

Political Risks in the Western Balkans

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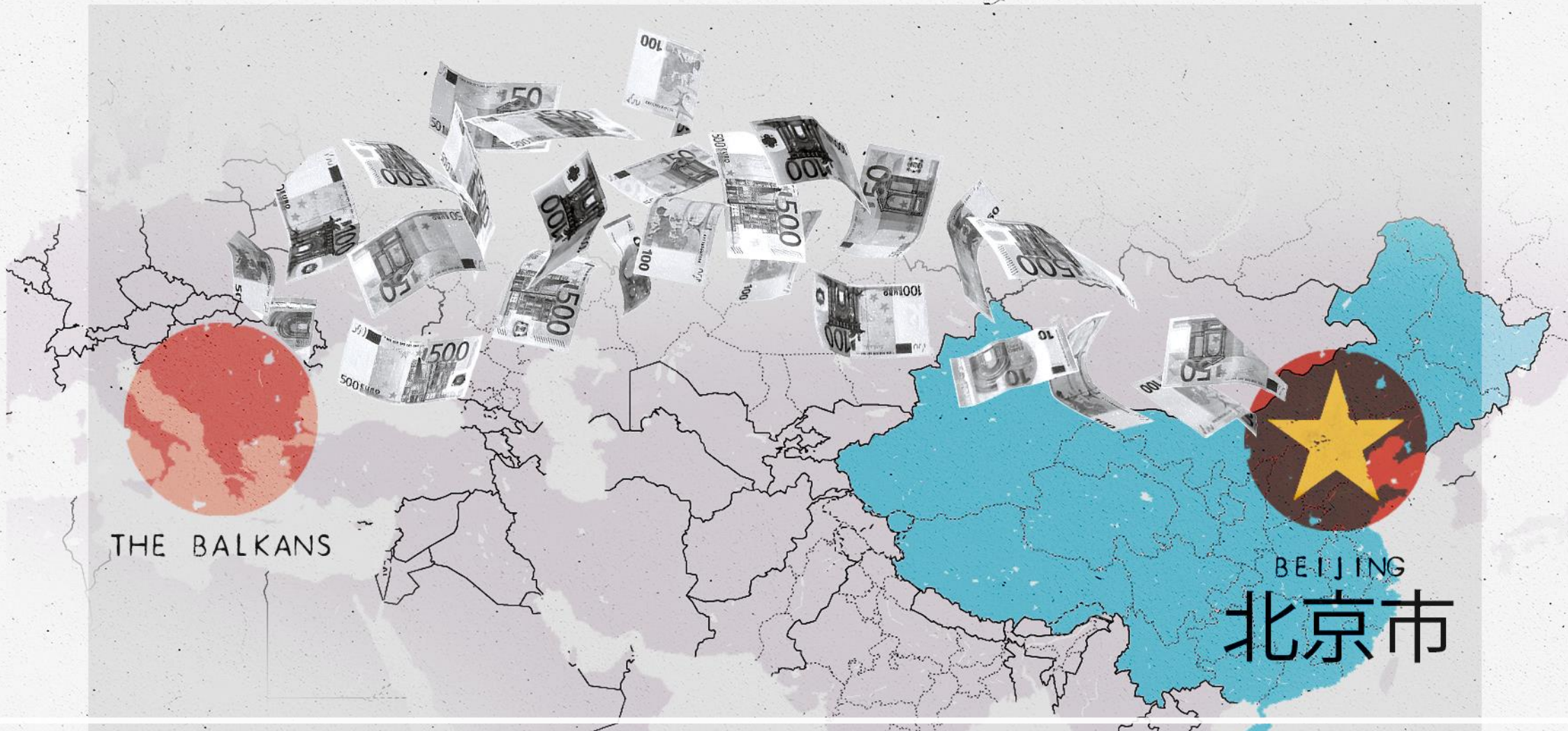




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THE BALKANS

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Introduction

- Political risk
 - Concept borrowed from political economy
 - *Risks faced by investors, corporations, and governments, whereby political decisions, events, or other conditions will significantly affect the profits of a business actor (Matthee 2011)*
 - Adapted to political science and IR
 - Risks to security, stability or democratic development of countries and territories, caused by political decisions, externalities, or other predicaments affecting the well-being of the population.
- Western Balkans
 - Political concept, developed in the late 1990s to denote EU's southern neighbors in line of EU accession ("ex-Yugoslavia – Slovenia + Albania"; but Croatia entered the EU in 2013)

Political risks: types and outcomes

- Three types of political risks, central to the Western Balkan context
 - **Contested states** => political instability => conflict
 - **Lack of democratic culture** => state capture => autocracy
 - **Dependencies on external actors** => bankruptcy => radicalization

Contested states

- the post-Yugoslav WB5 are all contested states
 - Domestic contestation - BiH, Kosovo, Montenegro, N. Macedonia, Serbia (?)
 - External contestation - BiH, Kosovo, Montenegro, N. Macedonia, Serbia (?)
 - Combination of the two – BiH, Kosovo, Montenegro, N. Macedonia, Serbia (?)

Contested states: implications and outcomes

- Political deadlocks =>
 - result of domestic contestation (reform blockages, e.g., Bosnia and Herzegovina)
 - result of external contestation (progress blockages, e.g., N. Macedonia)
- Political instability =>
 - result of domestic contestation (e.g., Montenegro, Serbia, BiH)
 - result of external contestation (e.g., Kosovo)
- Conflict =>
 - conflated lines between domestic and external contestation (e.g., Kosovo, RS)

Lack of a democratic culture

- Scarce experience with democracy
 - Post-socialist experience (very different from CEE)
 - Legacies of war
 - Low understanding of participation
- Disillusionment with political transition
 - “transition black hole” – cycle of negativity, belief that one’s voice means nothing
 - exit strategies – migration or political inactivity

Lack of a democratic culture: implications and outcomes

- State capture
 - Low accountability of political leadership (e.g., Montenegro, N. Macedonia, privatization)
 - Capture of state bureaucracies + economy
- Populism
 - Vucic (Serbia), DPS, Europe Now (Montenegro), Gruevski (N. Macedonia), Rama (Albania)
- Autocracy
 - Nearly all WB6 have tendencies of democratic backsliding and rise of authoritarianism

Dependencies on external actors

- Different types of influence exercised by non-democratic foreign actors
 - Economic => investments in the Western Balkan countries (China, Gulf states, Russia)
 - Political => Russia
 - Cultural & religious => Turkey, Russia

Dependencies on external actors: implications and outcomes

- Economic dependencies => environmental damage (Serbia) to possible bankruptcy (Montenegro)
- Political dependencies => de-democratization and misalignment with Euro-Atlantic foreign policy trajectory
- Cultural dependencies => radicalization (e.g., through media and disinformation campaigns)

Conclusions

- Three main categories of political risks in the WB countries, with important propensity to escalate, and the degree of this escalation will have different political and social outcomes, that might deter these countries from a democratic path, destabilize them domestically, and make them vulnerable to external threats.
- Question for you: do you see the Western Balkans as an area of “high risk” for European peace and security? Why / Why not?

THANK YOU!

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