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Social Challenges and European Integration
of the Western Balkans

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Abstract. The sub-region of the Western Balkans includes Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Albania and Northern Macedonia. Social challenges of these countries is different and depends on socio-economic development, political and security entities and elements. The processes of European integration of individual countries are different, since they are in different phases. This is determined by procedural acts related to Euro integration and open chapters of the nomenclature. In addition, Serbia, Montenegro and Albania have the status of official candidates for admission to the European Union. Due to the permanently expressed security challenges, risks and threats in theory and practice, it is called “barrel with gunpowder”. Therefore, this space marks one of the most attractive topics for all social phenomena researchers. The aforementioned micro region of the region of Southeast Europe implies the formulation of authentic foreign policy and security concepts of influential actors in the international community. The article deals with international, foreign political and wider social implications of the Western Balkan countries, inclusion in the strategic concept of Euro integration.

Keywords: Western Balkans; social challenges; European integrations; state; security; politics; European Union

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Социальные проблемы и европейская интеграция стран
Западных Балканов

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Аннотация: Субрегион Западных Балкан включает Сербию, Черногорию, Боснию и Герцеговину, Албанию и Северную Македонию. Социальные проблемы этих стран различны и зависят от специфики социально-экономического развития, политических структур и структур безопасности. Процессы европейской интеграции отдельных стран различны, поскольку находятся в разных фазах. Это определяется процессуальными актами, связанными с евроинтеграцией. Так например, Сербия, Черногория и Албания имеют статус официальных кандидатов на вступление в Европейский Союз. Из-за наличия постоянных рисков и угроз безопасности район Западных Балкан называют «бочкой с порохом». Поэтому это пространство – одна из самых привлекательных тем для всех исследователей социальных явлений. Микрорегион Юго-Восточной Европы оказывается объектом формулирования аутентичных концепций внешней политики и безопасности влиятельными участниками международного сообщества. В статье рассматриваются международные, внешнеполитические и более широкие социальные особенности западно-балканских стран, их включение в стратегическую концепцию евроинтеграции.

Ключевые слова: Западные Балканы; социальные проблемы; европейская интеграция; государство; безопасность; политика; Европейский союз

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Introduction. Geopolitical, military and economic relations in the modern world are a sign of conflict of interest that defines geopolitics, and therefore a security image of the world. The struggle of interests today is being guided by sophisticated economic and military means, and any study of global relations must be studied by international subjects and their relations. We can monitor world and regional security through the roles of some

important actors of the order (the most powerful and largest states in the world, that is, the world's major centers of power) and their interactions. Modern centers of power in the world are the United States, the European Union and the Russian Federation, and their mutual relations are the main factors influencing contemporary international, economic, military and geopolitical relations. It is therefore important to explore these relationships and

see what is good in them and what is bad, and what the development trends are. Modern world security is marked by globalization, the shifts of global actors in the world order, attempts to establish global governance and universal conventions.

The paper examines the basic characteristics of the position, national interests and economic, military and foreign policy orientations of the European Union and their impact on the region of the Western Balkans. A review is also made of the security strategy and strategy of this entity's performance in the Western Balkans, through the prism of the impact of that strategy on the security of this region. The regional security of the Western Balkan countries is determined by their individual foreign policies. Accessing these countries to the European Union is one of the main priorities of each of them. This implies the need for future harmonization of the foreign policy of these countries with the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). This commitment was also accepted thanks to the signing of an agreement on the stabilization of these countries with the European Union. Also, the promotion of the position of the Western Balkan countries within international organizations of a global and regional character can be encouraged through mutual support and lobbying in their work. It is very important for the peace and prosperity of this region to create opportunities for bilateral / multilateral regional partnerships.

Methodology and methods. *Social challenges of the Western Balkans countries.* The Western Balkans is the date of a newer date and appears as a neutral geopolitical determinant after the Cold War and the war in the former Yugoslavia. The Western Balkans is primarily a political category and marks mainly all Southeast European countries that are not members of the European Union (Nešković, Ketin, Šećerov, Đelić: 2018, 7545). This is the beginning of the 21st century. century is used to identify, first and foremost, the territories of the Balkan states. These are: Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Macedonia and Albania (since Croa-

tia became a full member of the EU in 2013). Also, this area has been through the history of the territory of the biggest disputes and conflicts in Europe. Over the last 40 years, the space of the Western Balkans is the only place in Europe where war is being waged, while all other countries resolve their misunderstandings with the negotiations. The reason for these conflicts is the centuries-old struggle for territories, and the diverse national, ethnic and religious affiliation of the people.

While the aspirations for unification appeared in Europe, the Western Balkans had a bloody clash at the end of the 20th century. This war took place between the countries of the former Yugoslavia, which lasted for 5 years, and later continued, with the bombing of Serbia and the conflicts in Kosovo. By bringing the Balkan countries closer to the European Union, security risks for war conflicts are also being reduced, and all nations, republics and entities are increasingly resorting to compromises and negotiations at state levels. Such a shift can also be seen within the individual issues of each state, because to date we do not have clearly outlined borders within individual Balkan states where there is still a great desire for secession and autonomy of certain regions in which national issues have not been resolved to date. After the end of the Cold War and the comparative commencement of the process of disintegration of the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, the newly emerging states on its soil began with the redefinition of their own foreign policy. The states created by Yugoslavia, during their first years of independence, distanced themselves from the foreign policy was conducted between 1945 and 1990, although during the first decade of independence, most of these countries did not have the basic strategic documents in the field of foreign policy.

Poor legacy of armed conflicts in post-Yugoslav territory left deep traces of interstate relations between the countries in the region within the region. "The leading actors of the international community, and above all

the European Union and the United States, have fully supported the normalization of relations between newly born states and entities since the end of the armed conflicts in the former Yugoslavia. Therefore, during the past fifteen years of fullness, one can notice the gradual transition of the Western Balkans from the armed conflict zone, the over region in which the democratic, economic and security situation is stabilized in the region, all countries are unambiguously oriented towards accession to the European Union. This means that the countries of the region in the perspective are ready to accept a number of European values – peace, democracy, human and minority rights, the principle of equality and the principle of solidarity” (Đukanovic: 2009, 12).

Since the situation in the Western Balkans has gradually stabilized, the need for the countries of the region to take greater or fuller responsibility for the functioning of multilateral forms of cooperation, which have been under the auspices of the international community over the past decade. All the countries of the Western Balkan, with the exception of the Republic of Serbia, are clearly defined for membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). This has created a completely new geostrategic environment in the Western Balkans, since all countries from these territories, excluding Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro, have already become members of this military alliance. It is also important to point out that Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Republic of Montenegro will probably soon become members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

Membership in the European Union is one of the priorities and strategic goals of most of these countries. There is a paradox regarding EU enlargement policy. On the one hand, there is a widespread belief (both at the professional level and at the political level) that it is one of the most successful and effective policies of the Union. The realization of this policy was of key importance for the stabilization of the European continent (formerly

for the countries of the south-former right dictatorship, then for the countries of eastern and central Europe - the former socialist country), as well as for strengthening the international influence of the EU and positive economic trends on the continent. However, one of the problems is the membership of the countries of the Western Balkans. The Balkans has long been a zone of second-rate interests of the EU, beyond the countries of Central Europe and behind some Mediterranean countries. This approach has changed only in the last years of the twentieth century for two reasons: because of the possibility of expanding the EU to the east, which made the Balkan countries become direct neighbors, and because of the conflict in Kosovo and its effects on the security of the region.

The Stabilization and Association Process (PSP) is a special kind of regional approach for the Western Balkan countries. Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Republic of Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro for the first time have been given the opportunity to become full members of the Union on the basis of their customized approach. In this way, the fate of the more successful states in this process is not conditioned by the position of the region as a whole. Starting the stabilization and association process towards the countries of the Western Balkans in 1999, in the conditions of the drastic lagging behind of these countries and in the conditions of the unwillingness of the EU countries to engage more quickly in this process, it points to the long-term period of the EU's accession to the Western Balkans for a decade or two.

The 1996-1999 regional approach did not yield adequate results because the EU measures were not adequate in relation to the size of economic, political and social problems in the Western Balkans region. This has been drastically shown in cases of BiH, Kosovo, Albania, etc. The main result of the development of the post-crisis space on the territory of the former Yugoslavia is the fragmentation of formerly federal space into mini-states, in the majority of which there is no stability of political institutions of power. The

contemporary Balkan crisis has shown that the diplomacy of most countries was very often unprofessional, and international organizations were powerless and that international law was not sought. The only interest and power played a vital role, and the settlement of all inter-ethnic issues did not arise until the situation and resolving of all inter-ethnic issues were made. From the above, it can be concluded that the path of the Western Balkan countries towards the EU can be traced in two phases – the accession process and the accession process. After 2003, all the countries of the Western Balkans managed to secure the status of candidates or the status of potential candidates for membership in the Union.

Research Results and Discussion. *Foreign Policy and European Integration of the Republic of Serbia.* The political public can hear remarks that it is not clear what the strategy of Serbian foreign policy is. The fact is that the modern world is extremely dynamic, and that the very environment of our country is in constant change, so it is clear that the republic of Serbia is determined in relation to The European Union, NATO and the immediate neighborhood in the region of Southeast Europe. This cannot be achieved without defining Serbia's relationship with the leading countries in the world (the United States and the Russian Federation), but also without empowering multilateral co-operation. Improving and strengthening Serbia's status in international organizations is also one of the leading goals.

The goals of our country's foreign policy are based on the aspirations of the country to join the European Union and the North Atlantic Alliance, to strengthen regional cooperation and bilateral relations with its neighbors, then to develop balanced relations with global foreign policy actors (the United States and the Russian Federation), as well as to foster relations for the countries "Third World", i.e. developing countries. However, the lack of a clearly defined foreign policy strategy in Serbia may pose a problem for further European / Euro-Atlantic integration of the country.

"It is evident that there is an extremely broad social consensus in Serbia regarding the country's entry into the European Union, but there is evidently no similar approximation of NATO accession. And in relation to Serbia's relations with the great powers there is a significant disagreement between political entities. On the one hand, there are political options that advocate strengthening the partnership with the leading world of the world – the United States, while, on the other hand, there are those who are in favor of balancing relations with this country, the Russian Federation and the People's Republic China". In Serbia, the most common are the "pillars" of foreign policy, which are mainly related to preserving the constitutional order of the country, including the preservation of Kosovo within Serbia, integration into the European Union, strengthening of good neighborly relations in the region of Southeast Europe and balancing relations with The United States and the Russian Federation. However, the layout of these "pillars" of foreign policy is very often changing.

International Position and Euro-integration of Montenegro. By adopting the Declaration of Independence in the Parliament of the Republic of Montenegro on June 3, 2006, after the referendum on May 21, the Government of the Republic of Montenegro took over the powers of establishing and conducting the foreign policy of the state of Montenegro as an independent international legal entity. Montenegro recognized in good time that good neighborly relations and integration are a guarantee of its successful development. Montenegro, as an independent state, has the opportunity to strengthen its position on the international scene and to dynamics and further improve relations with its most important actors. Accordingly, the Government of Montenegro has established the following foreign policy priorities: 1. Integration into the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization – NATO, 2. Improving and maintaining good neighborly relations and regional cooperation, 3. Developing bilateral and multilateral cooperation. Montenegro's strategic

goal is membership in the European Union. Montenegro sees the EU as the best framework for further development of overall reforms, adaptation to European standards and their adoption, as well as the improvement of bilateral relations with the members of the Union.

In Montenegro, there is a comprehensive agreement on the need for EU integration, which gives an additional impetus for accelerated progress towards this goal. The speed of progress in integration will depend on the dynamics of economic, political, judicial, security and overall reforms, i.e. from the speed and degree in which society as a whole will be engaged and reformed. In the foreign policy context, a regular political dialogue between the CG and the EU plays a particularly important role, as well as the long-term harmonization of foreign policy with the EU's common foreign and security policy. NATO membership is the second strategic foreign policy goal that is equally important, which is realistically achievable in a shorter period of time stability and security required to achieve other strategic goals such as joining the EU. Expectations are that accession to this organization will accelerate EU membership. The integration of Montenegro into NATO is closely linked to EU integration, because it is about two parallel and compatible processes.

Montenegro's strategic integrative goals – joining the EU and NATO – cannot be achieved without an active role in regional cooperation, the development of good neighborly relations and policy-making in a regional context. With all the countries of Southeast Europe, the goal is to develop good relations and communication with mutual respect and constant construction of political, economic, security, cultural, scientific contacts and cooperation and extremely important infrastructural connection. With these countries, Montenegro does not only share the same geographical area, but also the same foreign policy objectives. So far, more than 150 countries have recognized Montenegro and diplomatic relations have been established as well, and a considerable number of embassies in

Podgorica have been opened, and the diplomatic and consular network of Montenegro in the world has been expanding. Strengthening economic cooperation with foreign partners through strengthening the economic dimension of diplomacy is one of the key activities on the international level. Strengthening bilateral relations at all levels creates favorable conditions for more content, richer and more intense communication with the diasporas.

In the context of strengthening bilateral relations, the priorities are: strengthening relations and cooperation with the EU's influential countries, as key partners in international organizations and on the international political scene, is an important factor for achieving Montenegro's foreign policy goals, as well as for its internal development. Overall cooperation with these countries through permanent bilateral contacts, but also through the processes of European and Euro-Atlantic integration, contributes to the economic and democratic progress of Montenegro and helps the dynamics of integration. Relations with the United States are of particular importance for Montenegro. Given that the United States is the most important ally in the North Atlantic Alliance and the inevitable partner of the EU, as well as the region, and have an extremely important role in all relevant international organizations, it is logical that Montenegro devotes a significant part of foreign policy to developing and strengthening partnership relations with the US. Historical and cultural relations strengthened by mutual understanding on the political plane, speak about the importance of constant improvement of cooperation between Montenegro and the Russian Federation. Strengthening further relations with Russia, in all areas at the bilateral level and within international organizations, contributes to the integration goals of Montenegro.

Foreign policy of Bosnia and Herzegovina. “The Constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina lists exclusively institutional frameworks for conducting foreign policy, but it does not indicate certain priorities and directions of the country's participation in con-

temporary international relations. On the basis of the constitutional authority and in connection with the conduct of foreign policy, the members of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2003 established "General directions and priorities for the implementation of BiH's foreign policy". This implies a lot of compliance with the generally accepted principles of international law and respect for concluded and ratified treaties. In this regard, it is stated that openness and equality, mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, principles of peaceful co-operation, constructive dialogue, the fight against terrorism and organized crime and respecting the basic principles of BiH's foreign policy. Starting from the principles already outlined, the Presidency Bosnia and Herzegovina precisely defined the priorities of the country's foreign policy. These are the preservation of the country's insecurity and territorial integrity, the implementation of the General Framework of the Peace Agreement in BiH, the accession of the country to the Euro-Atlantic integration processes, the country's participation in multilateral activities and the promotion of the state as a partner in international economic relations with the aim of achieving full membership in the World Trade Organization" (Đukanović, 2010: 301).

In creating foreign policy, the BiH Presidency has come from the fact that the world is affected by the process of globalization, which structurally changes international relations and calls for the resolution of burning issues at global and regional levels in order to comprehensively protect human rights, eliminate poverty, develop a global partnership for development, a firm commitment to the processes of integration and transition in the region of Southeast Europe in the political, economic and security sense. Bosnia and Herzegovina's foreign policy is aimed at improving and preserving lasting peace, security and stable democratic and overall state development, that is, inclusion in contemporary European, political, security integration flows. The priorities are as follows: 1. Preservation and protection of BiH's independence, sovereignty

and territorial integrity within internationally recognized borders, 2. Complete and consistent implementation of the General Peace Agreement, 3. Accession to Euro-Atlantic integration processes, 4. Participation of BiH in multilateral activities, especially as part of the UN system, the Council of Europe, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, etc. 5. Promote BiH as a partner in international economic relations and activities that will enable its admission to the World Trade Organization and other international organizations and associations.

On a bilateral level: Improving cooperation with neighboring countries, with member states of the Steering Board of the Peace Implementation Council, the United States, the Russian Federation, Great Britain, France, China and other members of the UN Security Council, EU Member States, member states of the Organization of the Islamic Conference and other countries that contribute to the renewal and development of Bosnia and Herzegovina. BiH will pledge to establish diplomatic relations with the countries with which they have not yet been established, with a special emphasis on bilateral relations with the countries of the region of Southeast Europe. Also, the need for achieving interstate agreements is emphasized, especially in the areas of economy and foreign investment. The main goals of the country's foreign policy are, as stated in the same document, the promotion of the economy, as well as the development of co-operation in the field of science, technology, culture, education and sports.

On the other hand, within the framework of multilateral forms of cooperation, it is insisting on strengthening the position of Bosnia and Herzegovina in the geo-strategic sense and its membership in European and Euro-Atlantic integrations. Although seven years have passed since the adoption of this document, due to numerous internal problems in the country, to significant progress in improving the country's foreign policy position. However, it is evident that there has been some progress in the process of joining the European Union, and in particular NATO. In

the meantime, BiH's relations with neighbors have consolidated, but also strengthened forms of multilateral regional cooperation. On the other hand, no progress has been made regarding the country's accession to the WTO, and there has been no improvement in bilateral relations with the leading countries of the world (USA, the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China). The fact is that only citizens of BiH and Albania still have a rather rigorous Schengen visa regime. The two-entity BiH does not have a broader consensus on NATO membership, which is particularly noticeable in the Republika Srpska.

The international position of Northern Macedonia. In February 2019, Northern Macedonia officially proclaimed the current name internationally recognized. After declaring independence in late 1991, it was mainly focused on consolidating internal interethnic and political circumstances in the country. The 1991 Constitution of Macedonia, which was substantially amended by the amendments of the beginning of this decade, contains a chapter devoted to international relations in the Constitution of Macedonia, but it does not specify in detail the general direction of the country's foreign policy activities. In 2009, within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Macedonia, an internal document titled "Objectives and Priorities" was adopted internally. The document identifies the country's commitment to European and transatlantic integration. It was pointed out the necessity of completing the procedure regarding the acquisition of full membership in NATO, the start of negotiations on membership with the European Union, the abolition of visas for Macedonian citizens, the settlement of the name of the country with the southern neighbor – Greece, and the strengthening of economic and public diplomacy. (Nešković, 2016: 36).

As one of the leading priorities, strengthening the strategic partnership with the US is also developing a comprehensive partnership with the EU and NATO. At the same time, it is pointed out the necessity of cooperation with the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China. The im-

portance of the development of good neighborly relations with the countries in the region was also emphasized. Therefore, the construction of security, stability and cooperation represents a very important activity in the foreign policy of Northern Macedonia, both bilaterally and on a multilateral basis, and therefore it will aim for more significant participation in all global and regional organizations. This also implies an international fight against global security challenges – terrorism, organized crime and corruption, and the like.

Promoting the economic potentials and possibilities of Northern Macedonia, preserving the sovereignty, stability and security of the state, as well as affirmation of the national cultural and spiritual identity, are also the foreign policy priorities of the country. The care for members of the Macedonian community outside the country of origin is, as stated in this document, one of the important goals of foreign policy. "Unlike other strategic foreign policy documents of the Western Balkans countries, the goals and priorities of the Republic of Macedonia's policy are the review of the attitude in relation to current international problems. This document therefore contains the views of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Northern Macedonia regarding the enlargement of the European Union, international terrorism, as well as the situation in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq and Iran. At the same time, considerable attention is paid to the problems of Taiwan and the territorial integrity of the People's Republic of China, the nuclear weapons of North Korea, the development of the Middle East crisis and the situation in Sudan, the crisis in Georgia, or the postponement of the captured regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia" (Đukanović, 2010: 308). In the past ten years, Northern Macedonia has managed to make some progress in terms of NATO membership and the abolition of visas for its citizens. It has done a lot in connection with strengthening the strategic partnership with the USA and intensifying good neighborly relations in Southeast Europe. Definitely in February 2019, the dispute with Greece over the name of Macedonia

ended, which greatly facilitates the normalization of the bilateral relations of these two countries, as well as the issue of the accelerated accession of this country to NATO and the European Union.

The concept of foreign policy of the Republic of Albania. In 2005, the Assembly of the Republic of Albania adopted the Program of the Government for the period from 2005 to 2009. Within this document it is emphasized that Albania's membership in the European Union and NATO are two of the most important foreign policy priorities, and that, in this regard, it is necessary for all stakeholders in the country to be involved in the realization of the stated goals. The government therefore committed itself to implement and coordinate internal reforms in order to successfully complete the European integration. It is said that Albania should lead a pragmatic and realistic foreign policy, and it is especially important to ensure the possibility of increasing the volume of foreign investment. In international organizations, whose member Albania is, it is necessary to promote a new image of the country. Particular importance will be given to cultural diplomacy and bilateral cooperation with all democratic countries of the world. And relations with the United States are of strategic importance to Albania in the fields of economy, security and democratic consolidation.

“It is also noted that Albania will promote peace and stability in the region of Southeast Europe through the strengthening of political, diplomatic and cultural cooperation, where the conclusion of bilateral agreements with the countries of South-Eastern Europe should also play a significant role. In this document, Albania's friendship with Turkey is particularly emphasized. One of the important goals is also the establishment of better bilateral relations with the EU member states, so Albania will seek to establish better relations with Germany, France and Great Britain, as well as with Austria. The development of Albania's economic and political relations with

Japan, India and Canada, as well as stronger economic and cultural cooperation with the People's Republic of China, is also listed as foreign policy priorities. Albania will best safeguard its national interests through membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. It is highlighted in the Government's Program (2005-2009), but the country will actively engage in the work of regional security and defense forums – primarily within the framework of the Adriatic Charter Agreement and the South East Europe Co-operation Initiative for Southeast Europe – SEDM” (Đukanović, 2010: 309).

Like all the countries of the Western Balkans, Albania has managed to make significant steps in European integration. Also, the Stabilization and Association Agreement entered into force. But, despite all of this, Albanian citizens still cannot travel to EU countries without visas. The great success of Albania's foreign policy was achieved in 2009 by joining NATO, and the relations between this country and the United States are continually rising. When it comes to cooperation with the countries in the region, there is a certain relaxation in bilaterally relations with Serbia, which were burdened with the official Tirana's attitude towards the Kosovo crisis. With other Western Balkan and Southeast European countries, Albania has no open issues, which is also stated in the Government's program document.

Conclusions. The region of the Western Balkans represents a kind of ambience, characterized by a heavy century heritage, but also events from a close past. The security research of this region is very current, because due to modern challenges, risks and threats, it is difficult to predict potential consequences for the countries of this region. When looking at the position of the states in a conspicuous international relationship, the most important thing is that there is a certain predictability of their actions in the framework of the multi-lateral and multilateral relations at the regional and global level. That is why the adoption

of an external policy strategy is essential for defining the goals and tasks of the state's external action. The foreign policy strategy of the territories of the Western Balkans must be long-term or time-bound by the country's entry into wider integration. It is therefore important that the countries of this region define their own political strategy in relation to EU and NATO membership, and improve relations with neighbors, build a better relationship with the EU, and strengthen the role of these countries in international organizations. At the same time, most countries in the Western Balkans are also pushing for the promotion of their own economy and overall identity in the world.

Speaking about the military-political stabilization and security of the Western Balkans, a special challenge is the slowed European integration, the NATO enlargement process, the new positioning of Russia in the region and the new US concept in this part of the world. Although relevant international factors publicly emphasize the importance of co-operation and dialogue, their role in this region is very often contradictory and undefined. On the one hand, the European Union's firm resolve to strengthen its own security identity, on the one hand, increased the political and military autonomy of the United States against NATO, as well as the new need of the Russian Federation to position itself in the region. Conflicts and different perceptions regarding the resolution of important issues and problems in this part of Europe are very pronounced among them. It can be noted that in the short term, none of the relevant international actors wants a new civil conflict in this region, which characterized this area at the end of the 20th century, but nevertheless, there is the attitude of all of them about the need to retain international forces in this region.

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Конфликты интересов: у автора нет конфликта интересов для декларации.

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