

Some Aspects of Strategic Features in Southeastern Europe (Comparison with South Caucasus)

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Abstract

During the last two centuries, the region earned the reputation as the most flammable and problematic part of the Europe. Precisely, the past century witnessed the local or internal conflicts and coalition confrontations, revolts, revolutions, military coups, genocides, mass expelling of certain ethnicities, terrorism and various forms of violence which made the regional peace mostly unrest. Particularly, the Western Balkans was noticed as an unstable region since the sensitiveness of relations among major powers and revenge sourced from the deep historical roots. This area was an important part of Europe and had an important potential for peace and security in the world. The Western Balkans and the South Caucasus are two regions, which experienced similar grave events after the Cold War while facing similar threats and challenges. The root causes of tensions and conflicts, which led to instances of mass atrocities, including genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity, go back far in the past. The disintegration of Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union brought deep rooted tensions oppressed by the dictators for more than half a century back to the surface of political, economic and private relationships. Energy resources, namely oil and gas, which bear strategic importance, take a significant part in relations between Azerbaijan and the Balkan states. At the present stage the Balkans is a priority gas market for Azerbaijan. The Balkan countries - Turkey, Greece, Albania, Bulgaria, Montenegro, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Romania are participants and stakeholders in the Southern Gas Corridor project.

Keywords: the Balkans, South Caucasus, energy security, armed conflicts, strategic cooperation

1. Introduction

Southeast European countries form a single array, between Western and Eastern Europe and Central and Southern Europe, which are washed by the Black Sea to the East, the Adriatic Sea to the West. Sovereign states of the region are: Romania, Bulgaria, Moldova, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Slovenia, Croatia, Macedonia and Serbia. Main peculiarities of Southeast European countries are their compact location in the region, that seven states have access to the sea, direct access to the Danube waterway system, location at the intersection of routes from Western Europe to the Middle East, from Northern Europe to the Mediterranean countries, Asia and to the Indian Ocean, location adjacent to the countries of Central, Eastern, Western and Southern Europe as well as Turkey (geographyofrussia.com, 2017).

The Balkan region differs from other regions of Europe in its instability and ethnic diversity. "Balkan" is a Turkish word, which means "rough, mountainous territory" and it was the name given by the Turks to the mountain range that runs across Bulgaria from West to East. The first time the name "Balkan" was used in the West for this mountain range is said to be in late 15th century and at the end of the 18th century authors started using the name to the wider area between the Adriatic and the Black Sea. After the Turkish rule started at the end of the 14th century and lasted for some 500 years, Austro-Hungarian Empire became stronger in the North and weakened the hegemony of the Ottomans at the end of the 17th century. During the last two centuries, the region earned the reputation as the most flammable and problematic part of the Europe. Precisely, the past century witnessed the local or internal conflicts and coalition confrontations, revolts, revolutions, military coups, genocides, mass expelling of certain ethnicities, terrorism and various forms of violence which made the regional peace mostly unrest. Particularly, the Western Balkans was noticed as an unstable region since the sensitiveness of relations among major powers and revenge sourced from the deep historical roots (Bicher, 2016).

This area was an important part of Europe and had an important potential for peace and security in the world. The term “Western Balkans” was created in last decade of 20th century, at the height of armed conflicts in the territory of former Yugoslavia. This term enhances the countries, formed at the territory of Yugoslavia, as well as Albania (Firsova, 2016).

The Balkans are treated as the core, center of Southeastern Europe. The region includes eleven states, including East Thrace, having total population of 70 million people. To the exception of Romania (22 million), the population of the remaining Balkan states ranges from 2 to 10 million people. Throughout the course of history the Balkans witnessed the number of regional conflicts and wars which led to split of people according to their religious and ethnical relation. After the collapse of Soviet geopolitical environment nationalism, the balkanization once again demonstrated its destructive energy. Subsequently in 2006 year Federative Republic of Yugoslavia erased from the map of Europe having existed for 86 years. Russia withdrew from the Balkans and due to the fact, regulation of the region passed to the EU and the United States.

The religious factor has played a huge role in the conflicts and collisions taken part in the Balkans. Here as religious outposts serve the Serbian Orthodox, Croatian Catholic Church and Islam (Dergachev, 2017).

2. Strategic Comparison of Southeastern Europe and South Caucasus

After the collapse of Yugoslavia, the states that were part of it turned their integration into the European Union into the mainstream of their foreign policy. Following the accession of Croatia to the European Union in 2013, certain steps were taken to include other Western Balkan states - Montenegro, Serbia, Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo and Macedonia (<http://aa.com.tr/ru/8F/599869>, 2016).

Strategic comparison of one of the main features of globalization at current stage is interregional cooperation and integration. From this point of view, integration and cooperation processes have been observed between Balkan and Caucasus regions. However, each region has its strategic importance and development characteristics.

It has been observed common and distinctive features of development between the Southeastern Europe and the South Caucasus and common and different positions in foreign policy. The South Caucasus holds an important geopolitical position and was enriched by the new political, economic and economic motives after the collapse of the Soviet Union. According to natural geographical structure of the region, historically, people and cultures moved from South to North, from East to West. Beginning from the late 20th century the South Caucasus, defined by Zbigniew Brzezinski as Eurasian Balkans, has been an arena for confrontation among the states claiming to be regional and world powers. Situated between the Black and Caspian seas, the South Caucasus is of great importance because it is an area where Southern-Northern and Western-Eastern energy and transport lines intersect, a place rich with energy resources of the Caspian basin (Jabbarly, 2016). Throughout history and in the contemporary world, the South Caucasus became a battlefield between Turkey and Iran, the Muslim states of the Middle East and Russia and became a region where all interests collapsed. From this point of view not only the States of the region, but also other great powers were parties to the geopolitical struggle in the South Caucasus in the 1990s. If we look at the past 300 years there had not been any security problems in the South Caucasus given that the region was in the hands of one state and that Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia were part of a common security mechanism. However, serious problems emerged when the region divided in the context of military and security.

Regional states were occupied by Russia in 1920-1921, and were part of the Soviet Union's security mechanism until 1991. The fall of the Soviet Union and the creation of three independent states in the region led to emergence of new economic, military and political balance in the South Caucasus. Beginning from the late 1980s political, military and ethnic local armed conflicts had been posing a serious threat to regional security. One of the main reasons behind the failure to ensure security and stability in the South Caucasus was that in addition to regional countries super powers also attempt to build security mechanisms with the aim of safeguarding their own economic, military and political interests in the region. Russia, the United States and the European Union aspire to create a security system that will fully ensure protection of their interests. Although Georgia seeks integration into NATO security system and Azerbaijan tries to strengthen and enhance relations with the Alliance, both countries were pursuing a balanced policy with respect to Russia. As far as Armenia is concerned, it definitely entered Russia-led Collective Security Treaty Organization. However, the country still wants to develop its relationship with NATO (Jabbarly, 2016).

The geopolitical situation of the South Caucasus region is very important for its capacity and its geographical position. The South Caucasus serves as a corridor between the North and the South, the East and the West, playing the role of "cross-over point in the world."

The impact of positive or negative processes taking place in the region in the period of globalization on another region also manifests itself in the South Caucasus, as well as in the region of Southeastern Europe. Developments in the South Caucasus, as well as cooperation trends affect the development trends in the region of Southeastern Europe.

In 1992 year appeared the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization, unifying the States of both regions. The Organization included the Balkan countries (Albania, Bulgaria, Greece, Moldova, Romania, later Serbia, Montenegro), as well as three States of the South Caucasus-Azerbaijan, Georgia and Armenia. Relationships within the Organization were important for the Nations of the Caucasus and Balkan regions on economic, banking, transport, energy, environmental matters, as well as the inter-parliamentary and interuniversity cooperation. Europe and Russia were interested in strengthening the role of this structure (Biliarsky, Cristea, Oroveanu, 2012).

Strategic significance and weight of the South Caucasus depends on several factors:

1. Strategic resources -rich resources of oil and gas in the Caspian basin have attracted many countries and the Caucasus is the most satisfactory and reliable corridor for supply of these resources to the markets, particularly in Europe, having demand for energy;
2. Regional instability-the armed conflicts in the region and the probability of constraints thereof;
3. Organized crime – existence of impoverishment and unemployment in various regions and the institutional weakness of the newly independent countries have contributed to the transformation of the region to a transit corridor for various criminal offences. The South Caucasus appears closer to European values due to religious ideology and absence of powerful religious extremism. South Caucasus serves as a region with huge geopolitical significance in the Mediterranean, the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea. The roadblocks of the Mediterranean, the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea have extensively been discussed at international conferences held in the South Caucasus, Central Asia, the Balkans, and also in the countries of Southeastern Europe (Gojayeva, 2016).

During the years analysed have seen growing military spending in the Caucasus. At the same time this period has seen a decline in defense spending and in the number of men under arms in the Western Balkans. As a result there are today, proportionately to the population, two and a half times more men under arms in the South Caucasus than in the Balkans. Western Balkan countries have also decided to have considerably smaller armies than either Turkey or Greece, their regional neighbours. And although they are richer than the countries of the South Caucasus, their military budgets are significantly smaller. This means that they can allocate more of their public spending to other things, from education and health spending to public infrastructure (www.esiweb.org, 2010).

Table1. Active soldiers/paramilitaries relative to population size

Region	Population	Active soldiers/active paramilitaries
Balkan states	29,9 million people	101,785
South Caucasus	15,3 million people	156,870

Source: New wars? A comparison of the Balkans and the Caucasus 6 February 2010 // <http://www.esiweb.org/rumeliobserver/2010/02/06/new-wars-a-comparison-of-the-balkans-and-the-caucasus/>

As witness from the table, despite the small number of population in the South Caucasus, the number of active soldiers and paramilitaries is higher than in the Western Balkans. This can be explained by the fact that the conflicts in the South Caucasus is not yet resolved.

Table 2. Active soldiers/paramilitaries and defense budget relative to population size

States	Population (million people)	Activesoldiers / activeparamilitaries	Defensebudget (USD)
Albania	3.2	14,795	232 million
Bosnia	3.9	8,543	223 million
Croatia	4.4	18,600	962 million
Macedonia	2	18,490	163 million
Montenegro	0.7	14,600	59 million
Serbia	7.3	24,257	943 million
Azerbaijan	8	81,940	1,258 million
Armenia	3.2	42,080	395 million
Georgia	4.1	32,850	1,100 million

Source: New wars? A comparison of the Balkans and the Caucasus 6 February 2010 // <http://www.esiweb.org/rumeliobserver/2010/02/06/new-wars-a-comparison-of-the-balkans-and-the-caucasus/>

The research reveals that both active soldiers and defense budget and war costs of the South Caucasian States were much higher than of the Western Balkan States. In the 2009-2010 years the number of active soldiers in Kosovo reached 2500 people (www.esiweb.org, 2010).

3. Relations between Southern And Eastern Europe And Azerbaijan

Relations between Azerbaijan and Southeastern Europe have become one of the priorities in foreign policy of Azerbaijan. During the Soviet Union Azerbaijan had no independent relations with these states. Since, at that time, the Western Balkan States were part of the Federal Socialist Republic of Yugoslavia. The development of relations between Azerbaijan and Central and Eastern Europe states predicate mutual security and economic interests internationally and regionally. One of the key differing strains of Eastern and Central Europe is its carriers of energy and sources of raw materials. Capital coal deposits in the region are on-stream in Poland and the Czech Republic, oil reserves in Romania and iron ores in the Western Balkans, Romania, Czech Republic and Slovakia. However, Eastern and Central Europe states have lack of resources. Eastern Europe takes front-rank in the world for quantity of ethnic conflicts over the last millennium (Hasanov, 2005).

However, hands-on progression of relations between Azerbaijan and the Southeast European countries, especially with the Western Balkan countries, developed in early 21st century, after the breakup of Yugoslavia. Relations with Southeastern European states subsisted within the framework of strategic projects and performed a significant function with regard to delivery of Azerbaijani natural gas to Europe.

From among the EU states, Greece held a paramount significance with regard to delivery of Azerbaijani natural gas to Southeastern Europe. Greece and Italy served as direct participants of the Southern Gas Corridor project. The TAP is envisaged to deliver the natural gas to Italy bypassing through Greece and Albania amongst the states of the region then onward to the Western European countries. Transportation of Azerbaijani gas to the region was of a great importance for Bulgaria in terms of energy security of the country, which stands in need of natural gas fuel and imports the whole part of its demand in natural gas. Implementation of the Southern Gas Corridor project and transportation of Azerbaijani gas to the region carried a large value from the perspective of energy security strategy of Southeast Europe and the EU (Mainstream of foreign policy of Azerbaijan, 2017).

Relations of Azerbaijan with Southeastern Europe were a major asset to co-operation with other European regions and subregions. Relations of Azerbaijan with Central and East European states had numerous specific traits. First and foremost, occurrence of the countries, constituting a part of socialist camp, in an integrated economic system, caused each of such country to run and integrate this kind of economy. During the USSR, Azerbaijan established strong cooperation with these countries in the areas of oil production and refining, petrochemicals, machinery and agriculture. Breach of relations had a strong impact on the economy of Azerbaijan. While Azerbaijan was interested in developed states of Central and Eastern Europe having established mutual productive cooperation, these States also held an interest in establishing the same peculiarities in Southern Caucasus. Azerbaijan pursues complimentary policy with Central and Eastern European states in the framework of various projects in the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation and exhibit common stand in international relations (Hasanov, 2005).

The availability of rich hydrocarbon resources of Azerbaijan and its location on the existing and potential transport corridors linking Europe and Asia behavoured as key condition for the East European countries in establishing and developing relations with the Republic of Azerbaijan. The 16 + 1 China-wide cooperation formula play a prominent play in developing cooperation with other countries where transportation corridor projects, which are also related to Azerbaijan, are implemented from perspective of development of economic relations between Central, Eastern Europe and China. This cooperation group includes China, Poland, Hungary, Czech Republic, Romania, Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and other European states.

The main objectives of the 16 + 1 economic cooperation formula are to ensure China's investment directly to the region and infrastructure projects and to expand trade relations. Transport projects, where Azerbaijan has also participated, like the "New Silk Road" and "One Belt, One Road" are of great importance in the implementation of these projects (Mainstream of foreign policy of Azerbaijan, 2017).

The Western Balkans and the South Caucasus are two regions, which experienced similar grave events after the Cold War while facing similar threats and challenges. The root causes of tensions and conflicts, which led to instances of mass atrocities, including genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity, go back far in the past. The disintegration of Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union brought deep rooted tensions oppressed by the dictators for more than half a century back to the surface of political, economic and private relationships (esiweb.org, 2010). The paces of peace and reconciliation processes in the two regions have been different. In the Western Balkans the new independent nations – through the intervention and collaboration of international players and the activities of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia – embarked on a bumpy path towards peace. The region of the South Caucasus is unfortunately lagging behind in that regard. The conflicts have protracted and the positions remain "frozen". The international players must therefore continue the efforts to find a path leading out of the current situation, which is full of tensions and threats.

During the years under analysis, the Embassy of the Republic of Azerbaijan, the new non-permanent member of the UN Security Council, and the Budapest Centre for the International Prevention of Genocide and Mass Atrocities decided to make a joint attempt to support the reconciliation processes in both regions from the perspective of preventing mass atrocities. With this aim in view they organized a conference represented by the experts from both regions. The conference provided a platform to invoke the world society to render legal value to Serebenicagenocide also the problems experienced in the South Caucasus (genocideprevention.eu, 2012). The conference held on 16 Feruary2012 in Budapest touched upon genocides committed in Khojaly, Serebnica, Bosnia and Herzegovina. The importance of the principles of international law for the peaceful settlement of Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan and the necessity to increase the efforts of international players to solve the problem had been emphasized in the conference. In the first instance it was suggested that the occupying forces should leave the Nagorno-Karabakhand other seven regions of Azerbaijan, and the displaced people should return to their homelands (genocideprevention.eu, 2012).

The conflicts and collisions in the Balkans also affected the South Caucasus. When Kosovo declared its independence in 2008, an idea was raised by the international community that this event would affect the development of international relations and may be a precedent for other disputed areas. Following declaration of Kosovo's independence, a new international political reality emerged in the context of regional conflicts in the Caucasus. In August 2008, Russia decided to recognize the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. As a result, the West expressed its harsh attitude and strong protest.

However, the standpoints of government of Azerbaijan and the Balkan countries are in accord with each other with regard to the issue of territorial integrity. As for Kosovo conflict Azerbaijan recognizes Serbia's territorial integrity. Such recognition was repeatedly uttered during the meetings between the presidents of both countries. Serbian President BorisTadić in his visit to Azerbaijanwhich took place in June 2011 asserted: "Serbia and Azerbaijan experience the same tasks and issues today. Our countries have several features in common. This is in reference to the issues of Nagorno-Karabakh and Kosovo. The Republic of Serbia does not support seperation of Azerbaijan nor has any intention to do so, instead recognizes Azerbaijan as a UN member within its territorial integrity.... I also thanked Mr. President for his position on the Kosovo issue." The President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, IlhamAliyev has repeatedly stated that he supports Serbia's territorial integrity: "... Our countries are countries that suffer from separatism. Our territorial integrity has been violated and, unfortunately, this injustice continues for many years. We recognize the territorial integrity of Serbia and will continue to support Serbia's territorial integrity in all international organizations where Azerbaijan is a member" (azpolitika.info, 2017).

4. Conclusion

Energy resources, namely oil and gas, which bear strategic importance, take a significant part in relations between Azerbaijan and the Balkan states. The Balkan states are not energy-rich states. The strategic importance of the Balkans is that alternative transit routes that transmit the Caspian basin and Russia's energy resources to the Western markets are passing through the Balkan countries. The oil reserves of the Western Balkans hold 335 million barrels. The European oil reserves hold 18.7 billion barrels.

The Western Balkan countries much of their oil needs through imports. The gas reserves in the Western Balkans are about 3 trillion cubic meters. More than 50 percent of natural gas is generated through imports. The rest is imported from Russia. The main feature of the Southeast Balkan countries, Bulgaria and Romania, lies in a strategic location on the West to the Black Sea, favorable geographical position for the potential natural gas and oil pipelines network from Russia and the Caspian Sea region. Romania is also known as the country of oil and gas. Bulgaria exports electricity to the region. The proven oil reserves of Romania are approximately 955 million barrels and are almost three times as large as the Western Balkans. Oil and gas production declined decades ago in Romania, which is the largest oil producing country in Central and Eastern Europe. Romania's gas reserves hold 3.56 trillion cubic meters. However, low level of gas production in Romania has led to satisfaction of gas needs through imports. From this point of view, the energy resources of the Caspian Sea and their diversification bear great importance. Oil reserves in the Caspian Sea range from 15 to 40 billion barrels. The gas reserves of the Caspian littoral states hold 236-337 trillion cubic meters. Transmission of Caspian oil to the Balkan countries, Baku-Novorossiysk, Baku-Supsa lines play a paramount role. One of the allegations during NATO's intervention in Yugoslavia in 1999 was that Western states sought a safe way to deliver Caspian crude oil to the Western markets.

At the present stage the Balkans is a priority gas market for Azerbaijan. The Balkan countries - Turkey, Greece, Albania, Bulgaria, Montenegro, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Romania are participants and stakeholders in the Southern Gas Corridor project. One of the important areas for cooperation between two regions is security. The Security Pact for South East Europe provides significant financial and organizational support for stability and development in the region. Although, the same idea was put forward in the Caucasus, it has not yet been realized. In a general sense, Azerbaijan has important prospects for regional cooperation in the Southeast European countries, cooperation in transport, energy diversification, implementation of joint projects, and exchange of experience in conflict resolution, tourism and investment.

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