

If There Is No Europeanization, There Is Balkanization

When the concept of Balkanization - fragmentation in the international relations literature - was born, a re-change of borders was put on the agenda. In some non-paper publications especially in the last two months, it is claimed that the main source of the problems in the region is the existing borders and that the countries there will rise to the level of "contemporary civilizations" if the borders are redrawn!

US President Joe Biden's signing of a decree^[1] which freezes the property and ban the entry to the United States of people who threaten the Western Balkans' stability and those working against the Dayton Agreement^[2], Prespa Agreement^[3], Ohrid Framework agreement^[4], and United Nations Security Council resolution 1244^[5], shows the seriousness of the published documents.

The first published non-paper was allegedly prepared by Croatia in March 2021 supported by Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece, Hungary, and Slovenia. While the document in question includes Bosnia and Herzegovina's problems due to the Dayton agreement, there was a demand for a change in the election law that would enable legitimate representatives of Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This amendment is interpreted as the first step towards the establishment of the third Croatian entity in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The main purpose of this non-paper can be interpreted as an effort to turn the Dayton agreement discussions in the favour of the Croats. Discussions have been made for years, that the Bosniaks, who have the largest population in the country, should take a stronger position in the administration. Otherwise, the Croats, who already have too much power in Bosnia and Herzegovina under the Dayton Agreement, are aware that they have to make concessions after any update.

The second non-paper was allegedly prepared by Slovenian Prime Minister Janez Janša, whose country held the Presidency of the Council of the EU on June 1. In the non-paper titled "Western Balkans - a way forward" ^[6], it was implied that the unresolved national issues of Serbs, Albanians and Croats actually emerged from the lingering border problems and that the solution was to replace political borders with ethnic ones. The document recommends for:

* The unification of Kosovo and Albania and the granting of special status to the region in the north of Kosovo that is densely populated with Serbs, following the example of South Tyrol.

* The unification of a large part of Republika Srpska's territory - located in Bosnia-Herzegovina - with Serbia. The document claims this will largely resolve the Serbian national question hence Serbia will be ready to agree about Kosovo joining Albania.

* The Croatian national question will be resolved providing:

- The accession of predominantly Croatian cantons in Bosnia and Herzegovina to Croatia, or
- A special status for the Croatian part of Bosnia and Herzegovina (following South Tyrol as an example).

* A referendum will be held after these steps have been taken so that Bosniaks will win an independent functioning state and take full responsibility for this and choose between the EU and non-EU (Turkey).

* The EU to initiate the implementation of a comprehensive economic program for the stability, better infrastructure, energy connectivity and environmental rehabilitation of the region, in cooperation with other factors in the region.

* It proposes accelerating the accession negotiations for EU and NATO membership, after the adoption and approval of all necessary bilateral resolutions in the region.

Although there is no suggestion about the Montenegro and North Macedonia borders in the document, the changing of borders of both countries based on ethnicity came to the fore in the shared maps.

If the proposed border changes are realized, the Bosnians, who are concentrated around 35% of the land despite having more than half of the country's population, and North Macedonia, where Albanians live in a significant part of the country's territory, will suffer the most. If the Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina are given any more rights than today, in the medium and long term, just like the Serbs, they will also ask to separate from Bosnia and Herzegovina.

It is safe to say that this non-paper, which envisages border change of all Balkan countries, is a war prescription rather than a solution proposal. This is because in the beginning of the 90s, the demand to change political borders according to ethnicity has caused wars that resulted in the death of more than a hundred thousand civilians. Changing the borders according to ethnicity may cause mixing not only the Balkans but also the whole continent.

Moreover, while it is recommended that almost all nations unite and establish larger countries, the fact that at least the Bosnians, who live intensively in the Sanjak region, are not proposed to unite with Bosnia-Herzegovina, proves that those who prepared these and similar documents are anti-Islam and do not want Muslim power in the region.

In addition, it is another example of Islamophobia to present Turkey - which supports EU membership processes of the Balkans countries - as a country that threatens the stability of the region, instead of Russia and China, which openly operate against the EU.

The last two non-papers contain policy recommendations for the ongoing conflict and dialogue process between Kosovo and Serbia. The first non-paper published on this subject recommends the creation of a special region in the north of Kosovo, where Serbs live heavily, as in the case of South Tyrol; the granting of special status to the Serbian Orthodox Church in return for mutual recognition of Serbia and Kosovo; and for Serbia not to prevent Kosovo's membership in international organizations.^[7] The second document, prepared in Serbian, states that Recommences Kosovo to remain an autonomous region of Serbia for 99 years, to grant approximately 873 thousand Kosovo Albanians with Serbian citizenship, to hold all-level joint elections in Kosovo and Serbia in April 2022, and that the elected governor of Kosovo should also be vice-president of the National Assembly of Serbia.^[8]

This shows that both documents prepared to change the fate of Kosovo mean that Kosovo renounces its current rights. On the one hand, although South Tyrol's example is given in its own country, the Serbian special region to be established will act more like Republika Srpska in Bosnia and Herzegovina rather than South Tyrol, and it will negatively affect the country's politics. On the other hand, it is out of the question for Kosovo to give up its independence that it had paid with a heavy price and to accept to be an autonomous region within Serbia.

The non-papers published in the last two months, the border demarcation agreement signed between Montenegro and Kosovo a few years ago, and the agreement that was allegedly reached between then-President of Kosovo Hashim Thaçi and his Serbian counterpart Aleksandar Vucic, all envisage border change between Kosovo and Serbia. The fact that border changes are so much on the agenda raises the question of whether the people of the region aim to prepare for such a change in the medium term. Or does the EU - which has problems in its enlargement process - is "Balkanization" the Balkans instead of Europeanizing them?

[1] Executive Order on Blocking Property And Suspending Entry Into The United States Of Certain Persons Contributing To The Destabilizing Situation In The Western Balkans - <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/06/08/executive-order-on-blocking-property-and-sus>

[2] Dayton Agreement Agreement that ended the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1995

[3] The Prespa Agreement is an agreement between Macedonia and Greece in 2018 that allows Macedonia to be renamed North Macedonia and become a NATO member.

[4] The Ohrid Framework Agreement is the agreement that ended the internal conflicts in Macedonia in 2001 and guaranteed the rights of all minorities living in the country, especially Albanians.

[5] UN Security Council resolution 1244 is the decision to establish an interim administration (UNMIK) under UN administration to create the necessary infrastructure for Kosovo to govern itself.

[6] Objavljamo dokument o razdelitvi BiH, ki ga išče ves Balkan –

<https://necenzurirano.si/clanek/aktualno/objavljamo-slovenski-dokument-o-razdelitvi-bih-ki-ga-isce-ves-balkan-865692>

[7] Ekskluzive, Kosova dhe Serbia do t'ia njohin integritetin territorial dhe sovranitetin njëra-tjetrës -

<https://www.koha.net/arberi/268451/ekskluzive-kosova-dhe-serbia-do-tia-njohin-integritetin-territorial-dhe-sovranitetin-nje>

[8] Нов „нон-пејпер“: Косово останува во Србија уште 99 години, ќе добие специјален статус

<https://lokalno.mk/nov-non-pejper-kosovo-ostanuva-vo-srbija-ushte-99-godini-ke-dobie-spetsijalen-status/>