



**Adam Balcer**

# **Direction: Balkans!**

The significance and potential of Poland's cooperation with the Western Balkan states





**Klub  
Jagielloński**

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Ministry  
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Republic of Poland



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# Introduction

Poland's foreign policy in the last 30 years has been focused on the East-West line. This is not surprising – after all, the main goals of Polish diplomacy were either in the West (like joining the EU and NATO, and then gaining the strongest possible position there), or in the East (like freeing oneself from the sphere of influence of Russia, and then “europeanising” the East). These objectives have dominated our foreign policy to such an extent that little room and energy remained for dealing with other areas. Although Poland started regional cooperation within the Visegrad Group at a very early stage, it covered its immediate neighbourhood, while other regional formats were not politically significant.

An important breakthrough was the Three Seas Initiative, which also included the countries of Central Europe that were not previously the subject of particular interest of Polish diplomacy. The initiative announced by President Andrzej Duda and formally proposed by Poland and Croatia is at an early stage of development but is already a significant novum. Starting cooperation among 12 countries of Central Europe changes the map of thinking about Polish diplomacy, “adding weight” to the North-South axis previously dominated by the West-East axis. We consider this change in the Jagiellonian Club Centre for Analysis to be very positive. When we published the “Map of the Three Seas” report in 2015, we emphasized the opportunities but also pointed out the challenges related to the new initiative.

This report is the next step. The study devoted to cooperation with the Western Balkan countries contributes to the development of the North-South axis, complementing the cooperation within Three Seas with the countries in its immediate vicinity. It is no coincidence that we publish this report on the eve of Poland's organisation of the Berlin Process Summit, an annual discussion forum with the participation of many EU Member States and Western Balkan countries. The organisation of the summit is an expression of the growing interest of Polish diplomacy in the southern vector of foreign policy and as such provides a great context to bring the public closer to the specificity of the region.

Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia are countries with which – as you can read from the report – Poland has had numerous ties throughout history, but these countries are currently not perceived as an attractive area for political expansion. Unrightly so. Although they are not economic or demographic powers, they are an important area in which the cohesiveness and effectiveness of the impact of both the European Union and NATO are being tested. The Western Balkans are also the scene of rivalry between the powers, the outcome of which is not indifferent to the Polish *raison d'état*. The presented report aims to familiarize readers with the political specificity of the region, present historical ties and contemporary connections as well as indicate the potential for

cooperation. In the report, we also point out specific recommendations which, as we hope, will help increase Poland's presence and influence in this region.

We want the Western Balkans to not only be a subject of discussion on tourism sites but also the subject of serious consideration for those responsible for foreign policy. After years of complaining about the very narrowed perspective of Polish diplomacy, we want to use the "5 minutes" that the Balkans will have in the media during the summit in Poznań. We would like to use them to familiarize the public with a region that has been poorly visible so far, and which is great "training" for Polish diplomacy in building political presence and thus increasing the importance of Poland in Europe. It's time for the Balkans!

Paweł Musiałek  
Director of the Jagiellonian Club Centre for Analysis

# Acknowledgements

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The report would not have been possible without the help of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs which financed the publication, at the same time being very open to the proposed formula of cooperation. Special thanks go to Ambassadors Roman Kowalski and Wiesław Tarka, who effectively coordinated the cooperation on the part of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and shared valuable practical knowledge gained during their ambassadorships in countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Thanks are also due to Mr Dawid Wieczorek from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for reliable contact in formal matters and availability outside of working hours.

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Director of the Jagiellonian Club Centre for Analysis

# Executive summary

- The Western Balkans<sup>1</sup> are an important region for Poland, as it is a scene of processes important for Polish national interests – EU and NATO enlargement, development of the common security and defence policy, etc. The failure of integration processes with Euro-Atlantic structures and the destabilisation of the region would be a serious blow to the credibility of the EU and NATO on the international arena, which would be detrimental to Poland.
- The possible deepening of instability in the Western Balkans will also have significant consequences in other regions of the European Union's neighbourhood. The bigger the problems in the Western Balkans, the less energy and attention the EU and NATO will focus on the Eastern Partnership, a key area for Poland.
- The Western Balkans are characterised by a significant political involvement on the part of countries important to Poland – the USA, Germany, Russia, China, Turkey and the Visegrad Group countries. This means that the "Great Game" between the main international actors in this region possesses a substantial importance for Polish foreign policy.
- Particularly important for Poland is the involvement of Russia, which treats the region as one of the most important fields of political rivalry with the West. Therefore, Poland is a consistent supporter of NATO and EU enlargement to the Western Balkans and is significantly involved in EU and NATO missions. However, this involvement does not translate into a significant role of Poland in the security policy of the EU and NATO in the Balkan region and the role of Poles in managerial positions in the structures of these organisations in the region.
- Poland's ties with the Western Balkans in terms of development aid, labour migration and academic cooperation (students from the region studying at Polish universities) are limited. Polish direct investments in the Western Balkans are also small. Poland's trade with the region is quite developed, but still below the potential. An important resource is the growing number of Polish tourists in the region, which increases the knowledge of the region by Poles and gives great potential for social acceptance of greater involvement of Poland in the Western Balkans.
- Poland has the potential (size and dynamics of the economy, relatively close geographical location, the status of one of the most important EU and NATO mem-

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<sup>1</sup> According to the EU, the term Western Balkans includes Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Kosovo, North Macedonia and Serbia.

bers, cultural heritage, historical ties) to become an important entity in the Western Balkans. A good basis for this process is the unprecedented increase in the activity of Polish diplomacy in the Western Balkans in recent years. Poland's accession to the Berlin Process and the development of the Three Seas Initiative, which is conducive to Poland's integration with the Balkan region, provide a great opportunity to intensify involvement in the region.

- However, a definite and lasting increase in Poland's involvement in the region requires major changes in Poland's investment and trade policy, development aid, cultural diplomacy (combined with the identity policy), scholarship opportunities and migration policy. These changes must be preceded by the allocation of more financial resources. What is equally important, due to the currently limited influence of Poland in the region, achieving this goal requires close cooperation with the most important Euro-Atlantic players (Germany/EU, USA).

# Characterization of the region

The importance of the Western Balkans stems not from its demographic or economic potential, but above all from its strategic location, its potential for instability, its ethnic and religious structure (unique in Europe), and the involvement of key international actors.

Almost all the countries of the Western Balkans fall into the category of the smallest European economies and, apart from the Eastern Partnership countries, are the poorest countries in Europe. Montenegro, the richest country in the Western Balkans, is significantly poorer than Bulgaria, the poorest EU Member State<sup>2</sup>. The total GDP of the Western Balkan countries, measured in purchasing power parity, amounts to less than USD 275 billion (less than Hungary), while the average per capita income in the region is only about USD 15 thousand. It is worth noting, however, that there are large differences between the countries of the Western Balkans in terms of population and the size of the economy. With regard to population and economic size, Serbia stands out from the rest of the region. It has over 10 times the population and economy of the smallest country Montenegro. On the other hand, the differences in per capita income between the countries of the region are insignificant<sup>3</sup>.

The Western Balkans are inhabited mainly by the three largest nations: Serbs (40% of the population of the region), Albanians (30%) and Bosniaks (more than 10%). Some countries of the region are among the most ethnically mixed countries in Europe – the largest ethnic group is only 45% of the Montenegrin population, slightly more than 50% in Bosnia and Herzegovina and about 60% in North Macedonia. Serbia, Albania and Kosovo are much more homogeneous ethnically (about 85-95%).

The total population of the six Western Balkan countries is just over 18 million people. However, it should be remembered that in recent decades, more than five million people in the Western Balkans have emigrated or fled wars, although many of them often visit the region. More than 45% of Albanians in the Balkans live outside Albania. In fact, we can speak of “2.5 Albanian countries” in the Balkans, since, apart from Albania and Kosovo, Albanians probably make up about 30% of the population of North Macedonia, and the state is bi-national according to its constitution. Also, a significant proportion of Serbs and Bosniaks live in the Western

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<sup>2</sup> Montenegrin GDP measured in purchasing power parity per capita is slightly above 80% of Bulgaria's national income per capita.

<sup>3</sup> The richest country in the Western Balkans is Montenegro (USD 19,000), while the poorest is Kosovo (USD 11,000).

Balkans outside their home countries (more than 10% of Bosniaks, nearly 20% of Serbs). Serbs make up 30% of the population of Bosnia and Herzegovina (with their own Republika Srpska within its territory) and Montenegro, while Bosniaks make up nearly 10% of the population of Montenegro. Interestingly enough, however, Albanians and Bosniaks are statistically over-represented among the region's inhabitants who have emigrated to EU countries. Moreover, the share of these two nations in the ethnic composition of the Western Balkans will increase in the coming decades, as they have a higher birth rate.

The religious structure of the Western Balkans (broad cultural definition based on religious origin) is also unique in Europe. Orthodox Christians make up more than half of the region's population, Muslims about 40% (the vast majority of Albanians, Bosniaks and others)<sup>4</sup>, while believers of Western Christianity (mainly Roman Catholicism) more than 5%. If these statistics include the Western Balkans diaspora living in Europe, the share of Muslims in the population will be slightly higher. It should be remembered that some nations of the Western Balkans have a complex religious structure, with numerous minorities (Albanians, Montenegrins, Roma). Three countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo) are mostly inhabited by Muslims, while in two others they constitute numerous minorities (North Macedonia – about 40%, Montenegro – about 20%). Within a few decades, Muslims will probably become the largest religious community in the region<sup>5</sup>.

The Western Balkan countries, after most of the Eastern Partnership countries, are potentially the most unstable region in Europe. At the same time, the probability of a repetition of the 1990s, i.e. the outbreak of a conventional war or the emergence of large-scale guerrilla warfare, is very limited. On the other hand, the likelihood of riots or armed incidents involving non-state actors and terrorist attacks is significantly higher, especially if the economic situation clearly deteriorates. According to the authors of the *Index of Fragile States*, developed every year on the basis of comprehensive criteria by the American *Fund for Peace* and *Foreign Policy* magazine, in 2019 each of the Western Balkan countries is less stable than the least stable EU members<sup>6</sup>. On the other hand, most of the Western Balkan countries were rated much better than Russia, Turkey and many of the Eastern Partnership countries. The index creators considered Bosnia and Herzegovina to be the most unstable country in the Western Balkans, with a marginally worse score than Ukraine. Kosovo was not included in the survey, but would likely be rated slightly higher than Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The most important challenge for the Western Balkans region is to establish relations between the major nations: Serbs, Albanians and Bosniaks. The problem is

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<sup>4</sup> Muslims in the Balkans (in terms of cultural origin) belong to the most secularised Muslim communities in the world.

<sup>5</sup> Religious identities often intertwine with national identities and are, although on a smaller scale than in the past, manipulated by some nationalist circles.

<sup>6</sup> The exception is Cyprus, which is considered less stable than Montenegro, the most stable country in the Western Balkans.

the living legacy of the wars of the 1990s and previous conflicts (lack of full reconciliation, living historical pretensions) and the regulation of two fundamental issues: the independence of Kosovo not recognised by Serbia, and the internal system of Bosnia and Herzegovina consisting of two autonomous entities: the Republika Srpska inhabited mainly by the Serbs, and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, inhabited by the Bosnian majority and Croatian minority. Bosnian Serbs treat this country as an artificial entity and consider the independence of the Republika Srpska to be the ideal solution. Serbia itself supports the *status quo*, which Bosnian Serbs consider to be a less optimal but acceptable solution. The EU and NATO assume that progress in the Euro-Atlantic integration of Bosnia and Herzegovina requires the reduction of the very broad competences of the Republika Srpska (the right of veto on all relevant issues). As a result, the support of many Bosnian Serbs for European integration is conditional, as most of them are strongly opposed to restricting the autonomy of the Republika Srpska.

The potential for instability in the Western Balkans also relates to “soft” security and is linked to strong organised crime, although it is weaker than a dozen or so years ago. Criminal organisations from the Western Balkans are also active in the EU and are linked to the main mafia structures. The region also has important intercontinental drug trafficking routes and routes for refugees and illegal immigrants, who can be joined by people from the Western Balkans. The refugee crisis in 2015-2016 showed this clearly.

Another weakness of the Western Balkans is that, after the Eastern Partnership, it is the least democratic region in Europe. According to Freedom House, all the countries of the Western Balkans are currently only partially free. According to Freedom House, Albania is relatively the freest country in the Western Balkans, although it should be added that it has also recently been the scene of violent and massive anti-government demonstrations by the opposition. Further down the line are Montenegro and Serbia, the only two Western Balkan countries that were considered free countries (within the meaning of Freedom House; Montenegro until 2015, Serbia until 2018). The regression of democracy in these two countries is particularly worrying because it has occurred despite the fact that these countries are the most advanced in the process of negotiating accession with the EU. The situation of North Macedonia and Kosovo, which have improved their ratings, is slightly more optimistic. The least free country in the region according to Freedom House is Bosnia and Herzegovina (especially the Republika Srpska)<sup>7</sup>. It is worth noting that in the opinion of Freedom House, in recent years several countries of the Western Balkans have experienced a significant deterioration in media freedom (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro).

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<sup>7</sup> Freedom House awards points on a scale of 1-7 (the fewer points the more democratic the country is): 1-2.5 free, 3-5 partially free, 5.5-7 not free). The scores of the Western Balkan countries are: Albania 3, Serbia 3, Montenegro 3, North Macedonia 3.5, Kosovo 3.5, Bosnia and Herzegovina 4.

Another very serious problem is the high level of corruption in the Western Balkans. It is slightly higher only in most of the Eastern Partnership countries and Russia. Comparing the Western Balkans with EU countries, according to the Transparency International (Corruption Perception Index), the level of corruption in Montenegro is the same as in Greece and slightly lower than in Bulgaria. The other Western Balkan countries are perceived as slightly more corrupt than Bulgaria<sup>8</sup>. The Transparency International ranking shows that the perception of corruption in the Western Balkans countries (society, domestic and foreign business) has remained at a similar level for dozen or so years, with only slight fluctuations. Compared to 2012, the perceived level of corruption increased in Bosnia and Herzegovina and North Macedonia, it remained unchanged in Serbia and slightly decreased in Albania, Kosovo and Montenegro.

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<sup>8</sup> Overall, the performance of the Balkan countries in the Corruption Perception Index does not vary significantly (on a scale of 0-100, more points mean less corruption): Greece 45, Montenegro 45, Bulgaria 42, Serbia 39, Bosnia and Herzegovina 38, Kosovo 37 and Albania 36.

# Integration of the Western Balkan countries with the EU and NATO

The process of integration with the EU and NATO, which act as the main stabilising anchors for the Western Balkans, is of key significance for the stabilisation and transformation of the region. The region is *de facto* very strongly integrated with the EU in social and economic terms (migrants, refugees, financial remittances, investments, trade, development aid, students). The Western Balkans are an enclave within the European Union and NATO. As a result, they constitute the shortest land bridge between the centre of the European Union and NATO in Europe (Germany, northern Italy) and its south-eastern part (Greece, Bulgaria) and Turkey. It is worth remembering that it was in the context of the conflict in the Western Balkans that the *Common Security and Defence Policy* (CSDP) was born, and the region became a very important arena for its implementation (missions), including as part of unprecedented cooperation with NATO, the USA and Turkey. From NATO's perspective, the Western Balkans also play an important role as a place where stabilisation missions were sent for the first time.

However, the problems in the region described in the previous chapter make the enlargement of the EU and NATO to include the Western Balkans a much more serious challenge than the integration of Central European countries. The rule of law is fundamental to the EU's enlargement agenda: the integration progress of the Western Balkan countries depends to a large extent on the level of advancement of the rule of law in these countries. On the other hand, the enlargement process to the Western Balkans is significantly easier than in the case of the Eastern Partnership countries. The population of Ukraine (even without the occupied territories) is over twice as large as that of the Western Balkans. Moreover, Ukraine is on average much poorer than Kosovo, which is the poorest country in the Western Balkans. More importantly, however, in the Eastern Partnership countries, the EU faces a much more difficult geopolitical context due to the very strong position of Russia, which is ready to use force to maintain its influence.

The region is highly diverse in terms of its relations with NATO. Albania became a member of the North Atlantic Treaty in 2009 and Montenegro in 2016. In addition, most probably North Macedonia will become a member of NATO in 2019 or 2020. Accession of the remaining three states to NATO (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Serbia) is highly unlikely in the medium term due to the lack of support from the elites (Serbia and the Republika Srpska in Bosnia and Herzegovina holding the

right of veto with respect to foreign policy) and the lack of full recognition of Kosovo by NATO members (Greece, Spain, Romania, Slovakia). It is worth noting that the case of Serbia and the Republika Srpska is unique in Central and Eastern Europe since until now, all the countries in this region have been interested in joining NATO and the EU at the same time.

As in the case of NATO accession, the countries of the Western Balkans are also characterised by different levels of advancement in the integration process with EU structures. Serbia and Montenegro are conducting accession negotiations (Podgorica started earlier and is more advanced), while Albania and North Macedonia are candidate countries that should soon start accession talks. Due to serious internal problems, Bosnia and Herzegovina did not apply for EU candidate status until 2016 and is waiting on the decision of Brussels. Kosovo, on the other hand, which is still not recognised by five EU Member States (Cyprus, Greece, Spain, Romania, Slovakia), has not applied for membership to date.

It should be added, however, that in every Western Balkan country, the majority of the population is in favour of EU membership. Only in Serbia, in some surveys, a large part of the population is opposed to membership. Moreover, the majority of the population of the Republika Srpska in opinion polls rejects accession, if it meant restricting its right of veto on internal and external affairs, as required for accession to the EU. By comparison, the vast majority of Albanians and Bosniaks are in favour of integration with the EU.

The enlargement policy pursued by NATO and, above all, the EU towards the Western Balkans focuses on stabilisation and emphasises inter-ethnic reconciliation and the coexistence of different nations and religions. Moreover, due to the high level of corruption, the proposal to build a state based on the rule of law also plays a key role in the negotiation process between the Western Balkans and the EU. It should be remembered that enlargement to include the Western Balkans is of major importance not only for the countries of the region but also for the EU. As a result of the possible enlargement of the EU to the Western Balkans, for the first time the EU would be joined by countries which are mostly or very largely inhabited by Muslims (well represented or over-represented in the ruling elites of the religiously mixed countries)<sup>9</sup>. It will, therefore, be inevitable to reflect on the place of Islam and the Ottoman heritage in the history and culture of Europe. It is worth recalling that today's right-wing extremist forces are already citing a religious argument in the discussion on the enlargement of the EU to include the Western Balkans. It is also worth remembering that within the framework of enlargement, three countries, mostly Orthodox (North Macedonia, Serbia, Montenegro) and ones with numerous Orthodox minorities (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Albania), would join the EU, which means a substantial increase in the number of Orthodox countries in the EU

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9 In North Macedonia, 40% of ministers in the government are Muslims (slightly more than their share of the population). The head of the parliament is also a member of this religion. In the Montenegrin government, Muslims make up 35% of ministers, almost twice as much as their share of the country's population. For comparison, in Bulgaria Muslims make up nearly 15% of the population, but there is not a single Muslim in the Bulgarian government.

(today only four countries). As a result, a broader reflection will also be needed on the Byzantine heritage as part of Europe's identity.

It should be stressed that the process of EU enlargement to include the Western Balkans enjoys the support of all EU countries, unlike Turkey's potential membership in the Community. However, according to Eurobarometer, the general attitude towards enlargement itself is not supported by the majority of EU citizens. According to the latest autumn 2018 survey, support for enlargement among EU citizens was nearly 45% in the EU, while 45% were against. Overall, support for enlargement is much smaller among the countries of northern and western Europe. There is a particularly strong opposition (over 60%) to enlargement in most important EU countries (Germany, France). These social moods mean that France and Germany belong to countries that slow down the enlargement process, opposing on several occasions the recognition of the European Commission's recommendations on the Western Balkan countries concerning decisions related to their integration (e.g. the commencement of negotiations with Albania). The Netherlands also has a similar position. These Member States justify their position by the need to prepare the Western Balkan countries for a longer period of time in order to meet the membership criteria.

A specific feature of the EU's involvement in the Balkan direction, as compared to the enlargement to Central Europe, is the lack of one undeniable EU player dominating the region, which was Germany in the case of the 2004 accession. While in the Western Balkans Germany and, to a lesser extent, Italy are the most influential players among the large EU Member States, many of the smaller Member States neighbouring the region also play a major role in Balkan policy. These include Austria, Croatia, Greece, Romania, Slovenia and Hungary. These countries, although to varying degrees, are important economic partners of the Western Balkan countries, and some of them are also important directions of economic migration and donors of development aid (mainly Austria). These neighbouring countries are the main advocates of EU membership for the Western Balkans. It is noteworthy that they also have their own policy in the Balkan direction, promoting their agenda in the region and sometimes colliding with mainstream Brussels policies. The most glaring manifestation of this tendency was Greece's blocking the commencement of accession negotiations with North Macedonia until 2019, due to the dispute over the name of the country. In fact, Athens has conducted such a policy for many years, violating the international agreement with Skopje, despite repeated recommendations by the European Commission, which were accepted by the vast majority of Member States.

# Competition between the powers in the Western Balkans

In addition to the leading role played by NATO and the EU in the Western Balkans, the region is also an area of rivalry between the broadly understood West and Russia, China and, increasingly, Turkey, which has increasingly worse relations with key Western<sup>10</sup> countries. This rivalry includes not only the economic and geopolitical dimension but also the dimension of political systems (authoritarianism at least accepted by Russia, China and Turkey vs. democracy promoted by the West). It is very likely that the influence of the three mentioned countries could significantly increase if the region is destabilised or if the Euro-Atlantic integration process is clearly slowed down or halted.

The involvement of non-European players makes the region also relatively important for the USA. The aforementioned significant potential for destabilisation of the region means that Washington remains the most important actor in terms of security. The most significant manifestation of this phenomenon is the American base in Kosovo and the fact that American soldiers are the largest contingent in the KFOR mission. The US, together with the most important EU members (Germany, France, Great Britain and Italy) as well as Russia and Turkey, is a member of the Peace Implementation Council in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which provides a sort of international protectorate over the country.

A special challenge for the West is the role of Russia, which in this group of non-European players has the greatest influence in the Western Balkans. Outside the former Soviet Union, the Kremlin nowhere has such *soft power* as in the Balkans. Moscow is trying to destabilise the region, for example by trying to overthrow the Greek-Macedonian agreement on Macedonia's name. The reason for such actions is simple: on the one hand, the Russians oppose NATO enlargement, and on the other hand, they do not want to allow a final solution of regional problems, which could result in the loss of the possibility to act as an external arbitrator (in line with the idea of the so-called "frozen conflict"). The failure of Kremlin's actions aimed at stopping Montenegro's accession to NATO and torpedoing the Greek-Macedonian agreement, and indirectly blocking the way for North Macedonia to the North Atlantic Treaty, shows a real limitation of Russia's influence in the region.

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<sup>10</sup> The West is also challenged by the activity of various Persian Gulf public and private actors (but with less influence than Turkey) among Balkan Muslims, who often promote a fundamentalist, non-Balkan variation of Islam.

Another challenge for the Kremlin is the definitely negative attitude towards Russia on the part of Albanians and Bosniaks, and to a lesser extent on the part of ethnic Macedonians and Montenegrins. Despite this, Russia remains an important player in the Western Balkans, referring to the ethnic-religious community (Orthodox Slavs). Moscow's strength in the Western Balkans is based primarily on the Serbs' very strong sympathy for the Russians, often combined with anti-Americanism, as well as the high level of support from the Serbian society and a large part of the elite for the alliance with Russia and Russian foreign policy (particularly high support is observed in the Republika Srpska). Moreover, Serbia has the most developed military cooperation with Russia among the European countries located outside the former USSR (joint military manoeuvres, more frequent than with NATO under the Partnership for Peace; repair and purchase of Russian equipment; a Russian humanitarian centre on its own territory – potential military base; intelligence cooperation). From Kremlin's perspective, Serbia and the Republika Srpska have an advantage in their opposition to joining NATO. It should be remembered, however, that Russia is an important economic partner of the Republika Srpska, Montenegro and Serbia – its significance is particularly important for the energy sector (infrastructure, investments, the supply of raw materials).

Turkey, on the other hand, has quite significant economic influences in the region (investment, trade, development aid, financial transfers from immigrants), especially in Kosovo, Albania and regions inhabited by Bosniaks, and to a lesser extent in Macedonia. It is worth noting that Turkey perceives the Western Balkans primarily through the prism of its heritage originating from the period of the rule of the Ottoman Empire over the region, to which, by the way, the current ruling elite in Ankara refers to an unprecedented scale in history. The soft influence of Turkey affects mainly Muslim Bosniaks and, to a much lesser extent, Albanians. Both these ethnic groups used to be the elites of the Empire in the past. What is more, Turkey also enjoys the sympathy of Orthodox Montenegrins and ethnic Macedonians and, at the very least, the neutrality of Serbs in Serbia itself. Only Bosnian Serbs are clearly opposed to it. However, Turkey's position is currently weakened by economic problems, authoritarianism and acute internal political conflict. The latter factor, in particular, has proven to be a blow to its soft power in the Western Balkans, which was built over the years by groups that are now fiercely fought by the authorities in Ankara.

Finally, China plays an important role in the Western Balkans, particularly in economic terms (Chinese exports and infrastructure investments), perceiving the region as an important transit area under the Belt and Road Initiative, linking China with Europe by sea (Greek ports as a gateway to Europe) and by land routes. The most important Chinese initiative for the region is the 16+1 format, covering Central and Eastern Europe (EU members and neighbouring countries), including all the countries of the Western Balkans except Kosovo, whose independence is not recognised by Beijing.

# Historical and cultural links between Poland and the Western Balkans

The Western Balkans culturally stand out in Europe and, as a result, the enlargement of the EU to this region has an important identity dimension. Poland, on the other hand, is one of the EU Member States which, although not bordering the Western Balkans, has particularly strong historical and cultural ties with them.

## Historical and cultural links between Poland and the Western Balkans:

### Slavic

The Slavs make up the vast majority of the population of the Western Balkans. The Poles had a significant contribution to the development of proto-Yugoslavian (16th century) and Yugoslavian (19th century) ideas, referring to the vision of the Slavic community. The proto-Yugoslavian idea appeared at the beginning of the 16th century through the influence of the concept of the Slavdom as a symbol of might (created by Archbishop Jan Łaski) on Croats visiting Poland. In the 19th century, the Yugoslavian idea developed under the influence of the so-called Lambert Hotel and Prince Adam Czartoryski, promoting the concept of the Balkan federation modelled on the state tradition of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. The Serbian national programme "Nachertaniye" by Ilija Garašanin, Prime Minister of Serbia, was inspired by this concept. Interestingly, the melody of Dąbrowski's Mazurka became the basis for the song "Hey! Slavs", which in the years 1945-2006 was the anthem of Yugoslavia and later Serbia and Montenegro.

### Roman Catholic

A large Roman Catholic minority has lived in the Western Balkans for centuries. Its relations with Poland concerned mainly the pastoral ministry of the Polish clergy in the Western Balkans and the education of the representatives of the Catholic community from the region in seminars in Poland. Polish clergyman Franciszek Malczyński was the bishop of Lezhë in Albania for 38 years (1870-1908). Anton Xanoni and Ndre Mjeda, Jesuits and outstanding creators of Albanian culture, graduated from the seminar in Krakow in this period.

## Orthodox

A significant part of the inhabitants of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and its remains were Orthodox basically until 1945. As a result, Orthodox clergymen (Serbian, Macedonian and Albanian), including bishops, regularly visited Polish and Lithuanian lands, becoming involved in the life of the local Orthodox community. At the beginning of the 16th century, the families of Wiśniowiecki, Czartoryski, Gliński, Sanguszko and Zbarski established ties with the dynasties of Serbian despots. In this way the hussars, a then light cavalry, reached Poland from Serbia. Lviv has maintained intense trade relations with the Western Balkans, which is reflected in the existence of Serbian Street in the old town. Jerzy Kulczycki, a Polish "spy" during the battle of Vienna from the vicinity of Lviv and then the founder of one of the first cafes in Europe, made a fortune and learnt Turkish working for many years as a merchant in the Ottoman Belgrade. One of the most interesting symbols of Poland's Orthodox relations with the Western Balkans is the monastery in Supraśl, a very important cultural centre of the entire Orthodox world, particularly strongly connected with the Serbian Orthodox Church and Archbishopric in the Macedonian Ohrid.

## Ottoman/Muslim

Muslims from the Western Balkans were definitely over-represented in the Ottoman army and elites (especially in Istanbul and the areas bordering Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth). As a result, they were either opponents of Poles during wars or partners in times of peace or alliances. Roxelana, called Hürrem, the most powerful empress in the history of the Ottoman Empire, a Ukrainian from Poland, supporting Polish-Ottoman cooperation, promoted her to-be son-in-law Rüstem Pasha, a Croat from Bosnia, as one of the most eminent great viziers. Another great vizier associated with Roxelana, Serbian Mehmed Pasha Sokolović, a statesman equally prominent as Rüstem, conducted very active lobbying during the first free elections in Poland in favour of anti-Habsburg candidates. Interestingly, his Jewish court physician was responsible for the health of King Sigismund August for many years. Later, in the 19th and 20th centuries, Poles, mostly after conversion to Islam, held key positions in the Ottoman administration and army in the Western Balkans. An example is Konstanty Borzecki vel Celaleddin Pasha, a key ideologist of Turkish nationalism, who was probably the son-in-law of Marshal Omer Pasha Latas, a Serbian by origin, one of the most eminent commanders in the history of the Ottoman Empire. Celaleddin Pasha was killed in the fight against the Montenegrins and is buried in northern Albania. For many years, General Antoni Iliński vel. Iskender Pasha also served under Marshal Latas; he was a legendary cavalryman, a participant of the November Uprising, an agent of the Lambert Hotel and an adjutant of General Józef Bem as the Commander-in-Chief of the Hungarian Uprising.

## **Vlach/Carpathian**

The Polish Carpathians were settled in the Middle Ages by Vlachs (called Wallachians in Poland), a shepherding Roman people from the Balkans, who lived there in symbiosis with Albanians. The Vlachs also colonized many mountainous regions of the Western Balkans. As a result, one can see numerous similarities between Polish highlanders and shepherds from the Western Balkans (law, customs, costumes, beliefs, vocabulary, material culture, etc.). For example, according to Kazimierz Dobrowolski, an eminent Polish ethnologist, the names Bieszczady and Beskidy are of Albanian origin.

## **Hungarian/Jagiellonian**

Poland's ties with the Western Balkans stem from the fact that for many decades the Polish and Hungarian thrones were occupied by the same rulers or persons belonging to the same dynasty (e.g. the Jagiellonians), while Hungary ruled over a large part of the Western Balkans at certain times. Queen Jadwiga, the wife of Władysław Jagiełło, was the daughter of Elizabeth of Bosnia. In the 1444 Battle of Varna, Władysław III, the king of Poland and Hungary died – the only Polish king to fall on a battlefield. His campaigns against the Turks in the Western Balkans played a key role in Skanderbeg's rebellion, the most important national hero of the Albanian people. Several years earlier, in Serbia, Zawisza Czarny, a legendary Polish knight, died in a fight against the Turks. Bosnian historiography has a popular theory that the ethnonym Bosniak obtained this particular spelling form under the influence of contacts with Poles at that time.

## **Habsburg/Austrian-Hungarian**

Galicia was with Vojvodina (today's autonomous province of Serbia) within the borders of a single Habsburg state from 1772, with the Bay of Kotor in Montenegro from 1815, and with Bosnia from 1878 (in addition, the Austro-Hungarian Empire occupied Sandžak in 1878-1908, a region now divided between Serbia, Montenegro and Kosovo). Poles were clearly over-represented in the Austro-Hungarian elites, for whom the Western Balkans was a key area of interest. An example is Minister Leon Biliński, the administrator of Bosnia between 1912 and 1915, a key period in its history (the assassination in Sarajevo, the outbreak of World War I). After 1878, a Polish community of up to 20 thousand people was established in Bosnia as a result of a settlement. The vast majority of Bosnian Poles were repatriated to Poland after 1945. Under Austro-Hungarian rule, Poles in Bosnia served as, among others, the deputy mayor of Sarajevo, the first fire chief of the capital city (Pole-Muslim), the director of the main hospital in Sarajevo and the chief sanitary inspector of the entire province. The latter, Justyn Karliński, promoted vaccination in Bosnia and took part in pilgrimages with the Bosniaks to Mecca, where he also contained an epidemic of cholera. As a result, he was appointed an Ottoman sultan's personal physician.

## Jewish

Jewish communities in the Western Balkans and Poland have maintained intensive contacts for centuries. For example, one of the ancestors of Simon Ashkenazi, the founder of the Lviv school of history and ambassador of the Second Republic of Poland to the League of Nations, was a rabbi of Sarajevo and one of the most eminent seventeenth and eighteenth-century Jewish theologians. Also connected with the Western Balkans was Sabbatai Zevi, a Sephardic Jew, married to a Jewish woman from Podole, who converted to Islam with his followers in the second half of the 17th century. Zevi became an important source of inspiration both for Hasidism, Jewish mysticism was created a few decades later in the south-eastern part of Poland, and for the so-called Frankists. The latter were the followers of Jacob Frank fascinated by the teachings of Sabbati Zevi. The Frankists initially converted to Islam and then to Roman Catholicism. Their descendants are well represented in the Polish elites and include Tadeusz Boy-Żeleński, Kazimierz Przerwa-Tetmajer and Jan Nowak-Jeziorański.

## modernity

In the 20th century, Poles played an important role as promoters of modernity in science and art in the Western Balkans. The father of Albanian geology is Stanisław Zuber (1883-1947), who lived in Albania for 20 years. After the earthquake in Skopje in 1963, which destroyed 75% of the city's buildings, Polish architects (Alfred Ciborowski, Stanisław Jankowski and the "Tigers" group) played a key role in the reconstruction of the city as a modern urban agglomeration.

All the differences aside, it is worth noting the similarities between the historical experiences of the Western Balkans and Poland, which today may provide a platform for cooperation in the sphere of culture and science between Poland and the countries of the region. According to the authors of the book "Europe and Islam. 15 centuries of history", a division was formed in Europe between Western Europe, torn apart by religious wars between small and medium-sized protocapitalist states, with a bourgeoisie growing in strength, and large states located in Eastern Europe (the Ottoman Empire and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth). The latter were characterised for a long time by greater religious tolerance, and as a result the creation of an ethnic and religious mosaic, correlated with a socio-economic structure and a similar economic model (high importance of agriculture, lower level of urbanization). The Western Balkans were especially similar to Poland because of the existence of serfdom, strong nobility, and an equivalent of Cossacks (free people who earned their living from military service). In addition, also in the more recent history of the 19th and 20th centuries, Poland and the Western Balkans have jointly experienced modernisation, setting Western Europe as an example, combined with ambivalence towards the West. In addition, we have similar experiences of func-

tioning within multiethnic empires, the division of nations between them, armed uprisings and conspiracies (the role of guerrillas and paramilitary formations). After the Second World War, the common experience of communism and post-communism should also be taken into account.

However, the awareness of historical and cultural links and similar experiences is limited both in Poland and among our Balkan partners. The problem on the Polish side is definitely the lack of its own historical and cultural narrative addressed to the countries of the region, which would take into account the polyphony of different traditions in Poland's relations with the Western Balkans. It is worth noting, however, that the weakness of mutual knowledge of contemporary cultures (literature, music, art) in Polish societies and countries of the region is asymmetrical – the number of translations of contemporary literary works of the Western Balkans into Polish is much smaller than the number of translations of Polish literature into the languages used in the region. On the other hand, in Polish cinemas and television channels, films from the Western Balkans after 1991 were shown more often than films of Polish production in the Balkans. This disproportion is particularly large in the case of music, the best example of which is the popularity of Goran Bregović and Yugoslavian rock (Yugoton) in Poland.

## Polish policy towards the Western Balkans

Polish strategic national interests in the Western Balkans are on the agenda of the EU and NATO, including the most important members of these organisations (Germany, the United States). For many years, Poland has considered the stabilisation of the Western Balkans and their integration with NATO and the EU to be strategic goals. Polish public opinion regarding enlargement also enjoys high support. In the autumn 2018 Eurobarometer survey, two-thirds of Poles supported EU enlargement (now almost entirely identical to the integration of the Western Balkans), while less than 25% were against. For comparison, the EU average was 43% for and 45% against.

From Poland's perspective, the stability of the region is perceived as a guarantee of security for Europe, especially for Central Europe, which borders the Western Balkans. Warsaw considers the region's integration with Euro-Atlantic structures to be the most important instrument for its stabilisation. The high involvement of the EU and NATO (missions, diplomacy, etc.) in the region means that Poland, aspiring to play an important role in both organisations, strives to be an important actor in their structures operating in the Western Balkans. Polish interest in this region is also a result of the already mentioned high activity of Russia, which from Warsaw's perspective is the greatest threat to its security.

In the 1990s, the wars in the former Yugoslavia and the collapse of state structures in Albania resulted in Poland, which strived to join NATO and EU and gain a strong position on the international arena, became significantly involved in UN, OSCE, NATO and EU missions aimed at stabilising the region.

### **Missions in the Western Balkans with the participation of Polish policemen and soldiers:**

#### **UN**

- UNPROFOR – Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro (1992-1995)
- UNMIBH in Bosnia and Herzegovina (1995-2002)
- UNPREDEP in Macedonia (1995-1999)
- UNMIK in Kosovo (since 1999, ongoing without the participation of Poles)

## NATO

- IFOR / SFOR (Stabilisation Force) in Bosnia and Herzegovina (1996-2004)
- AFOR (NATO's Albania Force) in Albania (1999)
- Essential Harvest / Amber Fox / Allied Harmony in Macedonia (2001-2003)
- KFOR in Kosovo (since 1999)

## EU

- EUFOR Concordia in Macedonia (2003)
- EUPM in Bosnia and Herzegovina (2003-2012)
- EUPOL Proxima in Macedonia (2004-2005)
- EUFOR Althea in Bosnia and Herzegovina (since 2004)
- EULEX in Kosovo (since 2008)

## OSCE

- election missions in Bosnia and Herzegovina
- election missions in Kosovo

During the most intensive period of 1991-2001, more than 10 thousand Polish soldiers served in missions in the Western Balkans. They also held key positions in international structures in the Western Balkans. Former Prime Minister Tadeusz Mazowiecki served as the UN Special Envoy in Bosnia and Herzegovina from 1992 to 1995. Henryk Sokalski was Head of Mission of UNPREDEP in Macedonia from 1995 to 1998. In 2000-2005, Marek Nowicki held the position of the International Ombudsman in Kosovo.

Currently, Polish policemen and soldiers are taking part in three missions in the Western Balkans: KFOR and EULEX in Kosovo and EUFOR Althea in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Poland has the seventh largest contingent in KFOR – Poles make up 6% of the NATO mission in Kosovo. The Polish contingent is also one of the largest in the EU military mission EUFOR Althea – it also accounts for around 6% of the forces. The EU mission in Kosovo (EULEX) currently has 500 members, 340 of whom are police officers. As many as 95 of them come from Poland, forming the largest national police contingent (nearly 30%). On the other hand, Poles do not currently hold key positions in the structures of EU and NATO missions (commanders, chiefs and deputies, high representatives) as well as in diplomatic representations of both organisations in the region. The highest position currently held by a Pole is the head of the operational pillar of EULEX.

The general consensus within the EU on enlargement to the Western Balkans does not prevent certain differences between Member States on the pace of the integra-

tion process. Poland is a strong advocate of the rapid enlargement of NATO and the EU to the Western Balkans. According to Poland, the acceleration of the accession process may lead to a comprehensive transformation of the Western Balkan countries. In this context, it should be stressed that Poland is an active member of the so-called "Friends of Enlargement" group (together with Spain, Great Britain, Central European countries and Sweden). In this respect, Poland's position differs from that of some Western European countries (Germany, France, the Netherlands), which slow down the pace of the enlargement process due to the conviction that a principled approach to the implementation of the so-called Copenhagen criteria is necessary. It is worth mentioning that these arguments are not based on substantive reasoning (the countries mentioned above reject the European Commission's recommendation on enlargement despite the fact that they were supported by a large majority in the Council), but are accompanied by political calculations (strong opposition of the societies of these countries to enlargement). At this point, it is worth noting that a similar position to Poland on the enlargement of the EU to the Western Balkans is presented primarily by the member states of Central and Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean basin.

The specificity of Poland's position on the Western Balkans is also related to Warsaw's attitude towards the independence of Kosovo. Although Poland recognised it, like the vast majority of NATO and EU members (23 out of 28 EU members, 25 out of 29 NATO members), at the same time it was the only one of these countries that did not establish diplomatic relations with Pristina. As a result, Kosovo is the only country in Europe with which Poland does not have such relations. Paradoxically, some EU countries that have not recognised Kosovo's independence (Greece, Slovakia, Romania) have their representations in Pristina, resulting in much more intensive bilateral relations with the Kosovo authorities than Poland has. Poland's position on Kosovo stems mainly from the cautious reaction of a large part of the Polish political elite to the 2008 declaration of independence of the country. This reaction was due to a number of reasons, including the belief that this act could be treated by Russia as a pretext for playing the separatist card against the countries of the former Soviet Union<sup>11</sup>. On the other hand, Poland's distanced attitude towards Kosovo's independence contradicts Warsaw's declared support for US foreign policy in Europe, which is the most important protector of Kosovo's independence and enjoys a very high level of Albanian sympathy.

The accession of the Western Balkan countries to the EU due to their limited economic and demographic potential will not, from the Polish perspective, mean a fundamental change in the balance of power in the EU. Nevertheless, there will be some adjustment through a significant increase in the number of members (an increase of over 20%), an increase in the number of countries interested in larger transfers from the EU budget and a temporary extension of the group of EU members outside the euro area. However, the new members from the Western Balkans

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<sup>11</sup> The frequent juxtaposition of Kosovo and Abkhazia in Poland is unfounded. Kosovo has been recognised by 116 states, while Abkhazia is now recognised by five states.

will rather not be significant competitors of Poland in the allocation of the EU budget. This is due both to the relatively small size of their economies and the relatively distant membership prospects, when Poland, for various reasons, will no longer be able to benefit from such a large amount of EU support.

The issue of enlargement to include the Western Balkans, on the other hand, is important for Poland in the regional dimension, both from the perspective of the Visegrad Group (V4) and the Three Seas project established in 2016 on the initiative of Poland and formally proposed by Poland and Croatia, bringing together 12 EU Member States located between the Adriatic Sea, the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea. The Western Balkans have been one of the most important topics on the agenda of the Visegrad Group for years. Since 2009, V4 Foreign Ministers have organised regular summits with Western Balkan partners, attended by representatives of European institutions and EU Member States. On the initiative of the Polish Presidency in 2016-2017, a decision was made to establish a Visegrad Network of Experts on Rule of Law and Fundamental Rights for the Western Balkans as part of such a meeting. Its aim is to support the transformation processes in the region and help in the accession negotiations with the EU. In addition, since 2013 the International Visegrad Fund has been awarding grants to NGOs from the Western Balkans, and since 2014 it has been sponsoring study visits to V4 countries for officials from this region (mobility program for civil servants). However, the impact of the projects is limited due to the limited resources available for cooperation with the Western Balkans. This is best illustrated by the number of officials from the region who took part in this programme in 2014-2018. There were only a little over 30 of them, from only two countries. Finally, it is worth mentioning that in 2017, on the initiative of V4, the Balkan countries established the Western Balkans Fund, which is modelled on the International Visegrad Fund.

The Western Balkans also play a key role in the Three Seas area, mainly due to the fact that half of the members (Bulgaria, Romania, Austria, Croatia, Hungary, Slovenia) are in the neighbourhood of the Western Balkans. These countries are often influential actors in the region. It is worth recalling that at the Three Seas Summit in Bucharest in September 2018, the Business Forum was inaugurated, to which private companies and public institutions from various countries, including the Western Balkans, were invited. Due to their geographic location, it may be assumed that the EU enlargement to this region will most probably mean joining the Three Seas Initiative by the Balkan states. However, the Three Seas Initiative can already be beneficial for the Western Balkans today, as it promotes multilateral cooperation between Central Europe and the region and coordination of support for the Balkan countries by EU Member States, especially those supporting enlargement. It should be added that in the final declaration of the recent Three Seas Summit held in Slovenia at the beginning of June 2019, the participants directly confirmed their openness to a partnership with the Western Balkans. Representatives of companies from countries of the Western Balkans also took part in the second Three Seas Business Forum.

In the context of Poland's role as the main promoter of the Three Seas Initiative, the fact that our most active partner in this formula is Croatia is of key importance. For obvious reasons, it has exceptionally strong multidimensional relations with the Western Balkans. Croatia is the only country bordering with three countries of the Western Balkans (Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina). Moreover, around 15% of Croats living in the Balkans live outside their home country in the neighbouring countries, particularly in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where they make up 15% of the population and have the status of a constitutional nation. On the other hand, many Bosnian Croats who settled in Croatia during and after the civil war (1992-1995) constitute a significant part of the country's population. Numerous representatives of other Western Balkan nations, mostly Bosniaks (some of them with Croatian citizenship) also live and work (mostly seasonally) in Croatia. Croatia is also a relatively important economic partner for most countries in the region, especially the already mentioned Bosnia and Herzegovina. It is important to be aware, however, that Croatia's high level of involvement in the region can be a burden due to its historical conflicts with the Serbs and, to a lesser extent, with the Bosniaks.

A specific challenge for Polish policy towards the Western Balkans may be the activity of other Central European partners in this direction, especially that sometimes the policy of individual EU members in the Western Balkans is inconsistent with the EU policy towards the region. The most spectacular example was Hungary's help in the escape to Budapest of the former Macedonian Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski, accused of numerous serious crimes<sup>12</sup>. Furthermore, through the actions of Prime Minister Viktor Orbán himself and the media of Macedonia controlled by Hungarian media owners, Hungary carried out a propaganda campaign during the pre-referendum period against the conclusion of the Greek-Macedonian agreement supported by the EU and NATO. Finally, Budapest's uncritical support for the decisively pro-Russian and anti-American elites of the Republika Srpska should raise considerable doubts.

Apart from V4 and the Three Seas, Poland is also developing cooperation with the Western Balkans within the framework of other common regional formats, such as the Central European Initiative and the 16+1 summits (15 countries from Central and Eastern Europe and China). All of the Western Balkan countries, with the exception of Kosovo, participate in both of them. Moreover, since 2016, on Warsaw's initiative, annual summits of presidents of parliaments of Central and Eastern European countries have been held in Poland, attended by representatives of parliamentary authorities of the Western Balkans, again with the exception of Kosovo<sup>13</sup>. On the other hand, it should be noted that none of the three previous summits were attended by representatives of all the countries of the region<sup>14</sup>. Moreover, Serbia

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<sup>12</sup> He was taken secretly to Hungary in the trunk of the Hungarian embassy's limousine.

<sup>13</sup> On the other hand, in 2011 the President of Kosovo took part in a summit of Central European countries in Warsaw with the President of the USA. Due to inviting Kosovo, the President of Serbia did not attend the summit.

<sup>14</sup> In 2016, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Macedonia and Serbia attended the summit; in 2017, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia; and in 2018, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia and Serbia.

participates in the format of cooperation “Carpathian Europe” established in 1999 on the basis of a Polish initiative in which Central European countries located along the Carpathian Mountains range take part. Joint declarations are accepted at meetings in these formats, but they do not have a significant practical impact on Poland’s cooperation with the region.

A breakthrough in the scale of cooperation between Poland and the Western Balkans was certainly the fact that Warsaw joined the Berlin Process, which was established in 2014 on the initiative of Germany. Poland was invited to this format by Berlin in 2018 (London summit). The Berlin Process supports regional cooperation in the Western Balkans and complements the EU’s enlargement policy. The Process involves the countries of the Western Balkans, the European Commission and 10 EU Member States – Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, France, Greece, Germany, Poland, Slovenia, the United Kingdom and Italy. The Process is based on annual summits, where decisions are made on the EU’s cooperation with the Western Balkans with the participation of the Process members, and the host country acts as the rotating chairperson. Poland became the President of the Process in 2019, and the practical dimension of our Presidency will be the organisation of a summit in Poznań on 5 July, during which Warsaw intends to present its own experience of transformation, accession negotiations and absorption of EU funds. The four priorities of the Polish Presidency of the Berlin Process are:

- economy;
- interconnected infrastructure;
- the civil dimension (including civil society, think-tanks, youth and culture);
- security.

On the other hand, it must be admitted that leading Polish politicians (prime minister, president) very rarely visit the countries of the Western Balkans. What is more, their visits are often limited to visiting Polish contingents or participation in multilateral conferences. President Lech Kaczyński has been to the Western Balkans three times, President Bronisław Komorowski twice, and President Andrzej Duda only once in 2019, when he visited Bosnia and Herzegovina and Albania (participation in a regional summit). At the same time, his visit was the first in history to be paid by the Polish President in that country. Prime Minister Donald Tusk visited Serbia twice and Montenegro and Kosovo once (joint visit with Serbia). Prime Minister Beata Szydło, in turn, paid one visit to the Western Balkans, to Albania. As in the case of President Duda, this was the first ever visit by a Polish Prime Minister to Albania. On the other hand, Prime Minister Morawiecki has not yet visited any of the countries of the Western Balkans.

The low frequency of visits is bilateral. Presidents and prime ministers of the Western Balkan countries also very rarely come to Poland. Their visits to the country are often connected with meetings of international organisations or initiatives and are

of multilateral rather than bilateral nature. In 2017, after 13 years, the Prime Minister of Albania visited Poland again. In turn, the last time the Prime Minister of Serbia visited Poland was six years ago, in 2013. In 2018, the Prime Ministers of Macedonia and Poland met in Warsaw for the first time in history.

It is worth noting that the activity of foreign ministers of the Republic of Poland has increased significantly after 2015. For example, in 2018, Foreign Minister Jacek Czaputowicz visited Macedonia, Albania and Serbia and held several meetings on the margins of various summits with his counterparts from the Western Balkans. Such an intensity of meetings with partners from the region was unprecedented in the recent history of Poland. The growing interest of Poland in the Western Balkans is also evidenced by the establishment of the Skopje (2010), Belgrade (2017) and Tirana (2018) conferences by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, aimed at sharing Polish experiences from the accession process to the European Union. These conferences are annual meetings of experts on the subject of European integration of a sectoral nature, coordinated by the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The meetings are divided into tables, the subject matter of which is indicated by the Balkan countries.

Another form of cooperation between Poland and the Western Balkans in the context of enlargement was the creation of the Academy of Enlargement by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2015. It brings together a range of subjects belonging to the competences of various ministries, important in the process of adaptation to the *acquis* (foreign affairs, European integration, security, agriculture, economy, justice, home affairs). During the year, officials from the Western Balkans, delegated to individual ministries, participate in training courses lasting one week. In 2017, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs also established the "Reconciliation and Remembrance" seminar, which aims to share the experience of German-Polish reconciliation as an inspiration for improving relations between the Balkan countries and overcoming the historical past. The project is implemented in cooperation with the Krzyżowa Foundation and the German Embassy.

It is worth adding that the framework for the policies of Polish ministries towards the Western Balkans are the Guidelines for the Policy of the Republic of Poland towards the Western Balkans, adopted by the Committee for European Affairs in 2014. Unfortunately, this document is not publicly available, and its laconic nature makes it difficult to regard it as a Balkan policy strategy that synchronises cooperation between different ministries, particularly in the important social and economic spheres. This problem also concerns the lack of coordination of activities at the local government level, where it is difficult to talk about advanced cooperation. What is very symptomatic is that the capitals of the Western Balkan countries do not have partner cities in Poland.

## Economic cooperation and relations between societies

After the break-up of Yugoslavia in 1991 and the fall of communism in the Balkans, Poland developed its economic and social relations with the region to a limited extent. Due to their size, the countries of the Western Balkans have no possibility to play an important economic role for Poland. The economies of the Western Balkan countries are in total almost 4.5 times smaller than the GDP of Poland measured in purchasing power parity (PPP). By comparison, the total GDP PPP of three small Baltic States (Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia), with just over 5 million inhabitants, accounts for nearly 75% of the total Western Balkan economies. Also, the GDP PPP per capita in the Western Balkan countries is about twice as low as in Poland. As a result, the total share of the Western Balkan countries in the Polish trade balance and foreign direct investment (FDI) is small. In both categories, especially in FDI, Serbia holds a dominant position. Nevertheless, according to the Central Statistical Office (GUS), every country in the Western Balkans (except for North Macedonia) has a significant trade deficit with Poland. It is enough to mention that in 2018, imports from the region had the value of half of the exports from Poland<sup>15</sup>.

### Trade

The volume of Poland's foreign trade with the Western Balkans in 2018 amounted to almost USD 2.4 billion (less than 0.5% of Poland's total trade). Serbia accounts for nearly 60% of trade with the Western Balkans, while North Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina each account for 15%. Poland's participation in the trade of services with the Western Balkan countries is also very limited. In the case of Polish FDI in the Western Balkans, there is a very clear dominance of Serbia as the main destination for Polish investors (nearly 85% of Polish direct investments in the Western Balkans)<sup>16</sup>. According to the most recent statistical data of the National Bank of Poland, cumulative direct Polish investments in the Western Balkans (as of 01.01.2018) amounted to nearly USD 360 million and over 80% of them were located in Serbia<sup>17</sup>.

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<sup>15</sup> It should be remembered that Polish statistical data often differ radically from the information provided by statistical offices of the Western Balkan countries. For example, the statistical office of North Macedonia for 2018 reported exports to Poland nearly 3.5 times lower than the Polish equivalent. As a result, Macedonian statistics show that North Macedonia is not in surplus, but has a trade deficit with Poland.

<sup>16</sup> These proportions do not correspond to Serbia's share in the region's economy (about 45%).

<sup>17</sup> Until 01.01.2018, Poland invested over USD 295 million in Serbia, USD 35 million in Montenegro, over USD 15 million in Bosnia and Herzegovina and almost USD 10 million in North Macedonia. Polish investments in Albania and Kosovo are negligible. According to the statistics of the central banks of the Western Balkan countries, in 2018 there were no major direct investments from Poland in the region.

As a result, they constitute only 1% of all Polish direct investments abroad, while Poland's share in the balances of foreign direct investments of Western Balkan countries is low, reaching a maximum level of less than 1% of all direct investments in Serbia and Montenegro. At the same time, Poland (except for Serbia) does not rank among the top ten most important trading partners of any of the countries in the region. Historically, Poland had the largest share in the Serbian trade balance in 2018, when it was 3% (10th place)<sup>18</sup>. For the rest of the Western Balkans, according to local statistical offices, Poland's foreign trade share ranges from 2.5% (Kosovo) to 2% in Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia and Montenegro, to just a few per mille in Albania. Poland's trade with the Western Balkan countries is also characterised by a high level of lability (one large contract executed by one company and then a decrease), and partly it is even indirect (Serbia as a transit market to Russia).

## **Tourism**

Poland plays an important role in the tourist sectors of the Western Balkan countries, which occupy a very important place in the economies of some countries of the region, especially Montenegro and Albania<sup>19</sup>. The vast majority of Polish tourists coming to the Western Balkans visit these two countries. In 2018, Poles accounted for almost 4.5% of all overnight stays of foreign tourists in the region, which gave them the sixth position in this group. It is worth noting that in North Macedonia alone, Poles constituted 5% of foreign tourists, ranking first among all EU countries (generally third), and in Albania almost 3% of foreign tourists (third place on the list of tourists from the EU after Italy and Greece and fifth place among all those coming from abroad)<sup>20</sup>. In 2016-2018, the number of Poles visiting Albania increased by almost 2.5 times. Last year Poles also accounted for 4% of tourists in Bosnia and Herzegovina (9th place in general, 5th in the EU) and almost 3.5% in Serbia (13th place). Poland is not a significant destination for the inhabitants of the Western Balkans, despite its close location and relatively lower costs of stay compared to Western European countries.

## **Development aid**

Development aid accounts for a significant share of the GNP of most Western Balkan countries, particularly Kosovo and Serbia, and to a lesser extent Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro<sup>21</sup>. However, in recent years, Poland has provided the countries of the Western Balkans with very modest financial resources, which is

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<sup>18</sup> Poland's share in Serbia's foreign trade amounted to 3.5% in 2016 (8th position). The decrease results from a decrease in Polish exports from nearly 4.5% in 2016 to over 3% in 2018.

<sup>19</sup> The direct and indirect contribution of the tourism and travel sector to Albania's GDP is more than 25% and to Montenegro's GDP more than 20%. The sector accounts for 25% of Albania's workforce, with over 15% for Montenegro. In the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the total share of this sector is 10% of the GDP, while that of Serbia and North Macedonia is around 7%.

<sup>20</sup> It is worth noting that a significant proportion of Italian and Greek citizens visiting Albania have Albanian roots.

<sup>21</sup> According to the OECD, in 2017 the share of development aid (ODA) amounted to 5.4% of Kosovo's GNP, 4.4% of Serbia's, 2.4% of Montenegro's and Bosnia and Herzegovina's, 1.4% of North Macedonia's and 1.2% of Albania's.

a result of the fact that this region has never been a priority of Polish development policy. It is reasonable to argue, though, that this small amount of money was mostly spent in an effective way. In the context of development aid, it is worth adding that Polish public and private institutions implement EU twinning projects in the Western Balkans, although also to a limited extent.

## **Social relations**

Although financial remittances from economic emigrants working abroad, with the exception of North Macedonia perhaps, play a significant role in the economies of the Western Balkan countries<sup>22</sup>, the number of economic migrants from the region working in Poland is still very low<sup>23</sup>. The situation in higher education is similar – although the Western Balkan countries are characterised by a very high level of external internationalisation of higher education (a very large group of students at foreign universities)<sup>24</sup>, the number of students in Poland is minimal<sup>25</sup>.

## **Prospects for development of economic cooperation**

It should be stressed that a significant challenge for the intensification of economic cooperation between Poland and the Western Balkan countries is the lack of promotional infrastructure in the region. No Western Balkan country operates Foreign Trade Offices of the Polish Investment & Trade Agency, Investor and Exporter Service Centres or Sectoral Promotion Programmes.

The potential for the development of trade relations between Poland and the Western Balkans is also limited by insufficiently developed road, rail, air and port infrastructure on the North-South axis. In the annual European Commission's *European Transport Scoreboard* ranking of 2018, the main Central and Eastern European member states located south of Poland were ranked, together with Poland, lowest in all four categories. The European Commission's ranking is based mainly on the *Global Competitiveness Report* published by the World Economic Forum, which takes into account a wide range of factors: frequency, speed, punctuality, price, etc. It should be added that although in the same report the countries of the Western Balkans received much worse marks than the vast majority of EU Member States, some of them were rated higher than the individual EU Member States<sup>26</sup>. For the

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<sup>22</sup> Financial remittances from economic migrants account for 15% of Kosovo's GDP, 9-11% for Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia, and 3% of the GDP of North Macedonia.

<sup>23</sup> According to data from the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy of the Republic of Poland, in the first half of 2018 citizens of the Western Balkan countries submitted slightly more than 800 applications for work permits.

<sup>24</sup> According to UNESCO data, in the academic year 2017/2018, over 5% of Serbian students, over 7% of Macedonian, 12% of Albanian and Bosnian, and up to 20% of Montenegrin students studied abroad. No data are available for students from Kosovo, but presumably, the index is similar to Albania and Bosnia. For comparison, only 1.5% of Polish students studied abroad this academic year.

<sup>25</sup> In the academic year 2017/18 slightly more than 150 students from all WB countries studied at universities in Poland.

<sup>26</sup> For example, in the case of rail efficiency, Serbia and Montenegro achieved a slightly better result than Croatia, which is the last country in the EU. Serbia and North Macedonia have overtaken Romania in terms of road quality. Also in terms of the quality of air transport, Serbia and Montenegro were rated slightly better than Bulgaria, Hungary and Slovakia. The latter two countries scored worse in the ranking than North Macedonia.

above reasons, the development of communication and energy infrastructure on the North-South axis within the framework of the Three Seas Initiative is of fundamental importance. The Western Balkans are located close to almost all transport corridors of the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) important for the Three Seas, including the ones significant for Poland: Baltic-Adriatic, Orient/Eastern Mediterranean, and Rhine-Danube (the latter even runs through the Western Balkans). In this context, it should also be recalled that the Via Carpatia communication route, which is to connect Klaipeda with Thessaloniki and Istanbul, including the Rijeka branch, is also to surround the Western Balkans. This makes it all the more pleasing that Via Carpatia was granted the status of an EU priority investment in April 2019 (co-financing from the EU budget). Among the Western Balkan countries, Bosnia and Herzegovina have so far expressed official interest in joining the project. Unfortunately, it should be recalled in this context that the rate of construction of the Via Carpatia in Poland so far has been unsatisfactory, unlike many other participants in this project.

## Recommendations

1. In recent years, an increase in Poland's interest in the region has been visible. If it is to genuinely raise its involvement in the Western Balkans, it is essential to first develop a comprehensive and long-term strategy for the region, covering all dimensions of the relationship, and then to implement it systematically.

2. Within the framework of the Western Balkans Strategy, Poland should place the region in the context of the necessary process of its own transition from a low labour cost economic model to a more advanced one based on investment expansion and export of more technologically advanced products, as well as on attracting skilled immigrants. In this context, it is worth recalling that the Western Balkans are located relatively close to Poland and will benefit from both EU financial support and growing market access in the pre-accession period. In addition, the countries of the region are characterised by still low labour costs, a relatively well-qualified workforce and decent medium-term GDP growth forecasts (around 4%). On the other hand, according to forecasts, in the coming years Poland will be the most dynamically developing country among the largest economies located relatively close to the Western Balkans. It should be remembered, however, that the intensification of economic cooperation between Poland and the Western Balkans will be particularly dependent on the development of the transport infrastructure on the North-South axis.

3. From the perspective of the Western Balkans, it would be beneficial for Poland to support exports from the countries of the region to the Polish market. This could be done by increasing the level of Polish foreign investments in sectors with export potential, which could develop thanks to know-how from Poland (food industry, textile, footwear, furniture, etc.). However, the precondition for the intensification of economic relations is Poland's creation of an economic promotion infrastructure in the countries of the Western Balkans.

4. The socio-economic acceleration of the Western Balkans could be enhanced if there was a clear increase in pre-accession aid to the countries of the region. The challenge for the Western Balkan economies is to compete with the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, which joined the EU in 2004-2013. The advantage of the latter lies in significantly greater financial transfers from the EU budget and the scale of access to the internal market. The small size of the Western Balkan economies means that an increase in EU pre-accession aid would not be a serious burden on the EU budget. It seems that Poland could initiate a serious discussion on this difficult issue in the EU arena.

5. One of the most important objectives of the Strategy should be to establish regular bilateral contacts at the highest level between Poland and the Western Balkan countries. Poland should also try to ensure that its representatives occupy more important functions in NATO and EU structures in the region, in order to increase their influence on the decisions made.

6. Polish policy in the Western Balkans should take Albanians into account to a greater extent than before (the fastest growing and second largest population, the fastest GDP growth rate of Albania and Kosovo, strong position in North Macedonia, close ties with the USA, the largest diaspora in the EU, a very dynamically growing number of Polish tourists). In this context, Poland should establish diplomatic relations with Kosovo, and preferably open an embassy in Pristina, as well as support stronger efforts at an EU level aimed at abolishing visas for Kosovo.

7. It is worth to consider recognising the Western Balkans, alongside the Eastern Partnership countries, as a priority region within the framework of Polish development aid. In addition, consideration should be given to improving the efficiency of the Belgrade, Skopje and Tirana conferences, as well as the Academy of Enlargement, as tools for sharing Polish transformation and negotiation experiences. One of the possible solutions is the establishment of a special fund with large financial resources, treated as development aid. Its purpose should be to sponsor large-scale study visits to Poland by officials, journalists, politicians, scientists, experts, trade unionists, representatives of small and medium businesses and activists of non-governmental organisations. These visits should also be carried out locally, especially since Poland's advantage may be its administrative and demographic potential (16 voivodships which can independently be partners for particular countries of the Western Balkans). It seems that Polish local governments of all levels could develop such cooperation in consultation with EU structures (Committee of the Regions) and, as a result, co-finance it from the EU budget.

8. Poland should create a system of support for public and private institutions, thanks to which they could engage in EU twinning projects on a much larger scale than before. At the same time, Poland should encourage V4 countries to both increase the budget of the International Visegrad Fund for the Western Balkans and radically expand the mobility programme for civil servants.

9. It would be justified to increase expert resources in the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs in order to broaden the team that would thoroughly analyse the involvement of EU Member States in the Western Balkans – their failures and successes should be a source of inspiration for a new opening of Poland to the region.

10. As part of the Three Seas Initiative, Poland should definitely involve the Western Balkan countries in the cooperation as broadly as possible, and joint projects

with the countries of the region should become one of the most important fields of activity of the participants in this initiative. Particularly important for the success of the Polish opening to the Western Balkans is cooperation with countries that have influence, cooperation experience and a high degree of convergence of interests. For this reason, priority should be given to the implementation of undertakings in cooperation with, among others, Germany (a positive example is the Krzyżowa project).

11. Due to the importance of the cultural and identity aspect of the Western Balkans and their relations with the EU, a very important element of the Strategy is the creation of a Polish polyphonic historical narrative promoted in the Balkan states. It should present Poland's rich and multidimensional relations with the Balkans and Polish identity as shaped by various religions and ethnic groups, including those originating from the Western Balkans. It seems that the condition for such a narrative is to deepen the reflection on Polish culture, history and identity in relation to the Ottoman and Byzantine heritage. To this end, Poland should establish a foundation for joint research and scholarships for Polish and Balkan researchers.

12. Polish achievements in reconciliation and historical dialogue with other nations (Germans, Ukrainians, Belarusians, Lithuanians, Jews, Russians), which can serve as a source of inspiration for the countries of the Western Balkans, should be considered a particularly valuable narrative resource. However, to maintain Poland's credibility as an expert in the field of reconciliation, it is necessary to prevent the creation of unnecessary tensions in historical matters with the countries in question. On the other hand, in order to maintain Warsaw's credibility as an advocate of the enlargement to the Western Balkans (the fundamental importance of building an independent and efficient justice system), Poland should strive to resolve the dispute over violation of the rule of law in the EU as soon as possible.

13. Every effort must be made to make the Western Balkans policy the subject of cross-party consensus, along the lines of the Eastern Partnership. This requires that the Three Seas Initiative, which is Poland's key bridge to the Western Balkans, be fully accepted by the main actors on the Polish political scene.

## **5 Principles of Expert Independence of the Jagiellonian Club Centre for Analysis**

### 1. Focus on our mission

The Jagiellonian Club, including the Centre for Analysis, acts with the purpose of changing the law through public consultation, participation in meetings of Sejm and Senate committees, petitioning public authorities, and other ways of consulting legislative solutions organised by public institutions, politicians and civic organisations. This activity is mission-focused and conducted with the primacy of common good in mind. The vast majority of the materials we publish is financed exclusively from our own resources. Every time a material is created in cooperation with an external partner or financed from sources other than the Jagiellonian Club, it is clearly stated in its content.

### 2. Independence

Contractual guarantee of research independence is an obligatory condition of establishing an advisory relationship with business entities. We do not allow any situation in which we would publish a material or draw up an analysis to prove theses developed externally.

### 3. Transparency

Contractual guarantee of full transparency regarding the principles of cooperation is an obligatory condition of establishing an advisory relationship with business entities. Any material created in cooperation with an external partner is marked with the name and logo of the partner on the title page. The information about the partnership is also included in media materials, where they exist.

### 4. Self-limitation

If the association or a company owned by the association establishes cooperation with business entities to prepare analyses, expert opinions, reports or draft legislations, the Jagiellonian Club may not be engaged within the legislative process in the area directly related to the subject of that cooperation for a minimum of 12 months from the material's publication. The Centre for Analysis experts who participate in the legislative process and who previously, individually or via the Centre,

performed tasks commissioned by business entities, are in each case required to present this information publicly in advance (e.g. in their opinion sent in as a part of public consultations or in an information to the authorities of a proper parliamentary committee).

## 5. Responsibility

Centre for Analysis does not act as an intermediary between its business partners and politicians or civil servants. It does not personally invite politicians or civil servants to promotional and discussion meetings around the materials created as a part of the Centre for Analysis cooperation with business entities if the materials contain legislative recommendations. As a part of its statutory activities, the Jagiellonian Club organises various types of debates, meetings and seminars, inviting representatives of different sectors of public life, including people from the world of business and politics. If a meeting of this kind addresses regulatory or similar matters, it is always mission-focused and financed exclusively from the association's own resources.

