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## **WEAK STATES OF SOUTHEASTERN EUROPE IN BETWEEN THE GREAT POWERS**

### **1. Introduction**

With this paper, I wish to offer an insight into some of the politico-geographical aspects of the stability of weak states in Southeastern Europe with respect to their position “in between”, regarding the powers outside this region.

Indisputably, Southeastern Europe has traditionally been saturated with internal sources of instability. But the question is whether they are always autochthonous, until we place them into wider regional, European, Eurasian and global geopolitical and geo-strategic frameworks.

### **2. Background**

Allow me to say some words at the start about the determination of the term “weak state”.

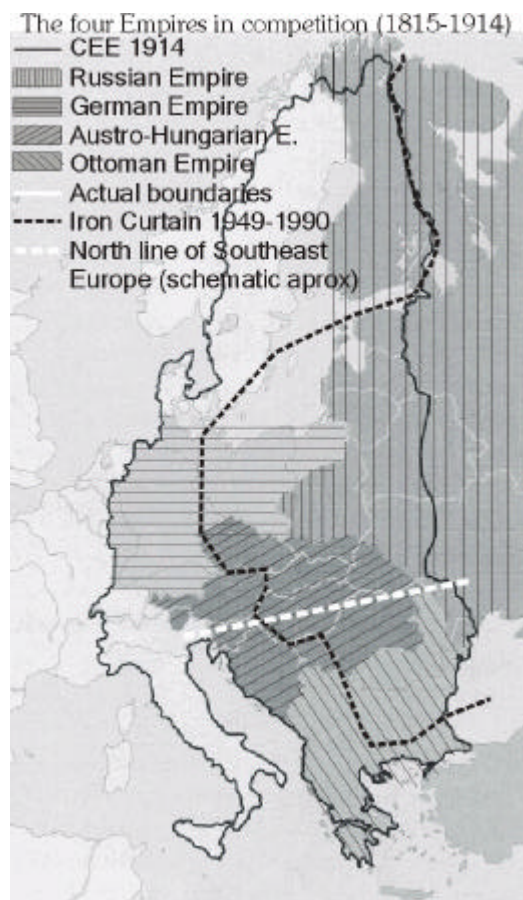
My starting point for defining a “weak state” is the term “small state”. This implies a question if a small state is the same as weak state. This is not necessarily so but it is as a rule. Nor is a large state necessarily at the same time also a power state.

However, the term “weak state” may be defined considering various aspects. Without entering into the various theoretical approaches, I am in this case taking as starting point the fact that “weak states” have fewer possibilities of choice in the decision-making processes and are more occupied with survival. At the same time they also have limited influence on their own and foreign policy.

Thus, my view on the weak state proceeds from the state’s position in the wider distribution of power, and hence from the consideration that “the most obvious fact about small powers is that their foreign policy is governed by the policy of others”. In addition to this, the size of a country in terms of its territory and population does not automatically reflect its power, but rather its force. Notwithstanding this fact, the term “weak state” can be applied usefully to describe those countries suffering from a lack of power and which are small in terms of territory. “From this point of view, a weak or small state is any state in the international system that does not belong to the category of the power....” (*quoted by Handel, 1990: 11*).

Thus, in this discussion I can proceed using the terms “small state” and weak state as synonyms.

Figure 1: Europe in Between



## 2.1 The Position of SEE in the Europe in Between

Presently, Southeastern Europe is only the southern arm of the “Europe in Between” and for many reasons should be treated as such. The “Europe in Between”, often called “Central” and “South-Eastern Europe”, is the European area in which the four European Empires were in touch, making out and paying their mutual accounts to the 1914.

The "Europe in Between" is a rough translation of the original expression in German "*Zwischeneuropa*", which came into use during the first phase of the collapse of the European "Concert of the Four Empires", recovering that by the super powers in the Eurasian and European territorial and security order and the security and geopolitical division of Europe into Western and Eastern Europe (Kennedy, 1987)<sup>1</sup>. Evidence to the region involving a group of small states whose status has always been disputable is provided by a long list of unclear designations such as: "Eastern Europe", "Central Europe", "*Mittleuropa*" or "*Mittellage*", "East-Central Europe", "the marching lands of Europe" or other more expressive terms such as: "borderlands of the West", "the soft core of Europe", "the grey area", "*cordon sanitaire*", "*barrière de l'est*", or "*die Schützerzone*". The original term "*Zwischeneuropa*" was introduced by the Czech writer and philosopher Tomáš Masaryk<sup>2</sup>. He described the region as "*zwischen Westen und Osten, zwischen den Deutschen und Russen*", that is, "between West and East, between the Germans and Russians". This is a kind of "Middle Europe" which presently includes nineteen countries: Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia,

<sup>1</sup> According to Kennedy, the second phase of the collapse of European forces occurred after the Second World War.

<sup>2</sup> T.G. Masaryk, *Das neue Europa. Der slawische Standpunkt* (1922).

Romania, Bulgaria, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Finland, Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, Albania and Greece.

Concerning stability and security the warning that the fragmentation of the region into small states (*Kleinestaateri*)<sup>3</sup> would lead to "fatal instability" was given immediately after the creation of these states. The non-living (weak) nation-states, each in conflict with one another and internally disunited "could become chess figures in the game of the big powers". The transformation of the principle of national self-determination into a system of territorial states was described by Wilson's Secretary of State, Lansing, as a utopian idea that raises false hopes and inevitably leads to new conflicts. Immediately after the creation of the "Europe in Between", the analysts of the new territorial system described the national territorial borders as fences (imaginary or physical), on which the questions concerning war and peace and the life and death of nations are temporarily hanged (*Bowman, 1928:31*).

After WWII, during period of the bipolar European security order, the "Europe in Between" was included in the bipolar world and served as a buffer between the two security systems.

However, it should be mentioned that all the states of SEE of that time were created before the whole "Europe in Between" was created. During about 100 years they appeared as vassal, semi-independent and independent states, building their own political, national and territorial identities and autochthonism, mainly inside Ottoman Empire, and served as buffer, peripheral or edge areas<sup>4</sup>. However, it happened first of all through a crossways of the interests of the powers around, and only after that political leaders and peoples in Southeastern Europe.

Figure 2: The weakness of South East European States

Category*	Largeness	The States in the SEE (km2)
Very large	> 2.5 mil. km2	[Russia, 4.858.000]
Large	350.000 to 2,5 mil. km2	[Ukraine, 603.700; Germany, 357.021]
Mediumsize	150.000 to 350.000 km2	Romania (237.500) [Italy, 301.230]
Small	25.000 to 150.000 km2	Macedonia (25.713), Albania (28.748), BiH (51.129), Croatia (56.538), FR Yugoslavia (102.173), Bulgaria (110.912), Greece (131.944), Moldova (33.700).
Very small	under 25.000 km2	Slovenia (21.271).

\*According to Glassner's classification

Presently, the "Europe in Between", leaving aside the Ukraine, extends over 20.5% of the area of Europe and includes 50% of European countries.

In Southeastern Europe, 26.3% of the European countries occupy 8% of the surface area and are inhabited by 10% of the total population of Europe. Only Romania is medium-sized, the rest are small countries. Besides Romania, only three other countries considerably exceed 100.000 km<sup>2</sup> in area, while all the others range in size between 21.000 and 55.500 km<sup>2</sup>. During the last decade, the number of countries in Southeastern Europe doubled. The collapse of former Yugoslavia led to the emergence of five entirely new weak states. For example,

<sup>3</sup> Hungarian social democrat Jazi, for example.

<sup>4</sup> Terms as are Ukrajine, Vojna krajina in Slavic languages mean edge, margin, as frontier provinces, frontispiece etc.

only the European part of Turkey (23.623 km<sup>2</sup>) is larger than Slovenia, and very near in size to Macedonia, Albania or Moldova.

## 2.2 Southeastern Europe in the “New Geopolitical Structure”

By the term “new geopolitical structure” I understand the territorial system created by the actual re-territorialisation<sup>5</sup> at the global, Eurasian, European and regional levels. This is marked by the dialectic of individualisation, diversification and localisation as well as (re)nationalisation, regionalisation, and re-imperialisation (Newman, 1999; Wæver, 1997, 1997a; Foucher, 1993, 1998; Paasi, 1986, 1999; Mlinar, 1994; Kürti, Langman, 1997). Although this is a dialectic process, I am, in this case, interested in regionalisation and re-imperialisation whose geopolitical dimensions mostly determine stability and security in Southeastern Europe, by pushing it to the edges of wider territorial systems and delegating it the function of a periphery or border area. It is the latter that I wish to continue this discussion with.

Southeastern Europe "In Between" in the “*new global geopolitical structure*”

"A 'new' geopolitics - offering fresh perspectives on the relationship between geography and politics - is important to the development of sound, balanced, and realistic paradigms for geopolitics offers the spatial conceptual basis for the new world map" (Cohen, 1994: 15). Cohen put the word "new" geopolitics in inverted commas because the hopes for the emergence of a new world order had been quickly dispelled. On the way, STRATFOR analysts, within the context of the NATO offensive on the FR of Yugoslavia in 1999, stated that "the post-cold war world quietly ended in 1998", which means that the battle for the spheres of interest and domination has effectively just started.

Cohen's analysis covers two types of the re-orientation and realignment of political territorial units at all levels of the geopolitical chart - territorial and political.

The first one may be considered in a classical geographical way.

The "new" world will be divided into *two geostrategic or geopolitical realms* - the maritime and the Eurasian continental - "arenas of strategic place and movement". Second on the hierarchy list and within and out of the geostrategic realms are the geopolitical regions, shaped by contiguity and political, cultural, military and economic interaction, and influenced by historical movement.

The region that I described as the "Europe in Between" is, in this context, presented as the gateway region of Central and Eastern Europe, which as a *transitional zone can facilitate contact and interchange between the two realms*.

Figure 3: Southeastern Europe as the two-fold gateway: to the East and to the Middle East



<sup>5</sup> Re-territorialisation is understood as the process opposite to deterritorialisation, which is founded on globalisation and is intended to lead to a non-territorial global society.

(Source: Cohen, 1994)

What seems to be very important is that our Southeastern Europe is twofold gateway. It is between geostrategic realms and at the same time also gateway toward second outside geopolitical region named a Schatterbelt region covering Near and Middle East (Figure 3). Thus Southeastern Europe is truly specific fault line along which geopolitical divisions are emerging (again).

Only third on the hierarchy list are the nation-states which are ranked in hierarchy with regard to the position *of their power* within the world system. The “*gateway territories*” which are currently components of the sub national, or *fourth level* of the hierarchy represent a special category. Gateways are embryonic states that can accelerate exchanges that will stimulate the evolution of larger states from which the gateways have spun off.

Politically, according to Cohen, the world is becoming multipolar with a *hierarchy of states within the system*. The position of a state on the system's hierarchy list will be determined *by its capability to project its own power*. The list will not remain static, and the positions of the states on it will be *changing constantly*.

However, on top of the list are five major forces or centres of the first order: the USA, a maritime and sole military and economic colossus; Russia and China<sup>6</sup>, military strong but economically relatively weak land Eurasian forces; Japan and the European Union, economically dominant but without sufficient military capabilities.

The second place on the list is occupied by regional forces which have challenged and changed the bipolar and multipolar world, but have not displaced the major powers. Rather, they have become absorbed within an evolving system. They are located within individual regions that are already dominated by a major force and cannot represent any serious challenge. "Second-order states may have regional hegemonic aspirations, but such hopes are far from reality", says Cohen. "In general, then, the destiny of second-order powers is not to achieve hegemony over an entire geopolitical region. Rather, it is to exercise broad regional influence, with hegemony having practical significance only in relation to proximate states".

Third-order states influence regional events in special ways. They compete with neighbouring regional powers on ideological and political grounds or in having a specialised resource base, but lacking the population, military, and general economic capacities of their second-order rivals. In the “Europe in Between”, only Poland has been rated as a third-order state among the countries (Cohen, 1999). Among the states of the fourth-order, he mentions only the Sudan and Ecuador, and puts Nepal in the fifth group, stating that all these countries "have only marginal external involvement".

Let me also point out that Slovenia is described as a state which "can be a prototypical gateway state" providing markets for raw materials from Serbia, Croatia, and whatever other states emerge on the space of former Yugoslavia and facilitate industrial development and innovation that could be diffused to the new southern states.

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<sup>6</sup> In contrast to Mackinder, Spykman and R. Nixon, who considered China as a maritime force.

Figure 4: Southeastern Europe as the convergence area of the three Civilisations



(Source: Hupchick&Cox, 1996:Map 4)

The frontier's position of Southeastern Europe within the new global geopolitical structure is also determined by Huntington's concept of clashing civilisations (1998). Huntington looks for the co-ordinates of the new system in the return to cultural and religious values. Brill sees the essence of the concept in the fact that geoculture is becoming a new factor of world politics (Brill, 1997).

The strengthening of the conscience of nations over the whole world is no longer a national matter but has rather been raised to the level of belonging to particular cultural and civilisation circles. "The world will be organised on the basis of civilisations or will not be organised at all. The world in which the major states play the leading or dominant role is a world of spheres of influence. Where major states exist, they represent the central element for the new international system founded on civilisations". The result of all this is that the areas of conflict in the world are increasingly emerging along the lines demarcating the civilisations. The differentiation between these civilisations is deep and is deepening further. The current task of the West is the "efficient exploitation of international institutions and the application of such military power and economic resources as will guarantee the maintenance of Western dominance, protect its interests and promote Western political and economic values" whereby America personifies the West.

Running from the Barents Sea, along the eastern edges of the "Europe in Between", turning towards the West in Romania and joining up the former Austrian military frontier (Vojvodina and Croatia) Huntington's line separates Western from Eastern Christianity whereby Bosnia and Herzegovina represents the area of the convergence of both the Christian and Islamic faiths. From here, it extends towards the East through Sandžak and Kosovo separating, in one part, the Islamic and Orthodox religions, and separating the Montenegrin and Greek Orthodox faith from the Orthodox heartland, in another part. In the Southeast and along the Bulgarian coast of the Black Sea, it once again separates Islam from Orthodoxy.

Thus, Southeastern Europe represents a triple border area - that of Western Christianity towards Eastern Orthodoxy in the East and towards the Islamic world in the South and, at the same time, of both Christian faiths towards the Islamic world. This is the area of convergence of the three great religions where, according to Huntington, it is not easy to construct the dividing line between civilisations in clash. In his study entitled "The Clash of Civilizations" Huntington has used the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina as an example through which he has elaborated his thesis on the ending of the ideological confrontation, which will be replaced by

the confrontation between civilisations and three religions that have been taken as the best illustration of divisions, which are also marking the zone of confrontation (Vukadinovic, 1997).

### 2.3 Southeastern Europe "In Between" in the new European imperial system

This part is aimed to proceed to keep looking to position of Southeastern Europe regarding the new European geopolitical structure.

European integration and disintegration constitute part of the changes of the political space, in which the reterritorialisation means the creation of the new territorial functional systems. Such orientation of European Union dictates the extension of its security and defence perimeters towards the extreme territorial boundaries of the Union and beyond.

Figure 5: Southeastern Europe as the "grey zone" regarding the Balance-of-power in Europe



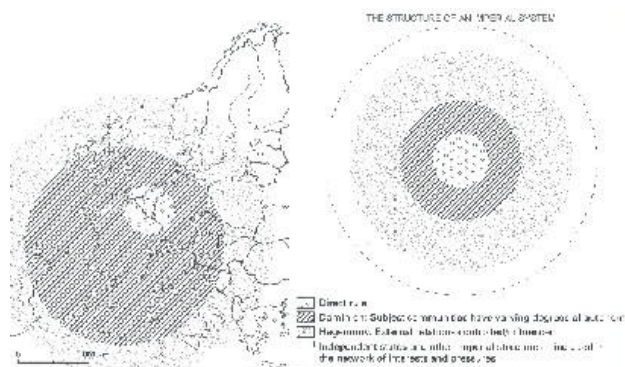
(Source: Wæver, 1997:66)

What is important in this context is that Europe is traditionally an area of balance of power in which we can see Southeastern Europe as the peripheral "grey zone". However, due to known historical facts, analysts talk of the European Union as the "neo-medieval" Europe in the spirit of medieval Christianity, the time when the European political idea rises in opposition to the "pagans".

Analysts have observed that the process of European reterritorialisation is leading to the territorial reorganisation of the Eurasian space, especially at the touchlines of Europe where numerous nations served to hold off the "others". The "others" are still talking about the creation of a European identity in opposition to Russia and the wider East. Here, the tendencies to define a new border line between the East and West are what Kjellen has called the "Great Cultural Divide", i.e., the use of history and religion in order to define the "others" on the other side, in military and cultural terms (Tunander, 1997: 19-20).

They are talking, at least metaphorically, of an European empire centred in Brussels with the periphery towards other imperial centres, Ankara and Moscow. Analysts generally agree, in the case of the European Union, that it's a matter of a return to an imperial system structure consisting of the following:

Figure 6: Integrated Europe and the Structure of Imperial Organized Systems



(Wæver, 1997: 64&67)

- o the central region (direct rule),
- o a circle of dominions with peripheral or local autonomous authorities who undisputedly accept the supremacy of the centre,
- o a circle of units with almost full internal independence, but with limitations in the field of their foreign policy, and certainly with a prohibition of mutual war (the hegemony circle),
- o a circle of units as recognised independent countries, albeit unequal, whereby the loyalty of leaders to other systems is also recognised (independent countries).

The system of territorial concentric circles also exemplifies the hierarchy of the distribution of power and the interests of the centre. More concretely, regarding the European Union, the hierarchical territorial system is represented by the structure from the "centre" around Brussels to the "periphery", and then followed by the "others". The system of territorial concentric circles also exemplifies the hierarchy of the distribution of power and the interests of the centre. The imperial ambitions in the European area which may, likewise, be felt or expected are harboured by Russia and Turkey, as can be seen by their policies in Southeastern Europe.

The imperialisation of the European space is characterised also with traditional rivalry of Germany, Russia and Turkey. The last two, due to their imperial legacy and geographical location, are even today wavering between the national and imperial vision of their identity (Wæver, 1997; Hassner, 1997)<sup>7</sup>. Therefore, it is a matter of the already familiar Europe of several imperial systems with centres and peripheries which may become a reality, especially in the event of the failure of the European Union project. As Wæver (1997:79) observes, "In the Yugoslav case, EU logic is to be involved too little rather than too much in peripheral European affairs. If the EU collapsed, the Great Powers that would emerge - Germany, France and Italy - would be much more inclined to intervene completely. In a European arena of rivalry, sub-regional gains would not be unimportant, gains in the Balkans would count. For

<sup>7</sup> Hassner argues that France and Great Britain were also European Imperial forces but outside European territory.

One of the major topics of the forecasts made by STRATFOR staff for the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century was "Europe Comes in Crossroads", "Germany as a Foundation Stone" (or keystone, "The New European Strategic Environment" and "European Dis-synchronisation"). Although the analysts strongly reject the forecast that something serious will happen during the decade, they have nonetheless clearly analysed the obstacles to the building of the European Union and have hinted at security and defence dis-synchronisation with respect to the position of Germany (and Poland), which is emerging with the return of the Russian Armed Forces to the eastern Polish border and, as such, to the NATO border and with the possible integration of the Ukraine.

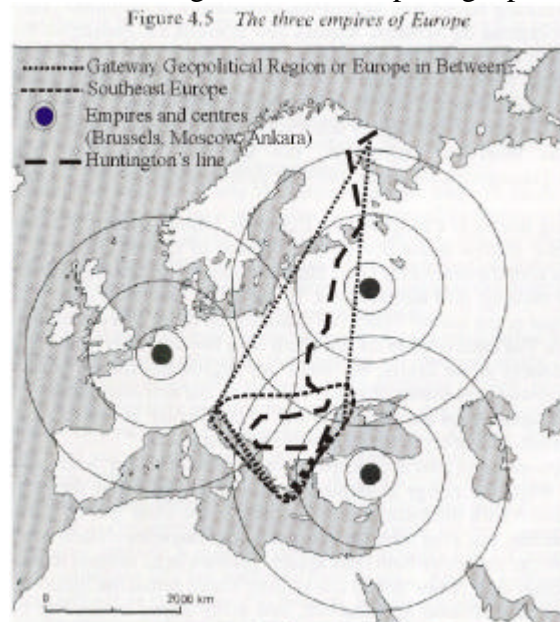


the EU, the aim is to lift itself to the level of a global political-economic actor and thus to avoid being caught up in old-fashioned, local struggles".

Instead of a system of sovereign states, we shall have to deal with complex centralised cultural/political structures of semi-independent states, with a uniquely complicated dualistic or double-headed *suzerain state-system* (Wight, 1977). In such a system, the importance and status of the states will depend on their position in the imperial territorial hierarchy of concentric circles from the centres towards their peripheries. This is what Taylor described as the imperialist system characterised by the operation of two types of state: "the core" (centre) and the periphery, with two classes of citizens operating in each of the groups: the rulers and the ruled (Taylor, 1997: 110-111).

In this context, Southeastern Europe is undoubtedly shifting to the function of the border area and convergence space, in which there is a likelihood of sovereign states being hardly recognisable. Instead of this they will be entrenched into lumps or sheaf of the weak states forming the intermingling border or tampon areas, with the centres providing them some form of "soft security".<sup>8</sup> Only some of them will have relatively more freedom for manoeuvres inside peripheral areas (not only because of position in this sense).

Figure 7: SEE in the new global and European geopolitical structure

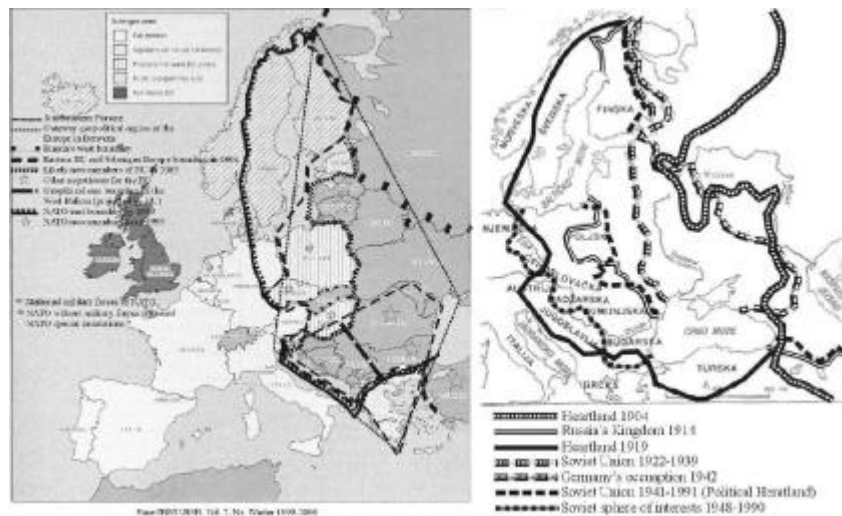


(Source: Wæver, 1997:77)

Is it then strange that the main ambition of the states in the area is to escape the tampon status (*glacis*) although it is not yet clear whether this is possible at all (Foucher, 1998: 236).

<sup>8</sup> As was introduced by Olav F. Knudsen for the Baltic States during an international Partnership for Peace seminar "Security in the Northern European Region", Stockholm, December 1999. There have been trends towards defining Europe without the Balkans, to define "The Balkans" as non-European.

Figure 8: Borders, borders and borders, but what about the weak states in between?



## 2.4 Southeastern Europe with respect to the new borders of wider functional territorial systems

For decades now, it has been repeated at almost all public gatherings that territory is no longer important and that we are building a Europe without separating borders while, at the same time, new separation lines and divisions are being created. It is undisputable that boundaries are a part of economy, security and strategy. With the shifts and the creation of new economic, security, military and other territorial systems, a system of functional boundaries is being developed, which is in contrast to the requirements for stability and security in Southeast Europe and the small states of the region.

"The First Europe" (*Brzezinski, 1995*) or "The European Fortress" (*Mann, 1993*) was created with the adoption of the so-called Schengen Border, while the enlargement of the European Union and NATO is meant to guarantee Europe a security belt, i.e., a periphery and, in that way, a "soft" contact with the East. A look at the illustration of the movement and formation of territorial boundaries clearly shows the border and convergence function of Southeastern Europe and its very complicated position. Are state territorial boundaries of the weak states of Eastern and Southeastern Europe keeping their autochthonous functions or do they abandon them in favour of the functions of borders of wider territorial systems? The concept of the enlargement of the European Union envisages the creation of peripheral states of the Union which are, today, already performing the frontal protection of the Schengen border. Russia shares no border with the Schengen Europe and very likely will not have any such border even after the European Union enlargement. In the sector of the Balkans or Southeastern Europe, we have now all three (SHE, EU and NATO) boundaries and borders corresponding to the same location, but with the NATO military operational bridgehead and forward lines of their own troops, observation posts, operational bases and forward positions in the Weak States of the Balkans.

It is clear that the role of Southeastern Europe as a border area is traditionally and presently also manifested in its peripheral position with respect to the Russian sphere of interest. Looking at the second picture of the Figure 8 this is evident also by the current security doctrine of the Russian Federation. As a Eurasian force, Russia inherited strategic interests that may be seen in the conceptualisation of its national security policy. The states of Southeastern Europe are located in the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> circles of Russian security interests about which the Russian Federation may bargain with the West whether these countries could be her allies in the formation of *ad hoc* political alliances against the West, especially the USA (*Grizold, Ferfila, 2000: 91*).

### 3. Instead of a conclusion

However, our Southeastern Europe is like the frontier area of everything. Given what has been said above, it is not difficult to conclude that the weaknesses and the smallness of the SEE countries is highly conditioned by the position of the region "In Between", on the intermingling edges and peripheries of powers and empires, serving as a gateway between realms. None of the SEE states belongs to the first circle of any system, and all are vulnerable to the conflicting nature of the border area in which the empires meet or where, to a less or more extent, their peripheries overlap. These are areas in which the European Union, NATO and individual forces expand, through a combination of economic, diplomatic and security (military) mechanisms, their new functional borders. The transformation of the "*First Europe*" (Brzezinski, 1995) or the "*European Fortress*" (Mann, 1993) into the Schengen Europe and the enlargement of the European Union and NATO towards the East have, primarily, geopolitical, geostrategic and security intentions, i.e., to create new functional and security borders which will be dislocated from the official borders of these territorial security systems, and to create their own peripheries (Foucher, 1998).

The citizens of the states of Eastern and Southeastern Europe bordering with Schengen Europe are now "foreigners" who are subjected, upon entering Schengen Europe, to all the procedures of classical and thorough border control.

Foucher has posed a question: "Is the concept of 'frontierisation' adequate to understand better what the essence of the European Union is? (Foucher, 1998:236). In the same way, I am also posing the following question: Is the concept of the 'frontierisation' of Southeastern Europe (and the wider Eastern and Southeastern Europe) adequate to understand better what the essence of the stability and security of the weak states in the region is?"

It is clear that Southeastern Europe consumes more history than it is capable of locally digesting. It also appears that its history is difficult to digest even for the UN, NATO, EU, Russia, and individual European forces. Has this region really been condemned to endemic instability and constant conflicts forever, and have the Balkans bred congenital barbarity which effectively obstructs peaceful co-existence? Have we, first of all, asked ourselves where and who we are? Although the region has been decomposed again, becoming periphery, and testing field for "democracy", but also for military, weapons, power-relations... answers to all questions of their destiny must be found by peoples of this region. One thing is certain: nobody can do it but we ourselves.

Many times during our discussion today the question was how our weak states should become strong states. I think this is not the right question. The more important issue is actually how our weak states are to become "normal weak states".

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