



WESTERN BALKANS AT THE CROSSROADS: ASSESSING NON-DEMOCRATIC EXTERNAL INFLUENCE ACTIVITIES

THE PRAGUE SECURITY STUDIES INSTITUTE (PSSI)
IS LAUNCHING A PROJECT

WESTERN BALKANS AT THE CROSSROADS: ASSESSING NON-DEMOCRATIC EXTERNAL INFLUENCE ACTIVITIES

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DEMOCRACY.

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About PSSI: PSSI is a non-profit, non-governmental organization established in early 2002 to advance the building of a just, secure, democratic, free market society in the Czech Republic and other post-communist states. PSSI's mission is to build an ever-growing group of informed and security-minded policy practitioners dedicated to the development of democratic institutions and values in the Central and South East Europe.

The project team will consist of Prague-based Balkan experts and one local researcher from each of the five countries in focus.

SUMMARY

The project will seek to identify, analyse and publicize Russian, Chinese, Turkish, and Gulf State influence activities and sharp power¹ in the Balkans. PSSI will specifically focus on malign foreign influence in five post-Yugoslav and not-EU member countries: Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Macedonia, and Kosovo. It will present its findings and recommendations to local and international experts, civil society, the media, and the public through six thematic briefs, series of blog posts and case study articles, a comprehensive final report, and a conference.

¹ A term coined by Christopher Walker and Jessica Ludwig of the National Endowment for Democracy to describe authoritarian powers' activities, which while not "hard" in the openly coercive sense, are not really "soft" either. In the new competition that is under way between autocratic and democratic states, the repressive regimes' "sharp power" techniques should be seen as the tip of their dagger—or indeed as their syringe. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2017-11-16/meaning-sharp-power>

BACKGROUND

In the past couple of years the former Yugoslav states that are not members of the EU or NATO (with the exception of Montenegro that gained NATO membership in June 2017), notably Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Macedonia, Montenegro and Kosovo, have been confronted with a wave of rising ethnic and social tensions, authoritarian impulses and corruption scandals. These tumultuous events have led to democratic backsliding in a number of cases. Serious vulnerabilities have emerged in this volatile region that are being exploited by non-democratic external powers for the purpose of increasing their leverage to achieve tactical and strategic gains with the ultimate goal of obstructing further integration of the Western Balkans into the EU and/or NATO. The Balkans have historically been viewed as a zone of great-power rivalry, where shrinking European or US involvement in the past decade has created a window of opportunity for malevolent external forces to diminish the freedom of action of several of the individual countries. Certain of these outside powers with relatively deep historical, cultural or economic ties to the region – most importantly Russia, China, Turkey and the Gulf states (i.e. Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the UAE), seek to increase their influence in the region employing a wide spectrum of tools, including economic, political, cultural and religious.

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

- Deliver a comprehensive analysis of influence activities carried out in the former Yugoslav non-EU member states by non-democratic external powers aimed at obstructing further integration of region countries into the EU or NATO.
- Gain valuable insights and illuminate a number of worrying trends designed to provide these external forces with lasting strategic advantage and greater control over local societies and politics.
- Raise awareness concerning the insidious meddling of foreign powers in this region and catalyse greater activism by the EU and NATO in countering these harmful activities.

PLANNED PROJECT ACTIVITIES

- Six briefing papers focusing on foreign power's influence in particular social domains such as politics, economic, religion or extremism
- Series of short articles covering current affairs and interesting case studies but embedded in a broader context
- Final publication providing a comprehensive picture of different influence activities and approaches used by Russia, China, Turkey, and the Gulf States in Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Macedonia, and Kosovo
- Concluding conference where new measures to counter the malign activities of external actors and ways to enhance the prosperity and stability of the region will be discussed

The project deliverables will be targeted at the policy-making and NGO expert communities as well as the general public in EU/NATO countries and the Balkans themselves.