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**THESES**

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**Regional security dynamics of the Western Balkans in the light of  
the transformativ impact of the European Union**

Ph.D. Dissertation

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## RESEARCH PROBLEM

In the 1990s, the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) fell apart in wartime. The resulting young and fragile Western Balkan region has undergone, and continues to undergo, a multi-level transformation over the past decades. They have simultaneously had to grapple with the issue of post-war stability and reconciliation, while at the same time they have sought and are seeking to implement major political, economic, social and security sector transformations to overcome the legacy of the war. The European and Euro-Atlantic integrations provide the dominant framework for the reform process, but the relations between the multi-ethnic states remain fraught with conflicts and tensions<sup>1</sup> that are unique to the Western Balkans.

After the Cold War, and almost simultaneously with the events of the South Slavic war, there was an increased interest in regional security, one of the results of which was the development of the analytical framework known as the Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) by the Copenhagen School.<sup>2</sup> As security is socially constructed, it depends on the political practices of a country and its wider environment.<sup>3</sup> Security cannot therefore be reduced to military factors alone. The conceptual expansion of security has gradually come to include additional sectors such as political, economic, social and environmental. The basic premise of Barry Buzan's Regional Security Complex Theory, published in 2003, is that geographical proximity influences the spread of threats, whereby security dynamics are intensified between countries in close proximity to each other. This is true for both conventional and non-traditional security challenges, whereby the resulting regional security dynamics are what distinguish a group of countries as a regional security complex, within which there may be sub-complexes, such as the Western Balkans Regional Security Sub-Complex within the European Regional Security Complex (ESCS).<sup>4</sup> The Regional Security Complex Theory is a theory in which the region is viewed from a security perspective.<sup>5</sup> The actions that countries undertake to promote security

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<sup>1</sup> Dobrowieczki Péter – Orosz Anna: A Nyugat-Balkán. In: Szálkai Kinga – Baranyai Tamás Péter – Szarka E. Luca (szerk.): *Biztonságpolitikai Corvinák I.* Antall József Tudásközpont, Budapest, 2019. 275-276.

<sup>2</sup> Buzan, Barry – Waever, Ole: *Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security.* Cambridge: UK, Cambridge University Press, 2003.

<sup>3</sup> Buzan, Barry – Waever, Ole – Wilde, Jaap de: *Security. A New Framework For Analysis.* Colorado: USA, Lynne Rienner Publishers Inc., 1998. 23-45. Lásd továbbá: Ejodus, Filip: *Međunarodna bezbednost: teorije, sektori i nivoi.* Beograd: JP Službeni glasnik: Beogradski centar za bezbednosnu politiku, 2012. 107., Vilijams, Pol D.: *Uvod u studije bezbednosti.* Beograd: Službeni glasnik: Fakultet bezbednosti Univerziteta u Beogradu, 2012. 120.

<sup>4</sup> Buzan – Waever (2003) i. m. 45-64.; Lásd továbbá: Ejodus (2012) i. m. 117-118.

<sup>5</sup> Buzan – Waever (2003) i. m. 43-44.

are regionally linked, where national interactions are strong and national and global security factors are simultaneously at play.<sup>6</sup>

*"Regional security is the level of security beyond the local level of territorial coverage. The state concerned, with the necessary means, then transforms not only its immediate neighbourhood but the entire region according to its own security needs, eliminating potential threats."*<sup>7</sup> Péter Tálas' reflections perfectly introduce the academic problem that influenced the writing of this thesis. The Western Balkans region is often the focus of attention because of its instability. Traditional and modern security challenges complicate the region's daily life and give it a specific security dynamic.<sup>8</sup> However, the persistent conflict between the countries of the region has not created the internal forces that would have allowed the region to transform itself by prioritising security concerns. External intervention in the region has become a permanent feature in order to create stability and the incentive to cooperate. One such external force, and the largest regional security actor, is the European Union (EU). This dissertation examines the changing regional security dynamics under the influence of the EU. The effectiveness of the EU's instruments in broadly defined<sup>9</sup> sectors of security will be the main focus in order to measure how it can shape regional security dynamics in such a way as to push the region towards closer cooperation with a view to building a security community. In this sense, this implies not only overcoming the security dilemma, but also political and economic cooperation and a certain regional identity.<sup>10</sup> Of course, the fact that the EU is not the only major power in the region was also a clear factor in the research, but since the turn of the millennium the EU has taken the lead in the region. Furthermore, it is the only international actor to which the countries of the region have without exception committed themselves to integration. However, the internal weaknesses in the region give room for further externalities, where the turbulent process of integration and disintegration is affecting the region at the same time. The European Union has been active in the region since the 2000s, and although through its enlargement policy, it has been formulating and adopting annual progress reports with recommendations, regional strategies and action plans for the region, there is a lack of a clear agenda and sanctions for missing deadlines, a lack of a clear vision and measurability for the

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<sup>6</sup> Ayoob, Mohammed: From regional system to regional society: Exploring key variables in the construction of regional order. *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, Volume 53. Issue 3. 1999. 242. Lásd továbbá: Buzan – Waever (2003) i. m. 43.

<sup>7</sup> Tálas Péter: In: Gazdag Ferenc (szerk.): *Biztonsági tanulmányok - biztonságpolitika*. ZMNE, Budapest, 2011. 15.

<sup>8</sup> Kinsella, David – Russett, Bruce – Starr, Harvey: *World politics: The menu for choice*. Wadsworth: USA, Cengage Learning, 2012. 15-16.

<sup>9</sup> Baldwin, David A.: *Economic statecraft*. Princeton: USA, Princeton University Press, 1985.

<sup>10</sup> Nye, Joseph S. Jr.: *Soft power: The means to success in world politics*. New York: USA, PublicAffairs, 2004.

development of the Western Balkans. Instead, the EU has created a kind of credibility crisis in the region vis-à-vis itself, while the declared commitment of the countries of the region does not presuppose political will. In such a dynamic, can the European Union have the transformative power to meet the minimum requirements of the security community?

The changes that took place in the former socialist member republics of Central and Eastern Europe in the 2004 enlargement wave were also inspired by the prospect of EU membership, which clearly steered their development towards democracy, market economy and the rule of law, while the region was also characterised by nationalism and intense security risks. However, the aspiration to integrate into Western political, economic and security structures prevailed in the countries' domestic politics, a consensus that paved the way for deepening regional cooperation, so that the EU's influence led to a change in the regional security dynamic towards the building of a security community.<sup>11</sup> The focus is therefore on the attitudes and interrelationships of regional actors that shape the nature of regional security dynamics. Thus, from a research perspective, the primary focus is on the internal direction of the transformation of regional security complexes, which I examine in the light of the EU's transformative influence.

The choice of topic was generated by my research during my previous studies, in addition to my personal interest. Firstly, at the Institute of Slavonic and Baltic Philology of Eötvös Loránd University, in the Slavic Studies, Serbian major, where, in addition to the Serbian language, I was able to learn about the region from a cultural perspective, and secondly, at the National University of Public Service, in the Master's programme in International Security and Defence Policy, where I wrote my thesis on one of the countries of the region, namely Bosnia and Herzegovina and the need to revise the Dayton Peace Agreement. Although this research is closely related to the dissertation, the current perspective represents a new line of thought. The novelty of the research lies in the fact that, although international studies are limited in scope, domestic research has hardly addressed the formation of regional security dynamics in the Western Balkans, although the literature on the region is distinctly broad. Another novelty is the so-called research gap, i.e. the direction of the research, since practically all the changes that are taking place due to the EU - Serbia (Serbo-Serbian Republic; hereafter: Serbia), Montenegro, Northern Macedonia (Republic of Northern Macedonia; hereafter: Northern Macedonia), Albania (Republic of Albania; hereafter Albania), Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo (Republic of Kosovo; hereafter Kosovo), on a case-by-case basis, which gives a holistic

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<sup>11</sup> Kavalsi, Emilian: *Extending the European Security Community: Constructing Peace in the Balkans*. London and New York: Tauris Academic Studies, 2008.

perspective on the changing regional dynamics. It does so in a broad timeframe from 1991 to 2021, in order to explore, in particular, the factors that constitute obstacles in measuring the evolutionary phases of the security community, in order to predict possible variations in the security dynamics. The year 2021 is crucial in two respects, the first being that I wanted to examine change in a timeframe of approximately one generation. The second, and politically crucial, is the retirement of German Chancellor Angela Merkel in December 2021 after 16 years in office, during which time she has been a driving force behind EU policy towards the Western Balkans. Her basic premise has been to put regional stability ahead of democracy and European values, even at the cost of supporting stability. His departure will certainly bring about a change in European attitudes, but whether his carrot and stick tactics will continue is not the subject of this thesis.<sup>12</sup> The topicality of the subject is almost constant even after 30 years. The collapse of Yugoslavia, the South Slavic wars, the armed conflict in Kosovo, and then the period of stability, construction, transition and commitment to integration have brought the region, which still faces many security challenges, under constant scrutiny.

## **RESEARCH AIMS AND QUESTIONS**

### **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The research and the development of the dissertation are guided by five questions in three themes, as follows:

1. What are the drivers of the security dynamics of the Western Balkans Regional Security Sub-Complex, what are the current dynamics of the region?
2. a.) Why is the EU the leading security actor in the region? How and through which instruments has it influenced the regional security dynamics of the Western Balkans?  
b.) Is the transformation of the region linked to EU policy? How has the regional security dynamics changed, what evolutionary phase has the EU's regional engagement reached?
3. a.) Which obstacles to the development of regional security dynamics can be identified through a multidimensional analysis of regional actors?  
b.) What are the likely directions of development of regional security dynamics in the Western Balkans as a regional security sub-complex? Overall, to what extent has the EU shaped the regional security dynamics up to 2021?

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<sup>12</sup> Velebit, Vuk: Angela Merkel's legacy in the Western Balkans. Veridica, 2021. <https://www.veridica.ro/en/editorials/angela-merkels-legacy-in-the-western-balkans> (Downloaded: 2024.04.17.)

## **RESEARCH AIMS**

In the course of the proof, I will pursue five main objectives, following the ratio of questions to hypotheses:

A1: Using the tool of documentary analysis, I intend to identify the essential characteristics and security indicators of the Western Balkan regional security sub-complex, along which I plan to define the current security dynamics of the region.

A2-a: I intend to briefly describe the European Regional Security Complex and the European Union – also using the tool of document analysis – and within this I plan to analyse in detail its mainly autonomous transformational activities in the region.

A2-b: Using theory-testing process tracing, I intend to demonstrate the transformative impact of the EU on the changing regional security dynamics.

A3-a: By analysing the transformational index, EU progress reports and national security strategies, I intend to explain the evolutionary phase of the security dynamics identified above by a multidimensional impact assessment of the transformation from the regional actors' perspective, as part of which I plan to identify the barriers to the evolution of the security dynamics.

A3-b: I plan to justify, on the basis of the information obtained, the possible outcomes of the changes affecting the sub-complex, with a focus on the role of the European Union, by using the tool of scenario analysis.

## **HYPOTHESES**

In line with the research questions, I aim to prove the following hypotheses:

H1: The regional security dynamics in the Western Balkans have become more complex and have been transformed in unique and specific ways in recent years. This has been defined by patterns of interlocking and interdependent relations of friendship and hostility, which have provided a framework for the persistence of traditional security challenges, while new types of security challenges have also burdened the region. The security patterns in the region are sufficiently intense, open and unresolved in terms of the degree of interdependence.

H2-a: The EU, as an external intervener, has no alternative to offer a comprehensive development concept for the region. The EU influences the security dynamics of the region through a combination of its multidimensional bilateral and regional policies.

H2-b: EU policies and the transformation of the Western Balkans region are interlinked. The EU's approach to the Western Balkans, and its changes, have shifted the region from negative security patterns towards positive security patterns. After 1995, its policy of containment was

replaced by a regional approach, and after 1999 the Kosovo conflict pushed the EU towards a more ambitious policy of moving the regional security dynamics in the Western Balkans into the European Regional Security Community space.

H3-a.: Internal problems in the countries of the region stand in the way of the development of regional security dynamics. In the narrative of the post-conflict region, temporary solutions have emerged. Lack of cohesion and political will is a factor in several areas. Security dilemmas, excessive concentration of power, divergent security and defence orientations are still present in the security dynamics and provide a weak basis for the development of regional security cooperation.

H3-b: The security dynamics of the Western Balkans sub-complex, although long in the making, is still the most likely vision for the region, and its development may take a long time. EU integration is an attractive force in the region, but EU membership alone is not a sufficient motive. The EU has only been able to shape regional security dynamics to a limited extent until 2021.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

The research is related to international security studies within the social sciences and military studies. Due to the complex nature of the research, it has an interdisciplinary outlook to other co-disciplines to the extent that the focus is emphatically on regional security as applied to security studies.

The dissertation draws primarily on primary and secondary sources in Hungarian, English and Serbian, which, in addition to using the literature that provides the theoretical framework, analyses other national security and defence strategies, EU and other international strategies, and annual reports on the implementation of transformational change in the region.

The research is applied research as it follows an analytical strategy to draw conclusions that can be applied in practice. This is based on an essentially qualitative methodology, which, due to the nature of the research topic, does not include any quantified measurement of its own, but does include quantitative elements in the form of complementary statistical data on military-security, political, social and economic aspects.

We arrive at the first two hypotheses (H1 – hypothesis "a" of the second questionnaire: H2-a) by referring to the Regional Security Complex Theory, by analysing the internal dynamics of the Western Balkan regional security sub-complex, the current regional security dynamics and by examining the European Union's regional approach to the Western Balkans. The relevant chapters in this case will primarily follow the methodology of documentary analysis. For both



hypotheses, document analysis is an appropriate choice because it is well suited for the analysis of explicit content, such as documents from international, European, regional and national organisations, institutions and agencies, as well as NGOs and academic databases.<sup>13</sup>

The second hypothesis (H2-b) of the second question refers to the transformation of regional security dynamics, its transformation curve, which explains the thesis to be proved by the change in the European Union's approach to the region. This is mainly investigated through a theory-testing process tracing<sup>14</sup> of the adaptation of three formations of regional security dynamics in the Western Balkans. Theory-testing process tracing can be applied when we use deductive methods, i.e. when we draw concrete conclusions, i.e. when we generate new propositions, from a general proposition, from another existing body of knowledge. Thus, we have a certain premise, along the syntactic transformation of which we can draw further conclusions. In the case of theory-testing process tracing, we can test the relevance of causal mechanisms. In the case of the Western Balkans, I examine the change in the EU's regional approach to security along the causal pathways, according to the three types of regional security dynamics described by Buzan, and how this process has affected the emerging security dynamics. Process tracing is applied in this case, to trace the evolution of the Western Balkans from a conflict-ridden, unstable area – referred to as a conflict hotspot in the Regional Security Complex Theory – to a region in its emerging phase in the European peace zone. This also helps to understand the evolution and application of the EU's transformative instruments. It is a powerful analytical tool for exploring descriptive and causal relationships.<sup>15</sup>

The third major theme of the dissertation, its hypothesis (H3-a), which presents a case-by-case multidimensional impact assessment of the countries of the region in the broad military-security, political, social and economic sectors of security, is presented in a separate chapter. To support this hypothesis, I used the methodology and analysis of the *Bertelsmann Stiftung Transformation Index* (BTI), which measures progress in developing and transition countries in general, along a set of proprietary criteria. The result of the methodology provides two indices, the Status Index and the Governance Index. While the former shows where a country

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<sup>13</sup> Weber, Robert Philip: *Basic Content Analysis*. Beverly Hills, CA: USA, SAGE Publications 1985. 5-13.

<sup>14</sup> Beach, Derek: *Process-Tracing Methods in Social Science*. In: Beach, Derek – Pederson, Rasmus Brun: *Process-Tracing Methods. Foundations and Guidelines*. The University of Michigan Press, 2013. 1-5.  
[https://edisciplinas.usp.br/pluginfile.php/5569087/mod\\_folder/content/0/Textos/Beach%20and%20Pedersen%20C%20Process-Tracing%20Methods%20-%20Foundations%20and%20Guidelines.pdf](https://edisciplinas.usp.br/pluginfile.php/5569087/mod_folder/content/0/Textos/Beach%20and%20Pedersen%20C%20Process-Tracing%20Methods%20-%20Foundations%20and%20Guidelines.pdf) (Downloaded: 2023.07.11.)

<sup>15</sup> Collier, David: *Understanding Process Tracing*. American Political Science Association, PS: Political Science and Politics, Vol. 44, No. 4, 2011. 824.  
<https://polisci.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/people/u3827/2011%20Collier-Understanding%20Process%20Tracing%20with%20Addendum.pdf> (Downloaded: 2023.07.13.)

is on the path towards democracy under the rule of law and a social market economy, the Governance Index measures the quality of political leadership that is in charge of the transformation process. The BTI provides a comprehensive set of data that can be used to identify the results of transformation strategies, trends in transformation and the factors that lead to success.<sup>16</sup> The relevant chapter of the thesis highlights the constraints and gaps in progress from the resulting analyses, along the lines of the EU's recommendations, in line with the research question. In addition, the mainly national security strategies of the Western Balkan countries, which are the subject of the documentary analysis, also play an important role.

The second and last hypothesis of the third major theme (H3-b) aims at explaining the possible further development of regional security dynamics, based on the knowledge of the dynamics of the causal chain already examined in the previous section, which is implemented through scenario analysis. The scenario or 'scenario' method, based on the results obtained, outlines the future directions and security dynamics of the EU-influenced Western Balkans sub-complex, as the method is used to describe a possible future situation, assuming a complex analysis that may involve the interaction of a large number of different variables.<sup>17</sup> The main purpose of applying the scenario method is to illustrate the ways in which the future may unfold, first by describing the initial state and then by examining the key factors that lead to a particular future state.<sup>18</sup>

## SUMMARY OF THE ANALYTICAL CHAPTERS

The dissertation is divided into three main sections and two further sections, of which the first introductory section contains the operational information of the dissertation. Its main task is to provide information on the topic, the topicality and the justification for the choice of the subject, in a way that also outlines the scientific problem. Following the literature review, the chapter presents the research questions, the objectives pursued and the hypotheses developed around

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<sup>16</sup> BTI Transformation Index Methodology; <https://bti-project.org/en/methodology#:~:text=Methodology%20The%20Bertelsmann%20Stiftung%E2%80%99s%20Transformation%20Index%20%28BTI%29%20analyzes.social%20change%20toward%20democracy%20and%20a%20market%20economy>. (Downloaded: 2023.07.13.)

<sup>17</sup> European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound) (2003). Handbook of Knowledge Society Foresight. 2017. 88. <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/pubdocs/2003/50/en/1/ef0350en.pdf> (Downloaded: 2022.05.21.)

<sup>18</sup> See: Godet, Michael – Roubelat, Fabrice: *Creating the future: the use and misuse of scenarios*. Long range planning, Vol. 29, No. 2, 1996. 164-171.; Kosow, Hannah – Gaßner, Robert: *Methods of future and scenario analysis: overview, assessment, and selection criteria*. Bonn: Germany, German Development Institute (DIE), Vol. 39, 2008. 133. [https://www.idos-research.de/uploads/media/Studies\\_39.2008.pdf](https://www.idos-research.de/uploads/media/Studies_39.2008.pdf) (Downloaded: 2023.07.11); Radeljak Kaufmann, Petra: *Scenario Method in Spatial Research and Planning*. *Hrvatski geografski glasnik*, Vol. 78, No. 1, 2016. 45-71. <https://hrcak.srce.hr/file/236297> (Downloaded: 2023.07.11.)

the research questions. It also discusses the methodological principles, tools and a summary of the structure of the thesis itself, and provides a detailed description of the theoretical framework. The first major chapter deals with the Western Balkans regional security sub-complex and its specificities. After a geographical, geopolitical and definitional delineation, it explores the risks and challenges that the region faces today. Highlighting the shift in emphasis between classical and asymmetric security challenges. By presenting the external actors with transformative power in the region, emphasising the role of the EU, it concludes what currently characterises the security dynamics in the region.

The first part of the second chapter discusses in detail the European Union as a major security actor in the region. Following the theoretical framework, the chapter describes the European Regional Security Complex, briefly introducing the central actor of the complex, the European Union, and the EU Common Security and Defence Policy. It focuses on the EU's regional security transformative action in the Western Balkans and its multidimensional impact on the instruments of stabilisation, state-building and peace-building, as well as enlargement policy, which provides the analytical basis for regional security cooperation and dynamics.

The second part of the second chapter provides a picture of the regional security dynamics, the evolutionary level of security cooperation in the Western Balkans, which is examined as a dependent variable for the purposes of this dissertation. Along the theoretical framework, the impact of the EU in changing regional security dynamics is examined according to the conditions of conflict formation, security regime and security community.

In the first half of the third major structural unit, there is a case study of the six countries facing EU integration in the Western Balkans - Serbia, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo - which the thesis examines in military-security, political, social and economic dimensions, explaining the current dynamics and exploring its causal chains. Using the minimum criteria of the emerging phase of the security community, the analysis explores the factors hindering the development of the security community in both national and regional terms.

In the shorter second part of the third chapter, it draws on all this information to outline the possible outcomes of the variations that could become optional in the future of the regional security sub-complex, highlighting the direction of the feasibility of a security community in the Western Balkans.

The final section discusses in the conclusion the results of the thesis, the outcome of the examination of the objectives and hypotheses, the new academic findings and their practical use and application.

## **RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH**

In the framework of the thesis, five research questions were developed, which were examined along the lines of the Regional Security Complex Theory as a framework, mainly typifying the defined regional security dynamics. The definitional scope of security and the objects of security references have expanded over time, thus pointing beyond military and political issues to sectors that present potential challenges. Fundamentally, the thesis sought to examine the transformative impact of the EU in terms of the extent to which it has shaped regional security dynamics, and then to analyse the results of this transformation from a holistic perspective. In doing so, the research sought to substantiate the place of the Western Balkans as a regional security sub-complex on the friendship-enemy scale.

The theoretical framework defines geographical distance as crucial for the spread of threats, and therefore the ability to develop more intense dynamics with our neighbours in this form is also a prerequisite for the complex and sub-complex. Accordingly, there is a strong regional interaction of national and systemic factors. The theoretical framework also establishes that at the heart of any complex are regional security dynamics, which are shaped by multiple factors. The ambition has thus been to consider the transformation of those sectors and factors that have the greatest potential to affect regional security outcomes.

The assumption of the thesis was that the only common strategic goal that the Western Balkan countries invariably affirm is EU integration, so that the EU, as the leading security actor in the region, can adapt the regional security sub-complex into the European security community through its strong influence. It has the normative power to change patterns of behaviour. In this form, it is not the reflection on how to achieve integration that is important, but the path to integration itself. The analysis of transformation provides insights into the most important sectors to understand the obstacles to peace and security.

The theoretical framework articulated in the introduction and several literature supports the applicability of the Regional Security Complex Theory, within the framework of which the thesis analyses the Western Balkans as a regional security sub-complex. As a result, the region faces complex security challenges and its specific security patterns are defined by interlocking and divergent processes of friendship and hostility, which are contradictory in nature, and do not bear all the hallmarks of the European regional security complex. Its weak institutions, its general underdevelopment and its war history, which is a relatively recent event for post-Yugoslav states, make them vulnerable and perpetuate traditional challenges where the potential for conflict is easily exposed.

In the meantime, it is a breeding ground for new types of security challenges with a societal shift of emphasis, where the basic scale of the management mechanism and the consensus needed to accelerate political and economic consolidation are missing. The instability of the region also creates avenues for external intervention, where the region no longer generates its own dynamics and also carries the potential to become a proxy war theatre. In turn, the EU's influence in the region has led to a medium-term situation where the sub-complex seeks to move towards the European regional security community, despite the fact that most of the patterns of security interdependence bear elements of the security regime, maintaining the recurrence of the characteristics of a conflict formation.

Recognising this, the EU offers the countries of the region a higher level of integration in which the sub-complex characteristics can be dissolved. The EU (EC) has been present in the region since 1992 and has undertaken to stabilise the region as a result of a change in its regional approach. In line with the theoretical framework, it can be argued that the EU is present in the region not only as a global power, but also as a regional power, which is unique in this form. It is the issue of EU membership that does not divide the Western Balkan actors, on the other hand, no other international organisation offers a perspective as conditioned as the EU, which is the most powerful driver of regional transformation.

It takes a holistic approach, and has been the custodian of several joint and separate initiatives specifically for the region, the best example being the development of the ESDP, motivated by the Western Balkans conflict, for which the region itself was the test bed. In addition to its stabilisation and accession policy and its financial instruments, it has also exerted its influence through the Common Security and Defence Policy, thus adding security criteria for the Western Balkans to the Copenhagen criteria.<sup>19</sup>

The EU policy, as an intermediate variable, has adapted to and influenced the security dynamics in the region, as a dependent variable, under the influence of external circumstances, as an independent variable. The transformation in the period 1991-1995 is not measurable, the EU was then equipped with ad hoc crisis response instruments, but after 1995, with the end of the containment policy and a new regional approach, the EU tried to approach the countries of the region with a new focus on the security regime, which was eventually thwarted by the Kosovo conflict. This gave an impetus to the EU, which undertook to stabilise and develop the region.

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<sup>19</sup> See: Remek Éva: Az EU bővítésének biztonságpolitikai aspektusai In: Túrke András – Besenyő János – Wagner Péter (szerk.): Magyarország és a CSDP. Zrínyi Kiadó, Budapest, 2016. 129-149. [https://europavarietas.org/hu/hungary\\_csdp\\_handbook](https://europavarietas.org/hu/hungary_csdp_handbook) (Downloaded: 2023.05.21.)

Through its socialisation mechanism, the expansion of the European peace zone was given impetus, a process which is still ongoing. Overall, therefore, through its comprehensive approach, its wide-ranging initiatives and its changing attitudes towards the region, it has had an impact on the region, where it can be said that by 2013 it had already achieved a positive shift in the spectrum of security dynamics, which Emilian Kavalski defines as an elite security community. This implies that in Adler-Barnett theory, the nascent (emerging) security community stage is the goal to be achieved. The previous sub-complex analysis, however, suggests that the region has not moved forward from this phase since 2013, the evolution of the current dynamics has still not reached the next stage, i.e. despite reforms, the criteria for the next stage of development are not met.

A multidimensional analysis of the region by country provides an answer to the reason for the stagnation, as patterns of security interdependence are maintained in the 2021 state of play, such as the security dilemma, which is part of the characterisation of the conflict scenario and the security regime. In practice, the countries of the region do not exclude the possibility of armed conflict, and the incomplete implementation of the transformation has created political and economic divisions in which unresolved security issues are linked to the national, ethnic and religious specificities of the region, which hinder the development of regional cooperation. It is characterised by an excessive concentration of power, which hinders the functionality of institutions, thus preventing the state from providing adequate security guarantees for its own citizens and, consequently, from contributing to the maintenance of peace and security at regional and international levels. The countries of the region have a different perception of their security and defence orientation, which fundamentally undermines regional security cooperation, while regional security is not in itself a motivation for the political elites that lead the region. Regional initiatives are not effective.

In practice, despite the EU's widest possible range of instruments, the development of democracy and democratic systems in the region is still not consolidated. Behind a formal framework of democracy, administrative reforms are slow, the political sector is unstable, the rule of law is weak and easily takes on an ethnic dimension, exacerbating long-standing social tensions, and these features act as a disincentive to positively promote security dynamics. Economic development is mostly stagnant, which further reinforces the negative dynamics, and the provision of fundamental rights to society is on paper, rather than declared, but in practice its implementation is selective and constantly lagging behind. All this is compounded by professional and financial capacity problems. As a consequence, it has a negative impact on internal cohesion and the development of a common identity, which is a key element of a

security community. Once the elite security community stage has been reached, progress is thus clearly due to a lack of political will, the root causes of which go beyond the means of the third, guiding party. For years, the security dynamics have been stretched along the lines of the 'pull it and let it go' game, often reinforcing the negative dynamics from the embryonic stage. The patterns that emerge support the assumption that in the longer term, the maintenance of the security regime in the region can prevail as a security dynamic that preserves the sub-complex nature of the Western Balkans.

The conclusion of this thesis is that the problems that have traditionally hampered relations between the countries of the region and that have also held back the development of regional security dynamics are beyond the EU's capacity for transformation. Historical legacies, hostile relations, intolerant behaviour, shape the image of security in the region to a greater extent than the EU. The countries of the region are not fully committed to the path of reform and reconciliation, and security dynamics tend to be drawn towards characters typified as unstable. Countries themselves therefore bear the greater share of responsibility for regional security.

### **Results of the hypotheses test**

Along the lines of the research questions, and in line with the research objectives, the thesis set out to prove and/or disprove a total of five hypotheses in three major groups.

The first hypothesis, that the regional security dynamics in the Western Balkans have become more complex in recent years, and have evolved in a unique and specific way, was proved by exploring the essential features and security indicators of the sub-complex. It now bears the hallmarks of both a security regime and a conflict formation, while at the same time, under the influence of the EU, it is seeking to move away from its sub-complex nature towards a European security community.

Based on the first hypothesis of the second theme, the EU, as an external intervener, has no alternative to offer a comprehensive development concept for the region. The EU influences the security dynamics in the region through a combination of its multidimensional bilateral and regional policies. The hypothesis is also proven by the description of the European Regional Security Complex, including the EU, and the analysis of its mainly autonomous transformational activities in the region. It can be concluded that the EU is the international organisation with the most practical mechanisms and the necessary political skills to deal with the challenges facing the region. Because of its geographical proximity and its integration into

the European regional security complex, it also has an interest in stabilising the region, for which it has the competences, political will and resources.

According to the second hypothesis of the second theme, the European Union's approach to the Western Balkans and its changes have shifted the region from negative to positive security patterns. Its policy of containment was replaced by a regional approach after 1995, and after 1999 the Kosovo conflict pushed the EU towards a more ambitious policy of shifting the regional security dynamics in the Western Balkans towards the European Regional Security Community. I have argued for a transformative impact of the EU using a theory-testing process tracing approach, an impact that was already significant after 1995, yet became dominant in shaping regional security dynamics after 1999. This suggests that the change in the dynamics of the region can be linked to the EU's policy towards the region. On the evolutionary question, however, it can also be concluded that the EU has only reached the elite stage in its transformation of the region, which it has not been able to consolidate and take to the next stage for years.

According to the first hypothesis of the third theme, the internal problems of the countries in the region stand in the way of the development of regional security dynamics. In the narrative of the post-conflict region, temporary solutions have emerged. Cohesion, a lack of political will, is a missing factor in many areas. Security dilemmas, excessive concentration of power, divergent security and defence orientations are still present in the security dynamics, providing a weak basis for the development of regional security cooperation and for which EU efforts alone are not sufficient. By analysing the Transformation Index, EU Progress Reports and National Security Strategies, as well as the multidimensional impact assessment of the transformation, it has been possible to identify the obstacles to the development of security dynamics - due to a lack of political will in most sectors - which explain the stalling of the evolutionary process. The first hypothesis of the third theme has been confirmed in the case of the country analyses and in the regional comparison.

The second and final hypothesis of the third theme of the thesis is that the security dynamics of the Western Balkans sub-complex, although long in the making, is the most likely vision for the region, and that it may be a long time in coming. EU integration is an attractive force in the region, but EU membership alone and/or the promise of EU membership is not a sufficient motive to change countries' attitudes towards each other, and the EU has therefore been able to shape regional security dynamics only to a limited extent.



After the relevant analysis, it has been confirmed and stated that the development of the security community cannot be expected within the current political framework. There are several strong indicators that hinder common political and economic progress and the pursuit of regional solutions to security issues. These indicators are mainly the projections of the internal orientation of regional actors, which even the prospect of EU integration could not be a sufficient motivation to overcome, at least until 2021.

## **NEW SCIENTIFIC RESULTS**

1. I have identified the specific factors of the current security dynamics of the Western Balkan regional security sub-complex. In doing so, I have justified the claim that the region's transformation shows complexities and unique features that prove that the region should continue to be treated as a sub-complex, despite the fact that it has started on the path of unravelling its sub-complexity through its integration efforts.
2. I have chronologically integrated the European Union's mainly autonomous initiatives designed and adapted exclusively for the Western Balkans from 1992 to 2021 along the arc of stabilisation, peace-building, state-building and enlargement, demonstrating that the EU is the leading security actor in the region.
3. 3. using a process tracing approach, I have demonstrated the congruence of the changes in the regional security dynamics of the EU and the Western Balkans, identifying the types of dynamics along the relevant theory.
4. I have demonstrated the stagnation of the security dynamics in the Western Balkans region by exploring the state of outcome of the individual transformation of regional actors in several dimensions, pointing out the main obstacles to the development of regional cooperation. In doing so, I have confirmed that the EU has been most successful in initiating the reform process, its influence on implementation has been medium, while its influence on the mechanisms for resolving outstanding issues affecting the region has been weakest.
5. I have argued that the most likely form of transformation of the regional security sub-complex in the Western Balkans is the long-term maintenance of a security regime and that the security outlook remains uncertain in the region. In terms of changing regional security dynamics, I have shown that the EU has been successful in maintaining peace in the region and has not deepened conflicts, but has failed to steer the region towards an emerging phase of a security community, as this depends mainly on regional internal factors.

## **PRACTICED APPLICATION OF THE RESEARCH RESULTS, RECOMMENDATIONS**

The research aims to be a comprehensive analysis of a segment of the Regional Security Complex Theory that is not explicitly covered in domestic research and is limited in international research, despite the wide range of literature on the Western Balkans. The study of regional security dynamics, the theoretical framework presented in this thesis and the form it takes, can serve as a point of reference for Hungarian researchers, not only for the Western Balkans, but also for other regions that can be understood along the lines of regional security complexes and their subtypes. However, due to its interdisciplinary nature, it can be used in several areas and can be further developed in each of its fields.

The research can also be used for educational purposes, in particular at the undergraduate and master's levels in international security and defence policy, in the context of the Regional Security as a subject, and in the research area of Security Studies at the Doctoral School of Military Sciences. It can also serve as an aid for the compilation of background materials for the Hungarian Defence Forces (HDF), as the HDF personnel with the highest level of ambition are present in the Balkans. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, it is part of EUFOR Althea, and in Kosovo it is part of KFOR.

The Western Balkans will also feature in Hungary's National Security Strategy, to be adopted in 2020. Conflicts in the region may also have an impact on Hungary's security situation. The successful conclusion or even acceleration of the European and Euro-Atlantic integration process would reduce the security risks for the region, including Hungary. Hungary has an active role to play as an immediate neighbouring EU Member State to maintain the EU perspective and support the enlargement policy. Although, as I mentioned earlier, there is a wealth of domestic and international literature on the subject, the experience is that after the events of the 1990s the momentum of interest in the region has slowly started to wane, so that fundamentally up-to-date, fresh research results are less available. The thesis also seeks to fill this gap and can form the basis for the preparation of policy decisions by the Ministries of Defence and Foreign Affairs.

The thesis covers a broad range of topics, including parts that have not been explored due to the scope and thematic limitations of the thesis, and raises questions that may be worthy of further academic discussion, such as: can the countries of the region achieve security goals, democratic processes without obstacles, and confidence building? Are they capable of producing a common strategic document to address common security challenges? Is there a need to set up a joint institution with a mandate to improve regional security? Is there the

capacity to act independently of political and social pressures to promote security? The thesis examines the transformative impact of the European Union through a multidimensional analysis, but the impact of other international organisations relevant to the region, such as NATO, on regional security dynamics and specifically on the process of security sector reform can also be examined. The thesis mainly explored the barriers to the development of these dynamics, so the inverse of this, the identification of the potential for spin-offs and common interfaces, could also provide an excellent basis for new academic findings. From 2018, the European Union has launched a new Western Balkans strategy, which is also addressed in this thesis, but with a clear focus on the strategy, its impact over the past five years may also trigger research questions, such as the new EU enlargement strategy adopted in 2022, or the Open Balkans cooperation, an internal initiative, or the Ohrid Agreement of 2023, which aims to normalise Belgrade-Pristina relations. The region offers a wide range of opportunities and many research directions, which justify and call for reassessment of the impact, and which may thus generate new academic questions for a future study.

## LIST OF THE AUTHOR'S RELATED PUBLICATIONS

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## SHORT ACADEMIC BIOGRAPHY OF THE AUTHOR

Rita Bihari was born on 1 July 1986 in Sátoraljaújhely.

She spent her high school years at the Reformed College of Sárospatak, specializing in English. Afterwards, she started her higher education at the Institute of Slavonic and Baltic Philology of Eötvös Loránd University, majoring in Slavonic Studies, Serbian Studies. It was here that he became acquainted with Slavic civilisation and culture, which formed the basis of his interest in the South Slavic region. He completed his undergraduate studies with distinction.

In addition to Slavic Studies, he studied Islamic Arts as a minor subject at the ELTE Faculty of Humanities and Political Science at the Faculty of Law and Political Science, both of which led him to security policy.

Between 2015 and 2017, she successfully completed a Master's degree in International Security and Defence Policy at the National University of Public Service, also with an excellent grade. There, he acquired a broad knowledge of both security policy and European and regional security studies. It was at this time that he began to focus on the Western Balkans from a military perspective, with his Master's thesis on the need to review the Dayton Peace Agreement.

In his doctoral studies, which started in 2018, he has published not only on Bosnia and Herzegovina, but also on the Western Balkans as a whole in regional terms, several of which were published under the Thematic Excellence Programme, with the support of the National Research Development and Innovation Fund. He currently has 10 publications and one conference paper in the Hungarian Archives of Scientific Works.

Since 2020, he is a member of the Civil-Military Relations Section of the Hungarian Military Science Society.

Until 2017, he worked in the competitive sector and since 2017 in the Hungarian Defence Medical Centre as a member of the defence staff. Most of his time there was spent on service development and management support.

In 2019, he was awarded a professional commendation by the Deputy Chief of Staff for his work in the field of service development. He is currently assisting the Hungarian Defence Forces in the field of human controlling, following the restructuring of the Corps.