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E. Macron, A. Vučić and A. Merkel, Berlin April 2019.

Photo: Instagram / Predsedništvo RS

THE "MINI SUMMIT" IN BERLIN: A NEW TRY

Negative tendencies, especially Russia's undermining effects, as well as permanent security challenges that may jeopardize the European Union as such, led to the conclusion that EU should act more vigorously towards consolidation of the Western Balkans so as to encourage development in the region and stabilize its institutions. Nevertheless, neither has EU's enlargement strategy been implemented nor EU member-states turned in unison about enlargement.

Signatures put under the Prespan Agreement solved the decades long dispute over Macedonia's name and opened it avenues towards Europe but also raised hopes that other open questions, such as Kosovo, could also be successfully settled.

Following the attempt at imposing border changes as a solution to the Kosovo issue, the Brussels Dialogue – met with opposition in Kosovo and Serbia alike, but in the international community as well – has come to a standstill.

Faced with the fact that the Western Balkans is falling under the influence of other players (such as Russia, China or Turkey), which could result in unforeseeable consequences in Europe, French President Emmanuel Macron and German Chancellor Angela Merkel decided that their countries – as EU's "motor powers" with "shared responsibility" – should launch a new process aimed at triggering off "a debate that would be make a first step on a long road, and not expected to produces an immediate result."¹

President Macron said that they wished to have an open debate, within an "informal frame," about the region's stability; this is a "European question," as he put it, the more so since the Prespan Agreement proved that "differences could be overcome."² By taking this initiative Chancellor Merkel actually reaffirmed her well-known stance that any change of borders would open Pandora's box and annul everything invested in stabilization and consolidation of the Balkans. On the eve of the summit meeting she said that Germany and France "share responsibility and are both after positive developments in the Western Balkan region."³

The Merkel-Macron initiative is of a special importance; never before have Germany and France together initiated a meeting with Western Balkan leaders to discuss European prospects for the region. It is also importance to note that a second meeting has been scheduled for July 1 in Paris, though in a "smaller format" (just Serbia and Kosovo). Although conclusions of the Berlin meeting do not imply any explicit promise for enlargement (due to ongoing developments in the EU on the eve of European elections), they clearly indicate an awareness that stabilization of the Western Balkans is imperative and that

the security challenges in the region have to be "addressed." The fact that Montenegro is now a NATO member-state and Macedonia is heading towards the membership proves that EU and NATO have been systematically rounding up Europe's security area.

Serbia was represented in the meeting by President je Aleksandar Vučić and Premier Ana Brnabić, while Kosovo's representatives were President Hashim Thaci and Premier Ramush Haradinaj. The list of invitees included Albania's President Edi Rama, and premiers of Croatia and Macedonia, Andrej Plenković and Zoran Zaev, Montenegrin President Milo Đukanović, Chairman of the Ministerial Council of Bosnia-Herzegovina Denis Zvizdić and Slovenian Premier Marjan Šarec.

Given Chancellor Merkel's strong stance against any change of border, the latter was not on the agenda in Berlin; this means that the issue has been taken of the agenda for the time being. This is why both Belgrade and Pristine said well in advance they expectations from the meeting were not high. To demonstrate it, President Vučić was parading with consultations he had with Russia and China as if to show that Berlin was not the one and only center of decision-making. He was simultaneously strong accusing Kosovo's government, mostly of high import taxes it had imposed on goods from Serbia. For his part, President Thaci declared that the EU had no moderation capacity for Belgrade-Pristina dialogue, while "EU member-states could not reach an agreement on how to appease the Balkans." To this he added, "A final agreement could not be reached without the US."⁴ At the margins of the meeting Kosovo's delegation also met with the US Ambassador in Berlin.

Considering presidents Vučić's and Thaci's grudges about the meeting some speculated that

1 <http://rs.n1info.com/Vesti/a480026/Makron-Srbija-i-Kosovo-da-nastave-pregovore-nemamo-nameru-da-propisemo-resenje.html>.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

4 <https://kossev.info/vasington-post-kosovski-lideri-kod-ambasadora-sad-u-berlinu-trazili-pomoc/>.

America, but Russia as well, could join in “the game.” Serbian officials have declared on several occasion that they would insist on Moscow’s participation should America get a leading role. To all appearances the two presidents have not given up their plans; the latter was evident in their attitudes and statements even after the meeting.

Both sides accepted conclusions of the meeting stating that Belgrade and Pristina had agreed to keep trying to implement all their previous agreements and participate constructively in the dialogue on normalization under the auspices of the EU, aimed at reaching an all-inclusive and final agreement. Although North Macedonia and Bosnia-Herzegovina were also on the agenda, the issue of Belgrade-Pristina relations dominated the meeting.

An inclusive and transparent negotiating process accompanied by confidence-building measures, emphasized the conclusions. The participants agreed to work harder towards the establishment of a regional economic area pursuant to the Declaration of the EU Summit in Sofia in 2018 and the Presidency’s conclusions on the Western Balkan Summit 2018.

Obviously, EU member-states are more focused on the Union’s future and challenges facing it, while Western Balkan countries on membership hoping it would secure them safe economic environment and prosperity. Unlike all the initiatives taken up to now, either by Brussels or individual EU member-states, the one launched by Germany and France opened up new prospects as it was more concentrated on the issues of stability and security. The meeting did not result in any actual step to be made towards enlargement. The latter could further weaken the EU’s mobilizing capacity in the region, but also generate Euro-skepticism in the Western Balkans. No doubt that the Paris Summit will

be an opportunity for the EU to start speaking loud and clear about the future of the Western Balkans.

Following on the Summit France publicized, via its Embassy in North Macedonia, a strategy for the Western Balkans. The strategy was initiated by President Macron’s with a view to bring countries in the region closer to the EU and assist the EU activities for enlargement. The said strategy lists the domains that call for reforms: economic and social issues, the rule of law, security and influences from the outside that, as it puts it, redirect the region away from its European prospects. According to the strategy, France will intensify political relations with countries in the region.

President Macron will visit Serbia in July, while the French Minister of Foreign Affairs will pay visits to Albania and Kosovo. Other members of cabinet and MPs are also expected to tour the region. France will strengthen bilateral relations with regional countries in four areas through the French Agency for Development, AFD. The amount of initial annual assistance AFD will be providing will be 100-150 million Euros planned to attract other donors, especially the German Reconstruction Credit Institute.

All the messages the Western community has been putting across boil down to the necessity to have the Western Balkan’s security consolidates and, above all, to hamper Russia’s destabilizing influence on the region. US, EU and NATO speak as one about lines not to be crossed in Europe: Black Sea and the Baltic. In this context, the Balkan was allocated to the Western sphere of influence long ago.

While in visit to the region following on the Berlin Summit US Deputy Assistant to the Secretary of State Matthew Palmer stated that US and the European Union had a shared vision for the Western Balkans, which coincided with those

countries' visions of the future: they all want to progress and move forward. Russians will continue their adverse influence, he said, as evidenced when the Prespan Agreement was signed.⁵

BELGRADE'S REACTIONS TO THE SUMMIT

Reactions to the Berlin Summit emanated disappointment given that – as things stand now – the change of borders has been taken off the agenda; obviously, with US' consent. Although the Summit's release said nothing about invulnerability of existing borders, the message it put across to all the participants was clear-cut.

President Vučić vented his spleen on regional leaders. Even before the meeting and during it he criticized the list of invitees, especially aiming at Macedonian Premier Zoran Zaev and Chairman of the Ministerial Council of Bosnia-Herzegovina Denis Zvizdić; the two, he argued, came "just to say this or that against Serbia."⁶ Upon his return from Berlin Vučić told the public that Serbia was in "an extremely difficult situation" in the matter of Kosovo, and that his "idea for setting a fair and just borderline between Serbs and Albanians" was turned down; this, he added, "destroys every possibility for Serbia to obtain anything from Kosovo."⁷ As long as he is the President, he said, he would not recognize Kosovo, adding pathetically, "You may kill me but I will never do it. See, I am saying this to everyone, to the English and Germans – I will not. Depose me, but I will not. Someone else can be the President fifteen years from now, but Vučić will not be the one to recognize it."⁸

He said he had been surprised how sharply Kosovo Albanians had demanded Belgrade to recognize Kosovo without an autonomy for Serbs and within some "new Republika Srpska."⁹ He responded strongly to a statement by Denis Zvizdić who said loud and clear that he was against drawing of some new borders along ethnic lines in the Western Balkans, reiterating that territorial integrity, sovereignty and multiethnic societies should be the only platforms for settlement of bilateral disputes, especially over borders.¹⁰ Zvizdić had also condemned the interconnection between statuses of Kosovo and one of Bosnian entities, Republika Srpska.¹¹ Arguing that "Kosovo and Metohija would be independent and sovereign on the entire territory, but not by his will or the fact that he had recognized it," only reveals Vučić's resignation and resolve to obtain "demarcation" with Albanians.

Some Serbian ministers said openly the Serbia would not give up its national project – a border change. Defense Minister Aleksandar Vulin said it was clear that "our position has not changed," while Foreign Minister Ivica Dačić explicitly stated, "Serbia's recognition of Kosovo within present borders is a mission impossible."¹² Minister of Innovations and Technological Development Nenad Popović declared it was imperative that Russia, China and US join in the dialogue, explaining that the "former regime" had made a historical mistake by allowing that negotiations on Kosovo be moved from the UNSC to the European Union. "It's foolish to hold Belgrade-Pristina dialogue in Brussels, which is powerless and will remain such, and that's why Russia,

5 <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/intervju-matthew-palmer/29930710.html>.

6 "Vučić: Elections will be called this spring," *Politika*, May 8, 2019.

7 Ibid.

8 *Politika*, May 8, 2019.

9 <https://www.bljesak.info/vijesti/politika/osuli-po-zvizdicu-napadnuti-srbi-i-republika-srpska/271337>.

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.

12 <https://www.blic.rs/vesti/politika/dacic-dijalog-ne-postoji-priznanje-kosova-nemoguca-misija/ttdddzg>.

China and US should join in the dialogue,” he said.¹³

Serbia’s turning towards the so-called sovereignists in the EU – in Hungary, Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia and Italy – that would enlarge the circle of allies and their delegates in a new composition of the European Parliament and the European Commission would manage to fundamentally change the attitude towards Kosovo, is being more and more considered. A statement by Matteo Salvini, Italy’s most powerful Politician, allegedly saying that he (Salvini) “advocates that Italy should withdraw its recognition of Kosovo’s independence” is a topic of growing speculation.¹⁴ Belgrade obviously banks on differences between “the big troika” – Germany, France and the Netherlands, and countries allied in the Visegrad Group, growingly sliding towards illiberalism.

Some pro-regime tabloids have publicized that a final solution to the Kosovo question had been postponed till Donald Trump’s next mandate. The said thesis was first announced by Prvoslav Davinić, the former defense minister, in a talk-show (TV Happy).¹⁵

Slobodan Zečević of the Institute for European Studies warns that Serbia “Serbia’s policy, not exactly concerned with ideology, seeks a stronghold wherever it could locate it.”¹⁶ And this in the countries and with the leaders, he explains, that are against Islamic influence on Europe and “could be expected to provide some assistance to our perception of the Kosovo crisis.”¹⁷ Vladislav Jovanović, ex-diplomat, takes that people may turn to Italy if Serbia decides to

go on campaigning for annulment of Kosovo’s recognition among the countries that have already recognized it. He warns, nevertheless, that moving closer to the Visegrad Group will resent the “big troika.” “Should Serbia turn to the Visegrad Group that could raise its standing among other Western Balkan states that would lose grounds for leaving it badly surprised all the time.”¹⁸

Serbia is obviously leaning toward illiberal current not only in Europe but also in the world (Russia, China but the US new administration as well), which is after establishment of some new international order that would stand against all liberal values US has been a guarantee of until recently. The Munich Security Report for 2019 testifies of challenges that could easily mark the end of the world order established after WWII. It not only warns against shaken old alliances and conflicts involving international players but also against developments in individual states – especially democratic ones.

PRISTINA LEADERS COMMENTING ON THE SUMMIT

The statements by Kosovo leaders following on the Summit – such as the one by President Thaci that regional reconciliation is impossible as long as Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina refuse to recognize Kosovo – notably irritated Belgrade. “Reconciliation will be impossible as long as Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina do not recognize Kosovo. Germany and France’s leadership and capacity could encourage such bold decisions,” said Thaci,¹⁹ adding that Kosovo would not allow the Community of Serbian Municipalities to have executive authorities as he takes that Serbia is after establishing in North Kosovo a

13 <http://www.novosti.rs/vesti/naslovna/politika/aktuelno.289.html:793950-Popovic-Dijalog-u-Briselu-propao-ukljuciti-Rusiju-Kinu-SAD>.

14 Politika, May 8, 2019.

15 Ibid.

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid.

18 Ibid.

19 Ibid.

community like Republika Srpska – “something not to be permitted.”²⁰

Premier Haradinaj said that the meeting in Berlin put an end to the dialogue swerving all the time or taking a wrong turn in the matter of Kosovo-Serbia relationship. Borders and territories shall be discussed no more; “the dialogue moderated by Mogerini is now non-existent as such” but was given “a new format.”²¹ In other words, he said, now that the dialogue has been redirected from Ms. Mogerini to Chancellor Merkel, whose stance against border change is clear and staunch, eases the burden. But we should also be more at guard, he added, given that “kitchens are still working, although we are faced with a risk of Kosovo’s partition no more.”²²

While in Berlin President Vučić said that Kosovo could not become a consolidated state without Serbia and that Pristina’s standing fully depended on Serbia given that Serbia was internationally recognized and a UN member-state, “neither dependent on Pristina nor looking for Kosovo’s recognition.”²³

REACTIONS BY THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

Some circles perceive the Berlin Summit as a failure since it has not taken a clear stance about enlargement.

Dimitar Bechev, the director of the Institute for European Policy (Sofia), takes that the European

Union failed to eliminate the idea about territorial exchanges and border corrections once and for all, and that its incapacity for action only mirrors its own polarization. They are aware of the fact that the extreme right could play on the poor Western Balkan candidates’ prospects for accession by arousing their fear of another wave of migrants, just to ensure electoral triumphs, he says. No one expects the European Union to accept the Balkan six as soon as tomorrow, he adds, because that would be both unrealistic and unwelcome; candidates need to manifest their readiness for reforms, deal with corruption, mend their judiciaries and implement the rule of law before making progress towards accession; and, Brussels should become aware of the advantages of accession negotiations and stop taking wrong steps in the Western Balkans.²⁴

According to the renown *Politico* portal, the Summit failed to make a breakthrough, while Merkel and Macron revealed how dysfunctional European diplomacy is. The Summit, says the portal, threw light on divisions not only between Kosovo and Serbia, but between Paris and Berlin, among EU member-states and the foreign policy apparat in Brussels as well.²⁵

Under the title “It’s Time for a New Approach to the Balkans” the magazine *National Interest* published a story penned by Frank Wisner, Cameroun Manter and Marko Prelec; the authors argue that all the attempts made in the past were mistaken in two ways: they ignored real problems and tried to accomplish something too soon. However, it’s not clear in their argument what it is they imply as a new approach, unless

20 Ibid.

21 <https://kossev.info/haradinaj-dijalog-kojim-posreduje-mogerini-vise-ne-postoji-preslo-se-na-novi-format/>.

22 <https://kossev.info/rama-za-haradinaja-lazov-haradinaj-za-ramu-brat/>.

23 <https://www.jutarnji.hr/vijesti/svijet/vucic-pozicija-kosova-ovisi-o-beogradu-nadam-se-da-ce-netko-imati-dovoljno-pameti-da-to-razumije/8805671/>.

24 <http://balkans.aljazeera.net/vijesti/zasto-je-evropska-unija-podbacila-na-zapadnom-balkanu>.

25 <https://www.politico.eu/article/merkel-macron-balkans-serbia-kosovo/>.

they are once again arguing to border changes as they have been over past couple of years.²⁶

Janus Bugaisky of Washington-based the Center for Analysis of European Policies take that French and German leaders have offered symbolism to the Summit rather than essence, and failed to settle open conflicts and announce new measures for enlargement. No doubt that this will generate skepticism about future meetings and EU's commitment to enlargement in the Western Balkans, he says.²⁷

The Russian portal Sputnik summarized experts' opinions according to which the Berlin Summit proved that Belgrade and Pristina would not reach any agreement this year, and that there is no need to Serbia to hurry given that time is on its side. All the experts the portal quoted believe that in many aspects the outcome of the Summit results from the messages put across during Serbian President's meetings with leaders of Russia and China in Beijing.²⁸

Russian senator Konstantin Kosachev sees the Berlin Summit as reflection of the growing anxiety over developments, given that Belgrade-Pristina dialogue gropes in the dark. Scores of decisions by the Kosovo leadership are in stark contradiction to the Res. 1244 and the very logic of a political dialogue. Here is mostly refers to the formation of a national army and 100-percent taxes imposed on the goods from Central Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. We witness, he says, that US actively supports Pristina thus provoking the worst scenario and failure of a political dialogue. He hopes that European capitals are aware of such tendency and that their concern would consolidate European position sooner or

later, as well as that at last Russian and Paris, Berlin and other European capitals would come to an agreement that the Res. 1244, in concert with Serbia's Constitution, is the one and only option for solving the problem of Kosovo. Moscow, Berlin and, of course, Belgrade will be finding more and more common ground on the problem in the time to come.²⁹

BALKAN DYNAMICS AFTER THE SUMMIT

Presidents Vučić and Thaci have not given up their plan for border changes and have been speaking about it almost on daily basis: Thaci is saying he will claim the Preshevo Valley, while Vučić that he will go on defending Serbian interest, while the issue of borders is on Albanians and Serbs to settle.

The annual Brdo-Brioni meeting on the Western Balkans Slovenia has initiated in 2010 with a view to settling its dispute with Croatia was held on May 9 in Tirana. Later on, the initiative encompassed the Western Balkans with official support from Germany in 2014.

Balkan leaders, especially Serbian and Albanian, went on measuring swords in Tirana. In fact, Vučić, Rama and Thaci alike did not give up their plan on border changes. Rama and Thaci announced an open border between Kosovo and Albania, and so infuriated President Vučić. Their rhetoric precisely charted their plans. Vučić told the press that everyone had an idea of his own about regional stability and maintenance of peace, and that he had said to Thaci, "You may appeal to Americans and all others, but this is a Serbian and Albanian matter. None of world

26 <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/its-time-new-approach-balkans-56917>.

27 <https://www.cepa.org/unpredictable-eu-elections>.

28 <https://rs-lat.sputniknews.com/komentari/201905031119657129-berlinski-samit-zapadni-balkan/>.

29 <https://rs-lat.sputniknews.com/komentari/201905031119657129-berlinski-samit-zapadni-balkan/>.

powers will force Serbia to behave contrary to its interests.”³⁰

Nevertheless, Western Balkan leaders put their signatures under a declaration calling on the European Union to treat the region as an issue of “geopolitical significance,” the more so since “EU should bear in mind that the Western Balkan’s full integration into European value system is as important as Europe’s stability in general.”³¹

Pascal Milo, the ex-foreign minister of Albania and well-known historian, takes that the Kosovo problem will not be solved in a foreseeable future as “the horizon over Serbia-Kosovo normalization is rather blurred.” Only strong and joint pressure from big international players, he says, can enforce normalization based on the actual state of affairs.³²

For the first time Belgrade marked WWII Victory Day May 9 with a parade in Nis (actually, organized it on May 10) to demonstrate Serbia’s power. While glorifying the President, the parade was meant to demonstrate his contribution to Serbia’s status of a military power in the Balkans. “Immortal Regiment” was marching in the streets of Nis and other towns.³³ “Every regime

takes what suits it from the corps of anti-fascist values and disregards the fact that Yugoslavia’s anti-fascist movement was authentic,” says historian Milivoj Bešlin, adding “Serbia is not marking its own victory but Russian victory over fascism.”³⁴

The fact that general Vojin Lazarević, the ICTY ex-convict, was at the helm of “Immortal Regiment” march also testifies that the event was not a manifestation of anti-fascist values. A part of the public opinion, including the US Ambassador, condemned promotion of a war criminal at the manifestation marking the Victory Day. Once again President Vučić proves that he actually cared little for anti-fascist values. Responding to criticism, he said, “For the first time Serbia is not ashamed of people who have defended the country and nation in the 1990s wars. Every person in his right senses feels pride. (The parade) proved that is protecting homeland that respects such people was is not in vain.”³⁵

Many Russian politicians, including Chairman of the Committee for International Relations Constantine Kosachev, attended the event. “It is obvious that the unsettled problem of Kosovo and fuming people in Kosovo are trying to solve the problem with the use of force. But if the situation sharpens Serbia will not be left to its own devices, as Russia was, is and will be its reliable strategic partner,” he said.³⁶

Evidently, President Vučić is in difficulties since the pressure from both the West and the East, but also from Serbia’s society (street protests, Serbian Orthodox Church, etc.) is stronger and stronger when it comes to the country’s

30 <https://www.kurir.rs/vesti/politika/3249169/predsednik-vucic-uzivo-iz-tirane-rekao-sam-taciju-da-mogu-da-pozovu-sve-strane-prijatelje-ali-da-im-to-ne-znaci-nema-te-sile-koja-ce-srbiju-naterati-da-radi-protiv-svojih-interesa>.

31 https://www.b92.net/info/vesti/index.php?yyyy=2019&mm=05&dd=09&nav_category=78&nav_id=1540061.

32 <https://www.dw.com/sr/vu%C4%8Di%C4%87-i-rama-ustom-%C4%8Damcu/a-48685421>.

33 “Immortal Regiment” emerged in Russia in 2011 when 5,000 people marched in Tomsk carrying pictures of relatives killed in the WWII. In the following years the movement spread to over 1,200 towns numbering some 12,000,000 marchers. More than one million people were marching in Moscow in 2018. Last year such manifestation was held in some 40 countries, including US, Germany, Great Britain, France, Austria, Italy and China. Blic, May 9, 2019.

34 https://www.slobodna-bosna.ba/vijest/113985/istorichar_iz_beograda_urnisao_i_vuchica_i_vojsku_ljudi_na_vojnoj_paradi_ne_liche_na_ljude_koji_su_pobijedili_fasizam.html.

35 Politika, May 15, 2019.

36 <https://rs-lat.sputniknews.com/intervju/201905081119725710-konstantin-kosacov-/>.

geostrategic course. Giving up the membership of EU would be fatal not only for Serbia but also for Vučić himself. Statements he is giving are more and more contradictory and manifest his ambivalence about EU. And yet, he says, "Serbia has no right to and cannot give up Euro-integration because its course toward Europe is a course toward the society we want to belong to." And then he adds, "It is on EU to accept Serbia or not."³⁷ With such wording he actually switches responsibility at EU.

According to the media, this may be the session of the Synod of the Serbian Orthodox Church (SPC) mostly discussed Kosovo; however, the public has not been given details. In Patriarchy President Vučić and Chairman of the B&H Presidency Milorad Dodik also discussed the issue and probably the situation of Serbs in the region too (given Dodik's attendance). No doubt that the SPC and Vučić are at odds, and the "inviting" him to the meeting was meant for the two sides to find some common ground. After the meeting Patriarch Irinej told the press that they "agreed that the situation in Kosovo was extremely difficult considering circumstances," and that finding a solution to Kosovo and Metohija stands for a gross uncertainty.³⁸ "I say we must continue fighting to get a maximum from whatever is possible to obtain for our people, to protect peace and security, respect others, but not to succumb to blackmail or give away to anyone what we are not entitled to, should not and cannot."³⁹ Many media speculated that Vučić was after disciplining "disobedient" with the helping hand from some archbishops close to Irinej, who gave him a carte blanche for settling the problem of Kosovo.⁴⁰

37 <http://rs.n1info.com/Vesti/a482022/Vucic-Necu-priznati-Kosovo-u-ovim-granicama.html>.

38 <https://kossev.info/sabor-spc-sa-vucicem-i-dodikom-neko-mora-da-donosi-teske-ovozemaljske-odluke/>.

39 Ibid.

40 <https://rs-lat.sputniknews.com/intervju/201905081119725710-konstantin-kosacov-/>.

Belgrade also has no high expectations from the summit in Paris. Foreign Minister Dačić anticipates "new pressures on Serbia" and does not expect any significant step toward resolution of the Kosovo problem. Speaking of recognition, he says, "That is out of question."⁴¹ Chances for the dialogue until July 1 are almost null, says political analyst Dragomir Anđelković, explaining, "Pristina is either terrified by the Special Tribunal and, therefore, tries to put across a message to the West that it can cause a chaos, or is dramatizing the situation to put Serbia in trouble and send a signal to prospective investors that Serbia is unstable."⁴²

Pressures can be expected from the Paris meeting: both Serbian and Albanian side would be required not to block regional cooperation. The taxes Pristina has imposed are blocking CEFTA too, and blocking it multilaterally for having included Bosnia-Herzegovina. And then Albania too "joined the party" by announcing trade integration between Kosovo and Albania. Serbia has blocked functioning of the Regional Youth Cooperation Office and, following on the agreement on free roaming in the region, announced that it would no more put its signature under a regional agreement.

Paris and Berlin will be insisting on revival of negotiations and implementation of the Brussels Agreement; comprehensive normalization between Belgrade and Pristina is the item No. 1 on the agenda, while recognition of Kosovo's independence comes second.

41 <https://www.blic.rs/vesti/politika/scenario-haosa-iz-pristinske-kuhinje-pristina-se-osilila-posle-berlina-stato-znaci/4yjl00d>.

42 Ibid.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Balkan solidarity and, most of all, a shared position on the membership of EU are imperative given that many players are having a trial of strength in the region and vitally influencing – or trying to – resolution of some regional questions.

New actors are playing on the logjam in integration and adoption of European values by promoting their policies and values of their own; this faces the Western Balkans and EU alike with extra challenges.

Although pretty small, the region's potential for "blackmail" suffices for manipulation of all actors in the Balkans. However, immaturity and corruptibility of Balkan political elites makes things easier for some actors.

This is why it is crucial that in Paris EU comes out with concrete measures for enlargement to the Western Balkans and thus obliges the region to fulfil the promises made and implement fundamental reforms, especially in the domains such as judiciary, corruption, freedom and human rights. To start with, it would be most welcome should the European Council meet its promise and open accession negotiations with North Macedonia and Albania (as put in black and white in the Council's conclusion on enlargement and stabilization of June 26, 2018).

Under no circumstances should Serbia-Kosovo negotiations lead toward drawing of new borders along ethnic lines. Some ethnic groups' ambitions for further partitions in the Western Balkans – by ethnic principle – should be cut dead as they threaten with new conflicts.