

Abstracts

Simonida Kacarska

The Opening of Accession Negotiations with North Macedonia – Glass Half Full or Half Empty?

In July 2022, North Macedonia provisionally started the much-awaited accession talks for EU-membership. Specific conditions apply to its negotiating framework, for instance the inclusion of the Bulgarian community in the national constitution and specific reporting requirements to the European Commission on bilateral relations, including historic topics. The political elites and the public in North Macedonia are divided as to whether these conditions compromise the likelihood of successful European integration. In addition to the political crisis that North Macedonia may face in the short and medium term in ensuring constitutional changes with a non-existent parliamentary majority, political instability in Bulgaria continues. The different interpretations of the level of incorporation of historical topics in the accession negotiations between the two countries and the European Commission can have a detrimental effect on the overall EU enlargement process.

Angel Petrov

How Instability in Bulgaria Helped Make the North Macedonia Deal

The solution to the Bulgaria – North Macedonia impasse this year was a product of political instability in Bulgaria, which is equally capable of breaking the EU-brokered deal and which showed how Balkan conflicts can be fueled or solved solely based on political calculations, not unlike the rest of Europe. Led by Kiril Petkov, the four-party coalition made substantial progress, but infighting among the governing partners on a number of issues – Sofia-Skopje relations being only one of various sticking points and not the root cause – jeopardized all gains. It was, however, the end of the coalition that allowed for the formation of cross-party support, beyond the collapsing government alliance, that helped carry through the deal which otherwise would have meant loss of political capital for some of the partners. The crisis was solved by political considerations, the very same problem that had sparked the escalation between the two countries. However, this locally-owned solution could be jeopardized by the same kind of considerations as the political environment gets ever more unpredictable.

Barbara Horstmann / Jovana Škrijel / Esther Wahlen

Taking Action against Sexualised Wartime Violence – Insights from the Field

In late 1992, the mass rapes of Muslim women during the war in Bosnia were the first incidences of sexualised wartime violence to receive international attention. 30 years later, sexualised wartime violence has gained more public visibility. Moreover, political leaders and societies are quicker to condemn these forms of violence as a war crime, and international aid organizations have dedicated programs to support the survivors. In a few states, survivors of sexualised wartime violence are now recognized as civilian war victims and receive reparation payments. This article reviews these achievements from the practice of an international women's rights organization. It argues that the awareness of the topic, the comparative expertise, international political measures as well as local support structures are the results of long-term political activism.

Marie Jelenka Kirchner

Sexualized Violence as a Weapon in the Bosnia War and Today – Societal Causes and Political Approaches to Solutions

During the first year of war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, reports about the systematic sexual abuse and rape of Muslim-Bosnian women and girls by Serbian soldiers became public. The horrific extend of sexualized violence as a weapon of war triggered global attention towards the role of sexualized violence towards women and girls during armed conflicts and initiated a response by the UN-Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. 20 years after the passing of the Resolution and 30 years after the war in Bosnia, news about sexualized violence as part of the Russian war strategy in Ukraine again gather political and societal attention across Europe.

This article looks at the role of gender in armed conflicts and war. It sheds light on the function of gender-based, sexualized violence as weapon of war. It draws parallels between the war in Bosnia in the 1990s and the current Russian War in Ukraine. The article asks whether or how the introduction of the UN Women, Peace and Security Agenda has changed today's awareness of the role of gender in armed conflict and political strategy towards ending war based on the premise of gender equality.

Florian Bieber

Between Russia and the West – Serbia's Staged Balancing Act

The Russian aggression against Ukraine put Serbia into the spotlight for not supporting EU sanctions against Russia. The ambivalence of Serbian foreign policy has thus come under greater international scrutiny in 2022. This analysis explores why the Serbian government has remained unwilling to commit to sanctions and how this constitutes a continuation of its foreign policy. Rather than being squeezed between East and West, as the Serbian president presents the dilemma, the ambiguity is a deliberate strategy of Aleksandar Vučić to secure his power domestically and maximize his maneuvering space internationally.

Armina Galijaš

“Putin Received Me after Midnight” – Russian Soft Power in the Republika Srpska

This paper examines the current Russian influence in Bosnia and Herzegovina, particularly in one of the two entities, the Republika Srpska with an 80 percent Serb majority. Russia's goals and methods are discussed, particularly the ideological and economic influence – with special regard to the Kremlin's soft and hard power. The article continues with remarks on how the spoils of this relation are divided between the Kremlin and Bosnian-Serb politicians. Finally, the contribution tries to assess the risk of Russian interference for the stability of the Republika Srpska and, by extension, the country as a whole.

Zuzana Finger / Christian Voß

Literature as Soft Power? The Literary Image of Russia in Albania

The article applies the concept of soft power as indirect influence on Albanian foreign policy through cultural attractivity. In the cultural memory of the multireligious Albanian nation Russia, Slavdom and Orthodox brotherhood do not play the major role as in Bulgaria or Serbia.

The split between Enver Hoxha's Albania and the Soviet Union in 1961/62 shows cultural and literary results in lab-quality triggered by ideological conflicts within the communist world. The novels written during the 1970s and 1980s by Ismael Kadare as the most important Albanian author have made these events internationally visible world literature. Kadare's negative ascriptions of Russians and Russia stand in contrast to the emotionally positive reception of Russian literature throughout the whole 20th century. Partly, this can be explained by prominent intellectuals translating into Albanian (from Fan Noli to Agron Tufa). Nevertheless, the young generation today lacks cultural brokers between Russian and Albanian culture.

Dietmar Müller

Russian-Romanian Relations between Geopolitical Determinism and Western Orientation

This paper analyses Romania's self-positioning in geopolitical and cultural terms in relation to its northern neighbour Russia. Historically, Russo-Romanian relations provide for little philorussian sentiments in Romania. Especially the fate of Bessarabia as part of the Romanian province of Moldova, having been transferred back and forth between Romania and Russia several times, proves to be the nodal point. Economically, the commercial and financial interdependence is on a low level, including for natural gas. Therefore, Russian influence is confined mainly to historical narratives and other soft power tools. There is a tendency to stir up relations with Ukraine and Moldova by depicting Romania as a revisionist country, and to question the merits of its Euro-Atlantic integration when compared with the loss of its orthodox-conservative value system within a culturally permissive European Union. This analysis pays special attention to the production of knowledge about Russia in Romania, and how this influences the formulation of the country's foreign and security policies towards Russia.

Alexander Andreev

The War and Russia's Influence in Bulgaria

In Bulgaria, all prerequisites for Moscow's successful influence exist. The related historical, intellectual and economic aspects are well known. There is also the fact that many media in Bulgaria are literally hijacked by political and economic interests. It is no coincidence that the country ranks last in terms of media freedom, not only in the EU, but even in the Balkans. Bulgaria is also the most corrupt country in the European Union, with a judiciary that does not deserve the name, not coincidentally still under EU scrutiny as regards the rule of law. A part of the Bulgarian intelligentsia is per se Russia-friendly, the military and secret services are still suspected of cultivating old Soviet-era rope networks. There is pervasive, corrosive corruption. Journalists are bought, politicians and magistrates are bought, entire media, businesses and even institutions are bought. Bulgaria is a country where Putin supporters make up perhaps 20 percent of the population, but the percentage of Putin apologists is even higher. A country often described as Moscow's Trojan horse in the EU and NATO.

Zaur Gasimov

Russia and Turkey – Pragmatism and Cooperation in the Post-American World

The two countries look back at a century-long neighborhood and interaction. Wars, border conflicts and animosities between them were characteristic between the 17–19th century and World War I. During the interwar period, Soviet leadership backed the Mustafa Kemal-led national movement and the modernisation course of the Turkish government. During World War II, the relations deteriorated: Moscow launched territorial claims against Turkey and urged it to search for protection in the NATO. Later on, the economic cooperation and the political dialogue between Moscow and Ankara constantly grew, particularly after the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991. The withdrawal of the US from active engagement in the Middle East under Obama caused the activation of Turkey's export-oriented economy as well as Russia itself striving for the restoration of its great power status. Despite clear differences, Moscow and Ankara have been collaborating in Syria, Libya, the Caucasus and to some extent in the different contexts of the Ukrainian crisis.

Thomas Schad

Autocratic Learning – Parallels between Russian and Turkish Neo-populism

This contribution explores parallels in the development of autocratic rule in Russia and Turkey. Given both regimes' activities in the Western Balkans, some of the main challenges for liberal democracy are demonstrated by pursuing three main theses: First, revisionist, neo-populist regimes are incompatible with the genuine interests of liberal democracy, posing a challenge to the demand for a value-oriented foreign policy, as advocated for instance by Germany. Second, there is a tipping point in the autocratic progress of populist regimes that can be missed – rendering functional partnerships between the two regimes impossible, and a return to the path of democracy unlikely. Third, the revisionist sense of mission by neo-populist actors in both Russia and Turkey serve a rule-securing function, by manipulating public consent both at home and abroad. Finally, the paper concludes with a plea to take revisionist neo-populism for serious, advocating for a strategic rethinking of foreign policy towards neo-populist regimes.