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Bookreview

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GEOPOLITICAL POSITION OF THE BALKANS IN THE MIRROR OF THE GREAT POWERS**



Vanja Glišin. 2019.
*Balkan geopolitical paradigm:
The Balkans in the geopolitical
vision of the great powers.*
Sremski Karlovci: Kairos, 160 p.

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Vanja Glišin's book *The Balkan Geopolitical Paradigm* is divided into two parts, both of which are divided into four chapters. This title can be defined as a guide through geopolitics for political researchers who are not sufficiently familiar with it as a discipline, for those who want to understand the geographical, political, strategic, and economic position of the Balkans and the interests of other political actors concerning the region and/or for researchers who strive to learn more about geopolitical paradigms and projects of certain regional and world powers. The first part of the book is devoted to the basic understanding of geopolitics, the areas of its theoretical conceptualization, important historical events and their consequences on the Balkans, and geographical and related geopolitical and geo-economics characteristics of the Balkan Peninsula and the Balkans as a knot of different influences and cultures, therefore Balkans of different interests. The second part of the title is marked by the introspection of the *Serbian national issue* in the Balkans, preservation of the entire Serbian identity, and examination of certain political processes such as *balkanization* and *political violence* through the action of the religious factor and reawakening of nationalism on the Peninsula.

Vanja begins with the before-mentioned theoretical breakdown and explanation of geopolitical concepts, but also geopolitics itself as a multidisciplinary science. Book considers not only the interpretations of different authors whose contribution to geopolitics as science is significant but also answers the questions of what geopolitics as science represents, which elements it synthesizes from other scientific disciplines, and what the geopolitical position of a state can be. In simplest terms, geopolitics represents a combination of geography and politics to determine their mutual pervasion on the overall maintenance and functioning of the state and society. Then the presentation of the three largest geopolitical schools has been made: Germanic, Anglo-Saxon, and Russian. This segment represents the most significant review-scientific, strategic key for judging the sources of the many conflicts and disputes currently being waged in the world. The author analyzes concepts such as Living space (*Lebensraum*), Large space (*Grossraum*), and Central Europe (*Mitteleuropa*) as German doctrines. The Heart of the land (*Heartland*), Rimland, the Central Ocean (*Midland Ocean*), the concept of integrated power, anaconda strategy and the relationship between tellurocratic (land dominant) and thalassocratic

(sea dominant) states in Anglo-Saxon geopolitics, and Eurasianism, ideocracy, and centrality regarding the Russian geopolitical school. Most of these doctrines belong to the domain of *realpolitik*, which means that they have been implemented, are currently being implemented, or have been left for later implementation, when more favorable conditions are created. Some of such projects are the Berlin-Baghdad rail, Elba-Euphrates, Elba-Equator, Rhine-Danube, the Sanitary Cordon, access to warm seas, or control of important traffic corridors, ports, and river courses. At the same time, for each important doctrine – which explanation requires additional analysis - an illustrative display has been left for better visual determination of the application of a given geopolitical doctrine.

The second chapter is marked by crucial historical moments for the reconfiguration of the Balkans. The author mentions only the most expressive ones but goes very deep into history, from the division of the Roman Empire, the Crusades, the arrival of the Ottomans in the Balkans, through the Great Eastern Crisis and the Berlin Congress, all the way to the collapse of the Soviet Union and the internal war in Yugoslavia. Historical overview refers to this area as a borderline, politically unstable, confessionally disparate region subject to the constant aspirations

of major conflicting powers. Similarly, it is possible to draw a parallel with the Balkan present state, but in a slightly different form and content. It is necessary to point out that the countries of the Balkans were often not a political goal itself, but rather a way station towards further penetrations to the East or West, depending on direction and angle of observation. Nevertheless, the Balkans have always represented an important crossroads of political paths, a place of connection, but at the same time a place of separation. As the author points out: "Throughout history, the Balkans have been an important transcontinental zone and a geostrategic fortress." In other words, the Balkans is *Catena Mundi*"(53).

In the third chapter, Glišin offers Jovan Cvijić's typology of the Balkan Peninsula features. As the Balkans are on the border of Europe and Asia, they have Eurasian elements and a mixture of cultures. In addition, the Balkan Peninsula is open to the north across the Pannonian Plain, and to Africa on the south, through the Moravian-Vardar valley and Greek islands. These features are the connecting points of the Balkans, as they enable undemanding communication. On the other hand, the mountain ranges in the Balkans in the direction east-west and northwest-southeast create features of separation, that is, hinder the

movement of civilization flows. At the end of the chapter, the author raises the question of the origins of a relatively new term "Western Balkans", clearly noting two discursive components. The first presents that the adjective "western" is a construct of the East as a European periphery or a political periphery in general. The second, related to the first, emphasizes belonging to the Western political sphere of interest and attachment of the Western Balkan states to the same political and cultural values.

In the last chapter of the book's first part, the geopolitical goals of the United States and Russia in the Balkans have been examined, mainly through the Cold War prism and the principles of Atlanticism and Neo-Eurasianism. Finally, the author has included in the analysis Germany with an indirect interest in the Balkans through Central Europe and Turkey with the reborn ideology and doctrine of Neo-Ottomanism. The expansion of the NATO alliance to the area of Eastern Europe and the Balkans—Montenegro joining NATO in 2017 was used as the last example are at least declaratively committed to European integration, prevents the return of Russia to Southeastern Europe. This is how the battle is being fought on Brzezinski's chessboard, aiming to isolate or surround the Central area or Russian Federation. Turkey

and Germany as allies of the United States, mainly use the occasionally given and limited field of action on the Balkan Peninsula, primarily through economic and cultural means for political influence. For its ambitions, Turkey supports Albanians and Bosniaks in the Balkans, intending to form a continuous green transversal from Bulgaria, Macedonia, and Kosovo through south-west parts of Serbia and Montenegro Bosnia and Herzegovina. Germany wants to control the Danube with reliable allies Slovenia and Croatia. Germany with The Balkans, ensures potential energy security, regulates large migrations like the one in 2015 and making a progress toward economic expansion to the distant markets of the Middle East.

In the second part, Glišin deals with political processes, primarily defining balkanization in public discourse as a pejorative and generated phrase. Born out of instability or loss of balance in favor of fear and maintenance of fostered chaos in the Balkans, balkanization is the result of the geopolitical redundancy of Yugoslavia in the post-Cold War era. The embodiment of balkanization is not the sole merit of the animosity between the Balkan states and nations, but the result of the pressure and aggression of foreign powers. Glišin exhaustively enumerates the consequences of

NATO bombing Serbia, despite international law and the Security Council's disapproval of such a procedure.

The rise of confessional radicalization in the Balkans, he sees in the intensive Islamization, primarily due to the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the arrival of the Mujahideen from Islamic countries. A similar situation can be found in Kosovo, where Albanians 2015 made up the largest number of Europeans in terrorist organizations in Iraq and Syria. The author explains that Islam and law form an inseparable system and that the temporary state of the Muslim minority (*dar al sulh*) is always only temporary until the conditions for the creation of a state based on Islam (*dar al Islam*) are met. It also points to the danger of taking neo-Ottomanism lightly as a moderate Turkish-Islamic synthesis, behind which works supremacy of Islam to the detriment of nationalism. As a last, but also the most important question, Glišintakes the position of Serbia and the Serbian people on the territory of the Balkan Peninsula. Here, not only the geographical characteristics of our country are determined, but the elements of national identity are also explained, what distinguishes true sovereign nations from synthetic or newly created, aided nations with the intention of geopolitical redistribution of power. For sovereign nations, a temporally

continuous and differentiated national identity is needed, in contrast to the rapidly formed, historical, ethnic, and cultural amalgam of synthetic nations. Unfortunately, according to the author, even sovereign nations like Serbia can be a fertile ground for the emergence of synthetic nations, because, in the previous historical segment, Serbia opted for a strictly exclusivist confessional model of nation emergence. Such a model did not accept the integration of Serbs of other religious affiliations into the national body, which had the effect of creating other national identities. Externally, Serbia suffers from the label of a western Russian governorate, while internally, autochauvinism (national self-hate) has been systematically implemented under the influence of the comprador political elite.

In the end, Vanja Glišin offers us a simple and proven method for political difficulties, “Svetosavlje” (based on the Christian orthodox teachings of Saint Sava) as spiritual guide and geopolitics of Serbian unity for successful multi-century duration.