



10/09/2021

Kosovo in foreign policies of Poland and Hungary

JAKUB LACHERT
RÓBERT GÖNCZI

W WARSAW
INSTITUTE

— SPECIAL REPORT —

SOURCE: FLICKR

Poland and Hungary are two Central European states, who thanks to their similar geopolitical positions and historic experiences have approximately the same vision about several matters from security policy, through economy to European politics. One of these are the Western Balkan policies and within that the recognition and support of the statehood of Kosovo. Or is it? In our joint Special Report Jakub Lachert expert and Róbert Gönczi visiting fellow are trying to find the answer for that.



SOURCE: FLICKR

The Kosovo policy of Hungary – What are the Hungarian aims?

Hungary's aim at the Balkans since the dissolution of Yugoslavia was always to promote peace and stability. One of the best tools to achieve this is European integration – as a wide range of politicians agrees on that in Hungary. From the Hungarian perspective, the most urgent integrations are Serbia and Montenegro, without forgetting North Macedonia, Albania and mentioning Bosnia and Kosovo, too¹.

One of the reasons why it is a primary aim to help these states reach the European Union is

the mass influx of illegal immigrants reaching Hungary through the Balkan route – as they are the gate to not even into the EU, but to the Schengen area, too². As the other aim we can also mention the possibility to increase the European free trade zone in the Western Balkans – because as Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Péter Szijjártó (2014-) said: “the European market can be bigger and the investment and export opportunity is more [...] and through that, the economic rebuild of Europe can be that more successful and fast”³.

The reasons behind Hungary's dynamic Western Balkans-policy

One of the main reasons why Budapest appears to be a dynamic force of power in the area of Western Balkans is because this region serves as the ‘economic hinterland’ of Hungary. The Hungarian state can easily play out its economic competitive advantages in the countries, such as their geographical proximity, tight historic connections, and the ability of supremacy in development⁴. With 519 kilometers, a long border

with the region, and the existence of a significant Hungarian minority in the post-Yugoslav states, mostly in Serbia: around 253 thousand people as the 2011 consensus says. Budapest can also declare why they are interested in the revival of this region. Another reason we shall also mention is the strong historical connections with the region. In the past 1000 years, Vojvodina and Croatia spent more time under Hungarian rule

1. VILÁGGAZDASÁG (2020): *Magyarország számára fontos az unió nyugat-balkáni bővítése*. 28/02/2020. Source: <https://www.vg.hu/kozelet/kozeleti-hirek/magyarország-számára-fontos-az-unio-nyugat-balkani-bovitese-2077524/> (Accessed on 21/05/2021)
2. PORTFOLIO (2021): *Szijjártó: Magyarország érdeke a Nyugat-Balkán európai integrációja*. 26/02/2021. Source: <https://www.portfolio.hu/gazdasag/20210226/szijjarto-magyarország-erdeke-a-nyugat-balkan-europai-integracioja-471696> (Accessed on 21/05/2021)
3. Ibid.
4. TÓTH, Bálint László (2015): *A Visegrádi csoport (V4) Nyugat-Balkán-politikája*. 2015. Source: <https://kki.hu/assets/upload/Teth.pdf> (Accessed on 21/05/2021)

than without it – and for some time Bosnia and Hungary were also in one state: the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

However, we can confidently say that the primary reason is the business opportunity in this big and free market. Or as Péter Krekó, leader of the Political Capital Policy Research & Consulting Institute said: “Hungary is determined with the integration of the Western-Balkan region because in this region Budapest can evolve its economic and political influence – it can be the Big Brother,

which eventually grows their European importance, too”⁵. Another reason behind the strong Hungarian attachment to the idea of the enlargement of the EU is the positive public attitude. According to the data used by PISM, in 2018 61% of Hungarians were in favor of the continuation of this policy (only with 31% against it) which is the fifth-highest percentage in any EU member state after Spain, Lithuania, Poland, and Romania⁶.

Tools and methods to achieve the aims of Hungary

Since the aims of Hungary according to the Western Balkans were consistent in the past 30 years, efficient methods and tools were created. One of these is the Eximbank (the Magyar Export-Import Bank Zártkörűen Működő Részvénytársaság or Hungarian Export-Import Bank Private Limited Company) which is an exclusively state-owned specialized credit institution. The Eximbank, together with MEHIB (the Magyar Exporthitel Biztosító Zártkörűen Működő Részvénytársaság or Hungarian Export Credit Insurance Private Limited Company) was created in 1994 with Law XLII. The reason behind the creation of these institutions was to help the Hungarian goods’ and services’ sales in foreign markets. The Eximbank became operational on the 26th of May 1994⁷.

Thanks to the smooth diplomatic discussions of Hungary, the government could achieve, that in 2019 the new European Commissioner for Neighbourhood and Enlargement was named to be Olivér Várhelyi, a professional Hungarian diplomat working in Brussels for decades.⁸ As Péter Balázs, the former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Hungary described him: “Olivér Várhelyi is a professional, who was a member of COREPER and the Permanent Representatives Committee – which means he knows everybody”⁹. While the Commissioners of the EU are always neutral in national policies, we can confidently say, Mr. Várhelyi is a strong supporter of the enlargement, partly thanks to his earlier work under the aegis of the Hungarian state.

5. MARÁCZI, Tamás (2020): *Miért érdeke Magyarországnak a Nyugat-Balkán EU-csatlakozása?* 06/02/2020. Source: https://mandiner.hu/cikk/20200206_miert_erdeke_magyarorszagnak_a_nyugat_balkan_eu_csatlakozasa (Accessed on 21/05/2021)

6. PISM (2018): *Changes in Hungary’s Policy towards the Western Balkans*. 23/10/2018. Source: https://pism.pl/publications/Changes_in_Hungary_s_Policy_towards_the_Western_Balkans (Accessed on 21/05/2021)

7. MAGYAR BANKSZÖVETSÉG: *Bemutakozás*. Source: <https://www.bankszovetseg.hu/tagreszlet.cshtml?tagId=17> (Accessed on 21/05/2021)

8. VILÁGGAZDASÁG (2020): i.m.

9. MARÁCZI (2020): i.m.

In 1999 Hungary also started the Stability Pact for Southeast Europe which became known as the Szeged Process¹⁰. This process was able to support the democratization of Serbia, but later its scope extended to all countries of the Western Balkans. Since 2004 the focus of the process has been the European integration perspective, conveying democratic values. These values are the strengthening relations between municipalities, development of cross/border joint projects, facilitating cooperation between Euroregions, trade development, promoting liberalization, encouraging investment, and promoting judicial reforms.

On a Hungarian base, we can also identify the HEPA (or the Hungarian Export Promotion Agency), too, which is an effective tool in the hands of Budapest. HEPA helps the “Hungarian case” with general export activities through the operation of special financial instruments in the target region of the Western Balkans, mainly in Serbia, Bosnia, and Montenegro¹¹. The HEPA’s uniqueness is that they use only Hungarian technologies while supporting the development of export operations of compatriot firms. Thanks to the enormous amount of calls for proposals from the Western Balkans to Hungarian companies, HEPA was able to create the WBIS (Western Balkans Investment Support). This grant can be used by the beneficiary organizations for the development of a subsidiary or majority-owned joint venture operating in the target countries. Partially because of the active use of HEPA in international relations with the Western Balkans, the implementation of the bilateral intergovernmental cooperation agreement could happen between Budapest, Belgrade, and Podgorica. With

these accords, through Hungarian state funding, companies of Hungary and Serbia will be able to cooperate to provide free project preparation services for Serbian infrastructure investments.

Along with the unique situation in Hungary (that the currently ruling party is in power for more than 10 years now with a 2/3 majority in the parliament) Fidesz, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán’s party was able to create strong bipartisan relationships within the Western Balkan region. These parties can be listed as the Aleksandar Vučić’s Serbian Progressive Party¹², the Albanian Democratic Party, the Party of Democratic Action in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Milo Đukanović’s Social Democratic Party of Montenegro¹³, and probably the most twisted and commendable relationship is with the North Macedonian VMRO-DPMNE¹⁴. This party used to be led by Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski, who was provided with shelter in Hungary after an arrest warrant was put out on him with the suspicion of abuse of power.

The Hungarian government also gives outstanding support for the Western Balkans in their Green Transition through the well-developed agricultural sector of Hungary¹⁵, and as always, plays a decisive role in the quick completion of accession negotiations¹⁶. We could see this behavior earlier, for example in June 2011 when right before the Croatian join to the EU the Council’s rotating presidency was in Hungary. We can also mention June 2017, when the Hungarian embassy in Podgorica served as a NATO Contact Point right before Montenegro gained accession to the alliance. However, not the agricultural

10. TÓTH (2015): i.m.

11. HEPA: *Nyugat-Balkán Fejlesztések*. Source: <https://hepa.hu/palyazatok/nyugat-balkan-fejlesztések> (Accessed on 21/05/2021)

12. MARÁCZI (2020): i.m.

13. EUROPEAN WESTERN BALKANS (2020): *Hungary active in maintaining good relations with the Western Balkans*. 04/06/2020. Source: <https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2020/04/06/hungary-active-in-maintaining-good-relations-with-the-western-balkans/> (Accessed on 21/05/2021)

14. *Changes in Hungary’s Policy towards the Western Balkans* (pism.pl)

15. KORMÁNY.HU (2020): *Magyar érdek a nyugat-balkáni országok csatlakozása*. 17/11/2021. Source: <https://kormany.hu/hirek/magyar-erdek-a-nyugat-balkani-oroszagok-eu-csatlakozasa> (Accessed on 21/05/2021)

16. PISM (2018): i.m.



SORUCE: FLICKR

sector is the only perspective where Hungary can be a major help for Western Balkan countries in a Green Transition. The Hungarian government has launched the WBGC (Western Balkans Green Centre) which is a know-how kickstart for sustainability in the region.¹⁷ With WBCG these countries could reach 1.2 million euros to drive green investments in Albania, Bosnia, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia. In the first round of the WBGC applicants can get up to 15-50 million forints (45-150 thousand euros) of grants for projects in the development of five sectors: renewable energy and energy efficiency; water management and waste-water treatment; waste management; urban development; agriculture, including forestry.

From the Hungarian perspective, we cannot leave out the banking sector, in which Budapest also invested. Thanks to this, OTP Bank is now one of the largest independent financial service providers in the Western Balkans¹⁸. The Hungarian government also providing a 400 million forints (app. 1 million euros) non-refundable grant to Hungarian businesses and higher education institutions to develop innovative solutions supporting the transition to a circular economy in the Western Balkans¹⁹.

17. INOTAI, Edit (2020): *Hungary's Green Fund for Western Balkans a 'Win-Win'*. 11/03/2020. Source: <https://balkaninsight.com/2020/03/11/hungarys-green-fund-for-western-balkans-a-win-win/> (Accessed on 21/05/2021)

18. Ibid.

19. HUNGARY TODAY (2021): *IT Ministry: Hungary Contributing to Western Balkans Development*. 17/03/2021. Source: <https://hungarytoday.hu/it-ministry-business-uni-contribute-western-balkans-development-climate/> (Accessed on 21/05/2021)

Kosovo and Hungary – a strategic partnership

Hungary was one of the first few states which recognized Kosovo as an independent country back in 2008.²⁰ The decision was made with a wide-range parliamentary assent and support. The reason behind this is simple. Since the fall of the communist regime in Hungary, and the first free election, the leaders of the state have always had the same vision as the first freely elected Prime Minister József Antall (1990-1993). This vision was the so-called ‘national policy’ (‘nemzetpolitika’ – in Hungarian) which is a complex foreign policy, that deals not just with the needs of the Hungarian state but with all the Hungarians, living outside of Hungary (such as in Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, etc.).²¹ One of the greatest aims of the Hungarian ‘national policy’ is to help the Szeklers (Szekler Hungarians, an ethnicity with 1.5 million people in Transylvania, Romania) gain autonomy, which they currently lack²². Every foreign policy move of the current government was parallel with the ultimate goal: the autonomy of Szeklerland. That was the move behind the recognition of Kosovo, too. With the promotion of autonomy and independence, the current government thought that they can make an actual difference. Sadly, these motives did not live up to expectations. Even today neither Romania, neither Slovakia (a country that with the mostly Hungarian region of Csallóköz has a similar position as Romania²³) recognized Kosovo as an

independent state.

Later another important topic came up too, that motivated Hungary to deepen their good relationship with Kosovo even better: the 2015 migration crisis. During the migration crisis, that started in 2015 and keeps happening even today, the Western Balkans became one of the most notorious routes of illegal migrants and smugglers – a route that affected even Kosovo. Since (as I earlier mentioned) the position of Hungary making the Hungarian-Serbian border one of the most severely affected external Schengen border section, Budapest needs allies all over the Western Balkan states, who can slow down or even stop illegal migration. (This was the time when Hungarian-Kosovan, -North Macedonian, and -Montenegrin foreign relations really deepened and strengthened.) With the support of the institutional reforms, Hungary hoped that they can make Kosovo a strong and fully autonomous state. For these reforms, they decided to invest even more support into the UN’s KFOR mission.

From the beginning of November 2021, the Hungarian armed forces’ delegation in the UN’s KFOR mission is going to acquire the commanding position²⁴. With this historic chance – when a Central-European state can finally reach the highest possible position in any leading UN

20. ORIGO (2008): *Magyarország elismerte a független Koszovót*. 19/03/2008. Source: <https://www.origo.hu/itthon/20080319-magyarorszag-elismerte-a-fuggetlen-koszovot.html> (Accessed on 21/05/2021)

21. JESZENSZKY, Géza (2016): *Nemzetpolitika: üzenet a határon túliaknak*. 2016. Source: <https://antalljozsef.igytortent.hu/szolgalatban/kor-manyfokent/kul-es-nemzetpolitika/a-tortenesz-kulugyminiszter-tanulmánya/111-nemzetpolitika-uzenet-a-hataron-tuliaknak> (Accessed on 21/05/2021)

22. ROMANIA INSIDER (2020): *Update: Romania’s Senate rejects draft bill for Szeklerland autonomy passed without debate by Chamber of Deputies*. 29/04/2020. Source: <https://www.romania-insider.com/romania-bill-szeklerland-autonomy-passed-tacitly> (Accessed on 21/05/2021)

23. PROCHÁZKA, Peter (1992): *The Hungarian Minority in Slovakia and the Autonomy Issue*. In: RESEARCH CENTER OF THE SLOVAK FOREIGN POLICY ASSOCIATION (1992): *Ethnic Groups and Minorities in Central Eastern Europe*. Vol. 1., No. 3., pp. 41-52.

24. GÖNCZI, Róbert (2021): *Hungary in Command – The Importance of the KFOR Mission from Hungarian Perspective*. 27/04/2021. Source: <https://warsawinstitute.org/hungary-command-importance-kfor-mission-hungarian-perspective/> (Accessed on 21/05/2021)

missions – also comes a staff increase of approximately 600-700 troops²⁵. Even without this, the Hungarian contingent is the fifth-largest in this partially recognized country and accounts for almost a 10th of the international KFOR mission²⁶.

However, the strategic partnership between Budapest and Pristina does not stop at defense and security. In October 2020, Mr. Szijjártó met with his Kosovan colleague, Mrs. Haradinaj-Stublla (2020-2021)²⁷, where the two foreign ministers agreed on an aid loan agreement, that comes with a 62 million euro tied aid program, that can be used for the building of two water treatment plants and other undertaking infrastructure projects in Kosovo, with the use of present Hungarian companies in the region.²⁸ A plan of a massive hydropower plant was also mentioned, which might be a project of the future in Kosovo with the help of Hungarian companies²⁹. In this meeting, a new period of the Stipendium Hungaricum scholarship program was also agreed, that provides an opportunity for 75 Kosovan students/ year to study in any Hungarian university and get an EU diploma that helps their competitiveness in their home country³⁰.

We should also mention the Hungarian-Kosovan Business Forum in Budapest back in 2012, where the Hungarian government's intention was attracting foreign investment and signing agreements of cooperation between the institutions of the two republics³¹. Hungary helped the young democracy to develop a well-functioning air traffic control system at the Airport of Pristina, too³². The development of HungaroControl (an organization providing air navigation services exclusively owned by the Hungarian state) cost 8 billion forints (more than 22 million euros). With this exclusive help, the annual decline in high-altitude aircraft movements over Kosovo exceeded 55 percent, with HungaroControl experts helping to transport 50,000 aircraft here.

We should also mention the consequent help of Budapest during the Covid-19 pandemic for Kosovo. Continuous donations of masks and other personal protection equipment (app. 50 thousand masks and 5000 protective suits) had been given to Pristina³³. The earlier mentioned Hungarian KFOR contingent is also helping the protection: one of their primary aims is to assist NATO Allied Partner Nations to help the institutions of Kosovo facing the pandemic.

25. MAGYAR HÍRLAP (2021): *Szijjártó: Fel kell gyorsítani a Nyugat-Balkán országainak uniós csatlakozását!*. 25/03/2021. Source: <https://www.magyarhirnap.hu/kulfold/20210325-szijjarto-fel-kell-gyorsitani-a-nyugat-balkan-oroszainak-unios-csatlakozasat> (Accessed on 21/05/2021)

26. PISM (2018): i.m.s

27. MAGYARORSZÁG NAGYKÖVETSEGE PRISTINA: *Szijjártó Péter külgazdasági és külügyminiszter koszovói hivatalos látogatása*. Source: <https://pristina.mfa.gov.hu/hun/news/szijjarto-peter-kuelgazdasagi-es-kueluegyminiszter-koszovoi-hivatalos-latogatasa> (Accessed on 21/05/2021)

28. HUNGARY TODAY (2020): *FM Szijjártó Meets Kosovo's FM: W Balkans' EU Integration Hungary's Strategic Interest*. 29/10/2020. Source: <https://hungarytoday.hu/szijjarto-kosovo-eu-hungary-haradinaj-stublla/> (Accessed on 21/05/2021)

29. BUDAPEST BUSINESS JOURNAL (2020): *Hungary extends EUR 62 mln in tied aid to Kosovo*. 29/10/2020. Source: <https://bbj.hu/politics/foreign-affairs/int-l-relations/hungary-extends-eur-62-mln-in-tied-aid-to-kosovo> (Accessed on 21/05/2021)

30. HUNGARY TODAY (2020): i.m.

31. THE PRIME MINISTER OFFICE (2012): *The Prime Minister of the Republic of Kosovo, Mr. Hashim Thaçi participates in the Economic Forum in Budapest during his official visit to Hungary*. 13/06/2012. Source: https://kryeministri-ks.net/en/the-prime-minister-of-the-republic-of-kosovo-mr-hashim-thaci-participates-in-the-economic-forum-in-budapest-during-his-official-visit-to-hungary/?__cf_chl_jschl_tk__=5eb05461d29777bb8a5f3302a5845b37bcae96e3-1621601626-0-ARLzMrhrtVNYAoUW0xnGe1kCKXMXyXlWO1bmay6x4m1lw-8K-DqBOMrDbBV-0lNpTb6hGdcLlElBnxoZXZ4Fe3jkr1xEE9SriE3DyZbTrO0cyaLiBqxf_g0Wic8SHaMqURnqd2LH1g8UCd7GdOze-eu8ql8LdfnPRz-RKUfTRaVV2M68t-mR4IMtk4K8dTISKZrM90K2W3PHeaasPvst94xuwsB71aKpyZTu61LMtaiVOVs5-G9OLAXZ95H0YqpdXLFxOVP6m_RETy-AQ_N7Om05j5tPDBejexJADc_fTGs-SZ33jd1Zhib44rbgB5Y3VXnbykTP_sUagaAg_nD0xRs7ASQCoLT-oOEmab-wMFLJWqjrs89adf-j_IdSJZYQNrhj-9BgednTEV2t-zfy3Brvv7msHI_6vBzeudb2g9B1cpkZw7x27cbUrOnvXfZetHMKSRva669UyGicfwNXEf3Pty9CXhLXPL2qNm8OuUSSQfvHrBVNf9x0NRTbZ8d2YlmgPu9wgLjjFj5o4k0HPGMraTzW0OdXVeb6j9Uf_Ud3Jua8OldKXyRwE1N0CRyiff64G27QC1zHOpRjcfZNTLM (Accessed on 21/05/2021)

32. ATV (2021): *Mintegy 8 milliárd forintból újultak meg a magyar légiforgalmi irányítás rendszerei*. 28/04/2021. Source: <http://www.atv.hu/belfold/20210428-mintegy-8-milliard-forintbol-ujultak-meg-a-magyar-legiforgalmi-iranyitas-rendszerei> (Accessed on 21/05/2021)

33. NATO.INT (2020): *Hungary Supports the Institutions in Kosovo to Respond to Covid19*. 19/11/2020. Source: <https://jfcnaples.nato.int/kfor/media-center/archive/news/2020/hungary-supports-the-institutions-in-kosovo-to-respond-to-covid19> (Accessed on 21/05/2021)



SORUCE: FLICKR

Weighting and the future

Closing the topic slowly one really important checkpoint has to be mentioned: doesn't matter how important the Kosovan-Hungarian strategic relations are for Budapest, there is one state that had been, have been, and will be carrying more significance for Hungary – Serbia. With Hungary being a Schengen country, currently, they have one of the external border sections, that faces not simply another EU member state but a third country. With this difficulty, Hungary's primary interest is to integrate Serbia into the EU as soon as possible, because, with this opportunity, most of their challenges could disappear.

One of the clearest manifestations of this logic (that 'Serbia first, Kosovo second') was the Maniasevic-case. In 2020, the Hungarian court decided to hand over a suspected war criminal (Ljubisa Maniasevic) to Serbia, who was

requested for extradition both by Belgrade and Pristina³⁴. (We could have seen scenes like this earlier in the Hungarian history, too, such as the Səfərov-case in 2004, when an Azerbaijani Major killed an Armenian fellow in Budapest, during a NATO Partnership for Peace program with an ax. Səfərov was requested for extradition both by Yerevan and Baku, but Budapest decided to send the murderer to Azerbaijan, where he gained presidential pardon³⁵.) Maniasevic might have been responsible for several unlawful killings during the 1998-99 Kosovo war. He was arrested at the Serbian-Hungarian Röske border crossing in 2019, while he was trying to sneak back to Serbia.

The real question is of course what is next since in 2022 there will be parliamentary elections in Hungary, that's going to be one of the most exciting for quite some time now. If the current

34. STOJANOVIC, Milica (2020): *Hungary to Extradite Serb War Suspect to Serbia, not Kosovo*. 19/06/2020. Source: <https://balkaninsight.com/2020/06/19/hungary-to-extradite-serb-war-suspect-to-serbia-not-kosovo/> (Accessed on 21/05/2021)

35. BBC (2012): *Azeri killer Ramil Safarov: Concern over Armenian anger*. 3/09/2012. Source: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-19463968> (Accessed on 21/05/2021)

government, the alliance of Fidesz and KDNP wins again, the change of the Kosovo policy is unlikely. However, their main challenger, the United Opposition is an eclectic and unpredictable collaboration attempt. The opposition platform consists of 7 parties and a civil movement. These are:

- DK (Democratic Coalition – a social-liberal people's party, led by former Prime Minister Ferenc Gyurcsány [2004-2009], their candidate for the opposition's prime ministerial preselection [PMP] is his wife, Klára Dobrev).³⁶
- Jobbik (Jobbik Movement for Hungary – a once far-right, now moderated, but populist right-wing party, led by once openly anti-Semitic and homophobic politician, Péter Jakab, who is also their PMP candidate)³⁷
- Momentum (Momentum Movement – centrist-liberal party, led by András Fekete-Győr, who is also their PMP candidate)³⁸
- MSZP-PM (the alliance of the Hungarian Socialist Party [MSZP] and the left-wing green party, Dialogue for Hungary – MSZP has led the country both between 1994-1998 and 2002-2009, currently the two parties have the same candidate for PMP: Gergely Karácsony, the mayor of Budapest from PM)³⁹
- LMP ('Politics Can Be Different' is the Hungarian green party, which enters the election without a candidate for the PMP, they support Karácsony, too, who was once a

member of LMP)⁴⁰

- ÚVNP (New World People's Party – a liberal-conservative micro-party led by a former minister of the Fidesz's government, József Pálincás, who is also their candidate for the PMP)⁴¹
- MMM (Movement for Everyone's Hungary – a civil movement, led by the mayor of Hódmezővásárhely, Péter Márki-Zay, who is also their candidate for the PMP)⁴²

Thanks to the fact that the two potential candidates of the PMP are Mr. Karácsony and Mrs. Dobrev, we can confidently say that Hungary's Kosovo policy will not change significantly if the United Opposition wins the 2022 election. The reason for this statement is that former Prime Minister Ferenc Gyurcsány has a strong relationship both with Mrs. Dobrev (his wife) and Mr. Karácsony who used to work at his Prime Ministerial Office during his prime ministerial presidency. Mr. Gyurcsány was the Prime Minister back in 2008 (with an MSZP-government) when Hungary recognized Kosovo as an independent state. Ferenc Gyurcsány back in the day even stated that the way of Kosovo towards independence is 'irreversible', so the Central European countries should support its endeavor. He even said that there is no realistic option for a comprehensive peace and stability in the Western Balkans without the option of autonomy/independence in any region of the post-Yugoslav states⁴³.

36. MIZSUR, András (2021): *Dobrev Klára bejelentette, hogy ő lesz a DK miniszterelnök-jelöltje*. 02/05/2021. Source: <https://telex.hu/belfold/2021/05/02/dobrev-klara-dk-miniszterelnok-jelolt-bejelentes-ellenzek-elovalasztas> (Accessed on 21/05/2021)

37. MOLNÁR, Szabina (2021): *Jakab Péter indul a miniszterelnök-jelöltségért az előválasztáson*. 25/01/2021. Source: <https://index.hu/belfold/2021/01/25/miniszterelnok-jelolt-jobbik-jakab-peter/> (Accessed on 21/05/2021)

38. DULL, Szabolcs (2021): *Fekete-Győr András miniszterelnök-jelöltként indul az előválasztáson*. 21/02/2021. Source: <https://telex.hu/belfold/2021/02/21/fekete-gyor-andras-miniszterelnok-jeloltkent-indul-az-elovalasztason> (Accessed on 21/05/2021)

39. 24.HU (2021): *Karácsony Gergely miniszterelnök-jelölt lett és mozgalmat alapított*. 15/05/2021. Source: <https://24.hu/belfold/2021/05/15/karacsony-gergely-miniszterelnok-jelolt-elovalasztas-ellenzek/> (Accessed on 21/05/2021)

40. MAGYAR NARANCS (2021): *Az MSZP és az LMP is Karácsonyt támogatja az előválasztáson*. 15/05/2021. Source: <https://magyarnarancs.hu/belpol/az-mszp-es-az-lmp-is-karacsonyt-tamogatja-az-elovalasztason-238502> (Accessed on 21/05/2021)

41. NÓTIN, Tamás (2020): *Pálincás József közös miniszterelnök-jelölt lenne*. 15/10/2020. Source: https://index.hu/belfold/2020/10/15/palincas_jozsef_kozos_miniszterelnok-jelolt_lenne/ (Accessed on 21/05/2021)

42. NÓTIN, Tamás – NÉMETH, Márton Sándor (2021): *Mind miniszterelnök-jelöltként indul, de csak egy maradhat*. 15/05/2021. Source: <https://index.hu/belfold/2021/05/15/mind-miniszterelnok-jeloltkent-indul-de-csak-egy-maradhat/> (Accessed on 21/05/2021)

43. GÖNCZI (2021): i.m.



SOURCE: FLICKR

Conclusion

As we see, the all-time Hungarian interest requires an active and deep relationship with Kosovo: both from the side of intentions in ‘national policy’ and the side of Central European desires for power in international politics. Hungary invested a lot of effort, money, and possibility into Kosovo to help the small state become not just

independent, but fully autonomous, too. While we should mention that the Serbian-Hungarian partnership will always be more primary than the one with Kosovo, the first cannot and will not ever result in the expiry of the second, thanks to the advantages, the recognition gave Budapest.

Polish presence in the Western Balkans

Traditional engagement of the Polish diplomacy has been oriented in Central and Eastern Europe. Western Balkans because of its location has a rather less traditional linkage with Poland in comparison to countries like Austria, Italy, Germany, Hungary, or even Czechia and Slovakia. From the Polish perspective, the most important factor of engagement has been the EU policy and perspectives of accession of these countries to the EU. However, Poland has had a chance to involve more in diplomatic relations with the Western Balkans countries during the Polish presidency in the Berlin Process, which has been an interesting German initiative directed to Western Balkans during the slow-down period for the EU enlargement. During the Summit of Berlin Process in Poznań (Poland) has been announced a new financial package for the Western Balkans in a sum of 180 million euros for the main infrastructure projects, and 20 million euros to support small and medium enterprises. The Polish presidency has been focused mainly on economic and social issues. The Poznań Summit hasn't

been presented any political decision on the EU future of the Western Balkans, however, during all of governmental, NGO's and diplomatic talks European future of the region has been presented.

Poland doesn't have many political tools and interest in an active policy towards Western Balkans, lack of common border and relatively small market (whole Western Balkans countries are inhabited by around 20 million people). However, the significance of the Western Balkans countries has raised after launching the Three Seas Initiative in 2015 by Poland and Croatia. From the Polish perspective, this economic and political block of countries located in Central and Eastern Europe has a new geopolitical significance to accelerate cooperation between countries in the direction South to North. New infrastructure projects like Via Carpathia will link Poland with Balkan countries via Romania and Bulgaria. New trade connections could affect also the future involvement of Poland in the Western Balkans.

Polish attitude towards Kosovo statehood

Poland has recognized independence of Kosovo soon after Pristina proclaim independence from Serbia in 2008. However, this decision has divided Polish public audience. The GENERAL doubts have been connected with uncertainty on the stability of whole region of Western Balkans. This decision has affected as well the bilateral relations

between Poland and Serbia. Belgrade has opposed the decision of Kosovo on its independence on all the international forums from the level of UN, where Belgrade could count on the Veto of Russia and China in the UN Security Council to the UE where some countries like Spain or Romania haven't recognized the independence of Kosovo.

According to Secretary of State in the Polish MFA Jan Borkowski: Polish government has recognized independence of Kosovo taking into account realistic approach⁴⁴. He mentioned: “The Polish government believes that in the long term, Kosovo’s independence will serve security and promote stabilization in the Balkan area, will allow to break the barrier of temporary solutions, mobilize the EU to joint action (which has already been reflected in the decisions to appoint a special representative of the Union and missions in the field of the European Security Policy), and Defense in Kosovo - EULEX), and it will be easier for the countries of the region to focus on solving internal socio-economic problems and on meeting the criteria necessary for their future EU membership. Poland will continue to express - as we have consistently done so far - constant support for Serbia’s integration with the European Union and support this process, as it has been and is the case with other Western Balkan countries”⁴⁵.

Polish recognition of Kosovo hasn’t impacted a lot on launching intense governmental contact with Pristina. Poland hasn’t conducted diplomatic relations with Kosovo. Poland is represented by a Hungarian diplomatic mission that helps Polish citizens in consular issues, except delivering the Polish documents like visas. In this context, the duties of consular issues are run by the Polish embassy in Skopje North Macedonia⁴⁶.

Poland is an active member of the KFOR mission in Kosovo where the Polish military contingent counts 300 soldiers who have served in the region from the beginning of its mission in 1999⁴⁷. Furthermore, Poland is an active member of the police mission in the framework of UNMIK from 2000 to 2008 and later the EULEX mission under the auspices of the EU. The role of this mission is very sensitive and important for stability in Kosovo because the duties of its member are to prevent social unrest by assisting the local police.

Polish debate on Kosovo recognition

The debate on the Kosovo recognition in Poland hasn’t been very turbulent. At that time, the decision on the Kosovo recognition has been led by the government of Donald Tusk. The government has claimed that the decision of Kosovo recognition has been made in the context of the US – Russian rivalry in the Western Balkans. President Kaczyński declared oppose statement. He claimed that the case of Kosovo independence could be used by Russia in the process of Georgia fragmentation, which lost two provinces Abkhazia and South Ossetia. In the latter process

of recognition of two states by Russia – the case of Kosovo has been recalled by Russia in the international forums.

The opposition party, at that time, Law and Justice opposed the decision of the government justifying that commitment of the government has affected negatively good relations between Poland and Serbia.

President Kaczyński has declared his dissatisfaction about the decision of Polish government which has recognized the independence of

44. „Odpowiedź sekretarza stanu w Ministerstwie Spraw Zagranicznych - z upoważnienia ministra - na interpelację nr 1575 w sprawie polityki zagranicznej Polski w Europie Środkowo-Południowej”, <http://orka2.sejm.gov.pl/IZ6.nsf/main/05A79FBF>

45. Ibidem.

46. <https://www.visahq.de/en/poland/embassy/kosovo/>

47. *Sily ONZ dla Kosowa*, <https://www.wojsko-polskie.pl/kfor-kosowo/>

Kosovo, during his official visit in Serbia in 2009. These discord between Polish government and president hasn't been big issue in the context of

domestic policy. In fact the debate on the Kosovo issues haven't been very publicized by Polish media.

Polish aims in Kosovo

Taking into account the fact that Poland despite the formal recognition of Kosovo statehood hasn't run diplomatic relations by the last 13 years could be proof that Polish diplomacy doesn't find this country as an important partner for Poland.

Poland supports Kosovo mainly by fulfilling NATO and UE obligation in the context of military and police missions. The official visits of Polish officials in Kosovo have taken place mainly in the military and police bases during the official Polish holidays which has been organized to visit Polish soldiers and police officers.

Conclusions

Poland generally is not very active in the Western Balkans as a whole region and particularly by running bilateral relations with individual countries. This situation has two main aspects. The Western Balkans are far from concluding their EU efforts, that's why there is no serious discussion on the joining the EU by any of the six countries. From the Polish perspective, the integrational factor is the most important in the context of acceleration in Polish – Western Balkans relations.

The second reason for Polish passive attitude towards Western Balkans is rather limited communications between the parties. Poland as a political and economic actor is not very present in the region. This country is also a rare destination for migration from the Western Balkans, that's why this factor hasn't stimulated closer actions. Poland doesn't have any particular relations with any of the countries from the region. However, Poles are interested in the regional cooperation between Western Balkans countries and the V4 or Three Seas Initiative in the framework of the connectivity agenda or the EU accession effort of each country from the Western Balkans countries.

AUTHORS:

Jakub Lachert

Jakub Lachert is a PhD candidate at the Faculty of Political Sciences and International Studies at the University of Warsaw. His research interests include: European Union neighborhood policy, including, in particular, Eastern policy, Eastern Partnership, Western Balkans in the process of integration with the EU.

Róbert Gönczi

Róbert Gönczi is currently studies in the Faculty of Military Sciences and Military Training of the National University of Public Service in Budapest, and in the School of Social and Historical Studies of the Mathias Corvinus Collegium. He currently works for the Budapest-based think-tank, the Migration Research Institute as a Research Assistant and also as a foreign policy journalist for the Hungarian Jewish online newspaper, Neokohn.hu. Earlier he worked for 2 years at the Hungarian civil conservative online newspaper Mandiner.hu as a news editor, reporter and foreign policy fellow writer. His main topics are the post-Soviet and post-communist states, disinformation, hybrid warfare, migration, defense- and security policy.



MAKE A DONATION

DECIDE HOW TO SUPPORT US

A RECURRING DONATION HAS THE BIGGEST IMPACT

BANK TRANSFER

YOU CAN SEND A DONATION DIRECTLY TO OUR BANK ACCOUNT.
WE STRONGLY ENCOURAGE YOU TO SET UP A STANDING ORDER,
ENABLING YOUR DONATION TO BE RECORDED MONTHLY ON OUR BANK ACCOUNT.

BENEFICIARY: WARSAW INSTITUTE
BANK: PKO BP
SWIFT: BPKOPLPW
TRANSFER NAME: DONATION
ADDRESS: WILCZA ST. 9, 00-538 WARSAW, POLAND

EUR: PL 85 1020 4900 0000 8902 3063 7814
USD: PL 82 1020 4900 0000 8502 3060 4017
GBP: PL 18 1020 4900 0000 8302 3069 6641

PAYMENT BY CREDIT CARD / PAYPAL



ANY QUESTIONS? WRITE US: office@warsawinstitute.org



Warsaw Institute
Wilcza St. 9, 00-538 Warsaw, Poland
+48 22 417 63 15
office@warsawinstitute.org

© COPYRIGHT 2021 Warsaw Institute

The opinions given and the positions held in materials in the Special Report solely reflect the views of authors.