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**Türkiye in the Balkans:
the role, position
and bilateral relations
(part 1)**



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(part 1)**

Lublin 2022

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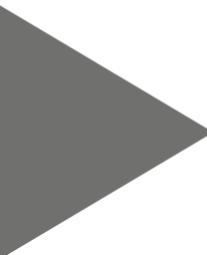
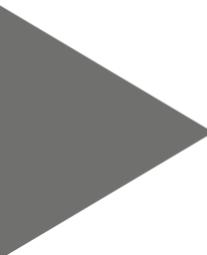


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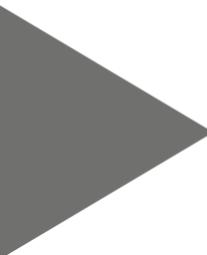
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Theses

- Many countries such as Russia, China, the USA and member states of the European Union are struggling to expand their economic, cultural and political influence in the Balkans. The Republic of Türkiye places a significant emphasis on its foreign policy in the Balkans due to the region's strong historical and cultural ties to Türkiye, as reflected in the concept of Strategic Depth (Stratejik derinlik) developed by Ahmet Davutoğlu. In recent years there have been several violations of the assumptions made in *Strategic Depths* and attempts to implement a foreign policy based on *hard power* in relation to the Balkan states (such as Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina), but the concept remains unchanged. In the post-Davutoğlu era, Turkish policy has continued to exhibit elements of Neo-Ottomanism, which involves a somewhat pragmatic approach to maintaining alliances and conducting investments and business with the Balkans, given the region's strong links to Türkiye.

- Bilateral relations between Türkiye and the Balkan states are focused on the following factors: the political stability and security of the region; increased economic influence; and the religious, historical and cultural links within the entire region. What is more, the growth of *soft power* (i.e., TİKA, the *Yunus Emre Foundation*) is an instrument with which Türkiye can build its own international position and economic relations. As a result of rising economic interests, Türkiye has developed trade relations with the Balkans and has been investing in infrastructure and assistance in crisis situations. In the area of culture, Türkiye has been focused on the preservation of damaged or neglected Ottoman and Turkish heritage. Türkiye is also engaged in educational projects and promoting Turkish culture and language.
- Türkiye is also focusing on high-level political dialogue with the goal of promoting regional integration and establishing “areas of common interest” through a trilateral meeting mechanism. At the same time, it acts as a mediator in resolving political disputes among the states. In addition, Türkiye is an advocate of the concept of “security for all” and supports the efforts of the Balkan states on their way to the European Union and NATO. This approach aligns with Türkiye’s own policy towards the EU.
- Türkiye has been a key partner for Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina for three decades, and relations on both sides are cordial and still developing.



Introduction

The Balkans have played a significant role in the development of the Republic of Türkiye's history, politics, culture, and economy, and as a result, they remain of great importance to the country today. Since the 1990s and the collapse of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, Türkiye has slowly begun to depart from a one-dimensional foreign policy and is now steering towards a multi-dimensional policy focused on cooperation with European countries and the Middle East. At the beginning of the 21st century, the *Strategic Depth* doctrine, heralded by the foreign minister Ahmet Davutoğlu¹, began to dominate in the foreign policy of Türkiye and was based on the concepts of Neo-Ottomanism related to the geographical and political influence of Türkiye². However, it seems that this doctrine does not place Türkiye in

¹ Ahmet Davutoğlu, the minister of foreign affairs from 2009 to 2014 and prime minister of Türkiye and leader of the Justice and Development Party from 2014 to 2016.

² M. Mitrović, *Turkish Foreign Policy Towards the Balkans, The influence of traditional determinants on Davutoğlu's conception of Türkiye-Balkan*, Hu-berlin.de, 24 March 2014, <https://edoc.hu-berlin.de/handle/18452/3742> [17.09.2022].

the context of a conflict with the West but sees it more as a bridge between the Muslim world and the Western world.

The year 2023 will mark the hundredth anniversary of the proclamation of the Republic of Türkiye, which on the one hand was the heir of the preceding Ottoman Empire, which existed from the end of the thirteenth century up until the twentieth century. On the other hand, under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the country pursued westernization through reforms³. 2023 is also significant because of the general elections (presidential and parliamentary) that will be held in June. An important speech which defined the framework of Türkiye's foreign policy was "Vision 2023: Türkiye's Foreign Policy Objectives", presented at the Türkiye Investor Conference: The road to 2023, organized by Goldman Sachs in 2011 in London and which defined Türkiye as a global power. The Minister of Foreign Affairs outlined a vision that covered not only the Caucasus and the Middle East but also the Balkans. He specified the key elements implemented in Türkiye's foreign policy, such as free economic and business cooperation and the creation of a stable, secure and prosperous belt based on political dialogue and assistance to countries in the region and those neighbouring Türkiye. The common goal has been integration with the European Union and support for the states of the region in this matter. Türkiye stressed the importance to react quickly to crises in the region through mediation, without the long procedures that exist in the EU⁴.

³ N. Stone, *Turkey. A Short History*, London 2017, pp. 156-159.

⁴ S. Kaydi, *Speech entitled "Vision 2023: Türkiye's Foreign Policy Objectives" delivered by H.E. Ahmet Davutoğlu, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Türkiye at the Türkiye Investor Conference: The road to 2023, organized by Goldman Sachs (London, 22.11.2011)*,

The bilateral relations of Türkiye and the Balkan region discussed in this paper fall under the rule of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, leader of the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, AKP), who served as prime minister from 2003 to 2014 and president since 2014⁵ until present times. In 2014, Erdoğan announced the victory of the “New Türkiye” after winning the presidential election. Moreover, the AKP’s governments, drawing on the traditions of Islam but at the same time questioning the secular nature of the Republic, were reintroduced to the redefinition of Kemalist Türkiye⁶. One of the symbols of New Türkiye is the attempted coup d’état in 2016 of which Ankara accused Fethullah Gülen. It should be mentioned that the extensive network (of schools, business associations, cultural institutions) allowed the Gülen movement to become a global representative of both conservative Islamic values and “Turkishness”, spreading the country’s language and culture abroad. Türkiye benefited from this by consolidating Turkish *soft power* and supporting Ankara’s interests in Europe (and around the world) while increasing the popularity and prestige of Gülen’s movement both in Türkiye and internationally. Despite earlier AKP-Gülen cooperation, the emerging deep tensions led Recep Tayyip Erdoğan to a direct conflict with

https://www.mfa.gov.tr/speech-entitled-_vision-2023-_Türkiye_s-foreign-policy-objectives_-_delivered-by-h_e_ahmet-davutoglu_-minister-of-foreign-af.en.mfa [11.09.2022].

⁵ The ministers of foreign affairs in Türkiye in the 2002-2022 period were as follows: Abdullah Gül (2003-2007, also prime minister 2002-2003 and president 2007-2014), Ahmet Davutoğlu (2009-2014, also prime minister 2014-2016) and Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu (2014-2015 and from 2015 until now).

⁶ Three coups took place in Türkiye, in 1960, 1971, 1980 and another one was about to take place in 1997. See: M. Chudziak, *Pucz jako mit założycielski. Filary ideologiczne Nowej Turcji, "Punkt Widzenia" 2017*, no. 66, https://www.osw.waw.pl/sites/default/files/_pw_66_pucz-jako-mit_net_o.pdf [15.09.2022].

Gülen. For example, in 2007, the AKP government founded an official network of Turkish cultural centres, Yunus Emre, to compete with Gülen's activities abroad⁷.

The contemporary Turkish foreign policy towards the Balkan region, as outlined by Ahmet Davutoğlu, is based on four elements⁸: 1. High-level political dialogue – leading to broad regional integration and the creation of so-called “areas of common interest”, as shown by the numerous visits of the Turkish president and foreign ministers to the Balkans; 2. Security for all – Türkiye supports the efforts of the Balkan states on their way to the European Union. The Balkan region represents a potential bridge of cooperation not only between the Balkans and Türkiye, but also it might be seen in the context of regional integration and Türkiye's goal of EU cooperation; 3. Economic integration; 4. The preservation of the multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-religious social structures in the region.

Thus the main goal of this paper is to analyse the geopolitical presence of Türkiye, among other international actors, in the Balkans and the current bilateral relations between chosen countries in the area, with particular focus on the following: the political stability and security of the region, growing economic contacts, use of religious, historical, ethnic and cultural links with the Balkan countries, and the soft power used as an instrument to build Türkiye's own international position.

⁷ B. Balci, *The Gülen Movement and Turkish Soft Power*, carnegieendowment.org, 4 February 2014, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2014/02/04/g-len-movement-and-turkish-soft-power-pub-54430> [15.09.2022].

⁸ Republic of Türkiye, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Relations with the Balkan Region*, <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/relations-with-the-balkan-region.en.mfa> [25.07.2022].

In the political and economic sphere, Türkiye prefers to cooperate with certain states using the trilateral mechanism, such as Serbia-BiH-Türkiye. Besides, political leaders of Türkiye have striven to be mediators in areas of conflict, both on the ethnic level in certain states (such as in BiH) and at state level. It is also noticeable that Turkish policy has a rather pragmatic policy when it comes to maintaining alliances and conducting investments and business in regions linked to Türkiye, especially with Bosnia and Herzegovina, Albania and Kosovo owing to their large Muslim population. In the economic sphere, there are two types of perception of Türkiye in the Balkans. The first is the perception of an “emerging Türkiye” and the second is a fear of “Neo-Ottomanism” by those concerned about the presence of Türkiye. Turkish investments are appreciated in areas where the perception of an “emerging Türkiye” predominates; however, they are also considered to be economic invasions in places where fears of Neo-Ottomanism prevail. These regions prefer to establish economic cooperation with Western countries⁹.

Also, Muslim communities (in Albania, BiH) and Turkish minorities are essential in contemporary Türkiye’s policy towards the Balkan states. The growing interest in the Turkish diaspora is seen through the securing of religious rights and the protection of the cultural heritage of Turkish minorities as well as cultural heritage after the Ottoman Empire. The Turkish minority in Albania and BiH is somewhat undersized, and Türkiye seems to be seen in both states as

⁹ E. Nuroğlu, H.H. Nuroğlu, *Türkiye and Germany in the Balkans: Competing with Each Other?*, “Insight Türkiye” 2019, vol. 21, no. 2, <https://www.insightTürkiye.com/articles/Türkiye-and-germany-in-the-balkans-competing-with-each-other> [12.10.2022].

rather positive. On the one hand, Albania and BiH see Türkiye in its foreign policy as one of its key partners; on the other hand, ethnic groups such as Albanians (inhabiting Albania, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Croatia) and Bosniaks (inhabiting BiH, Serbia, Montenegro, Kosovo, Türkiye) are seen by Türkiye as being traditional supporters of Ottoman-Turkish policy in the Balkans¹⁰.

Soft power, an important instrument with which the AKP forms its foreign policy in Muslim countries¹¹, is also clearly visible in the Balkan region and performed by such institutions as the Turkish Presidency of Religious Affairs (*Diyanet*), the Turkish Coordination and Cooperation Agency (*Türk İşbirliği ve Koordinasyon Ajansı, TİKA*), the Turkish cultural institute – the Yunus Emre Foundation (*Yunus Emre Enstitüsü, YEE*) as well as the Turkish Maarif Foundation (*Türkiye Maarif Vakfı, TMV*). TİKA has seven overseas offices (in total it has offices in 60 countries) in the capitals of the Balkan region – Albania, BiH, Croatia, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia. YEE has ten cultural centres in the Western Balkans (WB6) out of the 63 it has in total overseas. The institutes are located in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Albania, Montenegro, Serbia, and North Macedonia. TMV was established by the Turkish parliament at the beginning of 2016, and out of its 429 educational institutions worldwide, 46 are located in the WB6 region – ten

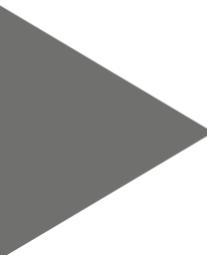
¹⁰ K. Öktem, *Angry Nation. Türkiye Since 1989*, Zed Books, Fernwood Publishing, 2011, p. 172.

¹¹ S. Cagaptay, *The New Sultan. Erdogan and the Crisis of Modern Turkey*, London–New York 2017, pp. 160–162.

in Serbia, nine in BiH, eight in Albania, seven in Kosovo and five in North Macedonia¹².

In the course of the analysis, many research questions emerged related to the period after 2002: What was Ankara's policy towards the Western Balkan region during R.T. Erdoğan's presidency? In which areas does Türkiye operate in the Balkans? What are instruments of Turkish *soft power*? Is Türkiye just a regional player? Or is the Turkish influence a part of the long-term strategy of Ankara? How does Türkiye compete in the Balkans with other international actors? In this publication, the geopolitics aspect of the rivalry between the powers in the Western Balkans was scrutinised, including Türkiye's bilateral relations with Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina, as one of the key examples.

¹² Turkish Maarif Foundation, <https://maarifschools.edu.ba/page/2018-MAARIF-IN-THE-WORLD-16> [9.09.2022].



Kinga Smoleń

Türkiye and the geopolitical rivalry in the Western Balkans

Introduction

The Western Balkans is a scene of geopolitical rivalry between the powers there. It involves a clash of influences and interests of many actors. On the one hand, there are the global “players” such as China and Russia. On the other hand, regional powers. One of them is Türkiye, which is particularly active in the area under consideration. The southern border of the European Union also runs through the Western Balkans. This determines its interest in the region¹. Taking into account the divergence of interests and the number of rival players in the Western Balkans, various geopolitical and geo-economic concepts are attempted – often disregarding the strategies and interests of the states

¹ See more: *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council: Western Balkans: Enhancing the European perspective*, 5 March 2008, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52008DC0127&from=EN> [4.09.2022].

located there². Due to the historical, cultural and religious conditions as well as the use of *soft power* – irrespective of the lesser potential than that of its competitors – Türkiye has managed to gain and maintain a strong influence in the region for almost two decades.

Geopolitical diagnosis of the Western Balkans

The specificity and geopolitical importance of the Western Balkans is significantly determined by the geographical location of the Balkans as a whole. The Balkan Peninsula is located at the meeting point of Europe and Asia. As a result, there is a clash of three civilisations: Western, Orthodox (formerly Byzantine) and Islamic³. For centuries, the major powers have competed to control the region⁴ because of its location in the strategically significant *rimland* (marginal area). Presently, researchers consider the Balkans a key area that connects Western Europe, the Caucasus, Central Asia, the Middle East and North Africa⁵. The Moravian-Vardar, Maritza and Durres-Tirana-Skopje-Sofia-Black Sea routes are considered crucial not only for the region but also for Europe and Asia.

The complex political character of the Western Balkans – apart from the geographical factor – is also due to ethnic, cultural and religious diversity. This diversity has contribut-

² Ibid.

³ P. Bukowski, *Geopolityczne źródła potencjalnych konfliktów w zachodniej części Bałkanów*, "Przegląd Geopolityczny" 2018, no. 24, p. 89.

⁴ See more: P. Dzieciński, *Geopolityczne determinanty konfliktów międzynarodowych*, [in:] R. Łoś, J. Regina-Zacharski (eds.), *Konflikty i spory międzynarodowe*, vol. 2, Łódź 2010, pp. 65-78.

⁵ A. del Valle, *Guerre contre l'Europe: Bosnie, Kosovo, Tchetchenie*, Paris 2000, quoted by: J. Markowska, *Bałkany – określenie medialne czy region geograficzny?*, "Prace i Studia Geograficzne" 2010, vol. 44, p. 51.

ed to the outbreak of long-lasting and bloody national conflicts⁶. The great powers were involved in the course of the conflicts and have supported the various parties engaged, which in that way built up their sphere of influence in the region. Seen from a long-term perspective, the involvement of external actors has destabilised the Western Balkans, fostered disintegration and revisionist tendencies in the area and also hindered the process of state formation and consolidation⁷. This phenomenon was clearly visible after the breakdown of the bipolar structure of the international system and the creation of a so-called geopolitical vacuum in the region⁸. In the 21st century – although on a smaller scale – this is again taking place, facilitated by the process of balkanisation. It manifests itself in the existence of independent or quasi-independent states in the region, among which hostile relations are observed⁹. Thus, it can be concluded that all geopolitical processes in the Western Balkans are simultaneously stimulated by regional and external factors, which are often mutually conditioned and intertwined.

The Western Balkans as a scene of geopolitical rivalry between world powers

The geopolitical importance of the Western Balkans, the complex ethnic and religious structure of the states locat-

⁶ See more: J. Markowska, op. cit., pp. 51-54.

⁷ H. Donnan, T.M. Wilson, *Granice tożsamości, narodu, państwa*, Cracow 2007, p. 17; J. Olchowski, K. Pawłowski, *Region Europy Południowo-Wschodniej*, [in:] I. Topolski, H. Dumala, A. Dumala (eds.), *Regiony w stosunkach międzynarodowych*, Lublin 2009, p. 77.

⁸ For more details see publications on the international system after the end of the Cold War: M. Pietraś, *Pozimnowojenny ląd międzynarodowy*, [in:] idem (ed.), *Międzynarodowe stosunki polityczne*, Lublin 2021, pp. 399-435.

⁹ Y. Lacoste, *Geopolityka Śródziemnomorza*, Warszawa 2010, p. 293; L. Sykułski, *Geopolityka. Słownik terminologiczny*, Warszawa 2009, p. 10, quoted by: P. Bukowski, op. cit., p. 90.

ed there, and the phenomenon of balkanisation determine the nature of the area, which remains a scene of rivalry and confrontation between external actors¹⁰. Irrespective of the confrontation taking place there between Türkiye, the European Union, Russia and China for influence in that region, at the same time, a struggle is taking place there between the West and Russia. Moreover, three of the four external actors present in the Western Balkans are striving to change the current international order. The area is thus a part of the wider context of global geopolitical competition.

The European Union

The European Union has been involved in the internal politics of the Western Balkan states since the mid-1990s. That is, since the intervention of the North Atlantic Alliance in the region during the war in Bosnia and Kosovo. The objectives of the European Union towards the Western Balkans have remained unchanged for years: their long-term stabilisation and a reduction of Russia's influence. The Community's long-term strategy towards this area is based on supporting the gradual integration of the countries of the region into its structures. This process is supposed to be assisted by political instruments and financial measures meant to stimulate development and political reforms in order to secure the rule of law and democracy. Since 2014 and the inauguration of the so-called Berlin Process, integration with the Western Balkan countries through long-term economic recovery, ecological and digital transformation, sustainable development of infrastructure and human capital,

¹⁰ See more: K. Smoleń, *Geostrategiczne położenie państwa*, Lublin 2021, pp. 21-44.

convergence of the region remains a priority for the European Union. Funds of EUR 9 billion have been allocated for these purposes¹¹.

Owing to the difficult and complex process as regards accession negotiations, out of all the countries in the Western Balkans, only Croatia and Slovenia, which some researchers do not consider to be part of the region, have so far become members of the European Union. Montenegro, Serbia, Albania and Macedonia have candidate status, whereas Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo are potential candidate countries. The main problems listed by the European Union on the path to membership for the countries of the region relate to the rule of law and democratic standards, broadly defined. The postponed and undefined prospect of accession weakens the determination of the authorities of those countries to make compromises and implement further difficult internal reforms. Significantly, it also increases the likelihood that revisionist and radical attitudes will be supported by those societies¹².

The delayed state of accession talks among the countries of the region and the European Union, as well as the lengthy process of its extension to include partners from Southeastern Europe, is considered a failure of the Community. The prolongation of this state of affairs, on the one hand, discourages the people there from joining the European Union

¹¹ J. Muś, *Plan Gospodarczy i Inwestycyjny dla Bałkanów Zachodnich*, "Komentarze IES" 2020, no. 279(182), 30 October 2020, <https://ies.lublin.pl/komentarze/plan-gospodarczy-i-inwestycyjny-dla-balkanow-zachodnich/> [7.09.2022].

¹² K. Pawłowski, *Niejasna perspektywa akcesji państw Bałkanów Zachodnich do UE wyzwaniem dla rozwoju i stabilności regionu*, "Komentarze IES" 2022, no. 644(156), 29 June 2022, <https://ies.lublin.pl/komentarze/niejasna-perspektywa-akcesji-panstw-balkanow-zachodnich-do-ue-wyzwaniem-dla-rozwoju-i-stabilnosc-regionu/> [7.09.2022].

and bearing the further costs of reform, and on the other hand, increases the likelihood of increased Russian and Chinese influence in the Balkans. All the more so as they offer the politically and socially unstable states of the region financial support, investment or energy security without having to implement troublesome reforms¹³.

Russia

Russia is another world power involved in the geopolitical competition for influence in the strategically important Western Balkans. Its main goal is to increase its presence in the region while limiting the ability of the Western states and institutions to influence it. Russia's position as well as its instruments of influence are too weak to shape the geopolitical order in the Western Balkans such that it is optimal from the perspective of its aspirations and interests. For this reason, the Russian authorities' strategy towards the area is mainly based on destabilisation and using regional crises and disputes for its own political purposes. In the long run, this is intended to delay and complicate the accession process of the countries there to the European Union and the North Atlantic Alliance¹⁴. At the same time, it is attempting to create a network of multidimensional bonds with the region so that they would become at least a temporary alternative to the distant membership of some of the Western Balkan states of the European Union.

Russia's activities in the region mainly focus on the areas on which it has the greatest influence: Serbia, Montenegro,

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ K. Pawłowski, *Wpływy...*, pp. 7-8.

Macedonia, northern Kosovo, and the Republic of Serbia in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In the case of Macedonia and Montenegro, the Russians support the opposition groups (mostly nationalist and traditionalist) that exist there and oppose the accession of these countries to the European Union. Being unable to create such structures in the Western Balkans that are competitive with those of the West, Russia focuses on the destabilisation of the countries there and the hindering of their democratisation process and transformation towards the rule of law.

Another of Russia's assets in the geopolitical "game" in the Western Balkans is its activity in the key – from the perspective of the states in the region – areas of the economy: the fuel and energy sector, banking, tourism and the real estate market¹⁵. As far as the energy aspect is concerned, a very important investment for Russian interests was the *South Stream* gas pipeline¹⁶. Thanks to the European Union's activities, it was possible to block the project. In response, the Russian authorities proposed the *TurkStream* gas pipeline as an alternative¹⁷. Despite its limited financial resources, Russia is also a creditor and energy partner to some of the governments there. Energy and loan agreements link

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 7.

¹⁶ *South Stream* was supposed to run from the Black Sea to Bulgaria and on to southern Europe (from Bulgaria the pipeline was to branch southwest through Greece and the Adriatic Sea to southern Italy and northwest through Serbia and Hungary to Austria); V. Socor, *South Stream: Gazprom's New Mega Project*, "Eurasia Daily Monitor" 2007, vol. 4, no. 123, http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=32826 [2.11.2012].

¹⁷ See more: K. Smoleń, *The Geopolitical Dimensions of the Turkish Stream Pipeline*, "Yearbook of the Institute of East-Central Europe" 2019, vol. 17, no. 4, pp. 101-119.

Russia with, among others, Serbia and the Republic of Serbia in Bosnia and Herzegovina¹⁸.

China

Owing to its large geographical distance from the SEE region, China's interests in the Western Balkans are not as strategically important as those of Türkiye or the European Union. Its activity in the region is mainly related to the economic sphere and focuses on investments. Between 2005 and 2019, Chinese investments in the Western Balkans – excluding Albania – reached USD 14.6 billion. And crucially, the majority of these funds are not foreign direct investment but loans for infrastructure projects, mostly transport and energy, related to the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)¹⁹.

Apart from the 17+1 format, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is China's main instrument for influencing countries in the region. Its intention is to build a land-sea corridor that will connect Greece at the port of Piraeus, Northern Macedonia, Serbia and Hungary at Budapest. The Chinese see the BRI project as a new way of cooperation with Western Europe. The Western Balkans themselves, on the other hand, are to be only a regional back-up for them in infrastructure projects. This is confirmed by China's existing cooperation with partners from the region. They mainly conclude agreements with countries where democratic procedures and

¹⁸ KN, *Znów wrze w bałkańskim kotle. Zobacz, jak globalne potęgi rywalizują o Bałkany*, forsal.pl, 27 May 2015, <https://forsal.pl/artykuly/873221,znow-wrze-w-balkanskim-kotle-zobacz-jak-globalne-potegi-rywalizuja-o-balkany.html> [7.09.2022].

¹⁹ K. Wysocka, *Chiny sięgają po Bałkany Zachodnie. Unia Europejska powinna się niepokoić?*, Euractiv.pl, 11 April 2021, <https://www.euractiv.pl/section/polityka-zagraniczna-ue/news/chiny-balkany-ue-unia-europejska-serbia-czarnogora-kosowo-albania-wspolpraca-polityka-zagraniczna-pekini-ekspansja-chin> [8.09.2022].

transparency in decision-making are insufficient. Thanks to investing in the development of infrastructure in the region, China easily implements its policy in the Western Balkans.

As a result, although the states in the region acquire foreign funds for infrastructure development, they become dependent on the powerful Chinese market, often also becoming indebted to China²⁰. In such circumstances, China additionally has the opportunity to monopolise the local markets.

The aforementioned 17+1 format has not brought the expected results. However, medical diplomacy has been much more effective. China's provision of medical equipment and vaccines to the countries in the region during the COVID-19 pandemic significantly improved its image among the Balkan populations. The positive perception of China's actions was further enhanced by disinformation campaigns promoted by China and Russia. They showed the helplessness of the European Union and the United States in light of the pandemic as well as their lack of interest in the region.

Analysing China's strategy towards the Western Balkans, it should be noted that it focuses on creating a counterbalance to the European Union as well as reducing the significance of the United States in the region. China's cooperation with European Union candidate states can be regarded as a serious concern as it hinders their pro-democratic reforms and delays the accession itself. However, it should be emphasised that cooperation with China is not an alternative to

²⁰ 15 per cent of the total debt of Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, 20 per cent of the debt of Northern Macedonia and 40 per cent of the debt of Montenegro are liabilities to China; K. Wysocka, *op. cit.*

membership of the countries of the region of the European Union, especially as genuine Chinese economic activity in the Western Balkans is far less than as portrayed by Chinese propaganda. What is crucial in building Chinese influence in the region is public diplomacy.

In the context of Russia's presence in the Western Balkans, the two powers are united by their desire to weaken the influence of the United States in the region and, globally, the emergence of a multipolar system. China wants to have an impact on the policies of the European Union, but it is not interested in stopping its expansion to include the countries of the Balkan Peninsula, which in turn is a strategic objective for Russia.

Türkiye's geopolitical strategy towards the Western Balkans

For the Turkish authorities, the Western Balkans represent another area in which they are attempting to assert leadership and build their own sphere of influence. This fits into Türkiye's broader foreign policy strategy. The aim of this policy is to make Türkiye a regional power with a global and proactive regional policy²¹.

During the Cold War, the Western Balkans were not an area around which Türkiye's foreign policy was focused. At that time, its authorities mainly focused on maintaining peaceful relations with the states of the region. President Turgut Özal (in office 1989-1993) and Foreign Minister İsmail

²¹ J. Bocheńska, *Neosmańska wizja polityki zagranicznej Turcji*, "Stosunki Międzynarodowe", http://www.stosunkimiedzynarodowe.info/artukul,963,Neosmanska_wizja_polityki_zagranicznej_Turcji [22.07.2011].

Cem (in office 1997-2002) are considered to be the originators of the development of the “Balkan” direction and the expansion of Türkiye’s influence in the area²². Nevertheless, the actual development of Türkiye’s relationships with the countries of the region only occurred after the *Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, AKP)* gained power in 2002. Türkiye’s present geopolitical strategy towards the Western Balkans results from a foreign policy concept entitled *Strategic Depth* (Turkish: *Stratejik derinlik*), developed by Ahmet Davutoğlu, the foreign affairs advisor of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, and a leading AKP politician²³.

According to the strategy, Türkiye’s activity in the region – as in the international system – is conditioned by two factors: geographical and historical. This is due to its specific geographical position (so-called geographical depth), i.e. its location between Europe and Asia, close to Africa and in the vicinity of sensitive world regions, such as the Balkans, the Middle East, Central Asia and the South Caucasus²⁴ as well as its historical experience (the legacy of the Ottoman Empire)²⁵.

From Türkiye’s perspective, the Western Balkans remain an attractive potential sphere of influence because of the following reasons: firstly, their central location with respect to the main regions; secondly, due to the passage of impor-

²² T. Kopyś, *Polityka Turcji wobec Bałkanów Zachodnich po 2008 roku*, “Politeja” 2018, no. 2(53), p. 128.

²³ See more: *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council...*

²⁴ See more: *ibid.*

²⁵ A. Szymański, *Polityka zagraniczna Turcji w latach: 2007-2009: kontynuacja czy zmiana?*, “Przegląd Dyplomatyczny” 2009, no. 2(48), p. 47.

tant communication routes through them; and thirdly, because of having strong historical ties with the local Muslim population²⁶. The shared historical experience – as intended by Türkiye’s leadership – is supposed to give it an advantage over other geopolitical rivals in the region and enable political and economic expansion²⁷. Building a stable and predictable Western Balkans region remains a priority for Türkiye. Since Türkiye’s accession process to the European Union has been hindered, the Turks have strived to develop an alternative, long-term formula for cooperation with the region’s states that are not EU member states²⁸. In economic terms, it is most essential to win markets as well as the participation of Turkish entrepreneurs in the development of the local infrastructure. Türkiye also aspires to be an important partner in the energy transmission networks emerging in the Western Balkans. Türkiye’s policy in the region is characterised by a clear pragmatism aimed at creating a peaceful environment in its immediate surroundings and promoting progress and development there²⁹, mainly using the instrument of *soft power*.

²⁶ See more: J. Rubacha, *Polityka Turcji wobec narodów i państw bałkańskich na przełomie XIX i XXI wieku*, "Slavia Meridionalis" 2011, pp. 221-240.

²⁷ J. Lachert, *Balkany Zachodnie w kontekście rywalizacji Chin, Rosji, Unii Europejskiej i Turcji*, Warsaw Institute, 25 November 2018, <https://warsawinstitute.org/pl/balkany-zachodnie-w-kontekscie-rywalizacji-chin-rosji-unii-europejskiej-turcji/> [5.09.2022].

²⁸ D. Gibas-Krzak, *Neosmanizm – jako idea w tureckiej polityce zagranicznej na tle sytuacji geopolitycznej Bałkanów pod koniec XX i na początku XXI w.*, [in:] A. Głowacki, S.L. Szczesio (eds.), *Balkany Zachodnie w systemie bezpieczeństwa euroatlantyckiego*, Łódź 2015, p. 232.

²⁹ T. Kopyś, op. cit., p. 131; G. Öztek, *Situation in the Balkans and Türkiye’s Balkan Policy*, "Turkish Review of the Balkan Studies" 2003, no. 8, p. 4.

The implementation of Türkiye's geopolitical strategy towards the Western Balkans

Türkiye implements its foreign policy objectives towards the Western Balkans by taking action on several planes: political, economic and cultural/religious. Its authorities opposed the break-up of Yugoslavia in the early 1990s. Faced with a *fait accompli*, however, Türkiye became involved in all the peacekeeping missions of the North Atlantic Alliance in the Balkans (SFOR, IFOR, KFOR, among others)³⁰. Between 1992 and 1995, they undertook a number of international actions to pacify the war in Bosnia. In turn, after the fights finished, they became involved in the reconstruction of the countries' armed forces. It was crucial for Türkiye's leaders to end the regional conflicts as soon as possible since they wanted political stability in the Western Balkans and their systematic economic development. For this reason, Türkiye supported the entry of the countries there into the North Atlantic Alliance. Among other things, Türkiye was involved in granting Albania, Croatia and Macedonia candidate status to NATO³¹. Over time, integration into European Union structures became a common goal for Türkiye and also its partners in the region³².

It should be emphasised that the integration and cooperation of the Western Balkan states with the Western institutions was part of Türkiye's broader foreign policy context,

³⁰ SFOR-NATO mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina (since 1996); IFOR-NATO international forces intended to strengthen peace and democracy in Bosnia and Herzegovina (one-year mandate from 1995-1996); KFOR-NATO's international peacekeeping force in Kosovo, operating as part of the Joint Guardian peace support operation.

³¹ K. Bieniek, *Polityka zagraniczna Turcji wobec państw bałkańskich*, Toruń 2008, p. 175.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 174.

which, in addition to the stabilisation of the region, was to become a kind of advocate and “intermediary” in relations between regional partners and the West.

A certain breakthrough in Türkiye’s implementation of its policy towards the Western Balkans occurred at the beginning of the 21st century. Two factors contributed to this outcome. The first was the terrorist attack on the United States in 2001, which resulted in a reduction of American and Western interest in the region and provided Türkiye with more opportunities in terms of expanding its sphere of influence. The second was the rise in power of the AKP, which intensified Türkiye’s activities in the Balkans. Taking into account the fact that during the first years of the AKP’s rule, Türkiye’s membership of the European Union became a priority for the AKP during the negotiation process, the Western Balkans constituted for Türkiye a kind of “bridge” to Western Europe. Cooperation with those countries was intended to confirm the political maturity of the Middle Eastern partner and the fact that they used the same standards and instruments (mainly the *soft power* categories)³³. Moreover, Türkiye’s presence in the Balkans and its involvement in the geopolitical competition for influence in the area allowed it to be perceived as an important international “player”.

Some experts point out that the “Balkan” direction has paradoxically intensified in Türkiye’s foreign policy after the stalled accession talks with the European Union and also as

³³ Ł. Reszczyński, *Geopolityczna emancypacja Turcji i jej wpływ na Balkany Zachodnie*, psz.pl, 20 July 2010, <https://psz.pl/117-polityka/geopolityczna-emancypacja-turcji-i-jej-wplyw-na-balkany-zachodnie> [5.09.2022].

a result of the rise of Neo-Ottomanism³⁴. The weakening of the geopolitical position of the United States during Barack Obama's presidency was also significant. The Turkish prime minister at that time, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, regarded it as an opportunity to change the world order in a multipolar direction. In order to be able to achieve the above goal, it was necessary to further consolidate Türkiye's influence. Since then, Türkiye has continued to focus on the political stability of the region and its economic development, whilst at the same time making use of its religious and historical links with the countries of that region and using *soft power* instruments to build its own international position.

Türkiye's ever-present aspirations in the Western Balkans are confirmed by a number of initiatives, including its chairmanship of the *South-East European Cooperation Process* (SEECP) in early June 2009. For the duration of Türkiye's chairmanship, its authorities chose the meaningful slogan "From a divisive history to a shared future"³⁵. At the same time, there was a diplomatic "offensive" by Türkiye's leaders in successive countries in the region. Türkiye regards Serbia as a key partner in the context of security and further stability in the Western Balkans. It also has extensive political relationships with Bosnia, Herzegovina and Croatia. The establishment of these relationships is accompanied by Türkiye's emphasis on the importance of Muslim communities in the Balkans as well as the Turkish minority living in the region.

³⁴ J. Lachert, *op. cit.*

³⁵ T. Kopyś, *op. cit.*

Türkiye would not have succeeded in establishing close relations with the region without the use of *soft power*. Its authorities co-founded two universities in Bosnia and Herzegovina. They are attended by students from Bosnia and Türkiye. Türkiye is also engaged in numerous projects intended to create a positive image of the country among the local population. For instance, the Turkish Agency for Development and Cooperation (*Türk İşbirliği ve Koordinasyon Ajansı Başkanlığı*, TİKA) donated USD 3.5 million to the reconstruction of the bridge in Bosnian Visegrad. In 2012-2013 alone, TİKA spent USD 3.7 million on the reconstruction and restoration of monuments (numerous mosques) and buildings built in the Balkans during the Ottoman Empire. In the territory of Macedonia, which is inhabited by 77,000 people who consider themselves Turkish, Turkish is taught in primary schools, and cultural and entertainment programmes are also broadcast in this language³⁶.

Another factor integrating Türkiye with the region is the widely understood economic sphere. Between 2002 and 2010, Türkiye's exports to the countries in the Western Balkans increased from USD 35 billion to USD 135 billion. The main markets for goods and commodities from Türkiye are in Serbia, Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Albania³⁷. The undertakings associated with infrastructure are of the greatest importance for Türkiye. Turkish companies, for example, have rebuilt the Belgrade-Bar highway (in Montenegro) and are involved in the construction of a dam on the

³⁶ Ibid., p. 137.

³⁷ T. Szigetvari, *Türkiye is Back. Turkish Interest on the Western Balkans*, "EU Frontiers Policy Paper ed. Budapest. Center for EU Enlargement Studies" 2012, no. 9, p. 11, quoted by T. Kopyś, op. cit., p. 139.

Vardar River³⁸. Some Turkish entrepreneurs have invested USD 200 million in the reconstruction of the air transportation system in Macedonia. TAV Turkish Airlines took control of Skopje Airport for 20 years. Türkiye also owned two Macedonian glass factories³⁹. The Turks are also investing in regional banks (including those in Albania), airlines (B&H Airlines in Bosnia and Herzegovina)⁴⁰ and telecommunications companies (Telekom Srbija in Serbia). In the energy sector, Türkiye's leaders regarded the aforementioned *South Stream* and *TurkStream* pipelines as key investments.

Conclusion

The geopolitical significance of the Western Balkans, the complex ethnic and religious structure of the states located there, and the phenomenon of balkanisation determine the nature of this area, which remains a scene of rivalry and confrontation between the external actors. Irrespective of the confrontation taking place there between the aforementioned Türkiye, the European Union, Russia and China for influence in the region, at the same time a struggle is taking place in that region between the West and Russia. In addition, three of the four external actors present in the Western Balkans are striving to change the current international order. The area thus fits into the broader context of global geopolitical competition.

For the Turkish authorities, the Western Balkans is another area in which they are attempting to establish them-

³⁸ T. Kopyś, op. cit., p. 139.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 140.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 141.

selves as a leader and create their own sphere of influence. The Western Balkans remain in Türkiye's area of interest because of the following factors: firstly, their central location with respect to the main regions; secondly, due to the passage of important communication routes going through them; and thirdly, because of having strong historical bonds with the local Muslim population. Building a stable and predictable Western Balkans is a priority for Türkiye.

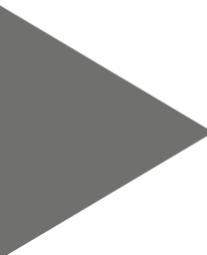
Since Türkiye's accession to the European Union was stalled, the Turks have been striving to develop an alternative, long-term formula for cooperation with the countries in the region that are not members of the European Union. In economic terms, it is of great importance to win markets as well as have Turkish entrepreneurs participate in the development of infrastructure there. Türkiye also has aspirations to be a significant partner in the emerging energy transmission networks in the Western Balkans.

Russia is unable to create structures in the Western Balkans that are competitive with those of the West. Therefore, it focuses on the destabilisation of the states of that region and hindering their democratisation process as well as their transformation towards the rule of law.

China and Russia have a common goal to weaken the influence of the United States in the Western Balkans and, in global terms, seek instead the emergence of a multipolar system. China wants to exert influence on the policies of the European Union, but it is not interested in stopping its expansion to include the countries of the Balkan Peninsula, which is a strategic objective for Russia.

Some observers are of the opinion that the consent of the European Union and the United States to an increase

in the position of Türkiye in the region can be construed as compensation for the failure of Türkiye's negotiation talks with the European Union. The above attitude cannot be disregarded since the long-term objectives of Türkiye and its Western allies in the region are the same. They focus on its stabilisation. Integrating and cooperating with the countries of the region, Türkiye is to provide them with a certain alternative to cooperation with China and Russia.



Anna Jagiełło-Szostak

Examining the “special” relationship between Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Republic of Türkiye

Introduction

The Republic of Türkiye plays an important role in the foreign policy of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and both states have particularly good and cordial diplomatic relations. As a result of the war in BiH (1992-1995) and the failure of Western powers in preventing ethnic cleansing, Türkiye has “resumed” relations with BiH and become an advocate of an active policy towards Bosnia and Herzegovina. Türkiye recognised and established diplomatic relations with BiH in 1992 and made diplomatic attempts to help Bosnian Muslims by urging international organisations to intervene¹.

¹ O. Tufekci, *The foreign policy of modern Turkey. Power and the Ideology of Euroasianism*, London–New York 2017, pp. 129-130; L.G. Martin, *Foreign Policy*, [in:] M. Heper, S. Sayari (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Modern Turkey*, London–New York 2012, p. 230.

Then, the Turkish military contingent was deployed in Zenica as a UN peacekeeping mission and continued its duty under NATO (IFOR, SFOR) between 1995-2004². After this period, the EU established a stabilisation force, EUFOR – a successor to SFOR – in which Turkish soldiers are present.

Both countries intensified relations after 2000 when the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, AKP) came to power. This resulted in the signing of agreements on scientific and cultural cooperation, free trade, social insurance, customs and cooperation in the field of tourism³. The continuation of mutual relations is seen in the number of official visits in the period 2010-2022, during which the leader of Türkiye Recep Tayyip Erdoğan eight times (the most in the WB6 region) visited BiH as prime minister or president. During visits, Erdoğan's speeches were very forthcoming and respectful towards Bosnian society and politicians. He described BiH and the entire region as “Balkan friends”, and he emphasised that “BiH serves a place in the hearts of our people”⁴.

Türkiye's foreign policy towards BiH refers to a political identity constructed on the basis of references to the past, cultural heritage, *soft power*, and economy treated as a support instrument of the bilateral relations. Thus, the aim of the chapter is to analyse the contemporary and selected

² Y. Coşkun, *Turkey's contribution to peace and stability in the Balkans: assessing the Turkish military contingent in Bosnia and Herzegovina under the Stabilization force (SFOR) mission (1996-2004)*, “Eurasian Studies” 2021, no. 27/59, pp. 35-39.

³ Ministarstvo vanjskih poslova Bosne i Hercegovina, *Bilateralni odnosi*, https://www.mvp.gov.ba/vanjska_politika_bih/bilateralni_odnosi/medunarodni_ugovori/prema_drzavama/Default.aspx [27.07.2022].

⁴ *Kancelar Scholz na Balkanu, daleko od Sarajeva*, DW, 9 June 2022, <https://www.dw.com/bs/kancelar-scholz-na-balkanu-daleko-od-sarajeva/a-62074111> [13.06.2022].

aspects of political, economic and socio-cultural relations between them. The period after the AKP's takeover of power in 2002 saw the AKP showing a growing interest in the Balkan peninsula, including Bosnia and Herzegovina. The main focus of the chapter is on the 2014-2022 caesura, which is related to the beginning of the presidency of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan until present times.

Political relations

Bilateral relations with Türkiye are important not only for Bosnia and Herzegovina as a state but also for its entities: the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Republika Srpska. The vivid symptoms of mutual support were visible after R. T. Erdoğan won the presidential election in 2014. Bakir Izetbegović, leader of the Democratic Action Party (*Stranka Demokratske Akcije*, SDA) and a member of BiH's presidency, called it a victory for all Bosniaks⁵, which indicates the close relationship with the president of Türkiye. A year later, Erdoğan visited BiH for the first time, just before the SDA congress, during which the new party leadership was to be elected. Furthermore, the possibility of Turkish investments in the sectors of culture, tourism, military and agriculture, as well as loans for small and medium-sized enterprises from BiH were discussed.

However, Ankara pressed for the Bosniak leaders to close the Fetullah Gülen organizations and educational institu-

⁵ E.M. Jukic, *Turkish President Cements Ties With Bosnia*, BalkanInsight, 20 May 2022, <https://balkaninsight.com/2015/05/20/turkish-president-erdogan-visits-bosnia-s-capital/> [17.08.2022].

tions network in BiH⁶; they had been operating in Bosnia since 1997 and were located in Bihać, Zenica, Tuzla and Mostar, and the most famous is Burch International University in Sarajevo⁷.

F. Gülen was accused by Ankara of carrying out a coup in 2016 and is treated as a threat to the Turkish authorities⁸. Despite the fact that B. Izetbegović called the coup attempt a “threat” to the development of democracy in Türkiye and made assurances that Erdoğan had strong support in Bosnia, support did not come from all Bosnian Muslim, Croatian or Serbian sides, which did not express enthusiasm about the events in Türkiye or support the closure of Gülen’s institutions⁹. In parallel, in 2016 the Turkish Maarif Foundation (*Türkiye Maarif Vakfı*, TMV) was founded, which provides education from kindergarten to secondary school as well as training centres (nine are located in BiH)¹⁰. An interesting example is also the private International University of Sarajevo, the campus of which was opened by Prime Minister R.T. Erdoğan in 2010¹¹.

⁶ E. Rose, *Bosnian Schools Feel Heat From War on ‘Gülenists’*, BalkanInsight.com, 22 November 2016, <https://balkaninsight.com/2016/11/22/students-of-bosnia-s-Gülen-schools-feel-the-pressure-11-21-2016/> [7.09.2022].

⁷ G. Knezević, *Bosnia’s Gülenist Network*, Rferl.org, 22 July 2016, <https://www.rferl.org/a/bosnia-Gülenist-network/27873908.html> [20.08.2022].

⁸ See: B. Başer, A.E. Öztürk (eds.), *Authoritarian politics in Turkey. Elections. Resistance and the AKP*, London–New York 2017, pp. 213–252.

⁹ R. Toe, *Bosnia’s Muslims Keep Worried Eye on Türkiye*, Balkaninsight.com, 18 July 2016, <https://balkaninsight.com/2016/07/19/bosnians-concerned-with-developments-in-Türkiye-07-18-2016/> [7.09.2022].

¹⁰ Turkish Maarif Foundation in the world, <https://maarifschools.edu.ba/page/2018-MAARIF-IN-THE-WORLD-16> [9.09.2022].

¹¹ International University of Sarajevo, <https://www.ius.edu.ba/en/board-trustees> [19.09.2022].

Nevertheless, political cooperation between BiH and Türkiye allowed Erdoğan to organize an election rally outside Türkiye in 2018 in Sarajevo. The meeting was held before the parliamentary and presidential elections in Türkiye¹². On the one hand, the rally was attended by Erdoğan’s supporters, not only from BiH but from other European countries. On the other hand, the event was seen as a return to the colonial times of the Ottoman Empire. For Erdoğan, the event was intended to encourage the potential electorate among the Turkish diaspora (undersized in BiH) inhabiting Europe to vote. B. Izetbegović encouraged people to vote for Erdoğan; in turn, Milord Dodik, the Serbian part of the BiH presidency and the leader of the Bosnian Serbs, accused the Turkish leader of “interfering” in Bosnia’s affairs¹³. The next visit of the Turkish president took place in July 2019, which was symbolic for Bosnia and Herzegovina because of the commemoration of the anniversary of the Srebrenica genocide. The other purpose of Erdoğan’s visit was to participate in the regional initiative summit of the South-East European Cooperation Process (SEECP), aimed at bringing WB6 countries closer to the EU. Similarly, Türkiye is a founding member of the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC), the operational arm of SEECP, through which it is involved in projects in the region.

The internal, uninterrupted political crisis in Bosnia and Herzegovina has also been of interest to Türkiye. Among

¹² Other European countries, including Germany, Austria, the Netherlands banned such controversial events.

¹³ *Erdogan holds controversial election rally in Bosnia*, EURACTIV.com, 22 May 2018, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/global-europe/news/erdogan-holds-controversial-election-rally-in-bosnia/> [27.07.2022].

the thorny issues, emphasis should be placed on M. Dodik's lack of recognition of the ban on genocide denial imposed by former Bosnian international envoy Valentin Inzko and the new high representative Christian Schmidt. Furthermore, the internal crisis in BiH had been growing since mid-2021, when M. Dodik announced that Republika Srpska (RS) wanted to create separate institutions, including a Serbian army. At the time, High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina Schmidt called the politicians' steps "equivalent to secession" and a violation of the Dayton Peace Agreement, which formally ended the war between Croatia and Serbia. The intensification of internal disputes in BiH did not interfere with the visit, at the end of August 2021, of the Turkish president, who met with all members of the BiH presidency – Željko Komšić, Šefik Džaferović and M. Dodik. One of the key topics was economic cooperation between the two countries (regarding the update of the free trade agreement; increasing Türkiye's trade, cooperation in the field of energy). The second aspect of talks was devoted to internal relations in BiH. The Turkish president has traditionally pointed out that BiH occupies a "special place" in Turkish politics and encouraged the strengthening of cultural ties. Bosnian Presidential Representative S. Džaferović assessed relations with Türkiye as fraternal and Erdoğan as a great friend of Bosnia and Herzegovina¹⁴. Similarly, all parties of BiH's presidency agreed that Türkiye was making significant efforts to stabilise the situation in BiH. Taking this into account, Türkiye

¹⁴ F. Međedović, *Erdogan svjedočio složenosti situacije, Dodik ne želi da se ponovi Afganistan*, N1, 27 August 2021, <https://ba.n1info.com/vijesti/erdogan-svjedocio-slozenosti-situacije-dodik-ne-zeli-da-se-ponovi-afganistan/> [27.08.2022].

is perceived by the ruling elite in BiH as a partner that does not impose or require changes, but offers solutions and aid.

In the face of the Russian aggression towards Ukraine, Türkiye intensified its relations with BiH, pointing out the unstable situation in BiH. The burning issues of the geopolitical instability of BiH were raised during the Antalya Diplomatic Forum in Türkiye in March 2022. The Turkish president and BiH’s members of the presidency discussed geostrategic issues and the current political situation in the Western Balkans (WB6), ensuring the functionality of the state institutions of BiH in a panel entitled “The future of Bosnia and Herzegovina”. Another diplomatic meeting took place in June 2022, when Bosnia and Herzegovina was visited by Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, the minister of foreign affairs of the Republic of Türkiye. The visit included meetings with officials, not only in Bosnia and Herzegovina but also in Croatia, Serbia and Kosovo. Talks were also held with High Representative Schmidt¹⁵. Besides, the visit to BiH coincided with the 30th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Türkiye and BiH.

Before the diplomatic visit of the ministry of foreign affairs of Türkiye, on 14 June 2022 in Istanbul, Çavuşoğlu met separately with a third member of the BiH presidency, M. Dodik. The Serbian politician pointed out the importance of trilateral cooperation in the region and expressed the role of Türkiye as a mediator contributing to the sta-

¹⁵ Republic of Türkiye, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Visit of Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu to Bosnia and Herzegovina*, 17-18 June 2022, <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/sayin-bakanimizin-bosna-hersek-i-ziyareti--17-18-haziran-2022.en.mfa> [6.08.2022].

bilisation of the situation in BiH¹⁶. Subsequently, Dodik travelled to St. Petersburg for the International Economic Forum, during which he met Sergey Lavrov, minister of foreign affairs of the Russian Federation. Both emphasised the traditionally friendly relations between RS and the Russian Federation. M. Dodik, described BiH as unstable and under the protectorate of Western countries. He also paid tribute to three world leaders: Vladimir Putin, Xi Jinping and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, calling them great world leaders¹⁷.

On 6 September 2022, the president of the Republic of Türkiye R.T. Erdoğan visited Bosnia and Herzegovina. During the meetings, the issues of Türkiye's involvement in calming the crisis in BiH and the aspect of increasing Turkish investments in BiH were discussed. Firstly, the visit was related to the general elections in BiH held in October 2022 and constituted symbolic support for representatives of the Bosniaks¹⁸. R. T. Erdoğan met with Bakir Izetbegović, the SDA candidate for membership of the BiH presidency. Both politicians have been involved in pre-election campaigns in recent years. The pre-election campaign took place in the light of unsuccessful negotiations on electoral reform, the possibility for High Representative for BiH Schmidt to impose changes in the electoral law and the input attempts at the territorial reorganisation of the Federation of Bosnia

¹⁶ *Dodik od Cavusoglua opet tražio posredovanje Milanovića, Vučića i Erdogana*, N1info.com, 14 June 2022, <https://ba.n1info.com/vijesti/dodik-od-cavusoglua-opet-trazio-posredovanje-milanovica-vucica-i-erdogana/> [30.08.2022].

¹⁷ *Dodik u Rusiji: Svijet ima tri lidera – Putina, Pinga i Erdogana*, N1info.com, 16 June 2022, <https://ba.n1info.com/vijesti/dodik-u-rusiji-svijet-ima-tri-lidera-putina-pinga-i-erdogana/> [30.08.2022].

¹⁸ According to the preliminary post-election data on 7 October 2022, B. Izetbegovic was not elected to the presidium of BiH.

and Herzegovina by the Croatian Democratic Community (*Hrvatska demokratsa zajednica*, HDZ) deepened the political crisis in BiH. The president of Türkiye unambiguously expressed his opposition to the imposition of decisions on the electoral law on BiH authorities and diplomatically indicated that Schmidt should not interfere in the internal affairs of the state¹⁹. This position is accepted by M. Dodik, who has not openly recognised – like Russia and China – the high representative for BiH since his appointment in 2021. Besides, Türkiye does not want to allow the crisis in BiH to escalate. Immediately after the outbreak of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, there was a visible diplomatic offensive by the EU, Germany, the USA and the UK against the region, especially Bosnia and Herzegovina, fearing internal divisions, and support of the Russian side by Republica Srpska and Serbia. Türkiye supports the Dayton Agreement, in which neighbouring countries are required to respect the political independence of Bosnia and Herzegovina and its cooperation with NATO and the European Union.

During his September visit, the Turkish president travelled from Sarajevo to Belgrade and Zagreb, where he met the Serbian president and the Croatian president and prime minister. It was a continuation of the trilateral cooperation mechanism in the region²⁰. In the past, when trilateral summit meetings started and were held in 2010-2013, the *Istanbul Declaration* and the *Ankara Summit Declaration* was

¹⁹ A. Halvadzija, *Erdogan protiv nametanja izmjena Izbornog zakona: Prijetnja demokratskom procesu*, N1info.com, 6 September 2022, <https://ba.n1info.com/vijesti/erdogan-protiv-nametanja-izmjena-izbornog-zakona-prijetnja-demokratskom-procesu/> [8.09.2022].

²⁰ M. Malulić, *Prospects for Trilateral Relations between Türkiye, Serbia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina*, “Insight Türkiye” 2019, vol. 21, no. 2, pp. 129-130.

adopted. The first meeting in Istanbul in 2010 was a breakthrough for Serbia and BiH relations due to the fact that the leaders of the two states met for the first time since the war. Besides the main goals of declarations was to strengthen the process of dialogue between the three countries, contributes to cooperation in the Balkan region, mutual encouragement and support for integration with the European Union²¹. Furthermore, the Trilateral Trade Committee was established and the “Declaration on Economic and Trade Cooperation” was signed to improve trilateral economic relations, which is continued today²².

Economic relations

Türkiye’s cooperation in the region is based largely on two aspects: assistance in crisis situations (such as floods, earthquakes, migration crisis) and by increasing investments in BiH. As an example of Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (*Türk İşbirliği ve Koordinasyon Ajansı Başkanlığı*, TİKA) activities in the area of humanitarian aid, there was a project to rebuild the Yanya River bed, which was implemented to prevent flooding. The initiative was related to the 2014 flooding in the Yanya province²³. Another example of such activities during the 2020-2021 COVID-19 pandemic was the supply of masks, overalls and test kits by Türkiye’s Health Ministry to WB6²⁴. Among TİKA’s projects, the “Bal-

²¹ Republic of Türkiye, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Relations with the Balkan Region...*

²² M. Mulalić, op. cit., pp. 129-130.

²³ Republic of Türkiye, Ministry of Culture and Tourism, *Annual Report*, TİKA, 2019, pp. 96-100, <https://www.tika.gov.tr/upload/sayfa/publication/2019/TIKAFaaliyet2019ENGWeb-Kapakli.pdf> [4.09.2022].

²⁴ M. Aydoğan, *Türkiye delivers medical aid to Balkans to fight virus*, aa.com.tr, 8 April 2020, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/health/Türkiye-delivers-medical-aid-to-balkans-to-fight-vi->

kans and Eastern European Countries Good and Life Safety Support Program” project was launched in 2017, which was used by over 1000 families and focused on the donation of agricultural equipment and training and help for farmers. In addition, TİKA was involved in the establishment of the Gradačac Vocational Training Centre in 2018 and the modernisation of hospitals and the construction and renovation of clinics, such as Sarajevo University’s Haematology clinic and the Krševac community clinic²⁵.

A second business area is seen in the implementation of economic cooperation. Since 2010, the Sarajevo Business Forum (SBF) has been held in the capital of BiH, in which Türkiye plays a significant role. The event, dubbed the “Balkan Davos”, focused on developing regional economic cooperation and attracting international investment to Southeast Europe. In 2022, the forum promoted, inter alia, regional investment projects in industry, agriculture, energy, education, finance, infrastructure, construction, the service sector, and tourism. The event was suspended in 2020-2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic²⁶.

As part of the official visit of the President of Türkiye to BiH in September 2022, the Chamber of Foreign Trade of Bosnia and Herzegovina (*Vanjskotrgovinska komora BiH*) in cooperation with the Committee for Foreign Economic Relations of the Republic of Türkiye (*Dış Ekonomik İlişkiler Kurulu, DEİK*) organized the BiH Business Forum – Türkiye, which aims to attract Turkish investment to BiH. During the forum

rus/1796700 [7.09.2022].

²⁵ Republic of Türkiye, Ministry of Culture and Tourism, *Annual Report...*, pp. 86-87.

²⁶ T. Öztürk, *Bosnia to hold 11th Sarajevo Business Forum*, aa.com.tr, 11 May 2022, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/bosnia-to-hold-11th-sarajevo-business-forum/2584417> [3.09.2022].

and subsequently, the tripartite relationship gradually garnered assistance in financing the construction of the Sarajevo-Belgrade motorway, which is Ankara's flagship project in the region and facilitates travel between Türkiye and BiH on the basis of identity cards²⁷, which undoubtedly made travel easier. Both projects demonstrate the strengthening of Türkiye's relations with BiH owing to the maintenance of close relations with the Bosniaks living in both countries and the perception of Serbia as a country influencing the stabilisation of the Balkan region. Nevertheless, Ankara is pursuing a pragmatic policy towards the Balkans and points to Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina as priority states²⁸.

It should be noted that in 2003, trade between BiH and Türkiye amounted to USD 70 million annually, and in 2022 it is expected to reach USD 1 billion²⁹. According to the BiH Foreign Investment Promotion Agency (*Agencija za unapređenje stranih investicija Bosne i Hercegovine*, FIPA), trade between BiH and Türkiye at the end of 2021 amounted to USD 845 million³⁰. Currently, the most important Turkish investments in BiH are in the Natron-Hayat paper industry in Maglaj, the Şişecam Soda chemical in Lukavac, and the banking sector of the Turkish Ziraat Bank in Sarajevo. Both countries co-

²⁷ A similar agreement was signed with the Republic of Serbia.

²⁸ V. Vuksanović, *Türkiye's Pragmatic Policy in the Balkans has its Limits*, *balkaninsight.com*, 11 November 2021, <https://balkaninsight.com/2021/11/11/Türkiyes-pragmatic-policy-in-the-balkans-has-its-limits/> [8.09.2022].

²⁹ *Džaferović na Poslovnom forumu: BiH je dobra šansa za turske investitore*, *n1info.com*, 6 September 2022, <https://ba.n1info.com/vijesti/dzaferovic-na-poslovnom-forumu-bih-je-dobra-sansa-za-turske-investitore/> [6.09.2022].

³⁰ Foreign Investment Promotion Agency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, FIPA, Database of Investment Projects, *External trade statistics 2021*, *Fipa.gov.ba*, http://www.fipa.gov.ba/informacije/statistike/izvoz_uvoz/External%20trade%20statistic%202021,%20Februariy%202022.pdf [7.09.2022].

operate on the basis of the Free Trade Agreement between Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Republic of Türkiye (*Ugovor o slobodnoj trgovini između Bosne i Hercegovine i Republike Turske*), which entered into force on 1 August 2021. The first such agreement was signed in 2003, and since R.T. Erdoğan’s election in 2014, increased interest in trade between both countries has been visible. It is an opportunity for Turkish companies to invest in a country close to the European Union. BiH can offer experience in industrial production and cheap, qualified workforce, as well as space for investments, e.g. in the agriculture, food, tourism, education, textile, and energy industries. Turkish investors may be discouraged by the political and economic instability in BiH and the difficult legislative conditions. On the one hand, imports from Türkiye to BiH in 2015-2020 increased by 43.5%. Exports to Türkiye decreased by 6.91% over the same period³¹. According to data from the Central Bank of BiH (*Centralna banka Bosne i Hercegovine*, CBBH), the largest number of investments in 2021 came from Switzerland and Türkiye, followed by Great Britain. On the other hand, most direct investments still come from Austria, Croatia and Serbia.

Socio-Cultural relations

Bosnia and Herzegovina and Türkiye, due to historical and cultural connections as well as heritage links, constitute an important axis of cooperation between both countries. In socio-cultural issues, attention is paid to the Turkish institu-

³¹ OEC, *Bosnia and Herzegovina*, <https://oec.world/en/profile/country/bih?compareExports=comparisonOptions5&latestTrendsFlowSelectorNonSubnat=flowo&tradeScaleSelector1=tradeScale2&yearlyTradeFlowSelector=flowo> [26.07.2022].

tions that influence *soft power* and the reconstruction of remnants of the Ottoman and Turkish³² legacy and demography.

In recent years, there has been an increase in Türkiye's actions towards Bosnia and Herzegovina in the context of *soft power*. One of the Turkish *soft power* instruments is TİKA and the Yunus Emre Foundation (*Yunus Emre Enstitüsü*, YEE), both subject to the minister of culture and tourism. YEE is engaged to promote Türkiye, the Turkish language, history, culture, and art, and to create a positive image of Türkiye abroad. There are three (out of ten at the WB6) Yunus Emre institutes in BiH – in Foynitsa, Mostar and Sarajevo – and TİKA has its overseas office in Sarajevo. In the last 24 years, with the help of TİKA, Türkiye has financed 900 projects in various fields in BiH, mainly in the area of the restoration of Ottoman and Turkish heritage, and infrastructure projects related to crisis management and agriculture³³. Turkish politicians, by reviving the memory of the legacies of the Ottoman Empire, have started “cultural investments”, focusing on the reconstruction of symbolic Ottoman monuments that were neglected or destroyed during the war, such as the Old Bridge in Mostar, the Ferhadija Mosque in Banja Luka, the Aladža Mosque in Foča, the Mehmed Pasha Sokolović Bridge in Visegrad, the Emperor's Mosque in Sarajevo and the Blagaj Dervish House in Blagaj-Mostar. These activities contribute to the development of the tourism sector in BiH. The number of tourists from Türkiye has been increasing

³² The period of rule of the Ottoman Empire in Bosnia and Herzegovina (functioning as a *sanjak*, then as a *vilayet*) lasted over four hundred years and *de jure* ended in 1908.

³³ *TİKA carries out 900 projects in Bosnia-Herzegovina in 24 years*, dailysabah.com, 9 January 2020, <https://www.dailysabah.com/Türkiye/2020/01/09/tika-helps-bosnia-herzegovina-with-900-projects-in-24-years> [15.09.2022].

since 2008, and its number decreased slightly in 2016 due to political turbulence; according to the Agency for Statistics of Bosnia and Herzegovina’s data on foreign tourist arrivals in the first half of 2022, Türkiye was fourth, behind Serbia, Croatia and Slovenia³⁴.

In BiH, more than half of the population are believers in Islam. Therefore, it is noticeable that Ankara is pursuing the Neo-Ottomanism symbolic policy of the “guardian”³⁵ who takes care of the Muslim community in the Balkans by using, among others, the religious institution – the Presidency of Religious Affairs (*Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı*, Diyanet). The most visible actions of Diyanet (in collaboration with TİKA and the Turkish Ministry of Culture) in BiH are projects which support the construction and restoration of mosques of the Ottoman period as part of Turkish-Islamic heritage³⁶. Among the criticisms, K. Öktem notes that the idea of Neo-Ottomanism in the Balkans is not seen as a positive idea for Christian or also Muslim communities because it diverts the Balkans’ attention away from Europe³⁷.

The area of ethnic, language and identity issues is significant for both countries. Bosniaks live in Bosnia and Herzegovina as a constitutive nation alongside Serbs and Croats. They also live in the WB6 region and outside the Balkan region. Thus, Bosniaks are seen by Türkiye as tradi-

³⁴ Agency for Statistics of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Business Statistics, *Tourism*, Cumulative January–June 2022, no. 5, 3 August 2022, pp. 2-3, https://bhas.gov.ba/data/Publikacije/Saopštenja/2022/TUR_02_2022_06_1_EN.pdf [10.09.2022].

³⁵ Д. Танасковић, *Неоосманизам. Доктрина и спољнополитичка пракса. Повратак Турске на Балкан*, Службени Гласник 2010, p. 86; K. Öktem, *Angry Nation...*, p. 172.

³⁶ K. Öktem, *Global Diyanet and Multiple Networks: Turkey's New Presence in the Balkans*, “Journal of Muslims in Europe” 2012, no. 1, p. 44.

³⁷ K. Öktem, *Angry Nation...*, p. 172.

tional supporters of Turkish policies in the Balkans. While Bosniaks in Türkiye constitute 2.6% of the population and are the fourth biggest ethnic group³⁸, the Turkish population in BiH is limited, and currently its number is estimated at just over 2,500³⁹. The contemporary Turkish community are made up of those who came on business purposes, to assist during the 1992-1995 war and then did not return to Türkiye, or they are Turkish peacekeeping troops deployed in BiH⁴⁰. Interestingly, data from the International Migration Organization from 2020 showed that the main migration goal of citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina is not Türkiye but neighbouring and Western countries, such as Croatia, Serbia, Germany, Austria, and Slovenia⁴¹.

Conclusion

In the international sphere, Ankara strongly supports BiH's sovereignty and territorial integrity as well as its Euro-Atlantic integration, which shows that, together with the West, it is a certain counterweight to Russia's influence in the Balkans. While Russia opposes Western interference, Türkiye is playing a strong role in promoting the cooperation of the Balkan countries with the EU and NATO. After Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Türkiye has significantly strengthened its influence in the Balkan part of Europe and is intensifying its

³⁸ *Worldatlas*, <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/the-ethnic-groups-of-Türkiye.html> [1.09.2022].

³⁹ *The Ethnic Groups Of Türkiye*, https://joshuaproject.net/people_groups/18274/bk [1.09.2022].

⁴⁰ C. Yenigün, *Autochthon Turkish Existence in the Balkans*, p. 527, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/278023076_Autochthon_Turkish_Existence_in_the_Balkans [1.09.2022].

⁴¹ International Migration Organization, IMO, <https://worldmigrationreport.iom.int/wmr-2022-interactive/> [10.09.2022].

interest in BiH. According to the principle of “zero problems with countries in the region”, Türkiye is playing a mediating role between states and constitutive nations in BiH and is seen as an advocate of Serbia’s and Croatia’s commitment to resolve the political crisis and contribute to the dialogue.

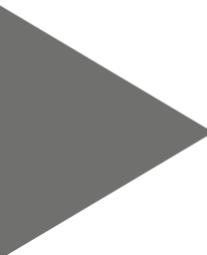
In the internal aspect, Erdoğan’s visits to BiH⁴² are seen as the official approval and support of the Turkish president towards B. Izetbegović and the SDA party. In turn, in June 2023, presidential elections will be held in Türkiye, and good relations with BiH may induce a large portion of the electorate of Bosniak origin to cast their votes for R. T. Erdoğan. On the one hand, relations between the Turkish president and all members of the BiH presidency are very good; they perceive Türkiye as a state which propose political solutions on BiH. On the other hand, not everyone supports Türkiye’s actions against F. Gülen, and Türkiye is not a model for those who oppose autocracy and support democratic reforms in the region.

The post-Davutoğlu⁴³ era and the Neo-Ottomanism in Turkish policy is still present and displays a somewhat pragmatic policy in relation to maintaining alliances and conducting investments and business with respect to the region’s links to Türkiye. Additionally, Türkiye is in a difficult economic situation (high inflation, unemployment). However, in the cultural context, Türkiye uses *soft power* by

⁴² A. Jagiełło-Szostak, *Przedwyborcza wizyta prezydenta Turcji w Bośni i Hercegowinie: „specjalne” relacje obu państw*, “Komentarze IEŚ” 2022, no. 691(203), 19 September 2022, <https://ies.lublin.pl/komentarze/przedwyborcza-wizyta-prezydenta-turcji-w-bosni-i-hercegowinie-specjalne-relacje-obu-panstw/> [19.09.2022].

⁴³ B.B. Coşkun, *The Post-Davutoğlu Era in Turkish Foreign Policy*, e-ir.info, 3 June 2006, <https://www.e-ir.info/2016/06/03/the-post-davutoglu-era-in-turkish-foreign-policy/> [17.09.2022].

the involvement of instruments such as TİKA, YEF, and TMV, which subsidise cultural, religious and educational institutions and attract potential investors. However, politically, Türkiye seems to be in charge of the Muslim community in BiH, which accounts for over 50% of the country's inhabitants. Also, it seems that Bosnians do not appear to see Türkiye as a substitute for the EU (in the area of migration).



Agata Domachowska

Towards a strategic partnership: Albanian-Turkish relations during Prime Minister Edi Rama's tenure (2013-2022)

Introduction

Albania and Türkiye are bound mainly by their shared past because for centuries the Ottoman Empire was present in the lands inhabited by Albanians. Many Albanians played a significant role in the history of the Empire, occupying prominent political, military and state administration positions. This can be evidenced by the fact that 35 Ottoman viziers were of Albanian origin¹. An important figure for both countries was Sami Frashëri (known in Türkiye as Şemseddin Sami), one of the leading intellectuals of the Albanian National Awakening (Rilindja) as well as the author of the six-volume Turkish Encyclopaedia *Kâmûs al-a'lâm* and

¹ R. Mita, B. Bajrami, *The role of Albanian personalities in the Ottoman Empire*, "Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences" 2015, no. 6(2 S2), pp. 189-190.

a reformer of the Turkish language². His comprehensive activity contributed to the development of the culture of both countries, and his son also went down in Turkish history as the founder of the famous sports club Galatasaray SK. The author of the Turkish national anthem, Mehmet Akif Ersoy, was an Albanian as well³.

It was only in 1912 that Albanians freed themselves from the yoke of Türkiye and began to build an independent Albanian state. During the interwar period, Türkiye and Albania established diplomatic relations and signed The Treaty of Friendship (1923)⁴. The development of relations halted after the outbreak of World War II. During the Cold War, when Albania was ruled by a ruthless communist leader, Enver Hoxha, who “closed” the country to the world, there was no chance for any remarkable improvement in the country’s relations with Türkiye. A change in this regard came along with the democratisation processes initiated in Albania in the early 1990s, when Türkiye began to financially support Albania (mainly through investments) with the aim of rebuilding the country’s economy, defence and the political sphere⁵.

The first ministerial meeting held in Ankara on 24 July 1992 strengthened relations between the countries. In February 1993, the then Turkish president Turgut Özal paid an

² D. Petrick, *Istanbul's Albanian Diaspora Reconnect With Their Roots*, BalkanInsight, 28 April 2021, <https://balkaninsight.com/2021/04/28/istanbul-albanian-diaspora-reconnect-with-their-roots/> [29.06.2022].

³ Ibid.

⁴ See more: I. Kaceli, *Economic, social and cultural relations between the Republic of Türkiye and Albania*, [in:] C. Erasian (ed.), *Turkish Foreign Policy During Atatürk's Era 1920-1938*, Istanbul University Press, 2021, p. 101.

⁵ A. Rakipi, *Albanian Turkish Relations – The Perils of Change*, 9 March 2022, <https://tiranaobservatory.com/2022/03/09/albanian-turkish-relations-the-perils-of-change/> [29.06.2022].

official visit to Albania, during which he delivered a speech to the Albanian parliament and signed a 15-year economic agreement on cooperation in, inter alia, infrastructure, defence and tourism. The Albanian president Sali Berisha returned the visit and went to Türkiye two months after those events⁶.

In the following years, Türkiye continued to support Albania, especially during the internal crisis in 1997; it also shared Albania's stance on Kosovo and supported Albania's accession to NATO, which eventually happened in 2009. Türkiye's support for Albania was also emphasised by Albanian President Rexhep Meidani, who said that "Türkiye, particularly in the decade of the 90s, ... extended a hand of hospitality like no other nation to Albania"⁷.

The aim of this text is to analyse the development of Albanian-Turkish relations in 2013-2022, during the tenure of Prime Minister Edi Rama, the leader of one of the two largest Albanian parties – the Socialist Party (*Partia Socialiste e Shqipërisë*)⁸. Currently (July 2022), Rama is the first prime minister in the history of Albanian parliamentarism to hold the office for three consecutive terms: 2013-2017, 2017-2021, and the current one. His ongoing term began in autumn 2021, after winning the elections. The analysis covers the political, defence, economic and socio-cultural aspects of cooperation.

⁶ P. Xhaferi, *The Post-Ottoman Era: A Fresh Start for Bilateral Relations between Albania and Türkiye?*, "Australian and New Zealand Journal of European Studies" 2017, no. 9(1), p. 48.

⁷ Ibid., p. 50.

⁸ The other party is the Democratic Party (*Partia Demokratike e Shqipërisë*, PD).

Cooperation in the areas of politics and security

Over the past thirty years, each consecutive Albanian government has striven to build relations with the country's three key partners – Greece, Italy and Türkiye. As he was fighting for his first victory in the parliamentary elections of 2013, the leader of the Socialist Party Edi Rama called these states Albania's main allies. On 4-5 October 2013, Türkiye's Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu paid an official visit to Tirana. A decision was made then to establish a high-level strategic cooperation mechanism between the two countries⁹.

The excellent relations between the two countries were confirmed once again in February 2014, when Albanian Minister of Defence Mimi Kodheli paid a visit to Türkiye at the invitation of her Turkish counterpart Ismet Yılmaz. The politicians focused mainly on security¹⁰, discussing, inter alia, the possibility of Turkish investment in the airport in Kuçova¹¹ or the Pashaliman Base – an Albanian naval base near the city of Vlora¹². For years, Türkiye has been supporting Albania in the modernisation of its armed forces, thus contributing to the improvement in security of this Balkan state.

⁹ Republic of Türkiye, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Foreign Minister Davutoğlu in Albania*, <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/foreign-minister-davutoglu-in-albania.en.mfa> [30.06.2022].

¹⁰ *Albanian Embassy in Türkiye*, <http://www.ambasadat.gov.al/Turkiye/en/defence-minister-kodheli-official-visit-Turkiye> [30.06.2022].

¹¹ See more: A. Domachowska, *Albania-NATO: modernizacja albańskiej bazy lotniczej*; "Komentarze IES" 2022, no. 508(20), 28 January 2022, <https://ies.lublin.pl/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/ies-komentarze-508-20-2022.pdf> [30.06.2022].

¹² In 1998, Albania and Türkiye signed an agreement for the reconstruction of the naval military base in Pasha Liman and the Naval Academy in Vlora, T. Kadam, "Up For Grabs": Russia's 'Most Strategic' Military Base That Gave Soviet Navy Access To East Med Offered To NATO, 28 May 2022, <https://eurasiatimes.com/up-for-grabs-russias-most-strategic-military-base-that-gave-soviet-navy-access-to-east-med-offered-to-nato/> [2.07.2022].

On 18-19 April 2014, Albanian Minister of Foreign Affairs Ditmir Bushati visited Türkiye to meet his Turkish counterpart¹³. The ministers signed, inter alia, the Memorandum of Understanding focused on bilateral Cooperation in Information Technologies¹⁴. The meeting was followed by a session of the “High Level Partnership and Cooperation Council”¹⁵ to discuss issues crucial for both countries.

In October 2018, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Türkiye Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu met his Albanian counterpart in Tirana. The two ministers agreed upon the Document for the Establishment of the High Level Cooperation Council, to be chaired by the prime minister of the Republic of Albania and the president of the Republic of Türkiye in order to deepen cooperation in areas such as politics, security, defence, economy, trade, energy, transport, tourism, culture, science, art and education as well as strengthen relations¹⁶.

During the first two terms of Prime Minister Rama, bonds with Türkiye were significantly strengthened. The personal relations between the Albanian head of government and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, with whom Prime

¹³ Republic of Türkiye, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, No: 122, 17 April 2014, *Press Release Regarding the Visit to Türkiye of the Albanian Minister of Foreign Affairs, H.E. Mr. Ditmir Bushati*, https://www.mfa.gov.tr/no_-122_-17-april-2014_-press-release-regarding-the-visit-to-turkiye-of-the-albanian-minister-of-foreign-affairs_-h_e_-mr_-ditmir-bushati.en.mfa [2.07.2022].

¹⁴ P. Tase, *Türkiye and Albania establish a dynamic agenda of bilateral relations*, 2 May 2014, <https://foreignpolicynews.org/2014/05/02/Turkiye-albania-establish-dynamic-agenda-bilateral-relations/> [2.07.2022].

¹⁵ It needs to be added that 2010 – High Level Council between Türkiye and Greece since 2010, D. Bushati, *For a Realistic Approach to Albania-Türkiye Relations*, Albanian Daily News, 21 February 2022, <https://albianidailynews.com/news/for-a-realistic-approach-to-albania-turkiye-relations/> [2.07.2022].

¹⁶ Ministria për Evropën dhe Punët e Jashtme, *Bushati- Çavuşoğlu çelin rrugën e ngritjes së Këshillit të Bashkëpunimit të Nivelit të Lartë, Shqipëri-Turqi*, 19 October 2018, <https://punetesjastme.gov.al/bushati-cavusoglu-celin-rrugen-e-ngritjes-se-keshillit-te-bashkepunimit-te-nivelit-te-larte-shqiperi-turqi/> [2.07.2022].

Minister Rama often meets, have also become particularly visible. In 2016, Rama was even invited to the wedding of Erdoğan's daughter Sumeyye¹⁷. What is more, the Albanian prime minister was the only foreign guest who took part in the opening ceremony of the Osman Gazi Bridge¹⁸. He was also the only Balkan head of government to be present at the swearing-in of President Erdoğan in 2018 – a ceremony in which no Western leader participated¹⁹.

Bilateral relations were significantly deepened during the official visit of Prime Minister Rama to Ankara, when on 6 January 2021 an agreement on a strategic partnership between the countries was signed. Additionally, a number of agreements were concluded to strengthen cooperation in such areas as economy, tourism, defence, energy, education, transport and health protection. The meeting between Rama and Erdoğan resulted in the signing of a joint political declaration on the establishment of the High-Level Strategic Cooperation Council²⁰. Both leaders unanimously highlighted the friendly – even fraternal – nature of the Albanian-Turkish alliance. Erdoğan was very explicit in calling the Albanians and Turks fraternal nations.

A year later, in January 2022, President Erdoğan visited Tirana, where he delivered a speech to the parliament. At

¹⁷ *Turkish President Erdogan's daughter marries in Istanbul*, 15 May 2016, <https://www.trtworld.com/life/erdogans-daughter-businessman-married-in-istanbul-ceremony-106790> [2.07.2022].

¹⁸ A. Rakipi, op. cit.

¹⁹ *Rama i vetmi kryeministër nga Ballkani që merr pjesë në betimin e Erdoganit*, 10 July 2018, <https://exit.al/rama-i-vetmi-kryeminister-nga-ballkani-qe-merr-pjesë-ne-betimin-e-erdoganit/> [2.07.2022].

²⁰ B. Bir, M. Aydogan, *Türkiye, Albania upgrade ties to strategic partnership*, 6 January 2021, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/politics/Türkiye-albania-upgrade-ties-to-strategic-partnership/2100611> [2.07.2022].

that time, seven agreements were signed with the Albanian government: on media, law enforcement, culture and science, sport, emergency management as well as a memorandum of understanding between the Turkish and Albanian Foreign Ministries for cooperation in the field of protocol²¹. Moreover, Erdoğan said explicitly that Albania is at the centre of Türkiye's interests in the Balkans, calling the country a friend and a natural ally²².

It is worth noting that Erdoğan's visit symbolically coincided with the 554th anniversary of the death of an Albanian national hero, Gjergj Kastrioti (also known as Skanderbeg²³), who fought against the Ottoman Empire. Thus, some Albanians regarded the arrival of the Turkish President on that day as a clear provocation²⁴.

A key issue in these bilateral relations, which bears great importance for Türkiye, is to fight the Fethullah Gülen movement (FETÖ)²⁵, accused by the Turkish authorities of organizing a coup in 2016. Fethullah Gülen, who lives in the United States, denies having any connection with this event. Nevertheless, Türkiye demands from the countries of the re-

²¹ *Erdogan in Tirana, agreements, agenda and measures that will be taken*, 17 January 2022, <https://abcnews.al/erdogan-in-tirana-agreements-agenda-and-measures-that-will-be-taken/> [3.07.2022].

²² R.T. Erdogan, *Relations between Türkiye and Albania*, Albanianailynews.com, 15 January 2022, <https://albanianailynews.com/news/relations-between-t-rkiye-and-albania/> [2.07.2022].

²³ Gjergj Kastrioti Skënderbeu was an Albanian national hero, who in the 15th century fought for the independence of the Albanian lands from the Ottoman Empire. Before that, he had fought in the Ottoman army.

²⁴ S. Tzimas, *Erdogan and Skanderbeg's ghost*, Ahval, 21 January 2022, <https://ahvalnews.com/Türkiye-albania/erdogan-and-skanderbegs-ghost> [4.07.2022].

²⁵ FETO, through its Gülistan Foundation, carried out its activities in the Balkans, including Albania, *Fetullah Gülen's broad Western Balkans network*, 28 July 2016, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/education/fetullah-gülens-broad-western-balkans-network/617524> [3.07.2022].

gion, and also from Albania, the expulsion of its members and supporters and the closure of its cultural and educational institutions, regarding them as anti-Turkish. Importantly, Rama was one of the first foreign leaders to condemn the unsuccessful coup attempt in Türkiye in 2016, and three years later a monument commemorating those who died at that time was unveiled in Tirana²⁶. President Erdoğan, in his speech to the Albanian parliament, emphasised his position: “A precondition to our support and brotherhood ... is your commitment to the fight against FETÖ”. This issue is constantly raised by Turkish politicians in their meetings with the Albanian government²⁷.

When analysing the political aspect of Albanian-Turkish relations, it is worth adding that these countries also cooperate in multilateral formats, such as NATO and the Southeast European Cooperation Process (SEECPP)²⁸. Furthermore, Türkiye and Albania support each other’s efforts to access the European Union, which, as can be expected, will not happen so soon.

²⁶ This monument sparked controversy in Albanian society due to the decision to unveil it as there are no other memorial sites in Albania commemorating internal events of other countries.

²⁷ See: Republic of Türkiye, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *The visit of the Foreign Minister of Albania to Türkiye*, <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/the-visit-of-the-foreign-minister-of-albania-to-turkiye.en.mfa> [4.07.2022]; Ministria për Evropën dhe Punët e Jashtme, *Bushati- Çavuşoğlu çelin rrugën e ngritjes së Këshillit të Bashkëpunimit të Nivelit të Lartë, Shqipëri-Turqi*, 19 October 2018, <https://punetejashtme.gov.al/bushati-cavusoglu-ceilin-rrugen-e-ngritjes-se-keshillit-te-bashkepunitit-te-nivelit-te-larte-shqiperi-turqi/> [2.07.2022].

²⁸ P. Tase, *op. cit.*

Cooperation in the economic area

The economic dimension in Albanian-Turkish cooperation is vital, predominantly for Albania, which recognises the considerable importance of foreign investments in the country. For over three decades, both states have been developing their economic relations²⁹, which were strengthened when Prime Minister Rama assumed power. In February 2014, several months after Rama was sworn in, Tirana held the Albania-Türkiye Economic and Trade Forum, during which the new head of the Albanian government said directly that he would remove all bureaucratic obstacles so that Turkish investors could freely operate on the Albanian market³⁰. Rama has kept his promise, and Türkiye is currently one of the most important investors in Albania³¹. As emphasised by the Turkish President, Türkiye has invested EUR 3.5 billion in Albania through 600 companies that employ more than 15,000 people³², and both countries aim to reach USD 1 billion annual trade exchange as soon as possible, from USD 853 million in 2021³³. Significantly, over the last eight

²⁹ "The Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between the Republic of Türkiye and the Republic of Albania was signed on 22 December 2006 in Tirana and entered into force on 1 May 2008. The Protocol on Rules of Origin of the Agreement was amended in 2009", Republic of Türkiye, Ministry of Trade, *Albania*, <https://www.trade.gov.tr/free-trade-agreements/albania> [4.07.2022].

³⁰ P. Tase, op. cit.

³¹ *Erdogan comes after Gülen group in Albania, finds support for EU membership*, 18 January 2022, <https://thearabweekly.com/erdogan-comes-after-gülen-group-albania-finds-support-eu-membership> [5.07.2022].

³² A. Taylor, B. Halla, *Erdogan demands Albania's support in fight against Gülen*, 18 January 2022, https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/short_news/erdogan-demands-albanias-support-in-fight-against-gülen/ [5.07.2022].

³³ *Erdogan comes after Gülen group...*; Republika e Shqipërisë, Kryeministria, *Joint press conference of Prime Minister Edi Rama and the President of Türkiye Recep Tayyip Erdoğan*, 17 January 2022, <https://kryeministria.al/en/newsroom/konference-per-shtyp-e-kryeministrit-edi-rama-dhe-presidentit-te-turqise-recep-tayyip-erdogan/> [6.07.2022].

years, Turkish investment in Albania has almost doubled, reaching a value of EUR 2.7 billion³⁴.

There are numerous Turkish enterprises which invest in Albania (e.g. ENKA, Gintaş, Armada, Metal Yapı, Aldemir, Servomatik, Kablo Yılmaz Cable, Merinos, and Everest)³⁵, predominantly in such branches as infrastructure, construction, transport, education, telecommunications and energy. Aviation is yet another sector which attracts Turkish investments in Albania. Turkish Airlines owns 49% of Air Albania³⁶. Furthermore, in April 2021, a contract for the construction of the airport in Vlora was signed with the following companies: Mabco Constructions SA (50%), owned by a Kosovar businessman and politician Behgjeta Pacolli; the Turkish YDA-Group (48%); as well as the Albanian 2A Group shpk (2%). YDA-Group was also involved in the construction of the hospital in Fiera (see the section below: cooperation in the socio-cultural area). Additionally, the Turkish Kurum International, specialising in the production of iron and steel, electricity, industrial gases and lime, took over 85% of the Albanian market within two decades³⁷. Also in 2021, it was decided that the Turkish company Gözüyılmaz Mühendislik would produce five boats for the Albanian police to guarantee safety on the coast³⁸.

³⁴ *Türkiye's investments in Albania as our fourth largest trading partner*, 17 January 2022, <https://euronews.al/en/albania/2022/01/17/Türkiye-fourth-largest-trading-partner-to-albania/> [6.07.2022].

³⁵ P. Tase, op. cit.; P. Xhaferi, op. cit.

³⁶ R. Burbaite, *Turkish Airlines helps set up national carrier Air Albania*, 13 June 2018, <https://www.aerotime.aero/articles/21413-turkish-airlines-helps-set-up-national-carrier-air-albania> [8.07.2022].

³⁷ Kurum, *About us*, <https://www.kurum.al/en/about-us/> [8.07.2022].

³⁸ *Turkish company to produce patrol boats for Albanian police*, 5 November 2021, <https://www.dailysabah.com/business/defense/turkish-company-to-produce-pa->

Interestingly, although more and more Turkish enterprises are operating on the Albanian market (594 in July 2022), still half of the foreign businesses registered in Albania are in Italian and Greek hands³⁹. Despite the declarations made by politicians and the actual growth of Turkish influence in the Albanian economy in recent years, Italy remains Albania's main trading partner. Economic cooperation with Türkiye is primarily reflected in Albanian imports – Türkiye ranks second here. However, it is still almost three times less compared to imports from Italy. In the case of exports, Albanian-Turkish trade cooperation is much less visible as the main recipients of Albanian exports are Italy, Kosovo, Spain, Germany and Greece⁴⁰.

Cooperation in the socio-cultural area

More than a hundred years after Albania declared its independence and finally freed itself from the Turkish yoke, Türkiye's presence is now particularly visible in the Albanian social and cultural space. Türkiye is engaged in projects aimed at building or renovating various facilities, including places of worship. The Turkish authorities finance, inter alia, the reconstruction of mosques (e.g. the Lead Mosque in Shkodra) and the restoration of historical parts of Gjirokastra and Berat. In addition, Türkiye is building a new mosque in Tirana (*Xhamia e Madhe e Tiranës; Xhamia e Namazgjasë*)⁴¹.

trol-boats-for-albanian-police [9.07.2022].

³⁹ A. Domachowska, *Albania – Turcja: wzmocnianie strategicznego partnerstwa*, "Komentarze IEŚ" 2021, no. 410(107), 22 June 2021, <https://ies.lublin.pl/komentarze/albania-turcja-wzmocnianie-strategicznego-partnerstwa/> [7.07.2022].

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ *Türkiye's investments in Albania...*

The cost of building the temple, financed by the Presidency of Religious Affairs (*Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı*) operating in Albania, is expected to amount to around EUR 30 million. In January 2022, President Erdogan, during his official visit to Albania, also inaugurated the historic 18th century Hajji Et'hem Bey Mosque (*Xhamia e Haxhi Et'hem Beut*) in Tirana, restored by the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (*Türk İşbirliği ve Koordinasyon İdaresi Başkanlığı*, TİKA)⁴². Importantly, since 1996 TİKA has completed 546 projects in Albania⁴³, worth approximately EUR 20 million.

In turn, the Yunus Emre Institute (*Yunus Emre Enstitüsü*), which operates in Tirana and Shkodra, is engaged in promoting Türkiye, its language, history and art. When it comes to cooperation in the field of education, the Turkish Maarif Foundation (*Türkiye Maarif Vakfı*), financed by the Ministry of Education, runs several institutions in Albania⁴⁴. Furthermore, according to the agreement concluded in 2021, Turkish may be taught in Albanian schools as an additional language⁴⁵.

The socio-cultural relations between the countries are greatly influenced by the large Albanian diaspora in Türkiye⁴⁶. It is estimated that up to five million Albanians may

⁴² Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye, *President Erdoğan inaugurates Hajji Et'hem Bey Mosque in Tirana*, 17 January 2022, <https://tccb.gov.tr/en/news/542/134375/president-erdogan-inaugurates-hajji-et-hem-bey-mosque-in-tirana> [10.07.2022].

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Turkish Maarif Foundation, op. cit.

⁴⁵ *Turkish language is introduced in Albanian schools, Albanian language in Türkiye*, <https://www.ocnal.com/2021/03/turkish-language-is-introduced-in.html> [10.07.2022].

⁴⁶ See more: Ş. Geniş, K.L. Maynard, *Formation of a diasporic community: The history of migration and resettlement of Muslim Albanians in the black sea region of Türkiye*, "Middle Eastern Studies" 2009, no. 45(4), pp. 553-569.

now live in the country⁴⁷. For centuries, Albanians have emigrated to the lands of today's Türkiye, settling most often in Istanbul and several cities of Asiatic Türkiye⁴⁸. Currently, Albanian associations are still operating there. Since 2003, there have been Albanian language courses organized in Bursa, a city inhabited by a considerable number of Albanians – it is estimated that up to 800,000 people of Albanian origin live in this Turkish city⁴⁹. Furthermore, the Albanian Culture Centre in Ankara also conducts Albanian language courses. It is also worth adding that Albanian politicians, when paying official visits to Türkiye, often meet the Albanian diaspora living there⁵⁰. As part of deepening mutual relations, in 2016 Tirana held celebrations of the 95th anniversary of the Turkish national anthem, written by an outstanding Turkish-Albanian poet, Mehmet Akif Ersoy⁵¹.

In the analysis of Turkish-Albanian relations in their socio-cultural dimension, it is not possible to ignore the Turkish help offered to Albania. In recent years, Türkiye has repeatedly provided Albania with real and multidimensional support. For example, at the end of 2019, when Albania experienced an earthquake, Türkiye offered to rebuild 524 residential buildings in Laç. The investment amounted

⁴⁷ D. Petrick, op. cit.

⁴⁸ J. Barjaba, *Albanian Diaspora across the World*, "Athens Journal of Mediterranean Studies" 2019, no. 5(3), p. 176.

⁴⁹ D. Morina, *Inside the Homes of Albanians in Türkiye*, 30 December 2019, <https://kosovotwopointzero.com/en/inside-the-homes-of-albanians-in-türkiye/> [15.07.2022].

⁵⁰ See Institution of the President of the Republic of Albania, *The President of the Republic, Bujar Nishani met with representatives of the Albanian community in Istanbul*, 10 April 2013, <http://president.al/old/presidenti-i-republikes-bujar-nishani-takohet-me-perfaqesues-te-komunitetit-shqiptar-ne-stamboll/?lang=en> [15.07.2022].

⁵¹ T. Öztürk, *Albanian capital marks birth of Turkish national anthem*, 11 March 2016, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/culture-and-art/albanian-capital-marks-birth-of-turkish-national-anthem/535543> [15.07.2022].

to EUR 42 million⁵². TİKA quickly organized food parcels and blankets for the victims of the quake, for which the Albanian prime minister expressed his gratitude – “... Türkiye was the first country to help Albania”⁵³.

Albania was also a beneficiary of Turkish aid during the COVID-19 pandemic. Türkiye financed the construction of a 150-bed hospital in Fier, whose total cost was EUR 70 million⁵⁴. The facility was built in just 68 days.

Conclusion

Türkiye has been a key partner for Albania for over three decades. These unique relations were strengthened during the rule of Prime Minister Edi Rama, and both countries have consistently been developing bilateral cooperation in the political, social, cultural and economic areas. First and foremost, Albania realises Türkiye’s powerful position in the region and that it is a strong NATO member. Positive personal relations between Prime Minister Edi Rama and President of Türkiye Recep Tayyip Erdoğan also contribute to the strengthening of relations between the countries. Türkiye remains a reliable partner and consistently supports Albania. As the former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Albania Ditmir Bushati stressed, Türkiye helped Albania in crisis situations – in 1997, during the humanitarian crisis caused

⁵² Gj. Kajana, *Albania-Türkiye: Erdogan’s visit boosts the bilateral relationship*, 25 January 2022, <https://www.balcanicaucaso.org/eng/Areas/Albania/Albania-Türkiye-Erdogan-s-visit-boosts-the-bilateral-relationship-215218> [15.07.2022].

⁵³ *Albania Gets First Aid from Türkiye After Deadly Quake*, 28 November 2019, <https://relief-web.int/report/albania/albania-gets-first-aid-türkiye-after-deadly-quake> [5.07.2022].

⁵⁴ R.T. Erdogan, *Relations between Türkiye and Albania*, “Albanian Daily News”, 15 January 2022, <https://albandailynews.com/news/relations-between-t-rkiye-and-albania> [2.07.2022].

by the war in Kosovo (1998-1999), during the 2019 earthquakes and the COVID-19 pandemic⁵⁵. For Tirana, Turkish investments in Albania are of great significance, and Türkiye continues to be an important trading partner.

In the context of the development of Albanian-Turkish relations during the subsequent terms of Edi Rama as the prime minister, a factor that should be noted are the potential risks connected with Albania's EU accession process combined with Erdoğan's authoritarian model of governance⁵⁶. It is also possible that the Albanian government will become less involved in the integration process in favour of tightening their relations with Türkiye – particularly as Rama's criticism of the EU has been increasingly noticeable since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic⁵⁷. However, the Albanians definitely remain a pro-European nation, and EU membership will be a priority for the subsequent governments in Tirana, despite the process delays caused by both sides. In any case, moving closer to the EU does not have to mean weakening relations with Türkiye. From Albania's perspective, both processes can develop simultaneously, without adversely affecting each other – particularly in light of the fact that, although in July 2022 Albania initiated accession negotiations, there is still a long way to go before this Balkan country becomes a member of the European Union.

⁵⁵ D. Bushati, *op. cit.*

⁵⁶ S. Tzimas, *Albanian PM looks to Türkiye ahead of election*, 24 January 2021, [https://www.ekathimerini.com/news/261602/albanian-pm-looks-to-turkiye-ahead-of-election/\[15.07.2022\]](https://www.ekathimerini.com/news/261602/albanian-pm-looks-to-turkiye-ahead-of-election/[15.07.2022]).

⁵⁷ See: *European Union Has Forgotten the Purpose of Its Existence, Rama Tells FT*, 13 May 2021, [https://exit.al/en/2021/05/13/european-union-has-forgotten-the-purpose-of-its-existence-rama-tells-ft/\[15.07.2022\]](https://exit.al/en/2021/05/13/european-union-has-forgotten-the-purpose-of-its-existence-rama-tells-ft/[15.07.2022]).

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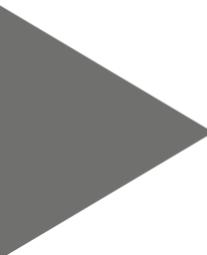
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The main goal of this paper is to analyse the geopolitical presence of Türkiye, among other international actors, in the Balkans and the current bilateral relations between chosen countries in the area, with a particular focus on the following: the political stability and security of the region, growing economic contacts, use of religious, historical, ethnic and cultural links with the Balkan countries, and the soft power used as an instrument to build Türkiye's own international position.

From the Introduction

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