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## The Idea of a Balkan Commonwealth or Confederation: A Realistic Perspective or a Utopia?

### 1. Introduction

It is a fact that until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Balkan nations were constantly under the dominion of the powerful empires (Roman, Byzantine, Ottoman initially and then, after the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the Austro-Hungarian and the Russian Empires)<sup>1</sup>. Despite the fact that the people of the Balkan Peninsula were of different origin and language, they still had so much in common, tradition, commerce and economy, agriculture but above everything the feature that connected them most, the common religion. The blast of the French Revolution and the spread of the humanistic ideas of the Enlightenment strengthen the movement for the self-determination and self-governance among the Balkan population, leading them to contest against the monarchies which ruled their countries. The idea of unifying the Balkan people was carried out initially by the Greek revolutionary thinker Rhigas (Velesinlis or Ferreos, 1757–1798)<sup>2</sup>, and it was

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<sup>1</sup> L. Hassiotis, *The Ideal of Balkan Unity from a European Perspective (1789–1945)*, “Balkanica” 2010, No. XLI, p. 209; P. Kitromolides, *Rhigas behind Velesinlis* [in Greek], Athens 2014, p. 51 ff; M. Mazower, *The Balkans*, London 2001, p. 26 ff.

<sup>2</sup> A. Balogh, *The possibility for a Greek-Turkish co-operation before the Balkan Wars*, [http://acta.bibl.u-szeged.hu/7701/1/mediterranean\\_013\\_045-050.pdf](http://acta.bibl.u-szeged.hu/7701/1/mediterranean_013_045-050.pdf) [access: 22.12.2018]; A. Manesis, *Η ελληνική Δημοκρατία του Ρήγα: Πολυεθνική, δημοκρατική, φιλελεύθερη* (*The Greek Democ-*

cultivated later in the thoughts of many leaders of the region. Gradually, the idea of the unification of the Balkan nations was turned into an idea to form a Balkan Confederation, which shall include all its nations and will help them to face the danger of the intervention of the powerful European states in that time, called the “Great Powers”, which coveted the region. After the Second World War, the majority of the Balkan States, with the exception of Greece and Turkey, adopted (or were forced to adopt) the so-called socialist regime. Still, during these years, the leaders of all these countries tried to cooperate and solve together some common problems of the region, such as energy, transport, green development. Nowadays, the Balkan states face common problems, not only concerning the development of their economy and the confrontation of the migration problem, but also the ones connected with strengthening democracy and security and consolidating their position in international relations.

## 2. The Balkan Federation as an idea during the revolutionary movements against the Ottoman Empire

From the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the Austrian and Russian Empires extended their power occupying territories, which were already occupied by the Ottomans (Hungary, Croatia, Black Sea). Dream and final aim of Russia was the revival of the Byzantine Empire under its rule, concerning itself the successor of it because of the common Orthodox faith of the Balkan people. On the other hand, the Habsburgs were worried about the liberation revolutionary movements at the south borders of the state and their possible influence on the peoples living in the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

Rhigas was a Greek independence fighter, intellectual revolutionary and poet, who was interested not only in the liberation of the land called “Roumeli” by the Ottomans, but also in the Balkan people liberation from any occupation. He is known for his text *New Political Constitution of the Inhabitants of Roumeli, Asia Minor, the Islands of the Aegean, and the Principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia*<sup>3</sup> which was an attempt to inspire the Balkans to rise up together, as well as to create the flag that would later be associated with Balkan unity. The “Greek democracy” proposed by him in his Constitution would be multi-natio-

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*racy of Rhigas: A Multinational, Democratic and Liberal One*) [in Greek], [http://aftercrisisblog.blogspot.com/2014/03/blog-post\\_25.html](http://aftercrisisblog.blogspot.com/2014/03/blog-post_25.html) [access: 26.12.2018]; M. Mazower, *op. cit.*, p. 28 ff; P. Kitromolides, *op. cit.*, p. 32 ff.

<sup>3</sup> All his works available at <http://leotychidaspolitistk/download/-DPduAAACAAJ-hapanta-ta-erga-tou-rega-velestinle> [access: 2.05.2019].

nal, multi-lingual, liberal and democratic<sup>4</sup>. The previous (under the Ottoman Empire) multi-national co-existence will be redefined and a democratic (quasi federal) administration based on the principle of sovereignty of the people no matter their nationality, religion or language, will replace the absolute power of the Sultan. In his programme, the new multinational state would be founded on the Greek education as a cultural common component and the political ideology of the European Enlightenment and the Human Rights Declarations of the French Revolution. Rhigas is just one example of how the early struggles for independence were not strictly ethnic. Politicians and leaders of other Balkan nations struggle not only for the independence of their nations but also for Democracy and Human Rights.

In the decade 1830–1840, in Croatia, was the upraise known as the Illyrian movement. Central idea of the movement was the creation of the Great Illyria, in which all Balkan nations were included.

Before these movements, Russia wanted to play the first role in the unification of the Balkan nations and this was one of the targets of its foreign policy. Prince Adam Czartoryski<sup>5</sup> (who had served as foreign minister of Tsar Alexander I), proposed to the tsar the creation of a self-governed union of some of the Balkan nations, but under the “protection” of the Russian Empire. Czartoryski was succeeded by Count Ioannis Kapodistrias, who came out in 1816 with another anti-Ottoman plan of confederation of Wallachia, Moldavia and Serbia. This could be the first step towards an all-Balkan state including the other nations (Greeks, Bulgarians).

One hundred years later Sir Frank Fox, a British (Australian) war correspondent in the Balkan wars wrote:

No, there is not a personality in the Balkans to-day at once forceful enough, honest enough, and skilful enough to give the Peninsula a union which would enable it by means of a bold decision now to ensure internal peace and freedom from outside interference. A great man could build up a greater Switzerland, perhaps, of the Slavs, the Greeks, and the Rumanians in the Balkan Peninsula with Great Britain, Russia, and France as joint

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<sup>4</sup> Article 7: “The people of the empire, every resident living all over the state, with no religious and dialectical exception, is of Greek [thus, Orthodox Christian: Greek, Slavic, Christian-Arabian], Albanian, Vlach [thus, Moldavian and Romanian], Armenian, Turkish [thus, Muslim: Arabian, Kurdish and Turkish] and other extraction”.

<sup>5</sup> He had supported the idea of a Polish-Lithuanian federation on which he insisted and later he proposed a more wide form including the Czechs, Slovaks, Romanians, Hungarians and other Balkan nations (later known as Yugoslavia). See also R. Genov, *Federalism in the Balkans: Projects and realities*, “Codrul Cosminului” 2014, Vol. 20(2), pp. 391–412.

sponsors for the freedom of the new Federation. But one hardly dares to hope for such a happy ending to the long miserable story of the Balkans<sup>6</sup>.

Karageorge Petrovic and Milos Obrenovic, Serbian leaders in the struggle for independence of Serbia, tried to form alliances against the Ottoman Empire, seeking agreements with the other Balkan nations and proposing Serbia as the leading State of this union<sup>7</sup>. Among the leaders who were in favour of the Balkan Federation were also the Bulgarian leader Georgi Rakovski and the Romanian revolutionary politicians Ion Ghika, Ion Bratianu and Nikolae Balcescu. The last one proposed the establishment of the “United nations of Danube”, following the example of the United States of America<sup>8</sup>. The struggle for independence of the Balkan states and the division of the Ottoman Empire caused many national and international conflicts on actual and diplomatic level concerning the dominance of the so-called Great Powers in the area and it is known in the history as the “Eastern Question”<sup>9</sup>, which ended typically in 1923, but actually I think that it is active till nowadays.

According to the foreign policy of Austria, the creation of national states in the Balkans was a “dangerous utopia”, having the fear that it could lead (and later had led) also to the division of the Austro-Hungarian Empire itself. Russia, on the other hand, wanted to have the control over the Slavic nations of the region and secure its south and south-western borders.

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the States of the peninsula gradually gained their independence, starting with Greece (1830) and later (1878) Serbia, Bulgaria, Romania, Montenegro<sup>10</sup>. It has to be mentioned that parallel movements for their independence were in action by many other European countries (e.g. Poland, Hungary).

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<sup>6</sup> F.J. Fox, *The Balkan Peninsula*, 1915, p. 206.

<sup>7</sup> R. Genov, *op. cit.*, p. 406.

<sup>8</sup> For more about the federative movements in the Balkans see R. Genov, *op. cit.*, pp. 391–412; L. Hassiotis, *op. cit.*, D. Lopandić, J. Kronja, *Regional Initiatives and Multilateral Cooperation in the Balkans*, Belgrade 2011 p. 35 ff; M. Mazower, *op. cit.*, pp. 171–178.

<sup>9</sup> A. Balogh, *op. cit.*, p. 49; F.J. Fox, *op. cit.*, p. 3; R. Genov, *op. cit.*, p. 406; A.J. Panayotopoulos, *The “Great Idea” and the vision of Eastern Federation: A propos of the views of I. Dragoumis and A. Souliotis-Nikolaidis*, “Balkan Studies” 1980, Vol. XXI(2), pp. 331–365.

<sup>10</sup> F.J. Fox, *op. cit.*, pp. 38–53.

### 3. The concept of a Balkan Federation in the 20<sup>th</sup> century

The 20<sup>th</sup> century is the period in which most serious and significant historical events occur both in the world and, of course, in the Balkans. We could say mostly in the Balkans, as the First World War starts in Serbia and expands over it. The Balkan wars (1912–1913) had left thousands of dead, in the attempt of the Balkan nations to define the borders after the liberation of the Ottoman Empire. Furthermore, the south-eastern Mediterranean Sea and the Black Sea were in the epicentre of the war between the Central Powers and the Entente: The new states wanted to take the most they could from the territory of the falling Ottoman Empire and this is to be confirmed with the Balkan wars. These movements were encouraged by the Russian policy following a strategic plan to maintain influence over Balkans against Austria. The main goal of all parts involved in these wars, was to take control over *vilayet* of Macedonia<sup>11</sup>, the last region still remaining under the control of the Ottomans. During the first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the idea of the Balkan federation is again brought into discussion. At the same time, having an ideological cover, namely the perspective of a socialist federation, the people of many areas call for unity. After the bloody periods of wars and the widespread ideas of socialism and later communism, urged many intellectuals to propose the union of the Balkan people towards the establishment of a new political system. The idea of a united resistance and struggle for the rights of all Balkan workers became also very popular and was adopted by the syndicates which were active in the territory of the Ottoman Empire, mostly in the big cities of that time such as Thessaloniki, Istanbul and Kavala<sup>12</sup>. But as the economy was based mostly on small factories and enterprises there did not exist any strong working class movements, as in fact the working class was mostly isolated and rather unorganized. Still, there was a common point, first with the socialist parties and then with the communist ones, as to the fact that war does not offer anything to the working people, but demands sacrifices from them. The idea of establishment of a Balkan Federation was dominant at meetings held in Belgrade, Sofia, Istanbul, etc., in the frameworks of the Socialist and Communist International, and the main slogan, accepted

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<sup>11</sup> Mostly as the Bulgarian Exarchate and the Patriarchate of Constantinople were struggling to gain the more possible influence on the people of the area, involving this way the interests of the church in the national and political issues. M. Mazower, *op. cit.*, p. 201 ff; R. Genov, *op. cit.*, p. 405.

<sup>12</sup> S. Dordanas, *Balkan Friendship Pacts, 1912–1941* [in Greek], [media.ems.gr/ekdi-loseis/2011/event\\_balkania\\_dordanas%20.pdf](http://media.ems.gr/ekdi-loseis/2011/event_balkania_dordanas%20.pdf) [access: 26.12.2018]; L. Hassiotis, *op. cit.*, p 217; A.J. Panayotopoulos, *op. cit.*, p. 2 ff.

by all, was the following: “The Balkans to the Balkan people! A free Federation of the free and equal peoples of the Balkan Peninsula!” We can notice that except for the doctrine mentioned above, no further actions were overtaken by the governments towards the creation of a federation, although the movement was accepted by many political parties, participating in the governments, such as the agrarian parties of Bulgaria, Greece and Serbia<sup>13</sup>. After some time (and apparently as a result of the decisions taken following the deliberations of the 3<sup>rd</sup> International – known as Communist International or Comintern – and the acceptance of the leading role of the Soviet Union ruling Communist Party over the participating socialist and communist parties), the idea of a Balkan People’s Federation has been abandoned. Nowadays it can be considered as the dream of some romantic Balkan intellectuals and socialist dreamers, who believed with passion in the ideas of the brotherhood and unity of the workers. In fact, the ruling parties and classes of the Balkan states never absolved themselves from the influence of the Great Powers, hoping that in every war they will be at the side of the winner, as it happened with Greece and Yugoslavia during the First World War. The idea of a quasi confederation became actual some years later, in the form of a Balkan peace and cooperation agreement, when, in 1934, in Athens, Greece, Romania, Turkey and Yugoslavia agreed to sign the (first) Balkan Pact<sup>14</sup>. The purpose was mainly to ensure the maintaining of the territory that each country possessed after the wars (Balkan and First World War) and to ensure that, for the moment, no territorial claim against any neighbour should be raised and a climate of peace and trust among these four countries would be established. Actually, this Pact was directed against Bulgaria, as the signatory countries were afraid of possible future territorial claims<sup>15</sup>. After the Second World War, in 1953, a second Balkan Pact was signed first in Ankara, this time between Greece, Turkey and Yugoslavia and one year later, the final agreement was ratified in Bled (Slovenia). This can be considered as a movement against the regimes ruling the rest independent Balkan states and as a “defence” against

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<sup>13</sup> L. Hassiotis, *op. cit.*, pp. 218–220; A. Lubotskaya, *Greece and the idea of the Balkan Union according to the materials of magazine Les Balkans*, “HAOL” 2006, Núm. 11(10), pp. 33–40.

<sup>14</sup> L. Hassiotis, *op. cit.*, pp. 225–226; M. Karagiannis, *Η εξωτερική πολιτική της Ρωσίας στα μετακομμουνιστικά Βαλκάνια (The foreign policy of Russia in post-communist Balkans)* [in Greek], [http://media.ems.gr/ekdiloseis/2011/event\\_balkania\\_karagiannis.pdf](http://media.ems.gr/ekdiloseis/2011/event_balkania_karagiannis.pdf) [access: 26.12.2018], p. 2.

<sup>15</sup> S. Sfetas, *Βαλκανικά σύμφωνα φιλίας 1913–2011 (Balkan Friendship Pacts, 1913–2011)* [in Greek], [http://media.ems.gr/ekdiloseis/2011/event\\_sfetas\\_balkanika\\_symfona.pdf](http://media.ems.gr/ekdiloseis/2011/event_sfetas_balkanika_symfona.pdf) [access: 26.12.2018], p. 10; D. Stone, *The Balkan Pact and American Policy, 1950–1955*, [https://www.academia.edu/1630691/The\\_Balkan\\_Pact\\_and\\_American\\_Policy\\_1950-1955](https://www.academia.edu/1630691/The_Balkan_Pact_and_American_Policy_1950-1955) [access: 26.12.2018].

Stalin and USSR satellite countries<sup>16</sup>. We have to mention that Greece and Turkey were already members of NATO and the Greek post-civil war governments were led politically by the doctrine “the danger for the Greek national security will come from its northern neighbours”. The aforementioned doctrine dominated the Greek policies (especially the foreign and defence ones) for decades. Of course, none of these Pacts was applied for long<sup>17</sup>; only sporadically Greece and Yugoslavia held meetings to discuss the emerging problems, as Tito had already turned his policy against Stalin and the Comintern. We have to mention that Greece had allowed Yugoslavia to use the port of Thessaloniki for its transport and commercial needs.

#### 4. The post-Soviet era of Balkan sovereign states and their orientation to the EU

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the former republics which belonged to it and the other states of Balkan and Eastern Europe, the allies of USSR in the COMECON agreement, went through dramatic changes to the multiparty political system and free market economy system<sup>18</sup>. The problems of strategic management and orientation arose while all Great Powers of the new era tried to take them under their sphere of influence. The political situation in European policy was defined now by the European Union, namely by its leading states, Germany (united already) and France. The United States of America was the other pole of influence as regards the international and, of course, the Balkan matters. NATO as an international organization was seeking its expansion to the former socialist states as regions of a great geopolitical and strategic importance.

Therefore, non rhetoric questions of great importance concerning the new independent Balkan states arose: What would be their future status? Could they defend their recently obtained sovereignty and independence? Would they become the peripheral satellites of Germany, Great Britain, France and the USA in the Balkans? Or should they focus on a future incorporation and integration in the

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<sup>16</sup> S. Dordanas, *op. cit.*; M. Karagiannis, *op. cit.*, p. 3 ff; S. Sfetis, *op. cit.*, p. 10, A. Tounda-Fergadi, *Μειονότητες στα Βαλκάνια. Βαλκανικές διασκέψεις, 1930–1934 (Minorities in the Balkans: Balkan Conferences, 1930–1934)* [in Greek], Athens–Thessaloniki 1994.

<sup>17</sup> P. Vukman, *The Balkan Pact, 1953–1958. An analysis of Yugoslav-Greek-Turkish relations based on British archival sources*, [http://acta.bibl.u-szeged.hu/30731/1/mediterranean\\_022\\_025-035.pdf](http://acta.bibl.u-szeged.hu/30731/1/mediterranean_022_025-035.pdf) [access: 22.12.2018].

<sup>18</sup> M. Karagiannis, *op. cit.*, p. 9; D. Lopandić, J. Kronja, *op. cit.*, p. 24 ff. An accurate and well-aimed analysis about the Balkans and their people conducted M. Todorova in *Imagining the Balkans*, Oxford University Press, New York 1997.

EU? These states have common borders with some EU Member States such as Greece, Austria and Italy. Meanwhile Russia is still considering itself as the “natural” protector of the Slavic nations. Some Balkan states had to face their future challenges and to plan their economic and political development using specific support programmes of various international organizations. In fact, I am convinced that all the states of the Balkan Peninsula aspired to be a member of the EU (some of them are already part of it). It was believed that this way, they can strengthen and stabilize their democracy, develop their economies and, simultaneously, the standards of the lives of their citizens. With the support of specific European programmes such as the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance<sup>19</sup>, the states can achieve the social and economic cohesion. On the other hand, the question arising is whether the EU is a solution in times of the unstable world (and European) economy and the worldwide jeopardization of human rights under the pretext of security. Furthermore, a subject to argue about is the role of the Balkan states in the EU and their possible influence on the European policymaking in terms of achieving a sustainable development of their economy. Recently (May 2018), at the EU-Western Balkans annual summit, which was held in Sofia (Bulgaria), in the final declaration (Sofia Declaration), the EU “welcomes the shared commitment of the Western Balkans partners to European values and principles, and to the vision of a strong, stable and united Europe, underpinned by our historic, cultural and geographic ties and by our mutual political, security and economic interests” and it is “determined to strengthen and intensify its engagement at all levels to support the region’s political, economic and social transformation, including through increased assistance based on tangible progress in the rule of law, as well as in socio-economic reforms, by the Western Balkans partners”<sup>20</sup>.

##### 5. A Balkan Confederation as an alternative for development and security in the Balkans

During the centuries passed, it became clear that the people of the Balkans shared not only the same historical past under Ottoman, Russian and Austrian rule, or the same religion, but also the same values and ambitions. Sometimes

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<sup>19</sup> Assistance for transition and institution building; cross-border cooperation (with EU Member States and other countries eligible for IPA); regional development (transport, environment, regional and economic development); human resources (strengthening human capital and combating exclusion); rural development. See details about the IPA programme at [https://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/en/funding/ipa/](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/funding/ipa/) [access: 2.05.2019].

<sup>20</sup> See the whole text of the Declaration at [https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/34776/sofia-declaration\\_en.pdf](https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/34776/sofia-declaration_en.pdf) [access: 2.05.2019].



that seem to be contradictory, but analysing the historical facts, the political history and political behaviour of all people living in the Peninsula, we come to the conclusion that what unites them is stronger than what separates them.

The recent problem of the migration flows, when thousands of people are trying to pass through the Balkans to the countries of central Europe (mostly to Germany and Sweden) and the unwillingness of the EU institutions to manage these flows through the Balkans, shows that the mere cooperation is not enough.

Generally speaking, apart from the illegal migration problems, the region faces a serious security challenge, which is at a very high level as provided in the common EU-Balkans cooperation agenda, for example, as far as the organized crime of drug and human trafficking is concerned. An effective institutional cooperation framework with priority on security issues should eventually lead to a deeper cooperation at the level of Common Security and Defence Policy. On the other hand, focusing on the security problems should not decouple the other issues related to the Balkan Peninsula, such as environmental problems, energy, transport, etc.

The Danube flows through many Balkan and Eastern European countries and carries out its waters to the Black Sea. For many centuries, this river was a traditional trade route and played a vital role for all the peoples of the region not only from an economic point of view, but also from the cultural and environmental ones. The energy and natural gas pipelines are also common fields of interest in the Balkans<sup>21</sup>.

The Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) is an example of the willingness of the countries of Black Sea and the Balkans to cooperate and it came into existence as a unique and promising model of multilateral political and economic initiative<sup>22</sup>. With the entry into force of its Charter on 1 May 1999, BSEC acquired international legal identity and was transformed into a full-fledged regional economic organization – the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation. BSEC serves as a forum for cooperation in a wide range of areas for its 12 Member States: Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Georgia, Greece, Moldova, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Turkey and Ukraine<sup>23</sup>. Another project is “The Road Ahead: Black Sea Basin Programme 2014–2020”, under the European Neighbourhood & Partnership Instrument (ENPI)<sup>24</sup> concerning all the countries

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<sup>21</sup> M. Karagiannis, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

<sup>22</sup> D. Lopandić, J. Kronja, *op. cit.*, p. 146 ff.

<sup>23</sup> Some of the areas of cooperation are: energy, science and technology, environmental protection, tourism, culture, agriculture, etc. (<http://www.bsec-organization.org/> [access: 2.05.2019]).

<sup>24</sup> Some of the objectives are: environmental protection, promotion of business and entrepreneurship in trade, tourism, agriculture, etc. (<http://www.blacksea-cbc.net/black-sea-basin> [access: 2.05.2019]).

of the Black Sea Basin and it is implemented by many Balkan States, starting from Romania, Ukraine, Turkey, etc.

Projects like these may enhance not only the economic and social development of the region, but the cooperation between the peoples of the involved states as well, reminding them that this area had been and will be their common motherland. They could be seen as the precursor of a more tight union. The attempts to establish a federative state in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries were unsuccessful, but people are considered to be more mature than their ancestors and ready to overcome certain barriers, mostly related to nationalism, which eventually is leading to an impasse. The way to the confederation is not an easy one, considering all the historical and geopolitical obstacles, mentioned above. Still, the foundation of such confederation, under commonly accepted policies and institutions, should be an option leading towards peace and development. The respect of the sovereignty of each state within the frames of the confederation is one requirement. The other, in my opinion, should be the respect of the international law. After all, international law will be the legal frame of its foundation, as any other possible form of a union will be difficult for the state members to accept. Nevertheless, the union should be based on a commonly accepted declaration, in which the sovereign power belongs primarily to its peoples, who have the exclusive competence to define the “constitutional” principles of its formation and structure<sup>25</sup>.

The recent Prespes Agreement, signed by the Prime Ministers (Alexis Tsipras and Zoran Zaev) and ratified by the Parliaments of Greece and North Macedonia, puts a legal end to the dispute over the latter’s use of the name “Macedonia”. Of course, it will take a long time to tackle this issue, given its more than 100 years controversies about it. Still, the people of Greece and Northern Macedonia should leave any nationalism behind and focus on the benefits that this agreement offers to both countries. Further, the expected integration of North Macedonia into the EU will reinforce the mutual relations between them<sup>26</sup>.

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<sup>25</sup> The formation of the European Union itself is based on the principles of a quasi confederation, functioning on a multi-level interactive bodies’ and institutions’ legal frame and recognizing the sovereignty of each Member State. It seems to be an implementation of the theory of “dual sovereignty”. This theory can be applied (according to the opinion of some writers e.g. H. Nawiasky, *Allgemeine Staatslehre*, Teil 3, Einsiedeln 1956, p. 140; T. Öhlinger, *Verfassungsrecht*, Wien 2016, p. 80) on state unions formed and functioning under the international law, instead of a federative constitution.

<sup>26</sup> EU officials and European press refer widely to the agreement, see, for example: <https://ec.europa.eu/commission/commissioners/announcements/31en> [access: 2.05.2019], <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-44511649> [access: 2.05.2019], <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jun/17/macedonia-greece-dispute-name-accord-prespa> [access: 2.05.2019].

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**Summary:** For centuries, the Balkan Peninsula has been used as the road connecting Eastern Mediterranean and Europe. It is an area of great strategic, economic and cultural significance and a place of common interests for all the nations living there for centuries. After their formation as sovereign states (mainly after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and recently after the Breakup of Yugoslavia), the new Balkan States try to find their geopolitical position on the European map. There are many questions which arise when one thinks about the current situation of those states. Is it possible for the Balkan states to successfully cooperate on a political, economic and strategic basis? Is it necessary to create a union of partially sovereign states (i.e. a confederation) or a looser structure (i.e. a commonwealth) is enough? And finally, is this a way to strengthen democracy and security and consolidate these states’ positions in international relations?

**Keywords:** the Balkans; the Ottoman Empire; the Austro-Hungarian Empire; the Russian Empire; Eastern Question; Balkan Federation/Confederation; Balkan economic/strategic cooperation

### **Idea bałkańskiej wspólnoty czy konfederacji: realistyczna perspektywa czy utopia?**

**Streszczenie:** Przez wieki Półwysep Bałkański był wykorzystywany jako droga łącząca wschodnią część Morza Śródziemnego i Europę. Jest to obszar o wielkim znaczeniu strategicznym, gospodarczym i kulturalnym, a także miejsce wspólnych interesów dla wszystkich żyjących tam narodów. Po ich utworzeniu, jako suwerenne państwa (głównie po upadku Imperium Osmańskiego, a ostatnio po rozpadzie Jugosławii), nowe państwa bałkańskie próbują znaleźć swoją geopolityczną pozycję na mapie europejskiej. Wiele pytań pojawia się na myśl o obecnej sytuacji tych krajów. Czy państwa bałkańskie mogą skutecznie współpracować na płaszczyźnie politycznej, gospodarczej i strategicznej? Czy konieczne jest stworzenie unii częściowo suwerennych państw, takich jak konfederacja, czy może wystarczy luźniejsza struktura (tj. wspólnota)? I wreszcie czy jest to sposób na wzmocnienie demokracji i bezpieczeństwa oraz konsolidację pozycji tych państw w stosunkach międzynarodowych?

**Słowa kluczowe:** Bałkany; Imperium Osmańskie; Austro-Węgry; Imperium Rosyjskie; Kwestia Wschodnia; bałkańska Federacja/Konfederacja; bałkańska współpraca ekonomiczna/strategiczna