

# STRATEGIC BALKANS

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**Date:** 4 September 2017

**Title:** IMF explores Balkan female employment conundrum

**Author:** Central Banking Newsdesk

**Source:** Central Banking

**Key words:** Balkans, gender-equality

**Link:** <https://www.centralbanking.com/central-banks/financial-stability/financial-inclusion/3292766/imf-explores-balkan-female-employment-conundrum>

### **Summary**

In order to improve the quality of institutions in the western Balkans and to improve the percentage of women in the labour force, there is a need for “targeted macroeconomic policies, and structural reforms”. A study by the IMF reveals that almost two-thirds of working age women are currently unemployed in the Balkan region due to “inadequate policies and fiscal disincentives”. Analysing both macro and micro economic data its shown that “improving educational attainment, having a more balanced family leave policy and reducing the tax wedge” would improve the supply of women to the workforce. Nevertheless, the key is inclusion; these policies need to encourage firms to accept women in the workforce as well as helping women finding work. To create more employment opportunities for women, the Balkan countries need to create adequate and robust demand for female works through structural reforms to improve the quality of institutions.

**Date:** 5 September 2017

**Title:** EU wary of China’s growing clout in the Balkans

**Author:**

**Source:** Sputnik News

**Key words:** Balkans, Bosnia, Russia

**Link:** <https://sputniknews.com/europe/201709051057097334-balkans-china-eu/>

### **Summary**

Former US ambassador to Serbia, Cameron Munter, believes that the U.S. need to play a bigger role in the Western Balkans, especially seeing China’s increasing influence in the region. China’s interest in the region is dictated by the geostrategic importance of the Balkans in Beijing’s “One Belt One Road” project, which will increase China’s role in European politics. To this end, China has allocated 10 billion dollar for the projects needed in 16 countries of Central and Eastern Europe, and Serbia has “already staked up \$2 billion” for infrastructural projects. “A large number of Chinese firms are interested in working in the Balkan countries in the field of infrastructure and a wide range of industries, from household appliances to solar batteries and energy, from information technology to environmental protection”.

**Date:** 6 September 2017

**Title:** Russia's Bosnia Gambit

**Author:** Jasmin Mujanovic

**Source:** Foreign Affairs

**Key words:** Balkans, Bosnia, Russia

**Link:** <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/bosnia-herzegovina/2017-09-06/russias-bosnia-gambit>

### Summary

Russia has been actively trying to influence countries from the former Yugoslavia to remain “neutral”, that is, outside the EU-NATO fold. The pro-Western shifts of Macedonia and Montenegro have forced Russia to swing its attention to a new country in the Balkan region: Bosnia and Herzegovina. In order to keep Bosnia out of the Western alliance, Russia will try to maintain the country ethnically divided and fragmented, allying with Milorad Dodik, the secessionist president of Republika Srpska, and Dragan Covic, the Croat member of Bosnia's three-person presidency. These individuals are the “two biggest champions of ethnic fragmentation in Bosnia”. For Sarajevo, NATO membership is an essential objective to be reached, not only because it's easier and more important than joining the EU, but because it will guarantee sovereignty and territorial integrity. If Russia's allies in the country maintain their debilitating grip on power, Bosnia will not join NATO and EU, but if the outcome of Bosnia's general elections of 2018 will see a strengthened reformist alliance, than Russia's plan in the country will probably fail.

**Date:** 7 September 2017

**Title:** Around this country is the Balkans

**Author:** Keno Verseck

**Source:** Spiegel Online

**Key words:** Balkans, Macedonia, Albania

**Link:** <http://www.spiegel.de/politik/ausland/mazedonien-um-dieses-land-bangt-der-balkan-a-1166010.html>

### Summary

The presidency of Nikola Gruevski, which started in 2006, has brought Macedonia into authoritarianism and nationalism, as well as election corruption and ethnic conflicts between Macedonians and the Albanian minority in the country, situations that has created a state of crisis. The new government, formed by the former opposition Social Democrats and representatives of the Albanian minority, has been in office for 100 days. The new Foreign Minister Nikola Dimitrov states, “the expectations and hopes of Macedonian society are very high. We have won a second chance for Macedonia to build a genuine European democracy, and we must seize this historic opportunity”. The new government however needs to face many challenges; solve the conflicts with neighbouring countries, especially the name dispute with Greece, which has stalled EU and NATO integration; meet

the pressing concerns of the Albanian minority; parry the attacks of Macedonian nationalists; and find ways out of the economic and social misery of the country.

**Date:** 7 September 2017

**Title:** The radicalization of the Balkans, a threat to European security

**Author:** Charles Nonne

**Source:** Le Monde

**Key words:** Balkans, Radicalism, Islamic State

**Link:** [http://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2017/09/07/charles-nonne-la-radicalisation-des-balkans-une-menace-pour-la-securite-europeenne\\_5182082\\_3232.html?xtmc=balkans&xtcr=3](http://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2017/09/07/charles-nonne-la-radicalisation-des-balkans-une-menace-pour-la-securite-europeenne_5182082_3232.html?xtmc=balkans&xtcr=3)

### Summary

The Balkans have emerged since the implosion of the former Yugoslavia and the end of the Bosnian war. The European Union is now preaching the benefits of the region's economic and social development, with the preservation of the rule of law and democracy in the background. As for security, Russia, North Korea and Syria take precedence. The resurgence of radicalism in the Balkans over the past few years, however, poses real threats. Albania and Kosovo count with a Muslim majority population, as well as in Bosnia and Sandjak, in southern Serbia, extremism germinates in mosques controlled by local religious authorities, especially in rural areas. The economic situation of the Balkans fuels this phenomenon. For example in Kosovo, the government has been unable to improve the unemployment rate from 28.7% and removing almost a third of the population from the poverty line. Hence, it is estimated that more than 800 fighters have left the Balkans to join the Islamic State since the beginning of the Syrian civil war.

**Date:** 13 September 2017

**Title:** EU: Juncker wants to accelerate the integration

**Author:** Jean Quatremer

**Source:** Libération

**Key words:** Balkans, EU integrationa

**Link:** [http://www.liberation.fr/planete/2017/09/13/ue-juncker-veut-acceler-l-integration\\_1596173](http://www.liberation.fr/planete/2017/09/13/ue-juncker-veut-acceler-l-integration_1596173)

### Summary

In Strasbourg during his annual speech on “the state of the Union”, Jean-Claude Juncker opposed to the idea of a multi-speed Europe, developed by the French Head of State Emmanuel Macron, who envisions a more integrated Euro area, both from the economic point of view and from the security one. “The gap between West and Central Europe is likely to widen further. It is better to build bridges between them”, confirmed Jean-Claude Juncker at Libération. According to him, all the countries of the Union are destined, sooner or later, to join the euro, the banking union, the Schengen area, the defense and police cooperation, etc. Juncker, who even desisted from mentioning the democratic problems posed by Poland and Hungary, proposes “the creation of an instrument of accession to the euro” offering technical and financial assistance to countries that do not use the single currency yet.

**Date:** 13 September 2017

**Title:** “Europe is the antidote to the Balkan’s mine”

**Author:** Francesca Paci

**Source:** La Stampa

**Key words:** Balkans, Albania, European Union, Radicalisation

**Link:** <http://www.lastampa.it/2017/09/13/esteri/leuropa-lantidoto-alla-mina-balkanica-A4It9EJ39fgtyqzEYu9taM/pagina.html>

### Summary

The Albanian President Ilir Meta in his visit to Italy states that his country has just began the reforms needed in the justice department in order to begin the negotiations with the EU as soon as possible. He believes that his country is an integral part of the EU and that without the integration of Balkan countries to this international institution, the region will face the same problems of the past, such as nationalism and borders issues between and within States. President Meta believes that the main instrument to fight the high corruption in the country is through the judicial system, and that is why his country has begun a verification of the figures in the judiciary in order to improve transparency, to strengthen the rule of law and to increase foreign investments. When confronted with a question about the issue of home-grown jihadists, President Meta answered by saying that the problems and risks are not related to religion, but to the manipulation and wrong interpretation of this. Moreover, he highlights the historic interreligious coexistence and harmony present in his country, however stating that the weakest social areas of the country will need better education and professional opportunity in order to create hope.

**Date:** 19 September 2017

**Title:** Russia has a years-long plot to influence Balkan politics. The U.S. can learn a lot from it

**Author:** Jaroslaw Wisniewski

**Source:** Washington Post

**Key words:** Balkans, Russia, United States

**Link:** [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2016/09/19/heres-how-russias-trying-to-sway-opinion-in-serbia-and-the-balkans/?utm\\_term=.1fd70e970331](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2016/09/19/heres-how-russias-trying-to-sway-opinion-in-serbia-and-the-balkans/?utm_term=.1fd70e970331)

### Summary

Russia has been involved in information campaigns in the Balkans for many years, creating an image of Moscow as a great power and powerful ally. The region is of extreme interest for Moscow; first, because of the importance for Russia to control the Bosphorus Straits; and secondly, because many Russians feel strongly that all Slavs should unite across regions (“pan-Slavism”), hence claiming that a special relationship exists between Russia and the Slavic nations of the Balkans. The main tools employed by Moscow are the television network and Internet portal RT as well as the online news and

radio broadcast service Sputnik Srbija. The message they communicate is simple “there’s a special relationship between Russia and the Slavic/Orthodox communities in the Balkans”, whilst the West is culturally different and unable to understand Slavic exceptionalism. Russia is trying to “instil a sense that the two countries have the relationship of older and younger brothers. It’s trying to sell an image of Moscow listening and respecting as equals to the Slavic governments...”. In contrast, the West has not offered a coherent narrative for which the Balkan states are part of the E.U. identity. In Serbia, Russia’s strategy is paying off, as 67.2% of the population would prefer to ally with Russia, versus 50.9% that would like to join the E.U.

**Date:** 20 September 2017

**Title:** Doskozil: “Balkan route is not tight yet”

**Author:** NA

**Source:** Die Welt

**Key words:** Balkans, Austria, immigration, Balkan route

**Link:** <https://www.welt.de/politik/ausland/article168803733/Auf-dem-Balkan-entstehen-neue-Schlepperrouten.html>

### Summary

In an interview to ‘Die Welt’ the Austrian Minister of Defence has touched many subjects, from his political ambitions, to the migrant issue. He states that Austria has received more immigrants in relation to the population than any other EU country, and believes that the government will review this numbers in the future. More importantly, he states that the Balkan route has not been entirely closed. The Minister states, “almost 20,000 new refugees have already come to Austria this year. More than 12,000 asylum applications have been applied for. We are assuming that some 8,000 people who applied for an asylum application in Austria this year have crossed the Balkan route”. This new routes are due to Hungary’s and Macedonia’s increased protection of their borders, which have led refugees from Greece and Serbia to move northwards through the Slovakia route, taking the road via Romania and/or Bulgaria.

**Date:** 28 September 2017

**Title:** Serbia’s media stage blackout over pressure on free press

**Author:** Associated Press with Dusan Stojanovic contribution.

**Source:** NY Times

**Key words:** Balkans, Serbia, media-freedom

**Link:** <https://www.nytimes.com/aponline/2017/09/28/world/europe/ap-eu-serbia-media.html>

### Summary

Dozens of Serbian media outlets have staged a blackout to warn against Aleksander Vucic’s muzzling of the press by intimidation, threats and financial pressure. They have darkened their web pages for one hour with inscriptions citing “This is what it looks like when there is no free press!”, or “STOP media

darkness in Serbia”, after the closure of an independent newspaper (Vranjske) in southern Serbia. This action was however boycotted by mainstream media and the official journalists’ association, which said that the protests was aimed at dividing the press into “ours and theirs”. President Vucic has dismissed the accusations as attempts to discredit his government, which is actively trying to improve its civil rights record as part of reforms needed to join the EU. However Slavisa Lekic, head of Serbia’s independent journalist association, stated that “cases of press intimidation have more than doubled in the past five years” and that the large number of registered media in Serbia (1,800 outlets) “only serve to create a false image of pluralism”.

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