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STRATEGIC VISION PAPER (DRAFT)

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“Balances in the Balkans; EU, Turkey and Russia”

(20-22 April 2016, Pullman Istanbul Hotel, Istanbul)

Turkey has started to be called “new player” in the Balkans as a result of having very strong historical ties in recent years. Turkey has been able to maintain its presence in the region, Bosnia-Herzegovina in particular, through political, social and economic areas with renewed a understanding of foreign policy and support Balkans’ EU accession process for stability and normalization, aiming ultimately to make claim its geography within its own limits. Also Turkey has been providing support for, and wanting Balkan countries to shift the perception of security up to the highest level and enter to an international alliance, NATO.

In recent years, the increasing influence of Russia and Turkey in the region has encouraged investment, cultural activities etc. from many EU member countries. Russia’s obvious assistance to Serbia and Republica Serbska, the entity of Bosnia Herzegovina, is rapidly growing especially for military, defence and so on. From the outer perspectives, humanitarian sectors covered by Turkey does increase day by day but helps a lot of people by TIKA without religious discrimination during disasters such as flood. As well as the help and support of USA to Europe, increasing influence of Russia in the region continues in a stable way for the systemic and economic assistance without new players such as Russia, China, and Arab Emirates lagging behind.

The Ukraine crisis and the cancelled South Stream Project are two major examples of regional power struggles that have maximum impact. The South Stream is an abandoned pipeline project to transport natural gas of the Russian Federation through the Black Sea to Bulgaria and through Serbia, Hungary and Slovenia further to Austria and it will provide significant financial resources to these countries, therefore EU countries are concerned about this.

With Putin’s latest visit to Ankara, Turkey was included to struggling for natural gas. Russia always wants to give direction to the world of politics as a pivot. Due to embargoes by EU countries following the Ukraine crisis, efforts of Bulgaria in order to decrease its dependence on Russian natural gas, Russia has been unwilling for the South Stream gas pipeline through the borders of the countries. Therefore Russia, as a power that shapes world politics, stated its preference for the pipeline to go through Turkey and Greece.



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Political balance is achieved through Serbia and Bulgaria in the Balkans for EU and Russia. Therefore the Ukraine crisis has actually been a test for these countries. During that time Serbia has acted in favour of Russia to mention that they will not give up from the accession process of the EU and it has sent volunteer supply to ensure the security of Ukraine in favour of Russia. Bulgaria, because of the possible sanctions from the European Union and its economic crisis, has maintained a stance in favour of Europe.

Russia continues to focus on energy and infrastructure investments in the region. The two states had signed a loan agreement that will be given by Russia last year about € 600 million to the Serbian state railways. Alongside the South Stream Project; Russian Gazprom Neft, have shifted their activities regarding energy in the Balkans, to the highest level by buying NIS in the year of 2009, which is a Serbian public energy corporation which has a large amount of influence over countries like Montenegro, Macedonia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. Also in the banking sector; VTB Bank, provides financing regarding certain privatisation and infrastructure investments. The investments are not only restricted with Serbia. Russian petrol companies are taking steps in order to strengthen their own infrastructures in Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Macedonia. The Balkan governments meet up with authorities of Moscow quite often, in order to draw Russian investments into their own countries and in order to survive the economic crisis at the lowest level possible.

The expansion of the “Western Balkans”; is a process which the Balkan countries started in order for EU countries to adapt to the process of gradual integration of the Balkan Countries. After Croatia's membership in 2013; this expansion also involves Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia, Albania and Macedonia. The region is making use of regulated EU aid programmes, and unilateral concessions are present. As the Consistency and Partnership Negotiations carry the role of increasing cooperation within the region; it also carries the role of being a boosting factor for Legislative changes complyable with EU acquisitions regarding human rights of people within the region, democracy and justice.

Even though there is a serious cut on fund supports with the crisis, for example; Serbia received a € 2,9 billion financial support. Croatia received a support of € 105 million. Europe is continuing their political and security support towards the Balkans.

Turkey is mostly into trading and cultural diplomacy in the Balkans. With this vision; the trade volume which was \$ 2,6 billion in 2000, increased up to \$ 17,5 billion in the year of 2012. 12 Yunus Emre Cultural Centres are functioning in 6 Balkan countries. With these cultural centres; the people who learn Turkish, increases day by day. Out of thousands of applications, the “Turkey Scholarship” is given to almost 700 students every year. 18,5% of the aids of TIKA are made towards the Balkan countries. Since the year of 2007; under the leadership of the Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs the Muslim Balkan Leaders Summit is being organised. An office of “Anadolu Ajansı” (Anatolian News Agency) is present in Sarajevo where they present a great variety of news to other news agencies in the Balkans. Also; regional offices of TRT and TRT Avaz are functioning in the region.



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Brother-Municipalities Activities, that contribute into the strengthening of cultural-trading relations between Turkish and Balkan Municipalities. There is a great amount of affection in Turkish soap-operas; therefore, the soap opera – film industry creates an important are for building soft power.

This power distribution and the struggle between global forces in the region does not seem like it is going to end. Producing factors which would ease investment and trade in the Balkans and the understanding of “from regional integration and conflict to economic cooperation”, are expected to enable Balkan countries to show more of a presence in this system. The presence and activities within the region of the European Union which is a driving power in the conflict process with this project; Russia who continued their military&defence presence in the region and who created a big gap in their relations with the West as Kosovo became independent and NATO bombed Syria; and Turkey who are being influential over the region by using all the mechanisms of soft power will be analysed. The project will be finalised at the end of three phases which will be; in a EU member country who is influential in the region, in Russia, and in Turkey.

As a result, the theme of “Balance in the Balkans”, will help the region envisage; by analysing the project in every different phase in different locations by expert individuals, and with the experience and accumulation of these countries.

Main Theme

Balance in the Balkans; EU, Turkey and Russia

Sub Themes

Relations Between Russia, the European Union and Turkey

European Union Integration and Expansion Strategy of Western Balkan Countries

Russia's South Stream Project, it's Effects Over the Region and Energy Security

Difficulties and Opportunities for the Future

Centralization and Institutionalization in the Region

Contradiction Between Policies of the European Union, Russia and Turkey Regarding Conflicts in the Balkans

Evaluation and Strengthening of Soft Power Mechanisms

Regional Deliberations and Cooperation

Supporting Economic and Social Reforms within the Region

Construction of Workforce and Avoiding Migration

Fighting Political and Economic Corruption

Extremism and Avoiding Terror

Activism, Protest and Increasing Demands: Social Movements

Usage of Diplomacy

Regional Defence and Security Problem