

The Geography of the Balkans in reference to the Energetics of Continental Europe: one route for several gas pipeline projects

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Abstract: The Balkan Peninsula became one of the key geopolitical hot spots in the Europe ever since the Eastern question was opened. The ground connection from Central Europe to the Middle East led straight through the Balkans, which was of a great significance. Construction of the railway line through the Balkans, as a direct line between Berlin and Baghdad started immediately after the Berlin Congress. On the other hand, the additional motivation for the Great Britain engagement in this region was the fear that Russia would use its alliance with the Balkan orthodox nations in order to reach the Adriatic Sea. These issues are genuine even today. The difference is that today Russia has the ambition to use the geographic position of the Balkans for the construction of the new energetic corridors leading to the Central Europe. The US and the UK are trying in every way to prevent this development. Several projects in the domain of energy that had to do with the Balkans were presented since the nineties. First it was the project of AMBO and CPOT and later the South Stream and Nabucco pipelines. Meanwhile, due to delays by the Bulgarian and Serbian part, Russia has transformed its original plan, and together with Turkey it started realization of the Turkish stream project. Project Nabucco appeared as the American answer to the Russian-European South Stream project and it was intended to turn the Balkan countries away from joining the Russian initiative. After the Nabucco project failed other strategic gas pipelines were proposed as alternative to the Russian gas in the Balkans, such as: Transadriatic gas pipeline (TAP), East ring and AGRI transport system. Undoubtedly these projects lines cannot even close represent replacement for the Russian gas. But, nevertheless it can be expected that in order to stop the development of strategic pipeline that would connect Russia and Central Europe, the USA will continue with pressures and concrete actions. Looking from this side, new destabilization of the Balkans can be expected. In conclusion, this paper talks about the fact that the Balkans has an excellent geographical position which can constitute a comparative advantage for the countries in this area in a relation to the energetic linking of Russia and continental Europe. However, in the case of wider destabilization and further delay of the construction of strategic gas pipeline, development of alternative solutions can be expected. One of them, when it comes to Russia, might be to increase the capacity of the Nord Stream. One should also pay attention to the efforts of the Middle Eastern countries to enter the European energy market. The first announcement of this kind came from Israel, who is interested in the pipeline that would connect it with Cyprus, and then with Greece. If this project would be realized, then at a later stage it could include Qatar, which would significantly change the current geopolitical situation.

Keywords: strategic gas pipelines, geopolitics, The Balkans, Russia, Central Europe.

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The Balkans has a very favorable geographic position. Main continental roads leading through Western Balkans connect this region with Near East, Middle East and Caucasus-Caspian region. The Balkans also presents a rout (although less-used) which connects Europe with North Africa and Central Asia. Thanks to the Danube, river roads passing through the Balkans connect the Black Sea basin with the Atlantic aquatorium (Rhine-Main-Danube canal) ¹. A good geographical position and the importance of this territory in the geopolitical sense caused the great powers to show their interest in the Balkans since the opening of the Eastern Question in the 19th century. This interest s manifested in continuity until today. The geopolitical concepts of four large centers of power have played and are playing an important role in the Balkan geopolitics.

First of all one has to bear in mind the Anglo-American bloc, lead until World War II by Great Britain, and since then by the United States. The next one is the German continentalism that for a long time has used the Austrian (and Austro-Hungarian) vector to protect its interests in the Balkans while today it is using the EU instruments. Then there is Russia which during the twentieth century was part of the Soviet Union, and today is the center of the new Eurasian integration of the continent, which is being formed and which reaffirms the theory of Eurasianism. And finally, the fourth power, at present time the middle power, which is continuously interested in the Balkans, is the successor of the Ottoman Empire, Turkey. In addition, it should also be mentioned, and that for a long time France was an important factor in the Balkan geopolitics, especially during the Eastern Question and the period between the two world wars. After Charles De Gaulle, however, France is showing less interest for this region, and their activities are mainly carried out through the support of the Anglo-American bloc or correction of German initiatives that are implemented through the EU institutions. It looks like that since the beginning of the XXI century France is more focused on the Mediterranean and on its own role in the Sub-Saharan Africa where it is trying to impose itself as a leading regional player and according to that to define its own geopolitical goals. Balkans, as it became a trend in last four decades, remains a peripheral question for France. Noting that it is possible that Balkans will again become an important question in the France geopolitics (if France would need it in order to protect its interests in the Mediterranean) it should be highlighted that new geopolitical players more present nowadays in the Balkans are Chine, Iran, Saudi Arabia and pan-Islamic movement (embodied today in the Islamic State). Also, although on a lower scale, interest in the Balkans is shown by India and Japan.

Balkans is important for Chine because it is set on a western wing of the new “Silk road”, considered a strategic corridor that will connect Beijing with Europe. Regarding Iran, with its presence in the Balkans it is trying to create a new balance of powers in the Middle East, since the Balkan region is considered as the north-western border of the Middle East region. Iran is especially active in

¹ Dušan Proroković, „Bitka za kontrolu Dunava i uticaj na geopolitički položaj Srbije“, *Međunarodna politika*, God. LXV, br. 1153-1154, pp. 113-127.

its work with political and cultural elite in the Muslim public in the Balkans. For Saudi Arabia the Balkans is *terra missiones* for spreading the Wahabite teaching though which it is trying to strengthen its presence and create a solid platform for its future moves. As a result of domestication of the Wahabite ideas with the Balkan Muslims, a significant number of people responded positive to the calls of the Islamic State and joined its troops fighting in Iraq and Syria.

Goals and interests of four main geopolitical players in the Balkans are pretty clearly defined though several historical stages². For the Anglo-American bloc the Balkan is a part of Mackinder's Inner Crescent, or the Spykman's Hinterland, a territory of a great significance since it can be used for "surrounding Russia" and creating the control of the World Island. For the Anglo-Saxon politics creating control over Mackinder's Inner Crescent is of a key significance since in that way Germany and Russia would be separated and a possibility of a pact between middle European continentalism and Russian euroasianism would be prevented.

Map no.1: *The Heart of the World and the Inner Crescent according to Halford Mackinder*³



A prerequisite for the "encirclement of Russia", from the viewpoint of Atlantistic forces, is its "containment" in the Balkans, which is being implemented by suppressing the Russian presence in this area. The unfavorable fact for the Anglo-American objectives is that people living in the Balkans are Orthodox Christian, nations that are religiously and culturally close to Moscow. This is opening the door to Russia for strengthening of its political and economic influence in the region.

Strengthening of Russia's southwestern geopolitical vector goes through the Balkans. A century ago the Russian geopolitical goal was to install the "checkpoints" of its influence in the Balkans in order to geographically "besiege" Constantinople, and to provide access to the warm

² Dušan Proroković, *Geopolitika Srbije: položaj i perspektive na početku XXI veka*, Službeni glasnik, Beograd, 2012.

³ Mark Poelle, *Raising Cartographic Consciousness: The Social and Foreign Policy Vision of Geopolitics in the Twentieth Century*, Lexington Books, New York, 1999, p. 57.

Aegean, Ionian and Adriatic seas through the southwestern vector. “The indisputable Russian interest was to strengthen its position in the Balkans and to use the religious vertical in order to bind the Balkan countries to itself. Russian contribution to the preparation of the First Balkan War was immense and probably crucial to create a military alliance between Serbia, Bulgaria, Greece and Montenegro.”⁴ At the beginning of the 21st century Russia has tried to strengthen its south-western geopolitical vector through realization of the idea on creating strategic gas pipeline through the Balkans. This was the prelude to a new major geopolitical game, just as interesting as the one that took place a hundred years ago, in the final stage of solving the Eastern Question.

Just as hundred years ago Germany and Turkey are involved in this battle. Berlin’s interest in Balkans rose rapidly after the Berlin congress and with the German unification new ambitions of this new European power also rose. Germany started showing more and more interest in the Middle East and Balkans in order to realize its strategically important project “the Baghdad railways”. This, of course, was in contrast with British interests. The British were concerned that the railroad could extend to Basra, which would present a direct threat to their interests in the Persian Gulf and Indian Ocean⁵. In addition, French also had their concerns that the completion of the Baghdad railway would establish firmer ties between Berlin and the German colonies in East Africa (Rwanda, Burundi and part of Tanzania) and South West Africa (Namibia). That would undermine their existing balance of powers in the wider region and threaten not only the British, but also the French interests.

Map no.2: *The planned railway route from Berlin to Baghdad from 1900*⁶



In a long political struggle Germany constantly made concessions, and in March 1914 it even pledged to recognize the explicit rights to the famous “Anglo-Persian company” to explore and utilize resources in southern Mesopotamia, central and southern Persia. But not even these guarantees were

⁴ Dušan Proroković, „Geopolitički ciljevi velikih sila na Balkanu uoči Prvog svetskog rata I srpsko pitanje”, u: Živojin Đurić, Miloš Knežević [ur.], *Srbija I politika velikih sila 1914-2014*, Institut za političke studije, Beograd, 2014, pp. 61-87.

⁵ Michael Stürmer, *The German Empire: 1870–1918*, Random House, New York, 2000, p. 90-91.

⁶ Frank McMurey, *The Geography of the Great War*, MacMillan Company, New York, 1919, p. 6.

enough for the UK to change its view.⁷

For more and more active Turkey, after painful and difficult retreat at the beginning of the XXI century, Balkan today presents a corridor through which it can continue the geopolitical expansion towards the heart of the continent.

At the beginning of the XXI century the Balkan Peninsula presents an important geostrategic area through which several British geopolitical vectors go through: Balkans is a part of Mackinder's "East European belt" that enters the Inner Crescent, a point where it can stop the German progress towards Baghdad and Russian access to the warm seas. By controlling the Balkans the Great Britain stays the sovereign lord of the Mediterranean - it prevents the possibility of further growth of Germany as a continental force and consolidation of Russia's positions in South-East Europe. Just as it was a century ago, Balkan today is an important geostrategic area for the Anglo-American interests.

Since 1993, there were plans for eight energetic corridors to be built over the Balkans: „South stream“ pipeline, than its successor the “Turkish stream”, “NABUCO”, the “Trans-Adriatic pipeline”, “AGRI” and “East ring”, as well as the gas lines “AMBO” and “CPOT”. None of these projects was ever realized.

Table no. 1: *Basic informations about strategic pipelines*⁸

<i>Project</i>	<i>Established</i>	<i>Length (km)</i>	<i>Capacity</i>	<i>Realisation</i>
<i>AMBO</i>	1993	912	0.75 mil.brl/day	Never started
<i>CPOT</i>	2002	1856	1,2-1,8 mil.brl/day	Never started
<i>NABUCCO</i>	2002	3893	31 bil. m ³ /year	canceled
<i>TAP</i>	2013	870	16 bil. m ³ /year	preparations
<i>South Stream</i>	2007	2380	63 bil. m ³ /year	canceled

One of the key strategic goals of the US, EU and Russia in the Balkans is tied to the questions of energy security. Balkan is located in the area important for transport of oil and natural gas from Middle Eastern and Central Asian to western markets⁹. Western countries or so called “end users” import about 70% of this energy¹⁰.

The largest reserves of natural gas are located in Russia (proven reserves of 47 trillion cubic meters) and in Iran (28.5 trillion cubic meters). This is why closest to realization was the „South stream“ project. The building of pipeline was announced in July 2007 by the representatives of Russian Gazprom and Italian ENI and by the end of that year Serbia and Bulgaria also joined this project. The biggest shareholder of South Stream is Gazprom that owns one half and the other half is owned by the Italian ENI (20%), German BAF (15%) and French EDF (15%). In spite of all

⁷ Edward Earle, *Turkey, The Great Powers, and the Bagdad Railway. A Study in Imperialism*, Russel and Russel, New York, 1966, p. 261.

⁸ Dušan Proroković, Milorad Perović, „Strateški koridori i cevovodi i njihov uticaj na geoekonomski položaj balkanskih država“, *Nacionalni interes*, God. X, vol. 18, pp. 105-133.

⁹ Srećko Đukić, *Vreme energije: više od diplomatije*, Službeni glasnik, Beograd, 2009.

¹⁰ Dominique Finon, „The EU foreign gas policy of transit corridors: autopsy of the stillborn Nabucco project“, *OPEC Energy review*, Vol. 35, issue 1, pp. 47-69.

obstructions the building started in December 2012 at the Black sea coast and continued in Bulgaria in November 2013. It was announced that two out of four parts will be finished in the last quarter in 2015 or in the first quarter in 2016.

Map no.3: „South stream“ pipeline route¹¹



However, the project was halted in early 2015. The reasons can be found in the attitude of Bulgarian and partially of Serbian authorities, which found themselves under heavy pressure from the US and the EU. “Containment” of Russia in the Balkans is used by the Anglo-American geopolitics in order to prevent the construction of a strategic pipeline that would connect sources in Russia and end-users in European countries. For a long time, “Nabucco” pipeline was pushed as a counter-project to the “South Stream” pipeline. This pipeline would start in Azerbaijan and through Georgia, Turkey, Bulgaria and Romania it would bring gas to the rest of Europe. Length of this pipeline is supposed to be 3,893 kilometers and capacity 31 billion cubic meters. Although it was loudly announced, the implementation of "Nabucco" never started¹². In July 2013 it was announced that main supplier – Azerbaijan is withdrawing from project, and even before this the German investors also pulled out¹³. This is why “Nabucco” was in a sense replaced with the “*Trans-Adriatic Pipeline*“ that is supposed to bring gas from the Azerbaijan source Shah-Deniz to the south of Europe.

¹¹ <http://www.balkanmagazin.net/energetika/cid163-21138/juzni-tok-treba-i-rusiji-i-evropi>

¹² Erkan Erdogan, „Bypassing Russia: Nabucco project and its implications for the European gas security“, *Renewable and Sustainable Energy Reviews*, Vol. 14, Issue 9, pp. 2936-2945.

¹³ <http://www.rts.rs/page/stories/sr/story/13/Ekonomija/1355316/Propao+projekat+gasovoda+Nabuko.html>

Map no. 4: Planned route of the „Nabucco“ pipeline¹⁴



"Trans Adriatic Pipeline" should stretch for 870 kilometers from the Greek-Turkish border in the northeast, across northern Greece and southern Albania, then through the bottom of the Adriatic Sea to southern Italy. It would be linked to the „Trans-Anatolian“ pipeline on the Greek-Turkish border. The „Trans-Anatolian“ pipeline should be completed by 2018 and is supposed to initially bring about 16 billion cubic meters of gas per year to the „Trans Adriatic“ pipeline¹⁵.

Map no. 5: Planned route of the „Trans Adriatic“ pipeline¹⁶



Same question arises in the case of the “Trans Adriatic” pipeline as in the case of “Nabucco” pipeline – there is a “constant worry if the gas from Azerbaijan can be an alternative to the basic reserves of gas from Russia”¹⁷ it is not certain that the reserves in Azerbaijan are large enough. This question is even more important when it is known that gas reserves in Azerbaijan are supposed to be used also in two new alternative routes. One of them is the “East Ring” that should connect Turkey,

¹⁴ <http://www.nabucco-pipeline.com>

¹⁵ Nicolo Sartori, *Energy and Politics: Behind the Scenes of the Nabucco-TAP Competition*, Istituto Affari Internazionali, Roma, 2013.

¹⁶ <http://www.trans-adriatic-pipeline.com/news/news/detail-view/article/50/>

¹⁷ Eltay Dilbazi, „Energy Security and Alternative Sources in the Caspian Sea Region”, *International Issues*, Vol.XIX, No.1/2010, Energy (still) matters, Research center SFPA, Bratislava, 2010, pp. 79-94.

Bulgaria, Romania and Hungary and the second one is the announced AGRI project – a pipeline for LPG that would connect Azerbaijan, Georgia, Romania and Italy¹⁸.

Map no. 6: Planned route for AGRI pipeline



LPG would be transported by tankers from Georgia to Romania, and from Romania to Italy the pipeline would stretch through Serbian and Croatian territories. Both of these projects, however, are only announced so it is still not known who would finance the entire job, how profitable it would be and what selling price would be at the end destination. Therefore, it can be argued, that this kind of news is launched in order to demonstrate that there is an alternative to the Russian gas and pipelines that Russia wants to build with its partners.

In 2015 Russia went from the suspended „South Stream“ project to the „Turkish Stream“¹⁹. Russia is currently supplying European countries with about 180 billion cubic meters of gas through existing pipelines, plus 9 billion cubic meters that Russia is supplying Finland through joint Russian-Finnish pipeline.

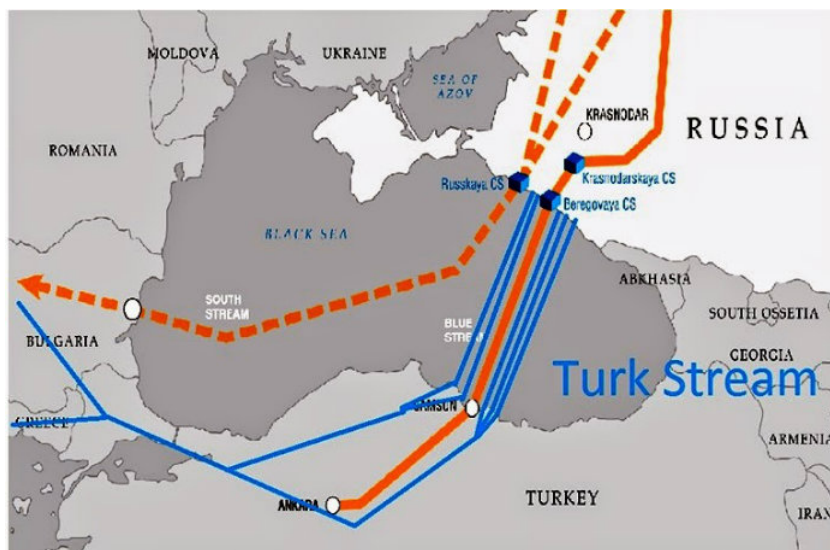
It is planned that through „Blue Stream“ pipeline another 16 billion (with projected growth to 32 billion by 2030) would be delivered from Russia to Turkey; through „North Stream“ that goes through Germany to Western Europe another 30 billion cubic meters per year (by 2030 it should be 55 billion); and around 30 billion cubic meters of gas per year was supposed to be delivered to southern and central Europe over two routes of „South Stream“ which were supposed to fork in Bulgaria²⁰.

¹⁸ Vladimir Socor, „Black Sea LNG Project to Draw on Gas From Azerbaijan“, *The Jamestown Foundation Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Vol. 7, issue 165. Available at: http://www.gab-bn.com/IMG/pdf/Re10-Black_Sea_LNG_Project_to_Draw_on_Gas_From_Azerbaijan.pdf

¹⁹ Jonathan Stern, Simon Pirani, Katja Yafimava, „Does the cancellation of South Stream signal a fundamental reorientation of Russian gas export policy“, *Journal of Self-Governance & Management Economics*, Vol. 3, issue 2, pp. 30-49.

²⁰ Katinka Bariš, *Cevovovodi, politika i moć: budućnost energetskih odnosa EU-Rusija*, Evropski pokret u Srbiji, Beograd, 2009, pp. 13-14, 93-95.

Map no. 7: Turkish stream²¹



According to the "Turkish stream" project the capacity of this pipeline should be 63 billion cubic meters a year out of which 47 would be directed towards the new gas station at the border of Turkey and Greece.

Map no. 8: Northern branch of the Turkish stream²²



Part of the installations previously laid at the bottom of the Black Sea for the "South stream" pipeline as well as the stations on the Russian coast, would be used for the construction of "Turkish stream". From the Turkish-Greek border the "Turkish stream" would be split in two directions. One would have continued from Greece to Italy and the other would go through Macedonia and Serbia linking Turkey and Central Europe.

²¹ The National Herald, издање од 19. априла 2015, доступно на: <http://www.thenationalherald.com/82239/>

²² <http://www.berlin-athens.eu/?p=964>

Projects like „South stream“ and „Turkish stream“ show the importance of Balkan’s geographic position in energy linking of Europe and Russia. However, it also shows how much effort the United States invest in order to prevent the implementation of these projects²³. The policy of „containment of Russia in the Balkans“ was set by NATO at the Summit in Bucharest in 2008 in order to decrease the percentage of Russian participation at the European energy market²⁴.

This is why all projects that were seen as a counter-proposals to Russian pipelines, like Nabucco, TAP, AGRI or East Ring had a dual function. First, they were to influence the decline of consumption of Russian gas by the EU market. And secondly, to demonstrate to the leaderships of the Balkan states that the issue of energy security could be solved by relying on other projects, in which there is no participation of Russia²⁵. Both of these tasks are debatable.

The biggest western energy project that concerned Balkan in the last two decades was the Nabucco pipeline²⁶. Although the construction of this pipeline was a political priority for the United States, it turned out that it cannot be competitive to the “South Stream” pipeline. First, the capacity of Nabucco supposed to be between 31 billion cubic meters of gas per year, which is only half of the capacity of the “South” or the “Turkish” stream. In addition it remained unclear from where would Nabucco withdrawing the said amount of gas, as the source from Azerbaijan's Shah Deniz could have filled the pipeline with a maximum of 16 billion cubic meters per year. Another open question is the price of thus distributed gas prices, because of the length of the pipeline, and the associated costs of providing pipeline that would go through unstable areas. Therefore, even if it came to realization, it would not be possible to provide a significant alternative to Russian energy through Nabucco, nor can it reduce the energy dependence of Europe from Russia²⁷. Same goes for “Trans Adriatic”, AGRI and East Ring²⁸.

All of the above shows that when it comes to energy security Balkan countries do not have alternative. The only sustainable possibility that in a long run can solve the question of energy security is attaching to gas sources in Russia. Because of this one can expect a new round of destabilization in Balkans. This is the context in which we should look at the conflict between Macedonian and Albanian paramilitary formations in Kumanovo in may 2015 or the attempt to misuse the marking of the twentieth anniversary of the crime in Srebrenica in order to destabilize Bosnia and Herzegovina and so on. Another thing is recruitment of members of the Islamic state in the attempt to destabilize

²³ Gokhan Bacik, „The Blue Stream Project, Energy Co-operation and Conflicting Interests“, *Turkish Studies*, Vol. 2, Issue 2, pp. 85-93.

²⁴ Bucharest Summit Declaration Issued by the Heads of State and Government Participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Bucharest on 3 April 2008, www.summitbucharest.ro/en/2.html

²⁵ Pavel Baev, Indra Øverland, „The South Stream versus Nabucco pipeline race: geopolitical and economic (ir)rationalities and political stakes in mega-projects“, *International Affairs*, Vol. 86, issue 5, pp. 1075-1090.

²⁶ Katinka Barysch, *Should the NABUCCO Pipeline Project be Shelved?*, Transatlantic Academy, Washington DC, 2010.

²⁷ Dušan Proroković, „Analiza ekspertskog predloga za utvrđivanje nove strategijske koncepcije NATO 2020“, Fond Slobodan Jovanović, Bilten br. 15/2010, decembar 2010. Dostupno na: www.slobodanjovanovic.org

²⁸ Mamuka Tsereteli, „Connecting Caspian Gas to Europe: No Large Scale Infrastructure Development in Near Future“, *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, Vol. 9, N. 2, pp. 45-52.

the Balkans. The estimates are that by now over 2.000 citizens of Balkan states are members of paramilitary formations of IS.

Map no. 9: *Proposed route for East Mediterranean pipeline*



On the other hand, it is possible that other geopolitical players will not wait for the “unbinding of the Balkan knot” and will seek other, alternative routes for the construction of new gas pipelines. For Russia and Germany the alternative is to expand the capacity of Nord Stream. Depending on the outcome of Ukrainian crisis the Russian side may once again consider the possibility of using this route (although it announced the closure of the pipeline through the territory of Ukraine). For the United States and countries that want to reduce the EU's dependence on Russian gas, an alternative is to link Israel, Cyprus, the Greek coast, Italy and other EU Member States²⁹.

So far confirmed reserves in the Eastern Mediterranean zone can provide 12 billion cubic meters of gas, although there is still a question of the right to exploit (in whose territorial waters are sources etc.)³⁰.

Conclusion

1. The geographic position of the Balkans is favorable. It sets Balkans as an important transit route, which is why six pipelines and two oil pipelines were projected over this territory.
2. Projects that exclude Russia are unreal and cannot in a long run solve the question of energy security of Balkan countries.

²⁹ Simon Handerson, *Natural gas export options for Israel and Cyprus*, The German Marshall Fund, Washington DC, 2013.

³⁰ George Stavris, „The New Energy Triangle of Cyprus-Greece-Israel: Casting a net for Turkey?“, *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, Vol. 11, N. 2, pp. 87-102.

3. Balkan countries are weak and although they show the will to make a strategic deal with Russia they at the same time cannot withhold the pressure of the US and EU.

4. The US has declared the decrease of European countries dependence on Russian gas as its strategic goal in Europe. This fits into the long-term geopolitical concept of restraining Russia. Preventing the gas pipeline through the Balkans that would link Russia and the EU is a priority in US foreign policy.

5. If the Balkan states continue to insist on arrangements with Russia new destabilization in the Balkan are possible.

6. Because of possible destabilization of the Balkans, alternative ways of supplying EU with gas are considered. One project is to expand the capacity of the pipeline "Nord Stream" and in order to reduce dependence on Russian gas it is also considered to link the EU and Israel with a new gas pipeline. The realization of these plans would in the long term influence the deterioration of economic performance and social environment in the Balkans.

7. In the current geopolitical framework the Balkan states are between destabilization and peripherization. Further binding to the NATO and the EU presents a minor or major harm to the region's future. Solving the issue of energy security and the political and economic peripherization is only possible in the new geopolitical framework.

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