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THE INDEPENDENCE OF KOSOVO IN THE LIGHT OF THE REGIONAL SECURITY COMPLEX THEORY

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Abstract

Regional security complex theory posits that whereas in the early 1990s the Balkans seemed to become a separate regional security complex, in fact it was a case of overlay. Starting with the Kosovo war the Balkans became a sub-complex within the EU-European regional security complex. Taking as a case study the fact that the West's recognition of Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence in February 2008 backfired in the post-Soviet space with Russia's unilateral recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia against the background of the Russian-Georgian war in August 2008, the paper points to the security interdependence between the Balkans and the Caucasus as sub-complexes of the EU-Europe and post-Soviet regional security complexes, respectively. As the great powers' projection of their power into adjacent regions and the interregional security dynamics are defining characteristics of a super-complex, the case study confirms the regional security complex theory.

Keywords: regional security complex theory, Kosovo, Balkans, Caucasus

1. Introduction

1.1. The Regional Security Complexes

The definition of a Regional Security Complex (RSC) is "a set of units whose major processes of securitisation, desecuritisation, or both are so interlinked that their security problems cannot reasonably be analysed or resolved apart from one another" [1]. Moreover, RSCs are characterised by long-lasting patterns of friendship and hostility taking the form of sub-global patterns of security interdependence. A local RSC is usually affected by historical factors as for instance historical antagonism and dispute between states or common cultural, civilisational and historical backgrounds. Furthermore, "the formation of RSCs derives from the interplay between, on the one hand, the anarchic structure and its balance of power consequences, and on the other the pressure of local geographical proximity" [2]. Thereby, the adjacency of states plays a significant role within security, creating more security interaction for

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neighbouring states, than for states located in distinct areas. The RSCs "are socially constructed in the sense that they are contingent on the *security practice* of the actors" [2, p. 48]. Thus, structurally, RSCs encompass four variables: boundary; anarchic structure; polarity; and social construction [2, p. 53].

A *standard RSC* is Westphalian in form, blends two or more powers, has a predominantly military-political agenda and includes characteristics such as: security interdependence; geographical proximity/physical adjacency; the existence of durable patterns of amity and enmity, rivalries, balance-of-power and alliance patterns among the main powers within the region; and penetration by outside powers, which, in certain cases, could lead to their security alignments with states or state-like entities within the region.

A *centred RSC* is one integrated and dominated either by a superpower (USA in North America), a great power (Russia in the CIS), or a set of institutions (EU in Europe).

In-between the above mentioned two types stand two hybrid types: *great power RSCs*, when the polarity of a region is defined by more than one global level power being enclosed in it; and *super-complexes*, when the spill-over effect of great power interaction in which would otherwise be separate RSCs generates a strong and sustained level of interregional security dynamics. An example of a super-complex is the all-European one, composed of the EU-Europe RSC, dominated by the EU, and the post-Soviet RSC, dominated by Russia.

The Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) distinguishes also *sub-complexes* or *sub-regional security complexes (sub-RSCs)*, which "represent distinctive patterns of security interdependence that are nonetheless caught up in a wider pattern that defines the RSC as a whole" [2, p. 51].

The RSCT investigates the conjunction of two levels: "The interplay of the global powers at the system level, and clusters of close security interdependence at the regional level" [2, p. 43]. According to Buzan and Wæver the regional level "refers to the level where states or other units link together sufficiently closely that their securities cannot be considered separate from each other. The regional level is where the extremes of national and global security interplay, and where most of the action occurs." [2, p. 43] The RSCT argues that penetration from global powers have influenced almost every region's security dynamics and resulted in an increased role of the regional level as compared to the global level. Moreover it is claimed that the security of a nation is never self-contained, and units in a region can thereby never be considered as separate from the security of the neighbouring states in a region.

The RSCs are not necessarily regions in other ways than for security reasons. Although the idea of security of regions as a result of cultural and economic reasons is not left out, by making the definition of RSCs only by looking at the security pattern, the causal relationship between its units can be more easily understood.

1.2. The EU-Europe RSC

The EU-Europe RSC is a particular case of a centred RSC. It stands somewhere in-between 'a highly developed security community' and 'a great power in its own right with actor quality at the global level' [2, p. 56].

To determine the standing of the EU-Europe RSC at the global level is a very tricky task. One reason for this is the fact that the EU is penetrated by other powers – the US but also Russia. The RSCT argues that the closeness of Russia is less influential and important than the influence and participation of the US, due to the history of the world wars. According to the RSCT, the EU is a special case of a great power, treating the influence from the US derived from the global power distribution as condition for the complex. Moreover the global standing of the EU gets complicated due to the standing of some individual member states and great powers, such as Germany, France and Great Britain, among others.

The Balkan wars in the 1990s have indicated that EU-Europe is a '*partly penetrated region*'. The US has been a main player in various types of actions such as diplomacy and military action and the UN has been greatly involved in Balkan peacekeeping processes.

At the global level the standing of EU-Europe is to a great extent defined by the interaction and alliances with other global powers and international organisations such as UN, OSCE and the Council of Europe. Thereby, as a unit, the EU is a great power, but still a part of the balance of the global powers. The shifting of focus from intra-regional to inter-regional and global levels is an ongoing development. However, the European presence at the global level is not always consistent and the EU is not acting according to its status in all types of issues and situations.

1.3. The Balkans: a sub-complex of the EU-Europe RSC

One of the main historical characteristics of the Balkans is that the region has never been very coherent but has frequently been divided. The Balkans have been overlaid, conquered and governed by numerous empires, kingdoms and different types of regimes. Before and after the Cold War, the essential structure of the Balkan sub-complex was by and large similar. Ambiguous remains the boundary of the sub-complex which has two cores: The first core is the constellation of conflict between Serbs, Croats and Bosnians; and the second core is around Macedonia, where Albania, Serbia, Bulgaria and Greece are involved. The outer border countries of the sub-complex such as Hungary, Romania and Turkey are changeably involved in different points in time, and this makes the outer boundaries unstable.

At the beginning of the 1990s, it seemed that the Balkans were merely replicating the first two decades of the 20th century. Having its own 'Balkan' wars, the Balkan region looked like a separate RSC and it seemed likely that the Balkans would form a separate RSC. During this period the domestic level was very important. The security dynamics at the unit-to-unit level took often the

form of triangle conflicts: Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia; Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia; the three groups within Bosnia, etc. At the overall Balkan level there was a pattern of formal and informal alliances with few stable elements, in which religion played the role of a very strong identity marker for ethnic or national identity. These alliances included, for instance, an 'Islamic arc' linking Turkey, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Albania and Kosovo; and the counter alliance formed by Orthodox Greece, Bulgaria and Serbia [2, p. 384, 386]. In a way, the post-Cold War period of semi-independence of the region resembled the period between the Balkan Wars and the World War I. Similarly to the latter, when the local balance of power system started to be connected to the wider European dynamics and finally, during the First World War, the Balkan and European security dynamics merged, starting the mid-1990s, the Balkans were more and more drawn in the EU-driven security dynamics. In fact, the Balkan region was both separate and distinct at the same time. It was separate because the interactions of almost all kinds were much less intense across the region than within it. It was distinct because the dynamics on the security field had very different characteristics (ethnic cleansing, war and dehumanisation) than in the part of Europe outside the Balkans.

It could be up for discussion whether the true definition of the Balkans is a sub-complex within the European RSC or a region of overlay. "*Overlay* is when great power interests transcend mere penetration, and come to dominate a region so heavily that the local pattern of security virtually ceases to operate. It usually results in the long-term stationing of great power armed forces in the region, and in the alignment of the local states according to the patterns of great power rivalry." [2, p. 61] If the Balkans were an overlay, this would manifest itself by the internal dynamics being suppressed by external powers and the current peace in the Balkans being forced involuntarily, and thus the region bursting into war again if the overlay was removed. The Balkans was a case of overlay during the Yugoslav wars (1991-1999), which showed the great influence of outside powers, including the EC/EU, the US and Russia. During this period the sub-region was overlaid by the dynamics from the regional great powers. However, when the external action was not very clear and resolute, the initiative in the Balkans was with local actors, and the external action was narrowed down to being represented by the UN trying to soften the consequences. Nonetheless, all in all, the break-up of Yugoslavia showed the great influence of external powers. It was even claimed that the disputes and issues might have been settled sooner if the region had been isolated, because in that case the actors would have had to use classical military-political means and logic, which "would have led the actors to calculate their chances – probably more realistically – and strive for compromise when they had no hopes of improving their situation on the battleground. But, because each of the main actors had powerful friends abroad, they kept hoping for support, and that made them less inclined to settle for less." [2, p. 383] The Croats expected, from a very early stage, support from Germany, the Serbs hoped for Russian support, and the Muslims seemed determined that

they would get support from the US. Therefore none of the parts showed any sign of seeking compromise, and thus, the external powers had a great influence.

Due to the asymmetry of power between the actors in and around the Balkans, the external powers were presented with two options: either to 'force' the Balkans into the European complex or to fence off the Balkans and thereby keep the security related problems of the region outside of Europe. Due to the expectations of involvement of domestic actors, the media and morality in West which did not allow for passivity, and security interdependence and spill-over effects, external powers chose the first option, committing themselves to never turn their back on the Balkans. At the end of the Kosovo war, Western actors and the EU introduced a sub-regional functional cooperation approach, i.e. the Stability Pact for South-East Europe, which had comprehensive effects in strengthening the Balkan region. Furthermore, the EU launched the Stabilization and Association Process (SAP), NATO's Partnership for Peace (PfP) and Membership Action Plan (MAP) programmes kept the countries of the region constructively focused and engaged in security activities and the Balkans were put again on the pathway towards integration. Starting with the European Council in Thessaloniki in June 2003, the stated goal was to integrate the Balkan region into the mainstream European and Euro-Atlantic organisations.

In sum, looking at the interaction capacity and securitisation features in the Balkans, the Balkan countries have been interconnected in the post-Cold War era. However, due to strong actors surrounding it, the Balkan region is being on its way to become an integral part of Europe, and the Balkans should be defined as a sub-complex of the EU-European RSC. This means that the security dynamics of the Balkans is interacting with the security dynamics in the rest of Europe.

1.4. The Caucasus: a sub-complex of the post-Soviet RSC

According to the RSCT, the Caucasus is a sub-complex of the post-Soviet RSC, which comprises two parts: North Caucasus in the Russian Federation including Chechnya, Dagestan, and five other units and many ethnic groups which makes it an ethnic mosaic; and South Caucasus consisting of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia, which are home for the unresolved conflicts in Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia.

Security-wise, South Caucasus presents itself as an area where two interrelated developments take their toll: First, the secessionist conflicts in Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia *per se*. Second, the alignments which these conflicts generate out of the region, including the Russian involvement in Georgian conflicts and the support Armenia and Azerbaijan managed to get for their claims over Nagorno-Karabagh from Russia, Iran, Turkey, or the USA. Whereas changes in leadership in all three South Caucasus states have been linked with successful or merely attempted shifts in alignments with surrounding powers, by far the most stable pattern has been the de facto alliance between Russia and Armenia [2, p. 409, 420-421].

South Caucasus in general and Georgia in particular are a symptomatic example of a characteristic feature for the whole post-Soviet RSC, *i.e.* the triangle secessionist minority-state-Russia. A case in point is Abkhazia, where a break-away minority endangered the territorial integrity of Georgia. As Georgia was opposed Russia's strengthening of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) structures, Russia at first supported the rebels and then finally assisted Georgia at the price of its re-entry into the CIS and the signing in September 1995 of a bilateral treaty allowing the creation of Russian military bases [3] and Russian peacekeeping on Georgia's soil, which has been part of the problem rather than its solution [4]. But when Georgia signalled its intention to get closer to NATO, Russia chose to use once more the break-away region to get Georgia back on track, in accordance with its 'near abroad' policy.

2. Regional and interregional security dynamics: the case of Kosovo

Kosovo is a good case study for the RSCT as it is relevant for all four levels of the Balkan security constellation, including domestically generated vulnerabilities of the states in the region, state-to-state relations, the region's interaction with neighbouring regions, and the role of global powers in the region. Thus, the Kosovo case is relevant not only for the international management of ethno-political conflict, but also for the spill-over which it generated both within the post-Yugoslav space (which is a consequence of the security interdependence feature of the RSC) and outside it, in the post-Soviet space (which is a consequence of interregional interdependence between two sub-complexes belonging to two adjoining RSCs).

The Dayton peace agreement in November 1995 put an end to the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina and created *the first* post-Cold War *protectorate* in Western Balkans. After its signing, Kosovar Albanians' frustration grew steadily. Although they were the first victims of President Milosevic's policies, due to his repealing of Kosovar autonomy (1989), their participation in the Dayton peace agreement negotiation was denied by the West. The radical elements of ethnic Albanians established a shadow government and formed Kosovo Liberation Army – KLA (1996). The KLA force grew gradually with the support they received from ethnic brethren from Albania and northern Macedonia. Serbian crackdown in 1998 transformed the Kosovo ethnic conflict into an open warfare. NATO intervention forced Yugoslavia to accept ceasefire and NATO administration of Kosovo by KFOR forces under UN supervision beginning in June 1999. Thus, *the second* post-Cold War *protectorate* in Western Balkans has been established.

The international administrations in Bosnia and Herzegovina (since 1995) and Kosovo (since 1999) aimed at building autonomous political institutions able to peacefully resolve political conflicts. Instead, institutions were created which heavily depended on the international administrations' authority for their functioning. The absence of conflict resolution impeded domestic institutions to become autonomous in the sense of being independent and having a capacity to

act. As the international administrations received extensive powers to impose peace and to build political institutions, domestic actors relied on the international administrations to take fundamental political decisions. This led to a situation in which the domestic institutions heavily depended on the international administrations' authority for their functioning [5]. In turn, this institutional dependence strengthened one of the characteristic features of the RSC, *i.e.,* the penetration by outside powers.

In the way the escalation of ethnic conflict took place there was a certain spill-over effect. After the expulsion of Yugoslav authority from Kosovo, extremist Albanian groups originating from the territory of Kosovo, as well as indigenous elements from southern Serbia and Macedonia, used guerrilla warfare to launch a conflict, initially in southern Serbia (the Preshevo Valley) in early 2001, and then into Macedonia. In turn, the outburst of inter-ethnic violence in Macedonia in the spring of 2001 forced more than 40,000 Albanians to take refuge in Kosovo, diminishing the chances to negotiate the province's final status [6]. Moreover, the growing frustration and impatience among Kosovo Albanians at the continuing delays on full independence led to an episode of Albanian violence against minority Serbs in March 2004 which, in turn, put pressure to put an end to uncertainty about Kosovo's legal status in 2005 "despite overwhelming consensus that Kosovo does not meet the conditions for recognition" [7].

Serbian policy-makers concentrated their efforts on negotiations with the international community, hoping to secure Kosovo's maintenance within Serbia - while pending the definitive settlement of the province's status. Correspondingly, Serbian constitutional theorists and policy-makers started favouring centralized options for Serbia's regional restructuring with only some room for functional decentralization and limited financial autonomy. This dominant trend among Belgrade's political circles was also reflected in the new Serbian Constitution, which was inaugurated on 8 November 2006.

Finally, on 17 February 2008, against the background generated by the failure of the plan proposed by Martti Ahtisaari, the UN Special Envoy for Kosovo, the Parliament of Kosovo agreed to authorise a declaration of independence from Serbia [BBC News, 17 February (2008), online at: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/7249034.stm, accessed on 17 February 2008]. The Declaration sent shock waves through Europe and was met with great frustration in Serbia, especially after several EU countries had recognised the independence of Kosovo. Prime Minister Vojislav Koštunića attempted to get his Cabinet to agree with him in rejecting any closer ties with the EU in response to recognition by EU states of Kosovo. Koštunića's party, Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS) was supporting a draft resolution from the nationalist Radical Party that was denouncing the EU's mission to Kosovo, claiming that this was illegal. Besides the draft resolution, it demanded that the countries which had recognised the independence of Kosovo should withdraw their decision [BBC News, 8 March (2008), online at: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/7285817.stm, accessed on 15 February 2008].

Russia, too, was against Kosovo's independence. It tried to support Serbia and convince the UN to declare the independence of Kosovo invalid and illegal but did not succeed to find support for the idea. Moreover, Russian officials warned the international community about the fact that Kosovo's independence sets a dangerous precedent [Deutsche Welle, 18 February 2008]. In 2008 as in 1998-1999, Russia's motivation was less its Slavic Orthodox link than to gain recognition of the principle that Russia should be heard both because it is a global great power (as member of the UN Security Council) and because it is a European great power [8]. Finally, frustrated by the West's overriding its position in regard to Kosovo, Russia chose to retaliate in an area where its interests were directly at stake: the Caucasus.

On 25 August 2008, the Russian State Duma passed a motion calling Russian President Dmitry Medvedev to recognize the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The very next day, Medvedev signed two separate decrees recognizing Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent states, and called other states to follow the example. Thus, two post-Soviet de facto states complemented their internal legitimizing strategies with external legitimacy building, gaining the much sought-after international recognition from a permanent member of the UN Security Council [9]. In fact, Russia used its separatist allies in Georgia to gain diplomatic advantage over the Georgian leadership, which was seeking Membership Action Plan (MAP) with NATO. Consequently, the West's recognition of Kosovo's independence backfired like a boomerang for its long-term interests in Georgia. A key country of EU's Eastern dimension of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), and Eastern Partnership (EaP) and Black Sea Synergy (BSS) EU-led initiatives, Georgia prior to the Russian-Georgian war was also contemplated to be granted NATO's MAP. Although vocally heralded prior to the 2008 NATO summit in Bucharest by the US President George W. Bush, the granting of MAP status to Georgia and Ukraine was denied by Germany and France, vitally interested to maintain good relations with their key energy provider, Russia.

This game of external and domestic factors became even more evident and interrelated when Serbia tried to use its turning towards Russia as a political tool in the negotiation process with the EU to provoke a compromise on the obligations of EU integration. Following this line of interpretation one could explain why in spite of Serbia's nationalist twist, and its prior unwillingness to fully cooperate with the International Criminal Tribunal for former Yugoslavia (ICTY), which was a condition for signing the Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA), EU signed a SAA with Serbia in April 2008. The independence declaration of Kosovo could be argued to have triggered another dimension of the problem of conditionality and an ambiguous approach on the part of EU. EU was fearful of the possibility that Serbian politicians' opposition to the independence of Kosovo would cause strong support to the nationalist parties. EU wavered between sticking to its conditionality regarding the ICTY and using the compromise on the conditionality regarding the ICTY issue as a barrier for the Serbian nationalist upsurge and a kind of leverage to Serbia for

eventually accepting its preferred solution for the dispute over the Kosovo status. Finally, it chose the second option which was more profitable for its overall long term interests.

The issue of recognition of Kosovo has reopened deep divisions among European states. Despite its recognition as a unit, five EU member states (Spain, Greece, Cyprus, Slovakia and Romania) refused to recognize Kosovo, due to concerns over the rights of territories to secede from states. Not only the EU's Balkan policy has been stalled, but the EU ambition to act as a global power has once again been questioned [10]. Moreover, as a global actor, the EU has embraced a double standard approach. In the case of Kosovo, its option stayed in sharp contradiction with the widely accepted general principle which says that conflicts over self-determination are best settled by negotiations for autonomy within existing states [11]. By contrast, in the case of South Ossetia and Abkhazia its option was to obey to that principle.

In sum, the EU and Russian reactions in regard to Kosovo's independence generated a significant amount of great power interaction in two separate but adjoining RSCs – the EU-Europe RSC and the post-Soviet RSC. Due to their power projection into adjacent regions two great powers – the EU and Russia – generated a strong and sustained level of interregional security dynamics, which is indicative for the on-going strengthening of the all-European super-complex, thus confirming the RSCT.

3. Conclusions

The RSCT offers a useful theoretical tool for analysing the Balkan security dynamics. In the early 1990s the Balkans for a while held the potential of becoming a separate RSC. But due to the great powers' impact on the wars associated with the break-up of Yugoslavia, in fact it was a case of overlay. Eventually, at the end of the Kosovo war, the region has become a sub-complex within the EU-European RSC. Over the long term, the Balkans sub-complex might amalgamate into the all-European super-complex.

Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence in February 2008 and Western recognition of it, lest 5 EU Member States, quickly reverberated in the Caucasus sub-complex of the post-Soviet RSC, against the background of the Russian-Georgian war in August 2008, with the unilateral recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia by Russian Federation. Not only does this episode points to the security link and security interdependence between the Kosovo secessionist case and Abkhazia and South Ossetia ones, but also confirms the RSCT inasmuch as the great powers' projection of their power into adjacent regions and the interregional security dynamics are defining features of a super-complex. The security dynamics between the EU-dominated RSC and the Russian-dominated RSC witness for the on-going process of strengthening the all-European super-complex.

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