

# GEOPOLITICS AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

**Research Article**  
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## *Abstract*

Geopolitics and International Relations are two phenomena always undivided and as usual closely related to each other. Nowadays Geopolitics is presented as a universal term in the global world which is essential in explanation of international relations because it gives a great illustration regarding the influence of geography in political power of a state.

Historically, the Western Balkans has been and of course continues to remain an important geostrategic region characterized by diversity in geopolitical orientation. It's an area where great powers have always had interests. Thus, if we refer the Euro-Atlantic process, the connectivity of geopolitics and Western Balkans is unavoidable.

So, examined from this point of view in this scientific paper I will elaborate issues related with geopolitics in general, its relation with international relations, the struggle of great power for their influence towards Western Balkans, and undoubtedly the importance of the Republic of Macedonia, as a country with very favorable geopolitical position whose purpose is integration into Euro – Atlantic structures and challenges of Republic of Macedonia during this process.

*Keywords:* Geopolitics, International Relations, Integration , EU, Western Balkans

## **The origin of Geopolitics**

Generally, geopolitics is directly related to nature. The science of geopolitics dates back to the context of geography, where often people face difficulties whether geopolitics and political geography are the same. While political geography studies the territorial political communities and the political aspect by the influence of geographic factors on one hand, geopolitics on the other hand studies the importance of geographic conditions in state politics. In a few words we can say that geopolitics is discipline closely related to geography and political sciences, but anyway more attracted from the aspect of political sciences.

In the political world constellation, during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century appear rapid changes in the aspect of the countries with economic development. The colonization of foreign countries has been targeted, which has resulted in the irritation of the relations between them. Based on this aspect, there is no doubt that geopolitics has an expansionist character, where we witness that

this character has been present in the past, when the goal of Milosevic's politics was to create great Serbia.

Johan Rudolf Kjellen was a Swedish political scientist who first coined the term "geopolitics" in 1899<sup>7</sup>, meanwhile the analysis and studies of this field are found during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Different authors define geopolitics in different ways. The most general definition of geopolitics can be the definition obtained from Griffiths and O Callaghan. According to them geopolitics is: "study on the impacts of geographic factors on the behavior of states. So how they affect: location, climate, natural resources, population and territory or physical terrain in the foreign policy of the state, as well as its position in the hierarchy of states"<sup>8</sup>

Three are the most important theses on geopolitics, set by Halford John Mackinder since 110 years ago who still stand:

- Whoever rules East Europe commands the Heartland;
- Whoever rules the Heartland commands the World-Island;
- Whoever rules the World-Island commands the World<sup>9</sup>

The above-mentioned theses make us realize that they are still valid today, meaning that who rules this region commands the World-Island (Europe), and who rules the World Island command the World, where still the heart of the Earth remains Euro - Asia, as a key geopolitical point of view, because there are over 50% of natural resources. This means that his famous formula should be rephrased as: Whoever rules the Heartland commands the World-Island; whoever rules the World-Island commands the World.

### **International Relations in the Geopolitical context**

International relations and geopolitics are two phenomena that are closely related to each other, where in the absence of one can hardly understand the meaning of the other. In fact, international relations and geopolitics although are connected among themselves, they are not synonyms. Until the international relations give us an explanation about all ways of countries how they behave among themselves, geopolitics on the other hand deals with the question of whether international relations are based on the interaction between geography and power.

Based on interconnection between them, it is impossible to analyze international relations without geopolitics. How important is geopolitics in studying international relations says Robert

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<sup>7</sup> Blerim Reka, Bardhok Bashota, Ylber Sela, "*International Relations*", Institute for Political and International Studies, Skopje, 2016, p.258

<sup>8</sup> Blerim Reka, "*The Geopolitics and Techniques of EU Enlargement*", Aspect, Brussels, 2010, p.25

<sup>9</sup> Halford John Mackinder, "Democratic Ideals and Reality", National Defense University Press, Washington, 1919 p. 113.

Kaplan on his book: “You just need to know the geographic map and based on the geographic map, you can know the upcoming events in international relations”<sup>10</sup>

International relations at the beginning of the 21st century gained a dynamic character. The characteristic of the first two decades of the 21st century was undoubtedly the Energy Crash, different from Cold War which had to do with ideology ,geography and political clash, or the period of new world order which had to do with the clash of civilization. Energy clash, oil and natural gas created new geopolitics. This geopolitics Lopes and Colin named “petroleum geopolitics”.<sup>11</sup> This geopolitics is made up by countries who want to provide energy for their country on one side, and producing countries that use oil as an instrument to achieve their goals in politics on the other hands. Today, the Western Balkans space plays an important role in EU energy security.

Based on the practice so far, we witness that not all regions are the goal of geopolitics, and not in all regions it can find its implementation. The goal of geopolitics, as usually are the countries with good geographic position and with rich natural resources but do not have a proper system of governance. Thus in the world there are central Asia, Middle East and Balkans which are part of so-called “triangle of global instability”.<sup>12</sup> Historically, the Western Balkans has been and continues to remain an important geostrategic region characterized by diversity in geopolitical orientation. It is an area where the interests of great powers are encountered, a transition area with appropriate positioning of all energy lines that come from East to Europe.

“The Balkans needs Europe, as much as Europe needs Balkans”<sup>13</sup>. This associated with reality that Western Balkans has too many advantages which may continue to be like that or no, and as such presents a threat to peace, stability, prosperity and undoubtedly the security of Europe.

### **Macedonia’s Geopolitics and its challenges into Euro-Atlantic Process**

The European Council on Foreign Relations in 2008 proposed the so-called "out-of-institutional membership" in EU, which would be developed after geopolitics dismounting of the Western Balkans, in two groups:

1. The Adriatic Peninsula, brighter perspective and faster EU membership through the current enlargement policy (Albania, Republic of Macedonia , Montenegro) ;
2. The Central Balkans, the slower regional group in the accession process (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Kosovo).<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Blerim Reka, Bardhok Bashota, Ylber Sela, “*International Relations*”, Institute for Political and International Studies, Skopje, 2016, p.263

<sup>11</sup> Blerim Reka, *Energy Challenges of the Balkan Geopolitics*, Conference: “The Security Architecture of South East Europe in Light of Wider Global Challenges”, Prishtinë, 2016, p.2-3

<sup>12</sup> <http://panalbanica.net/rikthimi-ne-gjeopolitike/>

<sup>13</sup> “Europe- destination inside us”, lecture of Prime Minister of Albania Edi Rama, hold in the Hague Institute for Global Justice, Europe, Albania and the Balkans, on May 27, 2014

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.kryeministria.al/al/newsroom/lajme/Evropa-destinacioni-brenda-nesh&page=29>

The European Union's geopolitics is undergoing one of its profound changes since the Soviet Union decreasing. Political crises undoubtedly present an increased risk for the Balkans and also a threat to European stability. Stability, democracy and economic development are key attributes for peace and integration of the Western Balkans into Euro-Atlantic structures.

The Republic of Macedonia, although it is a landlocked state, has a very favorable geopolitical position. The Republic of Macedonia is the crossroads of two Pan-European corridors. Corridor 10 which begins from Serbia to Greece and Corridor 8 which will connect the Black Sea with the Adriatic Sea through Macedonia. We witness that the Republic of Macedonia as a state separated from the former Yugoslavia is still not able to provide peace and stability within its own borders. Given that the security of the Balkans in general and Macedonia's security in particular provides security for the Europe, Macedonia aims its integration into Euro-Atlantic structures since 1992 when for the first time appointed its representative in Brussels. US involvement, the EU and also Russia's return to influence in the Balkans speaks very clearly about the importance of this area in Europe. Although Russia after 1992 was withdrawn for a time from its influence in the Balkans, recent years, especially after 2005 are back intensely in Balkans, especially to countries that are not members of the EU and NATO. It does not hide the fact that the Balkans is place where it has its own interests and where it wants to develop as a great power, even compared to the western countries. So we have a very fresh time when the government for several years was led by VMRO-DPMNE headed by Nikola Gruevski who did not hesitate to let Russia to influence the country. Up to 2012 Russian activity in Macedonia aimed to build gas pipeline named "South Stream" and its passage through the territory of the Republic of Macedonia, which in fact was suspended due to the denial of Bulgaria and Brussels to pass through EU countries. Based on the recent past, the protection of the politicians corrupted by Russia, even the VMRO - DPMNE leader was directed to Russia, as a single shelter for him when he noticed the EU insistence to fight corruption in the country, where he also began to pronounce against foreign ambassadors in the country.

VMRO-DPMNE nationalist politics generally began its downfall with the resignation of the leader of this party from the post of prime minister. The results of the recent parliamentary elections condemned nationalist rhetoric, where despite the fact that he won the largest number of votes, he failed to form a parliamentary majority. With the collapse of this regime, and now with the new parliamentary structure led by SDSM, always based on their program, Macedonia is expected to focus towards the West.

## **Conclusion**

It is known that one of the characteristics of the EU is that the EU supports poor countries and helped them become high-income economies, always remembering their geopolitical interest for the Western Balkans, especially for Macedonia. Although Turkey and Russia clearly try to have an influence in the Balkans nevertheless EU and USA remain the most powerful global actors. Although Russia has tried so far to prevent Macedonia's integration into EU and NATO has failed. Their support for Nikola Gruevski and the attempt to destabilize Macedonia, even through the assistance of Serbia is over.

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<sup>14</sup> Blerim Reka, Bardhok Bashota, Ylber Sela, "*International Relations*", Institute for Political and International Studies, Skopje, 2016, p.268

The Balkans is the largest part of the geopolitical clash between the West, NATO and the EU on the one hand, and Russia on the other hand which have the opposite goals. While the West is aiming Euro-Atlantic integration of the Balkans, Russia is aiming to disconnect the Balkans from this process and to extend its influence, that influence which it has tried in many cases.

Now with the new parliamentary structure, Macedonia continues to be under the influence of the great powers. It is the agreement on good neighborliness, which is expected to be ratified next week, proves that Macedonia continues to be closer to the EU than Russia. This agreement was also greeted by EU.

In the geopolitical plan, based on the previous developments, Republic of Macedonia should not forget the political pragmatism, it must reposition its attitude towards political initiatives. Its challenges towards Euro-Atlantic integration process are more than difficult, both politically and economically.

The focus and effort of the institutions should undoubtedly be oriented to the implementation of immediate reforms in order to achieve integration. The experience of other countries shows that these necessary improvements need to be done quickly respectively over years and not decades. The end of the prolonged transition would be a priority for the Western Balkans towards integration processes.

The problems and challenges in the region are closely related. The Government of the Republic of Macedonia and its citizens should be aware that membership in Euro-Atlantic structures carries stability on its own. What we should all be concerned about is the return of Russia especially in the oil sector.

Ultimately, Macedonia should as soon as possible make this time count, and turn opportunity into reality, not missed opportunity and then regret.

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