

**ECONOMIC SECURITY AS PRIORITY, ENERGY SECURITY, ADVANTAGE OF WESTERN BALKANS AND ALBANIA**

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**ABSTRACT**

In this article, i have tried to present an outline about one of the most important aspects of economic security of the Western Balkans, energy, as its value, an area of interest among countries of the region and the main actors with influence in global politics and the role of Albania, too. Economic security is becoming an increasingly used term, but it is a concept little treated theoretically in political and social literature. It has expanded the dimension of security and coincides mostly with the post Cold War epoch. It derives from the respective shift from geopolitics to gjeoeconomics. Today, for the majority of people in the region, security is much more closely related. The main challenges posing threat everyday to the citizens in Southeast Europe are poverty, unemployment and corruption. People are concerned about the security of their personal income, health insurance, and the assurance for the education of their children. By analyzing the sources of the kinds of energy, the state of reserves, the actual level exploitation, transitting capabilities and capacities, we notice, for example, that: BP shows interest especially with regard to transitting oil and gas form east to western consumers. None of the oil and gas pipes projects, carrying products from eastern sources toward West, can bypass the Western Balkans countries. As part of these interests, Albania is affected by two aspects: a) exploration and exploitation of the energy sources, non-renewable or renewable, by western countries companies, and b) interests for building transitting systems from Russia toward EU countries. The Balkans, because of the important gjeopolitical position it has, is a region of intersection and clash of various interests, including those related to energy. The proper percpetion of the advantages of the important geostrategic position of the Western Balkans and the optimized use of these advantages would serve the fast integration of the region into EU, thus putting an end to all the dilemas and impacts caused by forces counter to these processes.

**Keywords:** Economic security, gjeoeconomics, renewable energy, building transitting systems transitting capacities, geostrate.

**INTRODUCTION**

Authoritative researchers tell us that security is considered simultaneously a universal value and a very complex, particular and flexible concept. Its perception and implementation are already a duty and responsibility of numerous national and international actors. National security is the guarantee for the national integrity, existence of the nation and state, carried out through the use of national power elements<sup>1</sup>. The term security ranges on two levels. On a vertical level, security begins with the individual, moves to the state and ends up in the international system. On a horizontal level, we have to do with security in various ares like: economy, energy, ecology, emigration, diseases, natural and humanitorean disasters, etc. States bear the responsibility for the protection of their citizens, (responsability to protect), while economic and energy security are assuming priority. Providing sovereignty of economy is the corner stone of economic security. Transaction among international economies have

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<sup>1</sup> For more see: Allan Collins, Contemporary Studies Tirana 2009, p. 481-6.

increased dramatically. There has been increase of responsibilities of the national governments over economic policies. Our century witnesses the globalization of economy<sup>2</sup>. As Stremlau points out (1994): “we are entering an era in which foreign policy and national security will revolve more and more around our trade interests and the economic diplomacy will be essential to solve the big issues of our time . “In January 1993 US President Bill Clinton expanded the membership of the Security Council, including, among others, Secretary of State for the Treasury and the newly set up office of the assistant to the President for Economic Policy. This shows that Clinton acknowledged the growing role of economic issues in drafting the economic security policy<sup>3</sup>. Economic security consists, on the one hand, of individual economic security, and on the other, on the macroeconomic security Economic security at macro-economic level has been proposed as the determining issue in international relations, especially in geopolitics. Currently the transition is from geo-politics to geo-economics. Geo-economics considers the increase of the economic welfare of its citizens as the essential interest of the state. The state has remained territorial while the market and corporates have become international or, at least, are not constrained by international borders<sup>4</sup>. The state cannot afford to lack an effective foreign economic policy<sup>5</sup>. Threats to economic security of the country have been considered economic espionage. Economic espionage is an illegal or secret activity, or imposing of a foreign country in order to gain unauthorized access to economic intelligence, like classified information or technology for economic advantages. The Balkan region is not interesting for the main actors of global politics, as a region with large reserves of oil and gas energy, and even as big market. But the region is interesting for the fact that it is traversed by routes of the energy systems for transiting oil and gas, and that all projects take into account its importance for direct and safe connection. So, we may speak of “transit politics” or "politics of transit", in which the states of the region try to use and play with this card, aiming achieving their interests to become interesting for the big actors of "petropolitics".

The EU-Western Balkans Summit proved a new push in advancing the integration of the region “at snail’s pace”. The presentation of an integration process of four years mid-term plan based on annual re-assessment is one of the most comprehensive messages sent out by Brussels and Berlin. Put in the words of the Albanian Prime Minister Rama, “integration is not a process where EU only gives and Balkan receives, but where the Balkans gives and shares its values”. At this crucial moment of crisis between Europe and Russia, the energy supply, sea routes and energy security are the most precious value of the region.

### **Economic security as a priority**

"Economic security" is becoming more and more a usable expression, but also little theorized concept in social and political literature. It has expanded the security dimension and coincides mostly with the post Cold War era. It "is derived from the respective shift from geopolitics to geo-economics ..."<sup>6</sup> Economic security defined by Christopher M.Dent is: "*Preserving the structural integrity and prosperity-manufacturing capacities and interests of a political and economic entity in the context of various external risks and threats facing the international*

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<sup>2</sup> Mingst, Karen A. Basics of Internations Relations, p. 295-296.

<sup>3</sup> Collins Alain, Contemporary Studies. Dent, Cristopher. Conomic Security, p. 264

<sup>4</sup> Jean, Carlo. Geopolitics, Tirana, 1998, p. 197

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, fq. 205

<sup>6</sup> For more, see also : Allan Collins, Contemporary Studies on Security, UET/Press, Tirana, p. 223-260

*economic system.*"<sup>7</sup> Other authors have also spoken about the growth of economic security. Two American authors, New and Wolf, argue that economic security is "the ability to protect or promote the economic interests of the US in the face of event, development or action that may threaten or block these interests" and that "*these threats may come from internal and external sources.*"<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, the relationship between economy and security must be distinguished from that of economic security itself.

The issue of economic security has to do with relationships between the political structure of anarchy and economic structure of the market and avoid merging of security and economy into a single structure. We need to consider the relationship between the functions and physical and economic capacity of a foreign economic policy power, on the one hand, and the interests of the associated economic actors, on the other. Economic Security treats of: concerns of the state to protect the social, economic structure of the society and the ability of the state to safeguard international economic environment from instability. In the troubled Balkan region, security was considered earlier in connection with the risks coming from across borders and conflicts with other countries. Today, for the majority of people in the region, security is much more straightforward. The main challenges posing threat everyday to the citizens in Southeast Europe are poverty, unemployment and corruption. People are concerned about the security of their personal income, health insurance, and the assurance for the education of their children. SEE economies are still far from Western economies. Income and living standards are very low. The average incomes of the region are only 36% of the countries of the European Union (EU). Unemployment is the highest in Europe, with an average of 24 percent in 2012, in some countries exceeding 30 percent. More problematic is the youth unemployment rate, which on average exceeds 50%, but in Kosovo soars to 70%.<sup>9</sup> SEE inequality is scary; especially for some countries, where the part of the population living on less than \$ 5 a day is alarming figure. Respectively, 58% of the population in Albania, 40% in Macedonia, 30% in Kosova, and only 0.6% in Croatia. But after a decade of growth, it came to an abrupt end in 2009. SEE suffered the aftermath of the euro zone crisis through declining trade, investments, finance and remittances. Regional GDP contracted by 5.9% in 2009, followed by a double-dip recession in 2012, with another decline of 1.2%.<sup>10</sup> The most significant of the shocking waves of the crisis hitting the Balkans has been a reduction of 30% of foreign direct investment (FDI), followed by the decline of trade with EU, particularly Italy and Greece. The decrease of remittances had its evident consequences for small economies of the region, exacerbating social situation. In the regional average, unemployment among people with university education is 50% of those with basic education. But higher education also remains a problem in the region, in quantity and quality. According to the World Bank, in 2012, only 15% of the population in the region had a university education, compared to 35% of EU levels<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> Collins, op.p.262.

<sup>8</sup> Collins, op.p.267.

<sup>9</sup> Zeneli, Valbona Professor at George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies. Article was translated and taken in abridged version from Journal on European Studies on Security and Defence" for Concordiam"<http://www.panorama.com.al/2014/05/19/economic-security-in-the-balkans/>

<sup>10</sup> Same.

<sup>11</sup> Same.

## Energy security as the greatest value of the Western Balkans

The conflict in Ukraine, besides the gas crisis, undermines an important issue of the EU - ENP (Europe Neighborhood Policy). ENP, adopted in 2004 was considered as alternative to the traditional geopolitics including 16 countries in North Africa, the Middle East and Eastern Europe<sup>12</sup>. Ten years later ENP is on the verge of failure. In the east, ENP has produced competition with Russia and it is evident that the EU is not succeeding since we are witnessing states/ provinces that are rebelling, getting independent according to Russia's desires. In the south, also, dramatic political changes and the rise of new actors like ISIL, ISIS strongly threatens weak commitment of the EU in these countries and its objective of a secure region on its borders. In this broader context, it is clear that the EU does not want "pockets of insecurity" in the Western Balkans, as expressed by Janusz Bugajski-t in the book *"The Return of the Balkans"*<sup>13</sup>. Therefore, the conference EU-Western Balkans summit in Berlin with the participation of Albania, Macedonia, Serbia, Bosnia, Kosova, Montenegro, Croatia, Slovenia and German Chancellor Merkel, Austrian Chancellor, European Commission President Barroso and Commissioner for Energy Oettinger, assumes particular significance under such circumstances<sup>14</sup>. The main message of the conference was "change through contacts" in the three pillars highlighted in the closing declaration: strengthening good governance (fight against corruption, rule of law), regional cooperation and increase of prosperity through increased sustainable development<sup>15</sup>. Jude Dempsey of Carnegie Europe, praising Chancellor Merkel to call EU-Western Balkans conference says: "... if we abandoned the reform agenda, the high level of unemployment in the region (approximately 25 percent), endemic corruption, poor governance would strengthen the positions of populists and nationalists. Instability would follow. This is not what EU needs in its courtyard considering what is happening in eastern and southern corners of the EU<sup>16</sup>". In fact, instability Dempsey refers to has to do with fear of moving the axis of the conflict from Ukraine to the Balkans, where bilateral territorial issues are present. But to understand the Berlin conference, it is important to understand the Minsk Summit held on 26 August between Russia and Ukraine. In Minsk parties unveiled their claims on issues such as: i) food embargo; ii) expansion strategy of Russia; iii) and sovereignty of Ukraine<sup>17</sup>. Opposite positions, as expected, between Putin and Poroshenko did not bring any results. The Minsk meeting produced a winner, but the winner was not at the meeting. The neutral and silent role of Turkey over the Ukraine crisis was displayed by Ahmet Davutoglu, the next prime minister of Turkey, who, one day after the Minsk meeting, would comment on the importance of the meeting and the opportunities for Turkey in supplying energy to EU after major disputes between Ukraine and Russia<sup>18</sup>. The conflict between Russia and Ukraine and plans for establishing the Eurasian Union are unacceptable for the EU, therefore Russia will seek to bypass Ukraine as a transit

<sup>12</sup> EUEA, European Neighbourhood Policy 2004";

<sup>13</sup> J. Bugajski, "Return of the Balkans: Challenges to European Integration and US Disengagement", Strategic Studies Institute, May 2013, p-fq.25

<sup>14</sup> German Federal Foreign Office, "Western Balkan Conference in Berlin: Commitment to the European Perspective", 28 August 2014;

[http://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/EN/Europa/westlicherBalkan/AktuelleArtikel/140828\\_Westbalkankonferenz.html](http://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/EN/Europa/westlicherBalkan/AktuelleArtikel/140828_Westbalkankonferenz.html)

<sup>15</sup> The German Federal Government, "Final Declaration by the Chair of the Conference on the Western Balkans", Press Release No.288/2014, 28 August 2014

<sup>16</sup> Jude Dempsey, "Don't forget Western Balkan", CarnegieEurope, 28 August 2014;

<http://carnegieeurope.eu/strategieurope/>

<sup>17</sup> Euroactiv, "Putin shakes hand with Poroshenko but no solution found", 26 August 2014;

<sup>18</sup> Dr.Cemil Etem, "Russia, EU and Davutoglu's term in Turkey", Turkey Agenda, 28 August 2014;

<http://www.turkeyagenda.com/russia-eu-and-davutoglus-term-in-turkey-1086.html>

country for energy. Turkey offers the main route of South-East energy corridor and Turkey will hold the main card with the West and East. Southern Gas Corridor that passes through the Anatolian area will be the main hub for the transit of energy from the Caucasus to Europe and the only way of diversifying energy for EU<sup>19</sup>. In this context the Western Balkans assumes importance and its geostrategic position will serve energy transiting and pipelines flowing from the Caucasus, the Caspian through Turkey to the EU. This was implicit in the closing statement of EU-Western Balkans summit which concluded that

... participating countries agree that the European energy policy is of paramount importance for the Western Balkan countries. Regional cooperation within the framework of the Energy Community for Southeast Europe is an important component, especially in terms of energy security, energy efficiency and climate protection. Western Balkan countries will continue to work intensively on further advancement of the Energy Community, and in overcoming barriers to implementation<sup>20</sup>. But despite receiving - or applying for accession to the EU, the Western Balkans is divided when it comes to energy and works against the values and rules of the EU. Western Balkans can serve as a powerful alternative for the diversification of energy supply to the EU, taking into consideration:

- Creation of an LNG terminal in Krk, Croatia which will enable entry into market of a quantity of 5 billion cubic meters of gas per year (bcm / y) with expanding opportunities to 15 mmkv<sup>21</sup>;
  - Construction of the two-way interconnection pipeline between Croatia-Hungary that would allow the transport of a quantity of 1.5-2.5 mmkv expandable to 6.5 mmkv;
  - The discovery of new reserves on land and sea as;
  - The opening of the energy corridor through TAP which will carry 10 mmkv through Greece-Albania-Italy with potential expansion to 20 mmkv in future from sources that can come from Azerbaijan and Iraq<sup>22</sup>.
- IAP pipeline construction that could provide 5 billion cubic meters, etc.

But the situation is actually deteriorated by two important factors. First, Russian interests exploit the corrupt system and the weak rule of law, which, combined with their commercial interests seeking to keep the region dependent on Russian supply sources. Secondly, the corrupt system and lawlessness promote protectionism in the energy system and do not allow the opening of the energy market to the EU, where companies and businesses can invest in network connection with the EU. Although the countries of the region are members of the Energy Community, including Ukraine and Moldova, countries are always in violation of the regulations of the treaty and do not implement the obligations deriving from it. Flagrant case is that of Serbia where even though the third package of energy clearly defines the system of "unbundling" for energy infrastructure and pipelines, measures are not taken to stop building South stream. Moreover Serbia's agreement with Gazprom in 2008, where it transferred 51% of the assets of state company Serbia gas, the only case in the region where no other country involved in South stream has accepted. The question is how is it that a country aspiring for EU membership, even though just candidate, but does not respect EU legislation, by

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<sup>19</sup>For more see also: Journal, International Relations, Center Hapsirë, Tirana, No,11. P.53-78

<sup>20</sup> The German Federal Governemnt, "Final Declaration by the Chair of the Conference on the Western Balkans", Press Release No.288/2014, 28 August 2014 fq.3

<sup>21</sup> OSW. A Croatian-Hungarian Gas Interconnector has been put into operation, Center for Eastern Studies, (2011) Warsaw

<sup>22</sup> Ribaj, P., and Qendro, E. (2011) *Energy Geopolitics and National Security: Approach toward Western Balkans and Albania*", Center, Hapësirë, p.86



increasing the country's energy dependency and thus the energy dependence of the union it seeks to join? Attending the inaugural ceremony of Resource Governance Programme at the University of Calgary, Collier would answer the question: Could Africa become Canada? – asked by Ghana officials, as follows: "... the question is not whether Africa can be like Canada, but does Africa want to become Canada<sup>23</sup>". "It's up to Balkans if it wants to integrate into the EU", Merkel stated at the press conference with President Barroso and Prime Minister Rama.

### Albania's Role

Albania has drafted new NSS document that provides a starting point for developing support strategies in the key state sectors and in other areas of social life, and also for the normative regulation of activities within the national security system. Document SSK2014 has been guided also by the 2010 Strategic Concept of the North Atlantic Alliance and the Common Security and Defense Policy of the EU. At global level Albania ranks among countries with the highest economic risk from disasters. 86% of the territory that generates about 88.5% of GDP, is exposed to two or more risk<sup>24</sup>. After the document analyzes the environment and considers corruption and organized crime as utmost priorities "as systemic risks that threaten the credibility of Albanian institutions and politics<sup>25</sup>". it continues classifying threats and risks into four levels. Level one includes Energy crisis that threatens the security of supply of the Republic of Albania. Meanwhile, European Energy Security Strategy (2014) foresees 24 infrastructure projects for gas and 6 for electric power, mainly in Eastern Europe<sup>26</sup>. Albania is in a geo-strategic position, where East-West and North-South corridors meet, and a naval port in the Strait of Otranto. Passage of the much spoken about TAP Project and its connection with the Ionian Adriatic Pipeline (IAP) project places our country at the center of interest for the Balkans Gas Ring<sup>27</sup>. If we add here the potential of the exploited gas fields of Dumre as deposits for gas stocks in case of emergencies, then we get a full picture of how the country turns into an important part of European energy architecture especially in times of crisis. On the other hand, contracts concluded in the field of hydrocarbons with numerous companies pose a potential positive rating. Judging from the data revealed by Bankers Petroleum, Stream Oil and Gas and Petromanas potentials may bring the production of oil in Albania to around 45 to 50,000 barrels per day by 2015 (2.3-2.5 million tons per year)<sup>28</sup>. This figure would result in the highest production that our country has ever achieved, even beyond its peak in 1974, when Albania produced for its own consumption and managed to export 5 to 10,000 barrels per day or 255 to 510,000 tons per year. Albania has considerable reserves of hydrocarbons in the Balkans, except for Romania, which although producing about 90,000 p/d, its reserves are shrinking and declining, while Turkey produces about 45,000 p/d, but considering the level of its consumption, it is an inconsiderable amount. In this context, becoming an exporter of oil in the Balkans, however small this quantity, is a very important tool and will give Albania a political lever as an important actor in the region. During, 2012-2013 oil production may have added about \$ 400-500 million to the Albanian economy,

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<sup>23</sup> Conference: Resource Governance, held by Calgary University, Canada, 15-17 May 2013.

<sup>24</sup> The Strategy of National Security, June 2014,

<sup>25</sup> The Strategy of National Security, June 2014,

<sup>26</sup> COM \*2014( 330

<sup>27</sup> Ribaj Pajtim, Qëndro Elton, *Energy Geopolitics and National Security: Approach toward Western Balkans and Albania*", Center, Hapësirë, Tirana 2011.

<sup>28</sup> Bankers Petroleum *Annual Financial and Operational Results 2013*; Stream Oil & Gas *Annual Financial and Operational Results 2013*; Trans Oil Group *Annual Financial and Operational Results 2013*; Petromanas Energy Inc *Financial Statement 2013*;

representing about 4% of the country's GDP<sup>29</sup>. If the price of Brent oil (Index with which Albanian oil is assessed) gets a value of \$ 100-115 per barrel for the coming years, the growth of oil production in Albania will contribute with about \$ 1 billion or for about 7-8% the country's GDP by the years 2015-2016. Increased oil production in Albania would affect the positioning of the country, the regional power structure, economic development and potentially the success or failure of other projects in the region, as can be the offshore and land explorations<sup>30</sup>. Increased oil production in Albania would increase exports to Italy and Greece could be interested in importing a significant amount of oil from Albania now that the Burgas-Aleksandropoulos project is out of the game, and moreover that Greece has suspended imports from Iran due to the sanctions. In this landscape, Albania has all the potentials, opportunities and chances to become an important intersection of the architecture of regional and European energy. Thus, in an article in the Turkish daily "Hurriyet Daily News" Borut Grgic, director of the "Transcaspian", analyzes the positioning of Albania versus "the more powerful" of this market. He writes: "Albania has never before been so powerful a 'player' in the Balkan energy market, but with TAP, Albania has a chance to turn into the main gas power in the region. Today, the future of the Balkan energy is compromised in many ways. It is in nobody's interest to let the regional power vacuum be filled only by Russia. After exiting through the door, Russia is trying to jump in through the window into the Balkan region, where its interests are not mere transit of energy, but fending off the transatlantic influence, rifting and forcing the region away from EU, complicating and the redrawing the political map of the Balkans<sup>31</sup>. The Ukraine - Russia gas war is a good example that explains what it means to make long-term gas business with Russian state monopoly: in the end there is a political price to be paid, or otherwise gas prices will be re-negotiated unilaterally or pipelines could be closed. This prospect is not at all a favorable one for the Balkan consumers and industries that want to compete globally. The Balkan region needs an alternative to Gazprom and the promotion of Albania as a reliable center for regional gas is a strategic objective that must be supported by the European Union. Physical geography provides the consistent data that make up the basis of the foreign policy of states. For all the improvements in terms of democratic stability, says our Minister of Foreign Affairs, our region today faces two different geopolitical dynamics: further European integration and strengthening of the Mediterranean dimension of the EU<sup>32</sup>. Of course, strengthening and improving the network of regional infrastructure, according to the main corridors and lines of movement and exchange, as well as their connection to European and Eurasian infrastructure and energy networks, will have a positive impact on the region, making it safer, increasing geopolitical dimension, expanding the market and providing incentives for foreign investments interest in the region<sup>33</sup>.

## CONCLUSIONS

The answer to prevention of internal risks is explicitly related to economic development. The capacity of government agencies to activate the international contributions into economic development will generate more jobs, increase revenues, develop internal capabilities and

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<sup>29</sup> AlbEITI Report 2010,2011, 2012.

<sup>30</sup> Greece and Montenegro have announced an extensive tender program for offshore oil exploration based on the continuation of geology and morphology of their shelf similar to the geology of Patos-Marinéz in Albania

<sup>31</sup>Haliti.P. "Russian Gas for Separatism" [http:// opinionese-komente.blogspot.com](http://opinionese-komente.blogspot.com)

<sup>32</sup> D. Bushati, 8 February 2014.

<sup>33</sup> Same.

social improvement in the living standard of the citizens. Thomas Friedman, in his book *The World is Flat* explains how globalization in the XXI century has enabled us to live in an interconnected and organic world. Friedman's theory explains that what happens in Texas about export gas shale (shale gas) from southern US to Europe might affect the fate of all the Warsaw Pact countries rather than ideas and policies drawn up by Berlin or Brussels<sup>34</sup>. However, technology and interdependence have not been able to diminish the role of geography. Today more than ever, as clearly pointed out in Robert Kaplan's book *The Revenge of Geography*, control of precious clean territories such as maritime routes or energy resources turn geography into the spotlight<sup>35</sup>.

The smaller the world becomes because of interdependence, globalization and technology, the more advantageous becomes every country and territory – it becomes more strategic. Therefore, knowledge of geography helps us to understand that the Ukrainian crisis is a crisis of space, it is 1939 Poland. If history is a guide to the future, TAP represents the first step in the development of the Southern Corridor, an important part of which is our region, namely the Balkans. The construction of a new first gas transport route is followed by further development of the market, with infrastructure and additional gas. I believe that additional gas resources in Azerbaijan will increase future gas exports to Europe. TAP will be able to afford these supplies by increasing its capacity where security is the top issue for our region even if other pipelines carry the Caspian gas to new markets. Estimates for energy consumption in Europe show that one of the most important challenges to energy security in our region over the next 25 years will be the ability to diversify the sources and ways of transiting energy imports. The future depends to a large extent on who owns these resources and who will put them into the market. Noticing that the geography of the countries with the main energy sources almost coincides with geostrategic rivalries, where the main center of gravity remains the struggle for areas of influence between Russia and US (NATO) in some regions, access to these resources may aggravate conflicts and in some cases may also be the direct cause of them. NATO is expected to have a more active role in ensuring energy security of member countries, including Western Balkan countries. Its future challenge is expected to be a showdown with Russia for control of the Arctic region rich in unexploited resources. Because of its own position at the crossroad of the main energy corridors, the Balkan region will inevitably continue for a long time to attract the attention of Western countries including the economic, political and military elements. From a geo-strategic perspective, by increasing its influence in the Balkans, the US would deprive Russia of the possibility of control over the entire trade flow of trade and energy towards Europe. Already politically rightly oriented and NATO member, Albania is playing an important role in the Balkan region in terms of preserving and guaranteeing security. This security environment guarantees also the development of important energy projects such as the TAP, part of which it is. Their successful implementation will ensure a greater economic development and, most importantly, would increase the country's strategic importance in the region and beyond. For this reason, I think that the countries of our region should be focused on two areas: first, the harmonization of energy policies in the region and look for alternative sources, in addition to Russian ones; secondly, improvement of cooperation and strategic planning of individual countries, to address the problem as a vital national security issue.

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<sup>34</sup> Friedman, Th. (2008). *The world is flat*.

<sup>35</sup> Kaplan, R. (2012). p.343.