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**Sergiy ASATUROV**

*PhD (History), Associate Professor of the Department of International Relationship and Social Science, National University of Bioresearches and Environmental Sciences, 15 Heroes Defense Street, Kyiv, Ukraine, postal code 01001 (asaturov555@ukr.net)*

**ORCID:** 0000-0003-3177-0510

**Andrii MARTYNOV**

*PhD hab. (History), Professor, Leading Researcher at the Department of History International Relationship and Foreign Policy of Ukraine, Institute of History of Ukraine the National Academy of Science of Ukraine, 4 Hrushevsky Street, Kyiv, Ukraine, postal code 01001 (martynov.andriy15@gmail.com)*

**ORCID:** 0000-0002-9802-5980

**Сергій АСАТУРОВ**

*кандидат історичних наук, доцент кафедри міжнародних відносин і суспільних наук Національного університету біоресурсів і природокористування України, вул. генерала Родимцева, 19, Київ, Україна, індекс 03041 (asaturov555@ukr.net)*

**Андрій МАРТИНОВ**

*доктор історичних наук, професор, провідний науковий співробітник відділу історії міжнародних відносин і зовнішньої політики України Інституту історії України НАН України, вул. М. Грушевського, 4, м. Київ, Україна, індекс 01001 (martynov.andriy15@gmail.com)*

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**BALKAN'S INTEGRATION PROCESSES: HISTORY AND POSTMODERNITY**

**Abstract.** *The purpose of the research is to highlight the attempts of the Balkan regional integration in the twentieth century and at the beginning of the XXIst century. The research methodology is based on general scientific (analysis, synthesis), special and historical (historical and genetic, historical and typological, historical and comparative) methods. The scientific novelty consists in the fact that for the first time in Ukrainian historiography, the distinctive essence of the Balkan integration projects of the modern and postmodern era has been shown. The Balkan region occupies a special place in European history. Various civilization influences intersect in the Balkans, and trade routes from Europe to the Middle East have traditionally passed. The uneven historical development of the Balkan peoples led to the severity of the nation-states formation and the dominance of conflicting internal regional and external interests in the Balkans. The Conclusion. The conflict potential of Balkan history was due to the clash of ideas of "great" state formations in the form of "Greater Serbia", "Greater Albania", "Greater Serbia", "Greater Macedonia". An attempt to resolve these contradictions on an international basis was an attempt to implement the Yugoslav project. This project had two*

different implementation attempts. After World War I, Yugoslavism was embodied in the format of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. After World War II, a more successful attempt at international integration was made in the form of Yugoslav federalism. However, exogenous processes overturned the achievements of endogenous regional integration. The implementation of the European integration project of the Balkan countries depends on the readiness of the European Union to accept them and on the readiness of the Balkan countries to become part of the European Union. The European integration of the Balkan countries raises the question of the European Union borders. Turkey remains on the verge of civilization influences. Turkey's accession to the European Union is of strategic global importance. The qualitative characteristics of the European Union depend on the solution of this issue. The EU does not synchronize the accession process of the Balkan countries with the negotiation process with Turkey. It is impossible to do that, because Turkey is more than all the six Balkan countries that emerged after the breakup of Yugoslavia.

**Key words:** Balkans, integration projects, European integration, European Union, North Atlantic Alliance, Yugoslavia.

## ІНТЕГРАЦІЙНІ ПРОЦЕСИ НА БАЛКАНАХ: ІСТОРІЯ ТА ПОСТМОДЕРНІСТЬ

**Анотація.** Метою статті є висвітлення спроб балканської регіональної інтеграції у XX та на початку XXI ст. Балканський регіон посідає особливе місце в історії Європи. **Методологія дослідження** орієнтується на загальнонаукові (аналіз, синтез) та спеціально-історичні (історико-генетичний, історико-типологічний, історико-компаративний) методи. **Наукова новизна** полягає у тому, що вперше в українській історіографії показано відмінну сутність балканських інтеграційних проєктів модерної і постмодерної доби. На Балканах перетинаються різні цивілізаційні впливи, традиційно проходили торгові шляхи з Європи на Близький Схід. Нерівномірність історичного розвитку балканських народів зумовила гостроту становлення національних держав і домінування суперечливих внутрішніх регіональних і зовнішніх інтересів на Балканах. **Висновки.** Конфліктний потенціал балканської історії був зумовлений зіткненням ідей “великих” державних утворень у вигляді “Великої Сербії”, “Великої Албанії”, “Великої Сербії”, “Великої Македонії”. Спроба врегулювати ці суперечності на міжнародній основі була спробою реалізації югославського проєкту, що мав дві різні спроби реалізації. Після Першої світової війни югославизм втілювався у форматі Королівства сербів, хорватів і словенців. Після Другої світової війни була зроблена більша успішна спроба міжнародної інтеграції у формі югославського федералізму. Проте екзогенні процеси перекреслили здобутки ендогенної регіональної інтеграції. Реалізація євроінтеграційного проєкту балканських країн залежить від готовності Європейського Союзу прийняти їх і від готовності балканських країн стати частиною Європейського Союзу. Євроінтеграція балканських країн актуалізує питання про кордони Європейського Союзу. Туреччина залишається на межі цивілізаційних впливів. Вступ Туреччини до Європейського Союзу має стратегічне глобальне значення. Від розв’язання цього питання залежать якісні характеристики Європейського Союзу. ЄС не синхронізує процес вступу балканських країн із переговорним процесом із Туреччиною. Зробити це неможливо, тому що Туреччина – це більше, ніж усі шість балканських країн, які виникли після розпаду Югославії. **Ключові слова:** Балкани, інтеграційні проєкти, євроінтеграція, Європейський Союз, Північноатлантичний альянс, Югославія.

**The Problem Statement.** The Balkan region occupies a special place in European history. The term Balkans was introduced in 1808 by Berlin geographer A. Zuine (Hartl, 1977, p. 10). Since then, the concept of the Balkans has become synonymous with obscure confusing processes. The medieval conquest of the Balkan peoples by the Ottoman Empire separated them from the general trends in the history of Western European peoples. Since then, the Balkans have been crossed by various civilization influences and traditionally passed trade routes from Europe to the Middle East. The Balkan region is inhabited by

different ethnic groups, which unequally reached the level of national identity at different times, sufficient to create their own nation-states. The uneven historical development of the Balkan peoples has led to the severity of the formation of nation-states and the dominance of conflicting internal regional and external interests in the Balkans. At the beginning of the 21st century, the Balkans remain an example of more than just disintegration. But also integration processes. Many different scientific developments are devoted to this issue. Instead, the topic of the search of integration regional projects, especially in the context of European integration processes. The idea of a united and independent Balkans dates back to the 19th century. But it was very difficult to implement it, because the region is a mosaic of eastern, western, Mediterranean influences, different nations and cultures. The slogan “Balkans for the Balkan peoples” has not been implemented, not least due to the principle of “one nation – one state”. The conflict potential of Balkan history was due to the clash of ideas of “great” state formations in the form of “Greater Serbia”, “Greater Albania”, etc. But the Balkan region is too mosaic and conflict-ridden for “mini-empires” to find their place here. An attempt to resolve these contradictions on an international basis was an attempt to implement the Yugoslav project. There were two different attempts to implement it. After World War I, Yugoslavism was embodied in the project of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. Instead, after World War II, a more successful attempt at international integration was made in the form of Yugoslav federalism. However, exogenous processes overturned the achievements of endogenous regional integration. In view of this, it is important to understand what factors made the implementation of the Balkan integration projects impossible and what the consequences were for Europe.

**The Analysis of Sources and Recent Research.** After World War I, the emergence of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes stimulated interest in research into regional integration processes. In German historiography of the interwar period, this interest was manifested in terms of the study of the Balkans place in European history. Against the background of the Great Depression, the German historian G. Gross optimistically substantiated the possibilities of regional Balkan integration in the format of reconciling the interests of the countries in this region. He considered the Balkan conferences to be a tool for such a consensus (Gross, 1932, p. 1). In Nazi Germany, the emphasis on the Balkan region changed. F. Tirlfelder justified the inclusion of the Balkans in the system of “new European order” (Thierfelder, 1941, p. 2). After World War II, he actualized the interest of American researchers in the Balkans. J. Roucek substantiated Tito’s dominance in Balkan politics (Roucek, 1948, p. 10). The United States hoped that Tito’s ambitions to establish the Balkan federation under his leadership would contribute to a radical weakening of the Soviet influence in Eastern Europe. This paradigm dominated the research of Eastern European researchers in Germany. Professor of the Munich Institute for Eastern European Studies J. Kuhl pointed out that the failure of Tito’s plan to federalize the Balkans against the background of the confrontation with Stalin was a kind of compromise with reality (Balkan Federation, 1964, p. 14).

From the point of view of the history and modernity of the development of Balkan integration projects, we can identify key stages in the development of regional integration processes. The first stage was associated with the existence of the “Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes” (1918 – 1941). Within the chronological framework of this stage in 1920, an ideologically different format of regional integration emerged in the form of the “Federation of Balkan Communists”, which had to make a difficult choice between national interests and socialist

solidarity. The second stage is identified with the development of the Yugoslav Federation in all its forms (1945 – 1991). The third stage after the Balkan wars (1991 – 1999) is due to attempts to join the region in the process of European integration. It continues to this day.

The practical attempts to develop regional integration were conditioned by the attempts of the ruling elites of the “Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes” to find a way out of the crisis of the Great Depression. That is, the idea of economic integration in the region at that time was more important than attempts at political integration. However, unfavorable global economic conditions of the crisis caused difficult problems with the creation of an effective regional integration project. In 1930 – 1934 there was the Balkan Entente. At the Balkan Conference in Athens (October 5–12, 1930) there was an attempt to establish cooperation on political, economic, transport, social issues (Kühl, 1958, p. 154). But conflicting regional problems also hampered integration economic processes. At the Balkan Conference in Istanbul (October 20–26, 1931) there was discussed the problem of exacerbation of the Macedonian problem in the global economic crisis (Dülffer, 2004, p. 162). The Balkan Conference in Bucharest (October 22–29, 1932), at which there were discussed the threats of National Socialism in Germany, was a peculiar reaction to the aggravation of economic problems in the crisis-ridden Weimar Republic, which was a key economic partner of the Balkan countries (Ponomareva, 2006, p. 214). Finally, at the Balkan Conference in Thessaloniki (November 4–11, 1933), an attempt was made to find positive results and obtain concrete solutions. As a result, the Balkan Entente Pact was signed on February 9, 1934 in Athens (Kudrjashova, 2006, p. 85). But this format of regional integration did not ensure the subjectivity of the region in the context of the pan-European crisis of the interwar period. In the early 1940s, the Balkan countries were occupied by Nazi Germany.

The second stage in the development of Balkan regional integration projects, linked to Yugoslav federalism, was synchronized with the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union. The two great powers turned the Balkans into a zone of struggle for the realization of their interests. Yugoslav leader Tito sought to consolidate the region on an equal footing with Moscow and Washington. On November 27, 1947, during a visit to Sofia, Tito expressed the idea of creating a Balkan federation under Yugoslav leadership.

On November 27, 1947, during a visit to Sofia, Tito expressed the idea of creating a Balkan federation under Yugoslav leadership. This provoked a direct conflict between Yugoslavia and the USSR. The direct conflict between different geopolitical interests took the form of ideological confrontation between Belgrade and Moscow. Tito sought opportunities for Yugoslavia to cooperate even with NATO countries. On February 28, 1953, an agreement on friendship and cooperation between Greece, Turkey and Yugoslavia was signed in Ankara. However, the Greek-Turkish controversy minimized opportunities for the creation of an Eastern European Balkan federation. Normalization of Soviet-Yugoslav relations took place in June of 1955 as a result of Khrushchev's visit to Belgrade (*Erklärung der Mitgliedstaaten*, 2003, p. 255).

**The Purpose of the research** is to highlight the attempts of Balkan regional integration in the twentieth century and early XXIst century.

**The Results of the Research.** The crisis processes of the Yugoslav federalism model in the context of the end of the Cold War in Europe were a reflection of the European system of international relations transformation. The strengthening of the Albanian national movement in Kosovo took place in the context of the national identity revival of other peoples of the former Yugoslavia. The disintegration of Yugoslavia contributed to the destabilization of the situation in

the Balkans. Yugoslavia was an important ideological and political element of the international order during the Cold War. After its completion, the objective need to continue the existence of such a model of multinational statehood disappeared. But for many major powers, the Balkans remain an element of controversy over spheres of influence. In addition, the radical nationalism of the Balkan peoples is capable of repeatedly threatening European peace and interstate borders in the region during the wars for the Yugoslav heritage. The problem of determining the status of Kosovo was at the origins of Yugoslavia disintegration process, and in fact the declaration of independence of Kosovo not only formally completed the disintegration of the Balkan regional space, but also made the disintegration of the former Yugoslavia irreversible.

At the same time, the enlargement of the European Union, which took place on 1 January 1995 and was associated with the accession of neutral Austria and Sweden, as well as Finland, added a significant “neutralist” note to the European Union’s foreign policy. Some EU member states considered it appropriate to postpone enlargement to the East until the structural and institutional changes in the “old” EU were resolved. That is, first solve your own problems, and then deal with others. However, in this case, the enlargement process risked being suspended for a long time, which did not suit the candidate countries at all. Although they asserted that they were carrying out reforms for themselves and not for the European Union. Thus, the EU’s critical assessments of the near future of Bulgaria’s and Romania’s membership were revised after the 1999 Kosovo war against Yugoslavia. After all, without the accession of these countries, it was difficult to count on long-term stabilization of the situation in the Balkans. In fact, the accession of Central European countries to the European Union was predetermined by the moral commitments of Western Europe and pragmatic considerations for overcoming the division of Europe in the aftermath of the Cold War (Kok, 2008, p. 273).

The postmodern Balkan wars of 1991 – 1999 consisted of several interethnic wars. The shortest was the war of the Yugoslav army against Slovenia (summer of 1991). The Serbo-Croatian war of 1991 – 1995 was more bloody and protracted. It was synchronized with the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which took on the form of a confessional war between both Orthodox Serbs and Croatian Catholics, and both between them and Bosnian Muslims. On March 31, 1995, the mandate of the UN peacekeeping force, which divided the country’s Croats and Serbs, expired. In May of 1995, the Croatian troops recaptured Western Slavonia from the Serbs. In August of 1995, the Croats recaptured Knin. On October 3, 1995, Zagreb and Belgrade agreed on the gradual return of Eastern Slavonia to Baranja and Western Srem under Croatian control. In February of 2000, S. Mesic was elected President of Croatia. Racan’s government launched reforms aimed at creating the preconditions for Croatia’s accession to NATO and the EU. Croatia started cooperating with the International Tribunal in The Hague. In 1999, Croatia opened its airspace to the bombing of Yugoslavia. Finally, in 2013, Croatia joined the European Union.

On September 17, 1991, the Republic of Macedonia approved the Declaration of State Sovereignty. On November 17, 1991, the Constitution was adopted, which drew criticism in neighboring Greece. Albanian nationalists also claimed part of Macedonia. On February 21, 1992, Macedonia and Serbia signed an agreement to withdraw units of the Yugoslav People’s Army. On August 10, 2001, through the mediation of H. Solana, the Macedonian authorities reached a compromise with the Albanians. An amnesty was declared for Albanian militants and constitutional amendments were made, giving autonomy to Albanian districts. For this, Macedonia became an associate member of the EU.

On March 24, 1999, NATO launched a 76-day military operation against Yugoslavia, launching missile and bomb strikes on strategic and military targets. In total, 35,000 combat sorties were made and 20,000 bombs and missiles were dropped on the territory of the FRY. The losses of the Yugoslav People's Army amounted to more than 5,000 soldiers, and about 2,000 civilians died. On 9 June 1999, Yugoslavia surrendered and agreed to the deployment of NATO troops at the head of the KFOR international force. On June 24, 2000, the first direct presidential election took place in Yugoslavia, which was won by the leader of the Democratic Party of Serbia, V. Kostunica.

The path to Montenegro's independence was difficult. On April 27, 1992, the "third" Yugoslavia was established in the format of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, which included Serbia and Montenegro. On June 15, 1992, D. Cosic was elected President of the FRY. He nominated Panic, an American businessman of Serbian descent, as Prime Minister. In December of 1992, S. Milosevic returned to power. Only after the signing of the Dayton Peace Agreement in December of 1996 was the regime of economic sanctions against the FRY lifted.

The democratic opposition in Serbia intensified. The 35-year-old Prime Minister M. Djukanovic won the October 5, 1997 presidential election in Montenegro. NATO's war for Kosovo hastened the collapse of the FRY. Through the mediation of the EU representative H. Solana, the Serbian-Montenegrin talks took place, as a result of which a document entitled "Baseline Framework for the Settlement of Relations between Serbia and Montenegro" was signed on March 14, 2002. A transitional confederate model of relations was approved. On May 21, 2006, the majority of the Montenegrin population voted for independence.

The bloody war in Bosnia and Herzegovina lasted for almost three years. In Dayton, on November 21, 1995, the leader of Serbia S. Milosevic, the leader of Croatia F. Tudjman, the leader of the Bosnian Muslims A. Izetbegovic signed an agreement on the division of territory between the Muslim-Croat Bosnian Federation and the Bosnian Serb Republic. An international protectorate was established over these three national and three religious state formations.

The final peace agreement was signed on December 14, 1995 in Paris. The first post-war elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina took place on 14 September 1996. The elections were won by three ruling nationalist parties, the Croatian Democratic Union of K. Zubak, the Party of Democratic Action of A. Izetbegovic, and the Serbian Democratic Party of M. Kraišnik.

Since then, until 2022, the ethnic communities of Bosnia and Herzegovina had not been consolidated. Only in 2000 – 2002, owing to the Austrian diplomat V. Petrich, who held the position of High Representative in Bosnia and Herzegovina, harmonized the republican legislation. But the path to a multinational democracy is still a long way from EU integration.

The war in Kosovo in 1999 highlighted the need to integrate the post-conflict Balkans into the European Union. The EU made a significant mistake in the Macedonian issue. In particular, the European Union's refusal to sign the Stabilization and Association Agreement prepared in March of 2000 failed to prevent the ethno-political conflict in Macedonia with the participation of the Albanian minority. The Framework Agreement between the Slavic Government of Macedonia and the Albanian Community on August 13, 2001 in Ohrid paved the way for the federalization of Macedonia (Müller-Brandeck-Bocquet, 2006, p. 116).

On February 24, 2003, despite Greek criticism, a European Union peacekeeping operation was launched in Macedonia. This was made possible by the lifting of the Turkish veto on the implementation of the agreement between NATO and the EU on the use of Alliance resources in the military and political operations of the European Union (Boshkow, 2006, p. 97). Against the background of these contradictions, on April 16, 2003, the member states of

the European Union adopted the Athens Declaration in support of the accession of ten new member states to the EU. This step was a testament to the effectiveness of the European Union's common foreign policy (Zippel, 2003, p. 85).

The impact of the enlargement, which took place on 1 May 2004, was more serious, with ten new countries joining the European Union: Estonia, Cyprus, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, the Czech Republic and Hungary. For post-communist countries, returning to Europe was closely linked to identity. As the two parts of Europe reunited, the European Union's 2004 enlargement was described as "the most successful foreign policy act ever carried out by the European Union" (Rehn, 2006, p. 1).

Following the large-scale enlargement of the European Union on May 1, 2004, it was suggested that the growing heterogeneity of the EU member states would not radically complicate the implementation of the common foreign, security and defense policy (Solana, 2007, p. 61). The Balkan enlargement of the European Union following the accession of Bulgaria and Romania on January 1, 2007 put the issue of instability in South-Eastern Europe on the European Union's foreign policy agenda (Stoiber, 2007, p. 76). Interstate disputes appear to be acute in the region. Turkey hopes Islamization of the Balkans will help advance it to the European Union (Mennel, 1999, p. 44). European law sees such a prospect as a resurgence of the Turkish threat, pushed back from Vienna in 1683.

EU Commissioner for Enlargement Mr. Rennes says the European Union "defines itself by the common values of its members, not by geography" (Skreb, 2006, p. 3). Coordinator of the Common Foreign and Defense Policy of the European Union H. Solana officially called the accession of Bulgaria and Romania "a successful process" (Kramer, p. 114). Commenting on this wave of enlargement, European Commissioner G. Verheugen assured that the EU remains open to every European nation (Schmale, 2008, p. 216).

Analysing the consequences of the European Union enlargement, the Bavarian politician E. Stoiber noted that after the possible accession of Macedonia, Croatia and Turkey to the EU and bringing the number of member states to 30, it is necessary to establish the final borders of a united Europe (Bass-am-Tibi, 2005, p. 18). UN Security Council Resolution 1244 called for the establishment of a civilian administration for the UN Mission in Kosovo. The main task was to prepare the region for independence. In 2001, the "Constitutional Framework for Kosovo" was adopted. In particular, the creation of Albanian self-government was legalized. However, until March 17, 2008, when Kosovo was unilaterally declared independent, the United Nations exercised control over foreign relations, security, customs and financial policy. On June 15, 2008, the Constitution of Kosovo entered into force. At that time, the region was recognized by 43 countries. The Islamists believed that the emergence of another Muslim state in Europe was evidence of the growing influence of Islam in the world. Kosovo has applied to join NATO and the IMF.

On July 17, 2008, Russia expressed dissatisfaction with the report of UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon on the UN Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo. The Secretary General proposed transferring more functions in an independent European Union to Kosovo. On July 21, 2008, Serbian special services arrested former Bosnian Serb leader R. Karadzic. Belgrade has also decided to resume diplomatic relations with those countries that have recognized Kosovo's independence. This was to open Serbia's path to the European Union (Brzezinski, 2004, p. 139). But even after Karadzic's arrest, the Netherlands opposed considering Serbia's status as a candidate for EU membership.

Until 2021, the dispute between Greece and Macedonia over the name of the latter remained acute. Athens rejected the variants of the names: "Upper Macedonia", "Northern

Macedonia”, and “Vardar Macedonia”. The dispute had been going on since 1991, when the Republic of Macedonia became independent due to the break-up of Yugoslavia. In April of 2005, Macedonia rejected the name “Republic of Macedonia – Skopje”. As a result of this confrontation, Greece blocked Macedonia’s accession to NATO in April of 2008.

On July 21, 2008, the US President George W. Bush held talks with President of Kosovo F. Sejdiu and Prime Minister H. Thaci in Washington. The United States reaffirmed Kosovo’s independence and territorial integrity. On the same day, Kosovo began issuing passports to the Albanians. The Kosovo precedent was in sync with the constitutional crisis in Belgium. Wealthier Flanders wanted to separate from Wallonia. Catalan and Scottish nationalists questioned the European Union about the possibility of remaining part of the European Union if it defines itself as an independent state.

Croatia’s integration is also struggling. On October 29, 2001, Croatia signed an Association and Stabilization Agreement with the European Union. On 21 February 2003, Croatia applied to join the European Union. Finally, on March 17, 2005, after the transfer of General A. Gotovina to the Hague Tribunal, negotiations on Croatia’s accession to the European Union officially began (Bohle, 2002, p. 39). The Irish “no” to ratification of the Lisbon Treaty blocked negotiations on Croatia’s accession to the European Union. Instead, in the process of European integration, Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina are in the process of implementing the Association and Stabilization Agreements. Montenegro signed a similar agreement with the European Union. The EU’s relations with Serbia remain problematic. It is very difficult for Serbian society to change its mentality. Only in June of 2008 did the European Union sign Stabilization and Association Agreement with Bosnia and Herzegovina.

On October 3, 2005, formal negotiations on Turkey’s accession to the European Union began. Becoming part of the European Union is in Turkey’s economic interests. As a result, the Turkish labour force will be legalized. The Muslim world is also interested in Turkey’s accession to the European Union as a “Trojan horse”. Turkey’s accession is mostly lobbied by the United States, which sees it as a guarantee of strengthening the Euro-Atlantic Bridge. Historically, Turkey has seen Europe as an object of expansion. This fact still creates a lot of problems. Turkey, in particular, does not accept the ultimate precondition for recognizing the Armenian genocide in exchange for progress on the country’s accession to the European Union. Young Turks oppose a ban on Islamist parties in Turkey, allowing parties called “Christian” in Europe. However, there is nothing Christian in these parties except the name. The Turks will have a majority in the European Parliament. The issue of adapting Sharia law to European law remains open (Kneuer, 2007, p. 32). Instead, the United States is convinced that Turkey’s accession will change the global role of the European Union. But so far, it seems, the European Union itself is not ready for this. Turkey’s accession will have to be seriously considered in the event of the Balkan countries joining the European Union, including Muslim Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo. However, Turkey’s accession to the European Union will require additional financial costs, not on time in a crisis. The right-wing political forces of the majority EU countries believe that Turkey’s European modernization process cannot yet be considered complete. If, for example, secularization is considered a relevant criterion, then in Islamic Turkish society it is probably useless to count on the European volume of secularization (Kneuer, 2007, p. 14). However, this does not prevent American neoconservatives from believing that the modernization of Islamic countries on the basis of Western liberal-democratic values will be a day of final victory over

the threat of terrorism. The only question that remains open is how realistic this goal can be. Weakness of structures and insufficient consolidation of the European Union after several large-scale enlargements also hinder Turkey's accession. The European Union remains largely an "elite democracy." The hijabs on the heads of Turkish women became a symbol of misunderstanding (Kramer, 2000, p. 182). At the same time, one cannot ignore the argument that "if the doors of the EU are finally closed to Turkey," Brzezinski said, "the revival of Islamic religious and political traditions in this country and, as a result, radical (probably internal) shocks) changes in its international course" (Skreb, 2006, p. 89). So far, there are serious problems with the accession of not only Turkey, but also Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia and Serbia. They remain on the periphery of the EU enlargement process. Following the accession of Bulgaria and Romania on January 1, 2007, the European Union gained a population. Moreover, the Balkan enlargement of the European Union is seen as a crucial moment in creating a stable democratic system in the countries of Southern and Eastern Europe (Skreb, 2006, p. 12).

The Balkans remains a weak link in the EU's plans to build transport links with the Black Sea and the Caucasus. The fifth transport corridor Trieste – Ljubljana – Zagreb – Budapest – Chop – Kyiv passes through the Balkans. In addition, the Moravian – Vardar Pass is the tenth international transport corridor connecting Western Europe with Greece. Trying to stabilize the Balkans will take a lot of time and resources from the European Union for decades to come. Since Croatia's accession to the European Union in 2013, no additional impetus has been given to Bosnia and Herzegovina's integration into the EU, Serbia, northern Macedonia, Kosovo and Montenegro.

Adaptation to the norms of the European Union of the countries of the Western Balkans is difficult. Each country has its own set of problems. Montenegro found itself in the networks of religious and secular discourse (Dzerdanovic, 2022, p. 18). The situation is complicated by the permanent geopolitical struggle for influence in the Balkans. China is using the Balkans as a backdoor to enter European Union markets (Jacimovic, 2023, p. 24). The Balkans remains the weak link in Europe. In this region, it is difficult to finally move from military and political instruments to "soft" power in the process of ensuring security (Lasaridi, 2011, p. 480). An additional destabilizing factor is the growing scepticism about the immediate prospects for all countries in the region to join the European Union (Sydoruk, 2022, p. 160). Despite the difficult conditions in the majority of Balkan countries, the practice of the rule of law and European norms for resolving conflicts is gradually being established (Bashkim, 2021, p. 201). Participation in the process of European integration provided the Balkan countries with the conditions for an evolutionary transition to the European tradition of applying law. The strategy of the European Union regarding the Western Balkans began to change under the influence of the pandemic after 2020 (Martynov & Asarutov, 2021, p. 229).

**The Conclusion.** The first two attempts to implement Balkan integration projects (Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, Slovenes and the Yugoslav Federation) contributed to some extent to internal regional consolidation, but did not include the Balkans in European integration projects. Tito-era Yugoslavia has been trying to join the Western European integration project since the 1960s. It remained a neutral state and was the deep economic periphery of the European Economic Community. The break-up of the former Yugoslavia provoked almost a decade of Balkan wars. As these wars withdrew from the former Yugoslav republics, Slovenia was the first to join the European Union (2004). It took another nine years for Croatia to join the EU in 2013. This is not enough for the integration of the Balkan countries into the EU. Scientific and political

discussions on the limits of Balkan integration into the EU continue. Full regional integration is possible after Turkey's accession to the EU. This is the programme maximum. The EU does not synchronize the accession process of the Balkan countries with the negotiation process with Turkey. The conditions of these processes are too different.

The global crises of the 2020s are slowing down the process of completing the accession of the Balkan countries to the European Union. The coronavirus pandemic has negatively affected the pace of negotiations between Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Northern Macedonia, Kosovo and Montenegro on joining the European Union. In 2021, the European Union updated negotiations with the Balkan countries. Achieving a compromise between Greece and Macedonia on the latter's name and unblocking the process of Northern Macedonia's accession to NATO can be considered successful. In the case of European integration, it is difficult to consolidate the national statehood of the Balkan countries and their accession to a supranational European project.

The European integration of Albania, Serbia and Kosovo is impossible without resolving the issue of Serbia's recognition of Kosovo's independence. The European integration of Bosnia and Herzegovina is also impossible without resolving the status of the confederation of the Bosnian Serbs, the Bosnian Croats and the Bosniaks. Without resolving the "Serbian" and "Albanian" issues based on the accession of Serbia and Albania to the supranational stage of development, it is impossible to complete the enlargement of the European Union to the Balkans.

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