has managed to do so far. Montenegro and Serbia are a step ahead when it comes to EU membership and for both of them accession talks are underway but with Serbia facing more difficulties as it has to achieve reconciliation and a diplomatic agreement with Kosovo by recognizing it as a sovereign state as a part of its conditions. Serbia on the other hand shows that it is not considering any potential recognition for Kosovo in the near future. Additionally, it seems to take steps back when it comes to its EU accession as it did not agree to place any sanctions against Russia for its invasion and aggression towards Ukraine as proposed from the EU. Serbia’s actions towards the recent developments regarding the war in Ukraine has left the country in an awkward middle spot ground where it is seen as trying to hold off on both ends, one being Russia and the other being its counterpart, the West. Serbia joined the West in three UN resolutions condemning the Russian aggression in Ukraine however, it still refuses to place any sanctions towards its Eastern ally (Dartford, 2022). As a result of such neutrality which could be seen as even absurd considering its aspirations to join the EU, EU officials have expressed their disappointment and disapproval for such actions and are even implying that Serbia might have disqualified itself from EU accession (Eror, 2022). Noteworthy would also be that the majority of the Serbian electorate for the first time when asked, would vote against joining the EU in a poll conducted by Ipsos and published in Blic newspaper (Jasnić, 2022).

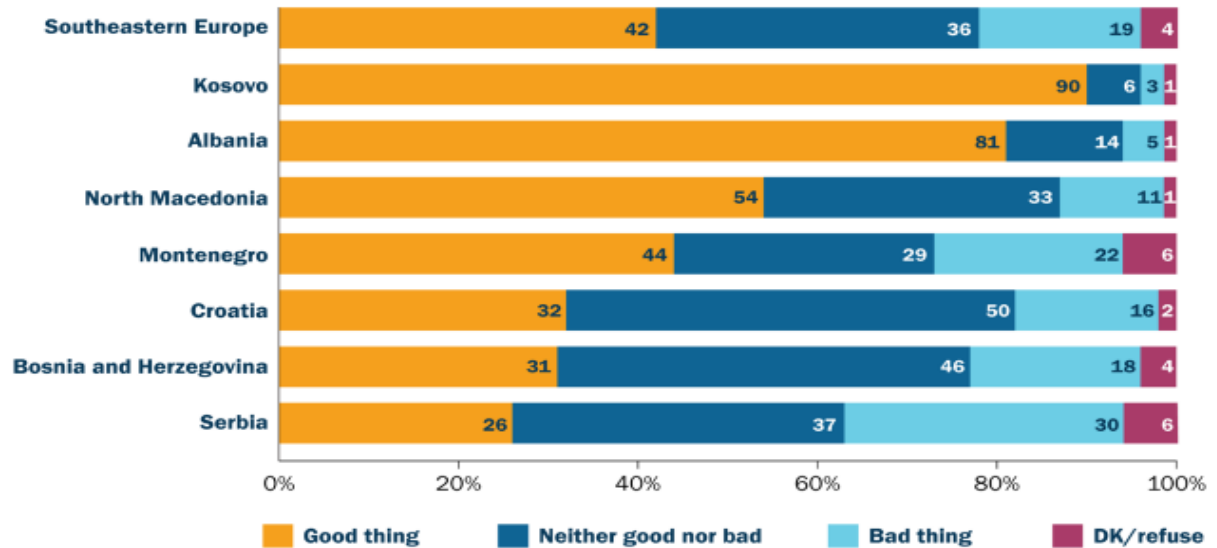
The two following countries regarding EU membership are Albania and North Macedonia who they both share the status of being in the accession negotiations stage which was agreed to open by the European Council in 2020. Albania on one hand is facing struggles within its structure and democratization process and has yet to fully and effectively carry out all the necessary reforms in different sectors as required from the EU’s conditions.

Corruption, judicial reforms, rule of law, democratic levels and government's influence on the mass media are yet to be achieved and compared to EU's standards and requirements. North Macedonia on the other hand, despite similar issues with Albania has shown a slight advantage over its neighbor when it comes to them. However, a conflict with Greece over its name and national symbols made the latter one use its veto powers and block the country's accession. Although a diplomatic resolution and agreement took place between the two, making Macedonia to change its name to North Macedonia, Greece withdrew its veto but its accession was now and is currently blocked by Bulgaria's veto. The issue with Bulgaria is that, despite being one of the first to recognize North Macedonia as a sovereign state, it does not recognize it as a different nationality and ethnicity other than Bulgarian. Bulgarians additionally claim that North Macedonia's language is not a different language but a derivate and just a different dialect of Bulgarian. They fail to recognize the North Macedonian ethnicity and therefore made demands for them to lift the veto. Such demands of reforming the constitution and giving full rights to the Bulgarian minority in North Macedonia which is the equivalent of 0.19 percent of the country's population and accepting their language and heritage is indeed Bulgarian, were perceived as absurd from North Macedonia's part as it called it a clear violation over EU's laws and policies over self-identification. However, both parties are engaged in efforts to work on the first condition, the Bulgarian government would lose its electorate's support if waived its other demands in order to waive the veto. However, recent events are awaited and the Council's opinion in the upcoming summit this year regarding these two countries' progress and status.

Leaving Bosnia and Kosovo for last as their situation could be considered as the "bottom" of the ladder when it comes to Western Balkans gaining EU membership. Despite its significant progress within its body and structures, Kosovo is still facing issues of recognition. A handful of EU member states fail to recognize Kosovo as a sovereign state and therefore its accession is being halted right at the beginning. Bosnia on the hand, having such a complex form of governance, has countless issues and reforms to do within itself and is very behind when it comes to EU's agenda of progress as explained in the background section. However, both countries share the potential candidate status as they both aspire in becoming members of the continent's dominant and mainly economic organization.

The upcoming graph in Figure 6.1.1 shows how different societies in the Western Balkans view their position and how favorable they perceive becoming an EU member would be.

Figure 6.1.1. Do you think that EU membership would be (is – for Croatia) a good thing, a bad thing, or neither good nor bad?



Reprinted from: Group of authors – GfK. (2017). *Balkan Barometer 2017: Public Opinion Survey* (M. Handjiska-Trendafilova & V. Gligorov, Eds.; p. 29). Regional Cooperation Council. <http://www.rcc.int/>.

There is a big noticeable gap between the Albanians and ethnic Albanians in Kosovo and the rest of the region when it comes to their opinion on EU membership. This could be argued as both ethnic Albanian countries see joining the EU as strictly positive because of the good relations they have with Western powers when compared to the East.

The Kosovo’s war intervention by NATO and the EU’s sanctions against Yugoslavia have also impacted the opinion for such an outcome. However it is also arguable that both countries come from a different ethnic heritage when compared to the rest of the Western Balkans that share Slavic cultural and linguistic heritage. Additionally, their relationship with Serbia that in its own term is mostly backed by Russia in decisions and stands, strive them the other way as they might feel threatened by the East, together with the non-recognition and blockage Serbia and Russia are doing to Kosovo in the international arena. Albania also suffering from the consequences of a strict isolation period during its communist regime and dictatorship, has the tendency to seek establishing good economic

and political relations with the modern international powers.

Albania, North Macedonia and Montenegro have joined and are currently members of the military alliance of NATO. In Montenegro's case, its NATO membership came through some tough issues and complicated developments. A little before its accession in NATO, 14 people were found guilty for a coup attempt in order to assassinate the Prime Minister and establish a pro-Russian leadership with anti-NATO values. After they were found guilty of trying to overthrow the Montenegrin government in 2016, two Russian military intelligence officials, two Montenegrin opposition leaders, nine Serbian individuals, and another Montenegrin were sentenced to up to 15 years in jail. However, the local security forces were successful in preventing the "terrorist" event from happening through information from Western spy and intelligence organizations (Gadzo, 2019b). However, Russian and Serbian officials denied any allegations and involvement from their part in the event. On the other hand, Russia also publicly expressed its dislike and content on North Macedonia's NATO accession (Radosavljevic, 2020).

Despite the anarchic stature of the international arena, becoming a member of NATO has shown its effectiveness in the past when it comes to intervening in order to put an end to violent conflicts, especially in neighboring countries of its members. So we could consider that NATO is a threat to the violent conflicts themselves when it comes to destabilization of bordering countries that could even indirectly affect its members. Becoming a member of such an alliance lowers further the potential of a conflict outbreak and as a result member states do not face any potential security dilemmas. Their defensive capabilities are already enhanced and strengthened and being in such an alliance makes the strengthening of military capabilities and security of a fellow member not be viewed as a threat towards another member's security. Therefore, regarding the case and the ethnic disputes in North Macedonia with Albania and Bulgaria, with all three being member-allies in NATO makes a potential outbreak of a violent conflict unlikely possible. The threat of a potential loss of group identity exists between the three aforementioned states more regarding and leaning towards the ethnic Albanians and North Macedonians rather than Bulgarians but such a fear does not have the prospective to aggravate and become threatening enough towards the security in order to be placed under the security dilemma because both countries cooperate in the security sphere under NATO. As a result we might consider NATO contributing in the anarchic status and becoming a higher authority regarding military involvement,

security stabilization and peace establishment when it comes to its own members. Thus, the security dilemma would be practically impossible to appear between its two or more fellow NATO member states.

6.2. Fear

This leaves us with the rest three Western Balkan states: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo and Serbia. These three states as previously mentioned, have yet to join NATO from which one of them, Serbia has no interest to join the organization and on the other hand has close relationship and ties with the organization's counterpart which is Russia. Also with Serbia, being one of the main culprits in the series of conflict in the region's past together with the recent events of Russia invading Ukraine, the region has entered a stage of unrest filled with insecurities. These three have a higher chance to find themselves in a security dilemma especially in the relations of Kosovo-Serbia and Bosnia-Serbia as they have been involved in the past in some serious violent conflicts that even threaten the core ethnic and group identities of Kosovo and Bosnia. As a result, security enhancement and a growing military of one directly threatens the security of the other two as motives and goals of doing so might be certainly unclear. With a reconciliation on the way however not a fulfilled one so far, relations between these countries still remain somehow distressed and aggravated. Thus, this leaves the aforementioned actors facing not only a state security dilemma but also a societal one.

Serbia has been raising its investment in its own military since 2017 and in 2019 took the first place in the Balkan region from Croatia in terms of military spending and percentage of GDP funds going in the army and military assets. Also displays and showoffs of their military power and assets have become present and relatively often these last years. A Serbian minister has also used the term of "Serb world" which might implicate and is used as a form and ideal to military protect all Serbs regardless of where they live and reside which could also mean an ethnic unification and Serbia's unification which similarly drove the region into violent ethnic conflicts in the 90s. The motives behind such a move remain unclear and even the co-chair of the US-Europe Alliance organization Reuf Bajrovic, has stated that when international conditions shift in Vucic's favor, such as when US forces leave KFOR (the NATO-led peacekeeping force in Kosovo) or when Russia, Serbia's ally

decides to intervene directly in the region, Vucic is preparing to deploy military force in Kosovo and Bosnia. Additionally he claims that “*Russia-trained mercenaries in Bosnia and Montenegro are an integral part of the Serbian military strategy for the region. It is a carbon copy of Putin’s pre-invasion actions in Georgia and Ukraine,*” (Gadzo, 2021).

Border tensions between Kosovo and Serbia have also been intense lately. The tensions escalated when the ethnic Albanian government in Kosovo decided in requiring drivers entering Kosovo with Serbian license plates to switch to temporary ones as the equivalent was already happening on Serbia’s part. Drivers entering Serbia with Kosovar license plates were required to switch to temporary ones. However this decision was badly taken by the Serbian minority in Kosovo and by Serbians who orchestrated a protest blocking the two countries’ borders. Additionally, two vehicle registration offices in Kosovo were attacked and burned near the border which was an event that was seen as a clear provocation for conflict from Serbia towards Kosovo. Kosovo’s government sent special police troops to maintain order and stability on the border meanwhile its counterpart, Serbia sent a decent amount of military troops and vehicles with aircraft flying in the border. However both counterparts are accusing each other of provoking a serious international conflict (AL JAZEERA AND NEWS AGENCIES, 2021).

Considering all the aforementioned, the relations between these three states seem pretty troubled and unstable. Kosovo on its part, does not have a well-established military force on its own yet and it is mainly relying on the KFOR forces which are NATO-led troops to maintain peace and security in the region. However, KFOR is an outside force and body and Kosovo not having its well-structured and established military leaves the state in a status of uncertainty with a serious security dilemma arising because it is not a NATO member yet and it cannot fully rely on the organization’s protection and to maintain security. In 2018, lawmakers in Kosovo voted in favor of creating their own army to rely on as the state so far had only NATO’s KFOR forces as their defense in case of events to respond to. Additionally, Kosovo so far had the Kosovo Security Force (KSF) which with the new law it would be transformed into a proper and professional army. However, the Serbian politicians boycotted the voting in order to protest the law. NATO and EU officials gave their slight criticism towards the law and proclaimed that such a process could be dangerous in the current unstable situation the state is facing with Serbia and that the process should be gradually done according to the constitution (*Kosovo Security Force*

[KSF], 2018).

By 2022, Kosovo's military strength is ranked 140th out of 142 by the Global Firepower (GFP) and Military Power ranking with a PowerIndex score of **13.9136** where a score of 0.0000 is considered 'perfect'. Bosnia scores **4.0288** and is ranked 123rd on the annual GFP review. On the other hand, Serbia is ranked 61st out of 142 with a score of **0.9923** (2022 *Military Strength Ranking*, 2022). This is a clear indication on the imbalance between the two states' military strengths and that in case of a conflict escalation between the two, Kosovo lacks the capabilities of properly defending or making an offensive move against Serbia without external help.

With events taking place such as the Russian invasion on Ukraine leaves the region and the two non NATO members Bosnia and Kosovo in a highly uncertain and anxious position. The security dilemma in these two countries and their ethnic populations keep arising and is more evident now than ever before since the wars that happened in the region. Bosnia and Kosovo are highly concerned about any aggressive move from Serbia's part higher than before. The Russian ally could reflect some similar sort of behavior towards them considering their relations and historical, political and violent past. Such concerns were publicly addressed by the president of Kosovo and Bosnia's defense minister where they claim that with the on growing Russian influence in the Western Balkans and the war raging in Ukraine, regional security and further security and safety concerns could be answered by relieved with joining NATO and becoming full members of it. A few days after the declaration of war in Ukraine, Kosovo's president requested faster NATO membership as well as a permanent and fixed US military installation within its borders. She additionally pleaded with the US President to use Washington's power and influence to aid the state in joining the military alliance and she further stated that "*We are already talking to [NATO] members to make sure that everyone understands how membership is becoming indispensable, especially in light of events in Ukraine,*" (Gadzo, 2022). From such a reaction, where the President of Kosovo calling the NATO membership as indispensable and crucial it is clearly evident the fear in which the country is currently. Therefore we have a clear situation of a security dilemma which is faced by Kosovo and wants to join the western military alliance in order to strengthen and raise its own security to not be and constantly feel threatened by Serbia and its ally, Russia that is showing signs of aggression. As a relatively young sovereign state, it lacks the power and tools to

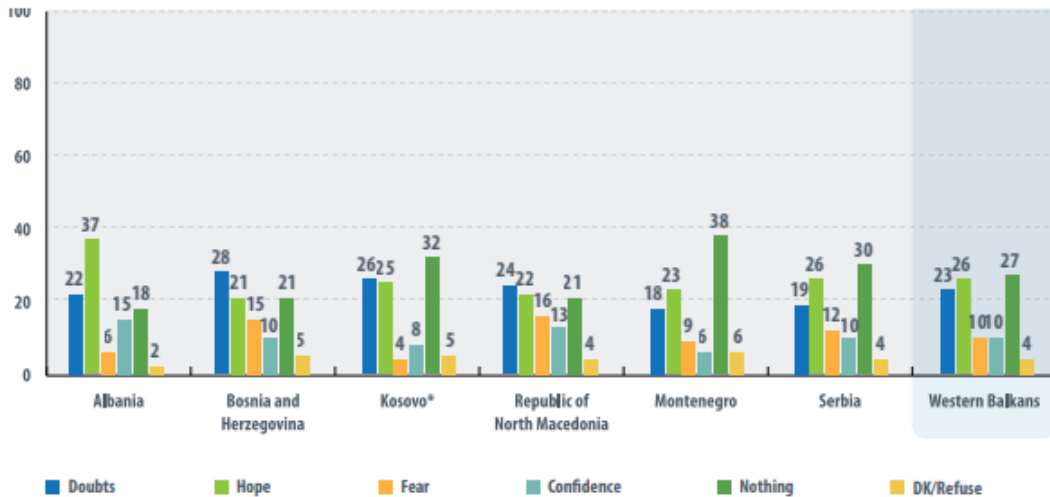
establish and grow its own defensive military power to properly and efficiently repel and confront any potential aggression acts within its territory and that is why it is mainly striving to seek comfort and stability from the actor that once helped it achieve a sort of stability and safety.

Bosnia on the other hand is facing an uncertain situation and is highly threatened for its efforts to join NATO. Similarly to Kyiv, Sarajevo's appeal towards joining NATO was strongly protested by Moscow despite their big geographic distance. Bosnia's defense minister claimed geopolitical ties will shift after the war in Ukraine, and the value of regional security will rise. This could result in Bosnia's NATO membership being accelerated however completing all the criteria would be very time consuming because of Bosnia's situation. Due to internal divisions, challenges and restrictions brought on by the 1995 Dayton peace accord, which was designed to only terminate the violent conflict, Bosnia has halted its investment in its security since roughly 2010. The Russian ambassador in Bosnia response towards Bosnia's efforts to join NATO has been heavily threatening. He claimed that "if Bosnia continues and advances its accession status towards NATO, it will become the next Ukraine". "Joining NATO is completely an internal decision within the Bosnian government and its population, however Russia will heavily react to such an event and 'hostile act' if it happens". Bosnia's representatives condemned such threats and compared it to the similar aggravated situation in Ukraine from Russia however they claim that such a threat is unacceptable to Bosnia (Mahanology, 2022). Bosnia by trying to improve its security with joining NATO, is considered as a hostile act and threat for Russia and therefore this latter one is threatening the first one to not do so. Another clear case where a security dilemma is notably visible, it being a state security dilemma but also a societal one, where population of Bosnia, especially the ethnic Bosnians and Bosnian Croats feel threatened and insecure for their own safety. The Bosnian Serbs however, due to their ethnic group belonging and their relations with Serbia and Russia are on the opposite side of the dilemma.

The fear of loss of group identity, fear of repression, uncertainty about the future and fear of physical survival are mainly evident in the three non-NATO members of the region. The only difference between Serbia and the other two is that Serbia might be facing fears for its ethnic populations outside its territory though, meaning in Kosovo and Bosnia and therefore its efforts to keep influencing the region itself, together with its Eastern allies is

pretty noticeable.

Figure 6.2.1. When you think of the Western Balkans, what feeling first comes to mind?



Reprinted from. ACIT and EPIK Institute. (2021). Balkan Barometer Public Opinion Analytical report (B. Zoric, Ed.; p. 19). Regional Cooperation Council. <http://www.rcc.int/>

On the graph above created from a survey in 2021, though before the conflict of Russia and Ukraine escalating, it is noticeable that the populations of the states that are not NATO members (except Kosovo which mainly expressed its concerns after the ignition of the conflict) exhibit a decent level of fear when asked about what feelings firstly come to mind when they think about Western Balkans. However, North Macedonia which at the time had become a full NATO member also showed a high level of fear and remarkably the highest when compared to the other states. Due to its heterogeneous ethnic population it is showing a public unrest and uncertainty when it comes to it but as argued previously, due to its both dominant ethnic populations being fellow members of NATO, violence and conflict between them is doubtful and less probable to be ignited. Followed by Bosnia, the fear levels the public opinion showed in the poll is quite considerable. A commonality between the two is the heterogeneous population they have within their borders when compared to the rest of the Western Balkan countries who mainly have a homogenous population. As a result we could treat this finding as an argument and approval of the theory that explains that conflicts and broader fear are more commonly found in multi-ethnic environments than ones with a homogenous ethnic population. However, in the case of Bosnia, there is not a mediating actor or higher authority regarding its security as neither

Bosnia nor its conflicting counterpart Serbia, are in NATO to mediate and establish some common grounds between them except the already agreed Dayton Peace Accords. The two states find themselves in a purer stage of anarchy where they are totally responsible for their own security and safety concerns and therefore they are more probable to face a security dilemma.

6.3. Misperception and regional initiatives

When it comes to the initiative for regional cooperation through the creation of the ‘Open Balkan’, Western Balkan members have different opinions and perceptions on the topic and are doubtful to the motives of such an organization. Kosovo on one hand is strictly against the idea and considers it as a threat to its core identity. Kosovo’s prime minister has rejected all the invitations to the summits for the ‘Open Balkan’ initiative talks and expressed his opinion in the media as: *“When they say Open Balkan, open for whom? Because we would need to be part of the European Union, not the Russian Federation or China. We oppose this kind of tendency. In order to have an open and free Balkan, Serbia will need to change first,”* (Euronews Albania, 2021). The prime minister has also shown his opinion on the matter that they already doing such steps and moving forward towards cooperation and integration but that is towards the European Union.

While Kosovo’s stance remains unwavering, Montenegro from its first refusal now stands to a more ambiguous position. While it joined the last summit happening previously this month, the newly elected Prime Minister Dritan Abazovic expressed that he and his cabinet would consider it and would make a decision based on the country’s best interest. He also expressed his optimism: *“I see the Open Balkan initiative as help for jointly creating a future of economic progress, business, greater mobility of citizens, and greater cooperation in all fields. Every initiative that can lead to progress and reconciliation will have the support of the Montenegrin government,”* On the other hand, the head of Bosnia’s Council of Ministers attended for the first time this last summit as an observer and expressed that the Bosnian business community and public would support the initiative however, a consensus is difficult to be achieved between the governing authorities due to “political reasons” (Marusic, 2022).

However, the initiative has received plenty of different and controversial opinions from the international community. Russia has long supported such an initiative meanwhile the European Union's members not so much. Some even call it as an attempt to create the Fourth Yugoslavia. Due to the actual economies of the three founding countries it is arguable that the economic development would not be very beneficial for all parties and that it cannot be created without including every Western Balkan member. Serbia has a GDP close to Albania's and North Macedonia's combined and therefore it is argued that Serbia would be the main beneficiary through the exemption of taxation and fees on its large exports of goods making it a clear hegemon in the region. Considering its strong economic relations with Russia and China results also in a further influence of the Eastern powers in the region and therefore a slight threat towards the European community and organization. Therefore Serbia's siding with Russia on the current topic regarding the war in Ukraine and its refusal to impose sanctions against its ally would have no actual consequences. The consequence so far was that Serbia's accession to the EU is at risk and reconsidered as it does not show clear EU values and ideals and it is moving away from those. However, with the Open Balkan initiative, Serbia would create its own hegemonic market and would develop its own economic and other sectors without needing the EU at all and might even be considered as rivalry within the European continent. Others are also concerned that such an initiative might fuel and ignite further nationalistic values and even be the first steps in creating 'Greater Serbia' and 'Greater Albania' (Joseph, 2022).

6.4. Findings: levels of anarchy, fear and misperceptions among the WB

From the data analyzed above we can draw this table which expresses the actual situation of each Western Balkan member state and pinpoints if there are any levels of anarchy, fear and misperceptions between them.

Figure 6.4.1 Table of findings

| | ANARCHY | FEAR | MISPERCEPTIONS |
|------------------------|----------------|-------------|-----------------------|
| ALBANIA | - | - | - |
| KOSOVO | + | + | + |
| NORTH MACEDONIA | - | + | - |
| BiH | + | + | + |
| SERBIA | + | + | + |
| MONTENEGRO | - | - | - |

The three states highlighted with red, show clear indications of existing anarchy, fear and misperceptions when it comes to each other and as such they find themselves in a state security dilemma and also in a societal security dilemma. Kosovo and Bosnia are highly concerned about Serbia’s motives and therefore participating in the initiative of the ‘Open Balkan’ could possibly end up undermining their physical and core identity survival. As Waltz claims: *“States do not willingly place themselves in situations of increased dependence. In a self-help system, considerations of security subordinate economic gain to political interest.”* (Waltz 1979, 107). On the other hand, Serbia is concerned about the ethnic Serbs residing within Bosnia and Kosovo and has openly expressed that it would do everything within their hand to fully protect and secure their safety.

On one hand, considering the Western Balkan states are considered as relatively “weak” states due to economic underdevelopment, inadequate civil societies, dissatisfied minorities, corruption, rising criminality and lack of solid democratic institutions. On the other hand, Bosnia and Kosovo having also a relatively “weak” military force and not being able to properly defend themselves in a crisis situation against a stronger opponent which in our case would be Serbia, explains why they find themselves in a security dilemma. The fact that Serbia is strengthening its own military lately creates even more uneasiness and possibly fear to the rest states that are finding themselves in such a security dilemma and state of anxiety.

North Macedonia is another case. It does not face a state security dilemma and does not reflect levels of anarchy and misperception due to the fact that its relations with the rest Western Balkan countries are positive or neutral. However, due to its intrastate issues with

its heterogeneous population, faces a societal security dilemma and shows signs of fear for its ethnic identity survival. Ethnic Albanians residing in North Macedonia on one hand and the Bulgarian minority on the other, together with the rights and things all parties claim, North Macedonians find themselves in a state of anxiety and internal uneasiness. Although such issues do not pose a threat towards North Macedonia's sovereignty.

Albania does not show any signs of either three categories and therefore is not facing any dilemma, being state or societal one. Despite the issues ethnic Albanians were and are facing in Kosovo and North Macedonia, Albania as a state has not made any hostile and aggressive acts and decisions against Serbia or North Macedonia. On the contrary, Albania is one of the initiating countries for the proposal of the 'Open Balkan'.

Montenegro, similarly with Albania from the data analyzed is shown to not face a security dilemma situation. Considering that it is the last country to leave the Yugoslav federation and it being a rather positive and peaceful departure when compared to the rest, there are no signs of hostile relations with the rest of the Western Balkan states. Although, some internal religious disputes occurred lately where Montenegrins claimed that the Orthodox Church was making decisions to further strengthen Serbian influence in the region and were undermining their language and church (Brezar, 2021). Despite this issue though, Montenegro is optimistic when it comes to future relations with Serbia (EURACTIV, 2022) and as it is previously mentioned, is now considering joining the 'Open Balkan' initiative.

7. DISCUSSION

The Russian- Ukraine conflict could be seen itself as a conflict occurring from a security dilemma where Russia wants to strengthen its security through acting offensively in Ukraine in order to prevent Ukraine from joining or consider joining NATO and EU. The idea and situation of having such a big border with NATO and its military bases and assets is a definite threat for Russia and its own security and influence. From the conflict occurred, we noticed a broader security crisis arising because not many would consider and predict an international war breaking nowadays in the European continent and so close to the West and NATO superpowers.

Although the crisis and conflict is between Ukraine and Russia, the security dilemma is happening between Russia and NATO. The chance of this conflict having a spill-over effect on the Western Balkans which have high Russian influence is not limited and out of the picture. Serbia is strongly influenced by Russia and its stance and position towards this war has further shown such a thing. Despite condemning the aggression, the refusal of imposing sanctions against the Kremlin is a strong indicator of their relations. Due to different outcomes and depending on how the conflict further escalates, NATO's troops and attention are highly focused on its member countries' borders with the two conflicted parties. This would mean less attention and higher difficulty in preserving and maintaining stability in the Western Balkans especially between the three states that are not its own members. Again due to the anarchic way the international arena works, we are considering NATO as a body and as an actor itself. As the realist theorists argue, an actor in the international arena would act accordingly and prioritize its own security first. Therefore the three Western Balkan states are outside of NATO's body and if conflict escalates and tensions aggravate between NATO and Russia, they are left in a "grey" area of uncertainty and anxiety.

Depending on the escalations of events, conditions might be pretty favorable for Serbia to make an aggressive move towards Kosovo or/and Bosnia as they might be considered as the right conditions in the offensive realism perspective in order to strengthen and maintain their security and position. On another perspective, Serbia might act as a Russian proxy deep in the European territory in order to annex and gain total influence and authority this deep into Western allies and threaten them. With NATO occupied and with its attention mainly focused on Russia, makes it difficult to properly and efficiently operate in maintaining peace and stability outside of its member states and their territories. As a result, NATO might intervene at some later point but it is unable to prevent potential conflicts in the non NATO Western Balkan members. Bosnia and Kosovo share a similar situation with Ukraine, they all expressed their desire to join the Western organizations of NATO and EU and therefore came Russia's response.

However, we notice that NATO is slightly out of its jurisdiction and cannot properly intervene in the conflict where a state is not their proper member and their only response is to economically and humanitarily aid the defending country with an addition to some military supplies. However, proper military assistance is out of the picture. Arguably enough a similar situation might occur in the three Western Balkan states that are currently experiencing a security dilemma and further concerned by the ongoing crisis in Ukraine and the West's disability and "incompetence" regarding the issue at hand. Similarly they portray themselves in the position of Ukraine and realize that they are 'alone' in the military fight if conflict erupts in their already unstable region.

This is also shown from the high stance of Bosnia and Kosovo towards accelerating their accession in NATO as they are highly concerned of a potential conflict escalating within their region noticing the war eruption in Ukraine. Additionally, the constant strengthening lately of the Serbian military and the military assets show offs are not helping the region rest from its anxiety. Aggravated tensions the past year on the borders of Kosovo and Serbia are a sign to security dilemma pre-existing even before the war outbreak in Ukraine. Further signs are the threats from Serbia's part and ultimatums towards NATO to maintain peace and stability because they considered Kosovo's action as a clear provocation for war. Serbia also claimed and advertised its new military assets and is not afraid or will not refrain from using them in order to what it considers to secure their own safety within their borders and the safety of Serbs living outside.

On the other hand, it is noticeable that countries that are experiencing a security dilemma are less prone to start or become part of cooperation projects and unions with each other. Such is the case of the Open Balkan where the countries that are mainly facing a security dilemma like Kosovo and Bosnia are distancing themselves from the initiative. Kosovo is considering such an initiative as a threat to its core identity and existence as the cooperation agreement is implying an open border strategy meanwhile it fought a fierce and violent battle a little over two decades ago to establish them and declare sovereignty. Additionally, Serbia which is the main initiator and the main beneficiary is yet to recognize Kosovo as an independent state and does not recognize properly its borders with Kosovo as it considers them as temporary ones within the Serbian state. Therefore such a 'soft' waivance of borders is considered as a step backwards from Kosovo's perspective that might result in its loss of identity and a threat of its future existence. It also shows signs of controversy and double standards because it currently needs visas to enter its neighbor Bosnia and other European countries as is not yet a part of the Schengen area.

Bosnia having a three multiethnic presidency makes it even harder to agree on such an initiative where not all parties consider such a step in their own interest. Logically the Republika Srpska and its electorate within Bosnia might agree to join their fellow ethnic group in Serbia however, the other two ethnic parties might consider it as a threat to its well-being and identity similarly to Kosovo. Achieving positive economic and political agreements with parties that are experiencing a security dilemma is rather hard. Each party is doubtful towards the other's intentions to begin with and misperceptions towards such projects are more doubtful. They might even consider that participating in these projects, might result in assistance and in an easier way of their counterpart in the existing security dilemma to threaten them and even pull aggressive moves leaving the first one unable to properly react or protect itself. Strengthening and assisting in the economy of your own potential aggressor is a difficult idea to be easily disregarded.

However, such cooperation and political unions in the region are not something new. As some would controversially call it an attempt to form the Fourth Yugoslavia, decreases the optimism of the region towards such ideas. Most members of the region resulted in experiencing violent wars in order to disintegrate from such a union and declare their independence and now they are asked and invited to willfully rejoin a similar union. Some might even call it as "digging your own grave". This is also seen and could be argued by

the founding members and the potential ones. Albania was not in the Yugoslav federation in the first place and did not experience what the rest of the fellow Western Balkans did during the 90s. North Macedonia on the other hand had and experienced a relatively peaceful disintegration from Yugoslavia and so did Montenegro later. Albania, North Macedonia which are currently founding members, do not feel threatened by Serbia's economic strengthening and development as they themselves do not have such a violent history that resulted into full-scaled wars. Montenegro similarly might not be very threatened and as such is currently considering its potential membership. Contrasting is the Kosovo's and Bosnia's case. Both these states are still suffering from the conflicts they experienced with the main potential beneficiary of this proposed union. As a result they are also highly threatened by the further economic development and strengthening of Serbia which a decent amount of their population might even consider them as enemies till today. Reconciliation attempts are not enough yet for the trust-building process to be achieved between these states and so they are considering joining and becoming members of such a union as out of the picture.

Russia on its own point of view, could be using the Western Balkans as an instrument to maintain its relativity and influence in Europe and to properly counter and challenge Western ideologies and economies for its own personal gain. The region's appeal towards the West is a threat for Russia as it pushes its influence and hegemony back at its territory and towards its Eastern allies. Thus, the Western Balkan region is of high geographical important position and indirect confrontation between Western and Eastern rivals, their ideologies and influence. However, a probable war between the three Western Balkan states that are experiencing this security dilemma is arguably difficult to be aided by outside forces. Russia on one hand might be using Serbia as a proxy and as a tool for regaining more control in the region, but currently facing an open conflict itself with its invasion in Ukraine make its attention towards the region decently difficult. Additionally, the geographical route between Serbia and Russia is a high obstacle for any assistance to happen from Russia's part towards Serbia as most of the in-between states are NATO members and therefore making it NATO territory and nearly impossible for official Russian assistance to come through.

8. CONCLUSIONS

War and conflict erupting in the Western Balkans is highly improbable but so was Russia invading Ukraine. Despite half of the region being NATO members, the other half is not, which is a factor that slightly raises the chances of such an event occurring between them. Despite the wave of cosmopolitanism currently in the world and the formation of powerful international organizations in order to maintain peace and stability internationally, the anarchic state which states are in, is still evident enough nowadays as shown from the currently ongoing violent conflict. Such a tendency towards powerful international alliances creates another dimension of anarchy and a new anarchic situation appears. In this anarchic situation where parties compete for power, security and hegemony is even more complicated and might be considered more dangerous in the expense of humanity.

Actors in such a situation are not states themselves, but alliances and unions that are formed between them. States now have a relatively higher authority if they are part of an alliance but alliances do not. Despite them being consisted of a number of member countries, usually the most dominant and powerful one has a 'bigger say'. Therefore clashes between such organizations or such forces occur while they compete with each other over power and hegemony. However, one power-actor is insecure and uncertain towards its counterpart's motives and goals and vice versa. It is more dangerous than a conflict between just two states because of their large and powerful structure and body, which consists of the forces of many member states. Usually they measure their power in military assets and nuclear weapons while competing with each other, making a potential clash between them a high risk for casualties and even a risk for humanity itself. Just the risk of a nuclear war happening is a high threat for every society. Also dividing a conflict from the between states level towards the global superpowers level results in catastrophic results nevertheless the outcome and who wins. The competition between such powers should not be taken slightly as they are and act unexpectedly and unpredictably at different situations. However, due to their dimensions and catastrophic powers, a real conflict

ignition and active violence between them is slightly less probable compared to a similar situation between two or more states.

States that are not part of powerful military alliances and organizations find themselves easier in a security dilemma situation that could easily aggravate into an active conflict. The least possible conflict ignition is between two states that are members of the same organization and body of “higher” military authority but this does not exclude the possibility of the two states having increased tensions between them. An example to this case would be the dispute between Greece and Turkey over sea territory where tensions are aggravated but due to both being members of NATO make a possible war ignition very unlikely to happen as NATO works as their higher authority regarding their military power on an international domain. In a situation where one party belongs and is part of such a powerful actor and the other one not, security dilemma occurs only partially and is one-sided concerning mostly the party which is not part of a security organization and as a result is highly threatened. However due to the big difference of powers a potential aggression would be one sided with the weaker party either becoming a subject and submits to the powerful one or seeking assistance from outside forces, especially the rival of the alliance who might have an interest in confronting the aggressor and its alliance and therefore compete to achieve balance.

Lastly we have the case where two countries do not belong to any higher sort of power alliance and military organization. Security dilemma is very likely to occur in this situation especially when the relations between parties seem broken, weak or they share a conflicting history and past behaviors. Such is the case in this paper, Bosnia, Kosovo and Serbia where the three countries share a violent past with countless of conflicts and are currently no members of any peace-keeping and peace-securing organization. However, we could argue that the relations and strong ties Serbia has with Russia and China make it fall under the second aforementioned category. Despite their economic and political relations, they do not actually have a military alliance between them and therefore its case is better classified in this category. Additionally to the dichotomy of power that is currently happening in the international arena between NATO and Russia imposes states to fall under one side’s umbrella. Serbia tried unsuccessfully to maintain a neutral status regarding the recent conflict however, Western allies expressed that by not agreeing on the imposed sanctions against Russia, it implicates its support towards it.

Such an ongoing security crisis and indirect clash between the two superpowers in Ukraine, leaves the Western Balkan non NATO members feeling vulnerable and insecure. Noticing similar patterns with Ukraine, they are afraid and in a state of anxiety of finding themselves in the same position as Ukraine and therefore two of them are rigorously requesting for NATO's attention to maintain their security and stability. However, depending on how the conflict and the situation escalates, the latter's attention and assistance might become roughly feasible for prevention purposes and 'the perfect opportunity' may occur for Serbia to act aggressively and make the first strike towards the other two achieving its goals, ethnic and territorial purposes.

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CURRICULUM VITAE

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