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New Silk Road on the Balkans. Case of Macedonia and Serbia

Abstract

In this article I focus on the New Silk Road - the Chinese initiative – until 2016 known as the One Belt One Road Initiative OBOR and later changed to the Belt and Road Initiative BRI. I put special attention to the Balkan part of this economic strategy that is crucial and to two countries taking part in it: Macedonia and Serbia. The shortest way from Greece to Central Europe is going through Macedonia and Serbia and this track is becoming more important after Chinese investments in Greek port of Piraeus. I focus on Chinese plans and investments in these two countries and also on the possible threats to the initiative on the Balkans such as migrant crisis in Europe and radicalisation of Muslims.

Keywords: Balkans, China, transport, Serbia, Macedonia, New Silk Road, Belt and Road Initiative, migrant crisis

Introduction

One of the most important part of the New Silk Road (NSR) in Europe is its Balkan part. New Silk Road on the Balkans starts in Greece and goes through Macedonia and Serbia to Hungary.

In this paper I will focus on the New Silk Road on the Balkans with a special view on Macedonia and Serbia. I will pay attention to the Chinese presence and investments in this part of Europe in railways, motorways, heavy industry, inland waterways, hydroelectric power stations as well as cooperation in the field of transport (city buses, trains). I will try to explain the importance of the project in this part of Europe as well as Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) cooperation with China in the formula of 16+1 with a special focus on Macedonia and Serbia.

I would also like to focus on the possible threats for the New Silk Road on the Balkans such as the problem of the migrant crisis, the question of radicalisation of Muslim community on the Balkans or the terrorist threats and organized crime in the region that might have negative impacts on the NSR initiative on the Balkans.

Beginning of the New Silk Road

The idea of the New Silk Road (initially The One Belt One Road initiative OBOR) emerged in 2011 when a first direct train came from Chongqing (China) to the Duisburg in Germany. Another date mentioned as the beginning of the New Silk Road is November 18th 2014 when train that started in Yiwu arrived in Madrid on December 9th 2014. There has been a discussion where is the far end of the New Silk Road

in Europe. Will it be Duisburg, Rotterdam or maybe Berlin.¹ The Economist in the article “*New Silk Road Hardly an oasis*” mentioned that journey by sea from China to Europe takes about 60 days and train from Chongqing to Duisburg in Germany through Poland takes about 14 days.²

One of the first articles about the impact of the New Silk Road on Central and Eastern Europe was Dragan Pavelić’s article from the beginning of 2015 about possible benefits from the China-CEE cooperation and from overland route between Central and Eastern Europe and China. He highlighted two important points of the project: port in Piraeus in Greece and high speed train between Budapest in Hungary and Belgrade in Serbia.³ Pavelić noticed as well that China-CEE cooperation could be seen as a cooperation in the traditional sphere of EU influence and possible danger for EU unity.⁴ It is important to mention here that EU does not support any major infrastructural project in this part of Europe such as high speed trains.

The Idea of 16+1 and the position of Balkan countries including Serbia and Macedonia in the project

According to Simeon Djankov, former deputy prime minister of Bulgaria, the idea of New Silk Road first was mentioned in Warsaw by Chinese Prime Minister Wen Jiabao on the summit of leaders of 22 heads of governments from

¹ Lim Tai Wei, “The One Belt One Road Narratives” in *Chinas One Belt One Road Initiative* ed. Lim Tai Wei, Henry Chan Hing Lee, Katherine Tseng Hui -Yi, Lim Wen Xin (Imperial College Press London 2016), 151

² Wei “The One Belt”, 152

³ Wei “The One Belt”, 152

⁴ Wei “The One Belt”, 162

the countries of CEE in October 2011.⁵ Prime Minister Wen Jiabao proposed creation of the New Silk Road as an idea of bringing closer countries which are along the ancient Silk Road. China showed an interest of closer cooperation with the countries of CEE, members of the European Union, such as: Poland, Romania or Bulgaria. Prime minister of China admitted that China does not have an experience as an investor in CEE countries and expressed hope that the New Silk Road initiative will help China to be more active in those countries' market.⁶

Summit in October 2011 in Warsaw lead to annual summit China-CEE countries in 2012 again in Warsaw, which was followed by subsequent summits in Bucharest 2013, Belgrade 2014 and Suzhou 2015. Chinese government established "Secretariat for Cooperation between China and CEE countries", with three main goals to be fulfilled: coordination, communication and implementation of cooperation work between CEE countries and China. Secretariat consists of 16 national coordinators from 16 CEE countries and 18 Chinese government ministers. China-CEE Investment Cooperation Fund was also established. China EXIM Bank hold 94% shares and Hungarian Exim bank hold 6%.⁷

It has to be noticed that in the Warsaw meeting in 2011 representatives from 22 countries participated: Poland, Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia, Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia, Montenegro, Macedonia, Serbia, Albania, Bulgaria, Romania, and

⁵ Henry Chan, Hing Lee *The One Belt One Road initiative-Who's Going to Pay for it?* in *Chinas One Belt One Road Initiative* ed. Lim Tai Wei, Henry Chan Hing Lee, Katherine Tseng Hui -Yi, Lim Wen Xin (Imperial College Press London 2016), 169

⁶ Chan, Lee "The One", 170

⁷ Chan, Lee "The One", 170

the former Soviet states: Moldova, Ukraine, Belarus, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia.

In the annual summit China-CEE countries in 2012 in Warsaw representatives from 16 countries took part: Poland, Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia, Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia, Montenegro, Macedonia, Serbia, Albania, Bulgaria, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia. Romania.⁸ There were countries from Central Europe, Balkans and three former Soviet Baltic states (now EU members). 16 +1 in 2012 was formed by EU member states: Poland, Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia, Slovenia, Bulgaria, Romania, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia and non EU members, official candidates: Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro and Croatia (that was waiting to join EU in 2013), as well countries without this status like Albania and Bosnia. The idea was to bring together Central and Eastern European countries that have similar political and economical background and seek new investments especially in infrastructural projects.

“New Silk Road” was a part of a greater project. Chinese President Xi Jin Ping presented the idea of “21 Century Maritime Silk Road” in Indonesian parliament in October 2013. Maritime Silk Road has been one of the most important maritime route in the world. Starts from China through South Chinese Sea, Malakka strait and Indian Ocean to Africa Horn, Red Sea and Suez Chanel to Europe.⁹

In 2013 during annual meeting of 16+1 in Bucharest the goals of cooperation so-called Bucharest Guidelines were formulated. Guidelines were adopted in November 2013 during

⁸ *Prime ministers' summit marks closer China-central and eastern Europe ties* last modified April 26,2012, http://www.china-ceec.org/eng/ldrhw_1/2012hs/hdxw/t1410543.htm

⁹ Chan, Lee “The One”, 171

the meeting in the capital of Romania and both sides agreed that they will have regular ministerial meetings and developed agenda for cooperation between 16 +1 (CEE+China). Economy, terms of trade and investments are the most important elements of the guidelines.¹⁰

OBOR countries cover 2/3 of global population and less than a half of global GDP (Growth Domestic Product). It means that it has been the most ambitious economic project ever in world history.

Macedonia and Serbia bilateral relations with China

Macedonia

Macedonian relations with China should be considered from the beginning of the last decade of twentieth century. Declaration of independence of Macedonia in 1991 and referendum which took place on September 8th 1991 was not followed by recognition of Macedonian independence by other countries, because of Greece veto.¹¹ Greece even decided to block Macedonia with embargo in 1992, which was very dangerous for a landlocked country. It lifted the embargo in 1993 but later the same year there was reimposition of a new embargo.¹² Greece authorities wanted to force Macedonia to

¹⁰ Policy Analysis *New Silk Road Leads Through the Balkans. China and Southeast European Countries* Foreign Policy Initiative BH (Sarajevo July 2014) s. 12 accessed August 8, 2017, <http://vpi.ba/en/2016/05/16/new-silk-road-leads-balkans-china-southeast-european-countries/>

¹¹ More: Victor Gaber *Imeto Makedonija* (Name Macedonia) (Skopje: Vig Zenica, 2010)

¹² Sabrina Petra Ramet *Balkan Babel. The disintegration of Yugoslavia from the Death of Tito to ethnic war* (Westview Press, 1996), 232.

change its constitutional name.¹³ China as a member of Security Council of United Nations played an important role in Macedonian recognition, but because of mentioned above Greek veto, Macedonia was accepted as a member of the United Nations under acronym FYROM - Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.¹⁴

In the 1999 Macedonia granted diplomatic recognition to Taiwan in return for a substantial aid package.¹⁵ As a consequence, China had veto a United Nations peacekeeping force mission in Macedonia, which bordered the region, where Serbs and ethnic Albanians were locked in bitter fighting. However after new elections in 2002 Macedonian government withdrawal its support for Taiwan and after that China recognized Macedonia under its constitutional name Republic of Macedonia.¹⁶

Serbia¹⁷

After the collapse of Yugoslavia as a state of five republics and two autonomous regions, in 1992 Serbia and Montenegro together form a new entity - Yugoslavia. During NATO intervention in 1999 (war in Kosovo) and bombardment on

¹³ More on the Macedonian identity issue: Ernest Damianopulos *Macedonians their past and present* (Palgave Macmillan, 2012)

¹⁴ More Dimtar Mirchev *Balkanskiot megaetnikum* (Balkan meg-aetnikum) (Skopje: Vig Zenica, 2012)

¹⁵ *The Name Issue Greece and Macedonia* editors Svetomir Skaric, Dimitar Apasiev, Vladimir Patchev, (Skopje: Matica Makedonska, 2009), 383

¹⁶ *The name issue*, 221, Greece is expecting that Macedonia will change its constitutional name

¹⁷ Serbia in 1991 formed new Federal Republic of Yugoslavia with Montenegro. In 2003 its name was changed into Serbia and Montenegro. In 2006 Montenegro proclaim independence.

Serbian military and civil targets, Chinese embassy in Belgrade was attacked during air strikes.¹⁸ This situation caused long and furious protests across China against NATO intervention and against United States of America, American embassy in Beijing was attacked by protesters. In this time Serbians and Chinese share same feelings: sorrow, pain and anger. After war in Kosovo in 1999 and after withdrawal of Serbian soldiers from Kosovo, China did not stop support Serbia. When in 2008 Kosovo declared independence, China did not recognize it. Till these days China has been staying on the position that Kosovo is a part of Serbia and China fully supports Serbian sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Chinese policy on the Balkans:

- China supports sovereignty and territorial integrity of Serbia in case of Kosovo and do not recognize Kosovo independence
- China recognizes Macedonia under its constitutional name and is not questioning Macedonian identity
- China has good relations with both two countries, in contrary to many European Union countries which recognize independence of Kosovo and do not recognize Macedonia under its constitutional name.

Due to this position concerning crucial questions such as sovereignty and identity, China has better chances to develop good relations with both Balkan countries.

¹⁸ Three persons from embassy staff died during the attack.

New Silk Road on the Balkans. Chinese presence and investments in Serbia and Macedonia

China prime minister Li Keqiang on the eve of the annual meeting in Belgrade in 2014 said: "...The northern route thanks to regular trains between China and Europe, could become a new transport and logistics artery extending to Western Europe through Central and Eastern Europe. Based on Greek port of Piraeus and the railway connecting Belgrade and Budapest, the Southern route could be a China Europe land sea express line. It will significantly enhance regional connectivity, boost the economic development of countries along the route, and provide new and convenient access for Chinese exports to Europe and for European goods to enter China, as it goes through an area that involves 32 million people and 340 square kilometres of land... The China Europe express line, together with regular trains between China and Europe and existing transport and logistics routes, will become an integral, convenient and efficient connectivity network linking Asia with Europe (Tanjug, December 14, 2014)¹⁹

This shows how important is the Balkan part of the NSR initiative as a hub in Europe. In this part of the project maritime silk road and inland part of the NSR meet.

During the Belgrade meeting, an agreement was signed by Serbian, Hungarian and Chinese authorities related to construction of new High Speed Railway (HSR) between Budapest and Belgrade. Agreement was also signed by Macedonian prime minister as an extension of the project from Budapest

¹⁹ Dragan Pavlicevic *Chinas New Silk Road takes shape in Central and Eastern Europe*, accessed January 9, 2015, <https://jamestown.org/program/chinas-new-silk-road-takes-shape-in-central-and-eastern-europe/>

through Serbia and Macedonia to the Greek border. Greece was planning to upgrade its railway from port of Piraeus to Macedonian border, but as it was mentioned above Greece was not a part of 16+1 group but still plays very important role in the Balkan part of the NSR. Li Keqiang in his speech stressed that this project on the Balkans connects 32 million people. According to censuses in the Balkan countries, the project connects 11,5 million people from Greece, 10 million people from Hungary, 8,5 million from Serbia and 2 million people from Macedonia. These countries play an important role in the southern part of the New Silk Road in Europe.

In the next part of this paper I would like to focus on Serbia and Macedonia as well as on the China's investments in these countries.

Serbia

Serbia already, before first 16+1 meeting in 2012 in Warsaw, had signed a strategic partnership agreement with China in 2009.²⁰ Signing of the agreement was followed by a lot of joint infrastructural projects, such as building of new bridges in Serbia. One of the most important was building of a bridge on the river Danube in Belgrade *Pupinov most* Pupinov Bridge (Michajlo Pupin Bridge). It costs about 260 million dollars and was financed and built by China Road and Bridge Corporation and financed by Exim Bank from China. The bridge was open by Serbia's prime minister and his China's counterpart Li Keqiang. Another infrastructural project was bridge in the city of Vinca also on Danube river. Third joint infrastructural project in a field of bridge building

²⁰ Pavlicevic *Chinas New Silk Road*

was bridge on Sava river near the city of Obrenovac. Bridge building was so important in Chinese-Serbian cooperation because of collateral damage and lots of losses in infrastructure in Serbia after NATO bombardment in 1999 during the Kosovo war. Bridges were targets of NATO airstrikes.²¹

During the Chinese prime minister visit, delegations of both countries signed more than 10 memorandums and agreements regarding: infrastructure, telecommunication, and agriculture. The most important was an agreement about financing a new thermal power plant Kostolac from China Exim Bank with a loan of 608,26 million dollars for new thermal block of 350 MW. It has been a first new power plant investment in Serbia in about 30 years. The pit mine Drmno was planned to expand from 9 million tons up to 12 million tons per one year.²² Another great project is regarding Zelezara Smederevo, the one and only Serbian steel production mill which was purchased by China. China promised to invest in Zelezara more than 50 million dollars.²³ China Environmental Energy Holdings and Shenzhen Energy Group with Serbian company Electric Power Industry are constructing pit mine Radljevo and a new Block in Nikola Tesla B Power Plant in Obrenovac.²⁴

Moreover, as a part of the joint Chinese-Serbian projects one should mention the initiative of building a big river port (one of the biggest in Europe) on Danube river in Belgrade and possible plans to build another river ports in Serbia.

²¹ Pavlicevic *Chinas New Silk Road*

²² Dusko Dimitrievic *Chinese investments in Serbia – A Joint Pledge for the future of the New Silk Road* Balitc Journal of European Studies Tallin University of Technology (ISSN 2228-05880, vol 7 No 1 (22) doi: 10.1515/bjes-2017-0005, 74

²³ Pavlicevic *Chinas New Silk Road*

²⁴ Dimitrievic *Chinese investments in Serbia*, 75

The most important infrastructural project is a plan of building a new fast railway connection High Speed Train (HST) from Belgrade to Budapest. Balkan HST will travel 2 hours from one capital to another. Contract was signed in 2014. Cost of the project is about 2 billion EUR and the railway should be constructed by China Railway and Construction Corporation. This part of HST project is going on lowland in the South-Eastern Europe, but connection from Belgrade through Nis to Skopje and further to Thessaloniki will be much more difficult because of the mountainous terrain.

It has to be mentioned that on June 19th 2014 Chinese Prime Minister during his visit to Greece met with his Greek counterpart Antonis Samaras and announced important joint projects between both countries, such as building a port in Pireaus as a gate to Europe.²⁵

In addition to this, during the second Pan-European Transportation Conference on the Crete Island in 1994 ten European transport corridors were designed and four of them traverse Balkan Peninsula. Corridors were presented on the “Outline plan for European High Speed Train Network 2010”. Among them:

- Corridor 4 connecting Germany with Turkey: Berlin-Prague-Bratislava-Gyor-Budapest-Arad-Craiova-Sofia-Istanbul,
- Corridor 5 connecting Italy with Eastern Europe: Venice-Trieste-Ljubljana-Budapest-Uzhorod-Lviv,

²⁵ Dean Andromidas, Marcia Merry Baker *Greece and the Marshall Plan for the Mediterranean* in *The New Silk Road becomes Land Bridge* ed. Helga Zepp-LaRouche, Michael Bilington, Rachel Douglas (EIR Special Report, 2014), IX 9

- Corridor 8 connecting Adriatic Sea with Black Sea: Durres-Tirana-Skopje-Sofia-Plovidiv-Burgas-Varna,
- Corridor 9 connecting Greece with Russia: Aleksandroupolis-Dimitrovgrad-Bucharest-Chisinau-Lyubask-eva-Kiev-Moscow,
- Corridor 10 connecting Austria with Greece: Salzburg-Ljubljana-Zagreb-Belgrade-Nis-Skopje-Veles-Thessaloniki.²⁶

None of these EU corridors have been finished and almost nothing has materialised except Rhine–Main–Danube Canal.²⁷

It is worth mentioning that Troika²⁸ memorandum from 2012 ordered Greece to close its international railway service.²⁹ Greece was forced to stop its international railway communication.

Having this in mind, China is on a very good position helping Balkan countries authorities to improve their own infrastructure. Idea of HST (High Speed Train) from Thessaloniki through Skopje and Belgrade to Budapest will improve the development of the countries' infrastructure and trading possibilities.³⁰

²⁶ Andromidas, Baker *Greece and the*, IX 11

²⁷ Andromidas, Baker *Greece and the*, IX 10

²⁸ Troika in this case referred to: EU, IMF and ECB, representatives of: European Union, International Monetary Fund and European Central Bank.

²⁹ Andromidas, Baker *Greece and the*, IX11 Greece was forced to stop its international railway communication. It was very unfortunate decision if we take into consideration, that railway communication is more friendly to the environment.

³⁰ Some Serbian experts are considering New Silk Road on the Balkans as 12 times bigger project than the Marshall Plan for Western Europe after the Second World War. Accessed July 15, 2017, <http://www.diplomacyandcommerce.rs/the-new-silk-road-and-the-regional-cooperation-of-the-west-balkans/>

Macedonia

China recognised Macedonia as an independent state in a very crucial time of Macedonian modern history, during Greek embargo³¹ and what is more important recognised Macedonia under its constitutional name. In September 1994 Chinese embassy was open in the capital of Macedonia, Skopje.³² But in 1999 Macedonian government granted diplomatic recognition to Taiwan³³ and after that decision Chinese ambassador remained in Skopje just for ten days. At this time preventive peace mission UNPREDEP was in the Republic of Macedonia with an assigned task of monitoring Macedonia's borders with Albania and the troubled southern Serbian province of Kosovo to prevent the unrest in those areas from spreading.³⁴ But after this decision during security council meeting Chinese statement was: "...the situation there has settled and it's no need for prolongation of the mandate. The Republic of Macedonia is capable of resolving its matters by itself..."³⁵

But after Macedonian withdrawing from the decision of recognizing Taiwan, Chinese-Macedonian relations were normalized.³⁶

³¹ Greek embargo blocked port in Thessaloniki for Macedonian import, except food and medicine. Greece wants to force Macedonia to change its constitutional name - Republic of Macedonia

³² *"The Name Issue Greece and Macedonia"* ed. Svetomir Skaric Dimitar Apasiev Vladimir Patchev (Skopje: Matica Makedonska 2009), 221.

³³ Republic of Macedonia established diplomatic relations with Taiwan and open embassy in Taipei on 28.04. 1999.

³⁴ UNPREDEP United Nations mission deployed to Macedonia to keep peace in the country.

³⁵ More on this issue, interview with former Macedonian president Kiro Gligorov: *The name*, 382-383

³⁶ On 18.06. 2001 Macedonia recognised that the government of the

One of the most significant aspects of China-Macedonian cooperation is in the field of transport. China's companies are present in Macedonia and most visible they are in the capital of Skopje with double-decker Chinese buses driving through its streets. Someone could ask the question why double-decker buses? After the Second World War Great Britain donated double-decker buses to Skopje. And at the beginning of the 21 century Macedonian centre-right government purchased double-decker buses from China. The same situation was with the new railway engines and trains. Yet Chinese-Macedonian cooperation is further more than the transport facilities.

Chinese government decided to help to improve conditions and facilities in the field of education. Many schools in the Macedonian capital were situated in the barracks after the disastrous earthquake in the 1963. China helped to build new schools and gyms in different districts of Skopje, equipped them with sport facilities. The agreement was signed during annual meeting 16+1 in Riga. Macedonian prime minister Emil Dimitriev met with managers of Huawei who were operating in Central and Eastern Europe. They discussed possible future cooperation in the field of IT sector and cooperation of telecommunication companies. According to memorandum cooperation, 7 million euro donation will be secured for high schools in Macedonia. It includes equipment and technology.³⁷ Prime minister Dimitriev after signing memorandum mentioned that:

Peoples Republic of China is the legal government representing China and Taiwan

³⁷ "China donates IT equipment for Skopje high schools" Mia, accessed November 4, 2016, <http://www.mia.mk/en/Inside/RenderSingleNews/289/133419100>

“...Huawei which is a renowned global brand intends to expand its activities beyond education. We told company officials that the government (of Macedonia) is fully supporting Huawei’s plans to expand their businesses in Macedonia...”³⁸

Another great and one of the most important projects for the Balkan part of The New Silk Road in Macedonia is a plan to invest in high speed trains, and to build new Macedonian part of the railway Budapest-Belgrade-Skopje-Thessaloniki to the Piraeus port. China Europe Land Sea Express Railway, connecting maritime part of the NSR in Piraeus with an inland part in Central Europe in Budapest.³⁹

The most ambitious project is the initiative of building a waterway corridor - channel between Morava river in Serbia and Vardar river in Macedonia. This project will help to improve water transport in South-Eastern Europe. It is a chance to connect Aegean Sea with Danube river through Vardar and Morava river.⁴⁰ This is also a chance for Central and South-Eastern Europe to cooperate in the field of waterway river transport (connection of Oder river and Baltic sea with Danube river and also through Morava –Vardar channel to Aegean Sea).

Possible threats for NSR on the Balkans

The following problems should be mentioned as possible threats for the projects of NSR on the Balkans:

³⁸ Mia *China donates*

³⁹ Andromidas, Baker *Greece and the...*, IX 10

⁴⁰ Interview with Macedonian officials during my researches in Skopje from University of Warsaw Faculty of Political Science and International Relations on September 2016

- Migrant crisis in the South-Eastern Europe with a migrant route going through Balkan countries to the Western European countries.
- Radicalisation of Muslim community on the Balkans.
- Terrorism and organised crime in the region

Migrant crisis on the Balkans

Problem of migrant crisis on the Balkans is really complex, it starts in the 2015 when thousands of migrant people pass through Greece, Macedonia and Serbia to the Hungary. Migrants travelled by boats from Turkish ports to Greek islands and to Greek port of Thessaloniki and after that through Macedonia and Serbia to the Hungary, precisely through the planned Balkan part of the NSR initiative.

As an example of a large migration flow we should mention here the small town of Gevgelija (Macedonian city on the border with Greece), with population of 25 thousand people, which each day was entered by 4000 to 5000 migrants.⁴¹ In comparison, one could imagine, for instance, Przemyśl (Polish town on Polish-Ukrainian border with entire population of 80 thousand people) entering each day by 16 000 Ukrainian refugees. Situation was extremely difficult. Macedonian authorities decided to proclaim martial law in the country.⁴² They also sent troops and put the special control on the border with Greece. EU countries from Visegrad Group sent

⁴¹ Telma. *Otvoren punkt za begalci i migrant vo gevgelija* last modified: August 26, 2015, <http://www.telma.com.mk/vesti/otvoren-punkt-za-begalci-i-migranti-vo-gevgelija>

⁴² Kapital. *Makedonija proglasi krizna sostojba poradi migrantite vojskata e veke rasporedena na granitsite*. Last modified August 20, 2015, <http://kapital.mk/makedonija-proglasi-krizna-sostojba-poradi-migrantite-vojskata-e-veke-rasporedena-na-granitsite/>

police officers, to help Macedonia to protect its own borders.⁴³ Macedonian-Greek border was blocked and the same situation was on the Serbian-Hungarian border. Hungarian authorities built fence with barbwire on the border with Serbia. Hungarian example was followed by Macedonian authorities on the border with Greece.⁴⁴ After the agreement between EU and Turkey, Balkan migrant route was blocked.

Nevertheless, a new wave of migrants flowing through the Balkans again is quite possible. As a possible consequence of this, realization of the NSR projects on the Balkans could be completely blocked. During the migrant crisis in 2015, there were great problems to travel through Greece, Macedonia, Serbia and Hungary.

Radicalisation of Muslims on the Balkans

During the breakup of Yugoslavia, Balkan Peninsula became a main attraction for Islamic militants who participated in ethnic wars on the side of Muslims (Bosniaks, Albanians). In Bosnia and Herzegovina they were organised in El Mujahid division which was a part of Bosnian army.⁴⁵ In Albania organisations like Algerian Islamic

⁴³ Magdalena Tomaszewska Straż Graniczna. *Minister Mariusz Błaszczak podziękował funkcjonariuszom SG za misję w Macedonii*, Accessed May 26, 2016, <https://www.strazgraniczna.pl/pl/aktualnosci/3418,Minister-Mariusz-Blaszczak-podziekowal-funkcjonariuszom-SG-za-misje-w-Macedonii.html?search=8481875>

⁴⁴ *Vecer. se kreira vtoro ograda na granicata so Grcija*. Accessed February 8, 2016, <http://vecer.mk/makedonija/se-kreira-vtoro-ogradana-granicata-so-grcija>

⁴⁵ Marko Babic *Salafism in Bosnia and Herzegovina* European Institute of Mediterranean (Barcelona: IEMed Mediterranean Yearbook, 2017), accessed August, 08, 2017, https://www.academia.edu/33558491/Salafism_in_Bosnia_and_Herzegovina

Salvation Front, Al-Qaeda, Islamic Army Group were present and during the war in Kosovo, a conference of Islamic organisations resolved that Albanian guerrilla fight should be regarded as Jihad.

In multiethnic states like Macedonia, Bosnia or Serbia groups of Muslim minorities are large. In Macedonia were Muslims consist of about 32% of the population (Albanians 23,5%, Turks 4% Roma 3%, Torbesi 0,5%)⁴⁶, in 2001 Muslim militants consisted of Albanian minority members started a conflict with Macedonian security forces. The conflict was solved after few months of fights, but according to French Director General of the European Strategic Intelligence and Security Centre Claude Moniquet, Macedonia is a safe haven for the Islamic terrorist. C. Moniquet claimed that there were financial links between local organised crime and Al Qaeda.⁴⁷ Mufti Zenun Berisha was accused of recruiting fundamentalists to position them in administration of Islamic Community of Macedonia (ICM) *Islamska Verska Zaednica (IVZ)* and of supporting radical Islam.⁴⁸ During the struggle for control over the ICM armed Wahhabi Muslims⁴⁹ attacked its

⁴⁶ Marcin Sokołowski, *Naruszanie prawa podczas wyborów w Macedonii, in Kształtowanie ładu demokratycznego w państwa Europy Środkowej i na Bałkanach*, ed. Jacek Wojnicki (Warszawa: Aspra, 2015), 257

⁴⁷ Al. Qaeda was a terrorist organisation lead by Usama Ibn Ladin, Saudi Arabian origin, better known as Osama Bin Laden, killed by American forces in Pakistan in 2011

⁴⁸ Justyna Kędziora- Płachciak, *Is the proliferation of Islamic Extremism posing a potential terrorist threat to the Republic of Macedonia?*, in *Asymetryczne Bałkany*, ed. Danuta Gibas-Krzak (Częstochowa: AJD 2015), 263

⁴⁹ Wahhabi muslims are Islam fundamentalists following rules formed by the founder of the Islamic doctrine Muhammad Ibn Al Wahhab in XVIII century on the MiddleEast. Wahhab preach pure version

headquarter. Reis ul Ulema (head of Islamic community) was forced to resign.⁵⁰ In 2005 radical Muslims attacked and kidnapped five imams in the capital. This was called “mosque war”. In 2010 a fight between Wahhabists and IVZ erupted in Skopje when in Isa Beg mosque, a group of radical Muslims attacked secretary of IVZ Afrim Tahiri.⁵¹ New head of Islamic community Reis ul Ulema Rexhepi asked for help from international community to deal with the problem of radical Wahhabi Muslims in Macedonia.⁵²

Similarly, very complicated situations were in other parts of Balkan peninsula. Imam of grand mosque in Prishtina Shefket Krasniqi was arrested in 2014 by Kosovo authorities. He was charged of using his authority to force young man to fight in Syria and Iraq for Daesh to create a Caliphate. Serbian district of Sanjak was another place where radical Muslims have emerged. There as well some mosques were under control of Wahhabi Muslims.

Terrorist threat and organised crime

During the war in Bosnia in 1992 Islamic Mujahedin came to fight in the civil war on the side of the Bosnian army as El Mujahid unit.⁵³ And after the war many of them stayed in

of Islam from VII century without any later changes. Using of silk, jewellery, visiting tombs, drawing, photography is forbidden. It is a ruling doctrine in Saudi Arabia.

⁵⁰ Marko Babić *Muslims and Islam fundamentalism in Macedonia* academia.edu, accessed May 5, 2017, https://www.academia.edu/11547817/Muslims_and_Islamic_Fundamentalism_in_Macedonia, 393

⁵¹ Kędziora-Płachciak *Is the proliferation*, 266

⁵² Babić *Muslims and Islam fundamentalism in Macedonia*, 393

⁵³ Marko Babić *Salafism in Bosnia and Herzegovina* European Institute of Mediterranean (Barcelona: IEMed Mediterranean

Bosnia where wahhabi version of Islam has been significantly present. They glorified terrorists among them Osama Bin Laden. Imam of the Bihać mosque Bilal Bosnić said about Osama bin Laden: "... And so they tell us that most Muslims consider a man who spent his entire wealth and gave his life to raise the banner of Islam to be a terrorist. Does he care? Will the almighty judge by the verdicts of the corrupt? Or will he judge by his own will? Now Americans say they had to spend 300 billion \$. Let them be aware they lay down their lives for the Cause. That is the proof of their faith..."⁵⁴

This shows a real danger for the Balkan future. More than 200 young Muslims from Kosovo came to fight for Caliphate on the side of Daesh. After the war in the Middle East many of them could come back to the Balkans. Radicalisation of Islam on the Balkans is not only a threat for the peninsula but also to other parts of the world. Osama Bin Laden visited Albania two times, once in 1994 when he came to Tirana and another was in 1998 when he visited Al Qaeda training camps in northern Albania. Fatos Klosi, the director of Albanian secret service SHIK admitted that jihad warriors from Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Sudan were instructors in camps for UCK army (Liberation of Kosovo Army).⁵⁵ In fact many al Qaeda members have Albanian passports.⁵⁶

During the riots in Albania in 1997, 700 thousands Kalashnikovs were stolen from military bases. Lot of them were sold to organised crime organisations and terrorists. Albanians

Yearbook, 2017), accessed August 08, 2017, https://www.academia.edu/33558491/Salafism_in_Bosnia_and_Herzegovina

⁵⁴ Darko Trifunović Joannis Michaletos *Nexus between terrorism and Organize Criminal group from Balkan as threats to EU security* [in] *Asymetryczne Bałkany* (Częstochowa: AJD 2015), 279

⁵⁵ Trifunovic, Michaletos *Nexus between terrorism*, 289

⁵⁶ Trifunovic, Michaletos *Nexus between terrorism*, 287

live in many countries in Balkan Peninsula including: Macedonia, Serbia and also in Greece. Many of them were participating in fights in Serbia including Kosovo but also in Presevo valley in 1999, in Macedonia in 2001 and in 2015 in the city of Kumanovo.⁵⁷ In recent years there were also terrorist attacks on US embassy in Sarajevo⁵⁸ and on police station in Zenica in Bosnia.⁵⁹

Closing remarks

New Silk Road is a great geopolitical project which will strengthen economic and cultural partnership between China and other countries. It has made significant infrastructural changes in countries of South-Eastern Europe, especially in the field of transport and infrastructure. Serbia and Macedonia as Balkan countries are part of this New Silk Road. NSR will strengthen the influence of China on the Balkans and projects such as High Speed Train or Vardar-Morava channel are great opportunity for these small countries to develop. If the plans will materialise this part of Europe will have better perspective to develop and chance for brighter future.

Yet, there are certain threats that could seriously blocked realization of this initiative: possible new migrant crisis on the peninsula, radicalization of Islam and terrorist threat and organized crime on the Balkans. Any such act as mentioned above (like act of terror, murder of innocent people) could

⁵⁷ Sokołowski *Naruszanie prawa*, 241

⁵⁸ Reuters. *Gunman attacked US embassy in Bosnia*. Last modified October, 28, 2011, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-bosnia-usa-embassy-idUSTRE79R66F20111028>

⁵⁹ BBC. *Gunman kills officer in the Zvornik police station*. Last modified April 27, 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-32491026>

destabilised the fragile situation in Macedonia or southern Serbia where the New Silk Road projects on the Balkans have been planning.

It has to be said that NSR (Belt and Road Initiative) is a great chance for South Eastern Europe. It also helps to reunite the Balkans with the rest of Europe and to improve infrastructure in this part of the continent.

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