

Eötvös Loránd Tudományegyetem, Budapest

Univerzita Karlova v Praze

TEMA Erasmus Mundus Master Course

MASTER'S THESIS

**"Region building in the Western Balkan and Visegrad countries – political
and media discourse in Macedonia"**

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Budapest, Prague 2016

Hereby I declare that I worked out this thesis independently, using only the listed resources and literature, and I did not present it to obtain another academic degree.

Budapest 03th June 2016

Abstract

The process of region building and regionalization is an emerging phenomenon examined in the same time by historians, geographers, political scientists, economists diplomats and other scientific profiles. The concepts of region and regionalization could appear at different spatial scales, such as supra-state, sub-state or as a cross-border units and processes. Furthermore region and regionalization are complex for defining because they incorporate different narratives and categories as regional identity, spatial borders and delineating, cultural and social homogeneity, political and economic interdependence etc. Regions are invented, re-invented or constructed with purpose to reply to different functional, territorial and administrative purposes. In the era of ongoing globalization and deepening of the European integration, regions are becoming powerful tool for achieving different goals and interests. Nowadays regions, regional cooperation, regional identity are becoming a terms very often used in political and public discourses for different kind of mobilization. Western Balkan, similarly as Visegrad and Baltic regional formats is one of the emerging spatial formation that is appearing in the context of EU integration policies. In Macedonian political and public discourse these tendencies are also visible and are becoming powerful political and social mobilization factor. The terms ‘Western Balkan region’ and ‘regional identity’ are taken as granted without any kind of precise explanation what they exactly mean. Anssi Passi approach of analyzing the emergence of regions and regional identities could provide arguments whether Western Balkan is a region and what kind of regional identity is represented in the Macedonian political and public discourse

Резиме

Процесот на создавање на регион и регионализација е појава која ја истражуваат историчари, географичари, политички научници, економисти, дипломати и други научни профили. Концептот на регион и регионализација може да се појави во различни просторни размери како на пример регион преку повеќе држави, регион во држава или како прекугранична единица и процес. Регионот и регионализацијата се сложени за дефинирање, бидејќи вклучуваат различни наративи и категории како регионален идентитет, просторни граници и одбележувања, културно и социјално единство, политичка и економска меѓузависност итн. Регионите се измислени, ре-измислени или изградени со намера да одговорат на различни функционални, територијални и административни намени. Во ератата на тековна глобализација и продлабочување на европската интеграција, регионите стануваат моќна алатка за постигнување на различни цели и интереси.

Денес регионите, регионалната соработка и регионалниот идентитет стануваат термини многу често употребувани во политичкиот и јавниот дискурс за различен вид на мобилизација. Западниот Балкан слично како и Вишеградскиот и Балтичкиот регионален формат е еден од растечките просторни формации кои се јавуваат како резултат на ЕУ интегративните политики. Во македонскиот политички и јавен дискурс овие тенденции се видливи и стануваат моќен политички и општествен фактор. Термините како “Регион на Западен Балкан” и “регионален идентитет” се користат, без притоа да се даде било какво објаснување за нивното точно значење. Оваа теза користејќи го пристапот на Анси Паси и неговата анализа за појавата на региони и регионалните идентитети може да обезбеди аргументи дали Западниот Балкан е регион и каков вид на регионален идентитет е претставен во македонскиот политички и јавен дискурс.

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List of abbreviations

CS - Copenhagen School

EU- European Union

RBA - Region Building Approach

RCC - Regional Cooperation Council

SEE - South East Europe

US -United States

V4- Visegrad Group

WB - Western Balkan

WBDPD - Western Balkans Defence Policy Directors

Introduction

In the past few decades regionalism and regionalization, gain strong impetus and they become emerging phenomenon especially in Europe. Regions were invented, reinvented, or totally new were constructed with purpose to reply to different functional and territorial purposes. This means that the regions are not historically or geographically strictly determined, but they are institutionalized spaces that are socially constructed and politically contested. The processes of various spatial reshaping continuously are occurring at the European continent, but special dynamics and impetus gained only after 1950s. EU even itself is a product of the regionalization and as such embrace the idea of the region and region building process and develop whole set of regional policies through which supports the idea 'Europe of the regions'. Regions and regionalization have a multidimensional characters and they could appear at different levels, and can result with supra-state, sub-state or even with cross border spatial units.

In this thesis special focus will be put on the regions which are emerging at supra-state level and which are product of the various globalization trends but when it comes to Europe they are result also of the influence of European Union policies and its political practices. These was especially evident in the case of the countries from the Visegrad and the Baltic region. The countries from the Balkans or South East Europe (SEE) was not exception of these region building processes but they were postponed because of the armed conflicts triggered by dissolution of Yugoslavia at the beginning of the 1990s. The regionalization in the Balkans faced a lot of difficulties as a result of the antagonism between the countries. However the shifting in the dynamics of the regional cooperation have occurred only after in second part of the 1990s when many regional cooperation formats were initiated mostly by actors outside of the region, such as EU and USA. EU accession process have had a strong contribution towards accepting the regional cooperation by the Western Balkan countries as an important and valuable EU precondition. The terms 'Western Balkan' and 'Western Balkan region' become commonly accepted signifier inside and outside from the region for the regional interactions among the countries and their various cooperation formats. For the politicians they started to be inevitable phrase in their vocabulary and in the public media usual references for the countries from the region. As in the other Western

Balkan countries also in Macedonia in the political and public discourse these terms became commonly used.

Speaking about the study disciplines which could be applied for the purposes of this research and taking in consideration that there are a lot of different understanding of the region and the process of regionalization there is an evident necessity of interdisciplinary approach for examining of this topic. Knowing the fact that historian, geographers, anthropologist very rarely are dealing with the regions at supra-state level and political societies, economist, international relations experts very rarely used their analytical tools I considered that overcoming the gaps between different understanding of the concepts of region and regionalization by these two camps could be reduced only with interdisciplinary approach.

The thesis will research whether Western Balkan presents a region through the approach developed by Anssi Passi and using his theory of institutionalization of the region. Through the four stages that Anssi Passi have argued that every region has I will try to show whether Western Balkan could be considered as a region. Additionally as a particular suitable for the case of the Western Balkan I am considering Passi's analytical distinction between two different types of regional identities - 'identity of a region' and 'regional consciousness' (or regional identity of the inhabitants, i.e. their identification with their region). I would analyze what kind of regional identity of Western Balkan is presented in the political and public discourse in Macedonia. However I want to point out on the limitations regarding examining the regional identity especial at this kind of supra-state regional unit and because of that regional identity will not be *per se* topic of this thesis, and I only will focus in which type of identity could be position Western Balkan identity presented in the political and public discourse in Macedonia.

Basically the analysis of the Western Balkan region is done in accordance with the constructivist approach of understanding the region building connections between regionalization and constructing regional collective identities. According to constructivism, the regions actually are socially constructed categories which are emerging for example from collective perception of common identity, common interests, values and trust or shared feelings of historical and cultural belonging, mutual interdependence etc. Therefore, regions could not be considered as fully static concepts but as categories which very often have fuzzy and shifting boundaries. Regions are

institutional structures and processes that are constantly in process of constructing. This kind of approach is especially communally accepted in the political science, economy, international relations where actually the term 'region- building' is used for characterizing these processes of deepening the interactions between states. Regarding the time frame analysis will focus on two time periods, first period in hronologicly in details is covering all the speeches, statements and articles the last two years and the second covers period of 5 years and it is focus only on main regional conference and events.

The thesis research will be based on the following research questions:

Whether Western Balkan presents a region according to the Anssi Passi theory of institutionalization of regions?

What kind of regional identity of Western Balkan is represented in nowadays political and public discourse in Macedonian?

How Western Balkan regional cooperation is represented in nowadays political and public discourse in Macedonian?

Firstly through elaboration of the process of region building and regionalization in Western Balkan countries and through comparison with some elements from Visegrad regional cooperation, secondly knowing the fact that regional cooperation in the Western Balkan region as a term and process is also widely used by the Macedonian political elites and presented in public discourse and thirdly taking in consideration that Western Balkan is widely represented as a region in Macedonia political and public discourse this kind of research will contribute for better understanding what these terms and process is actually representing. The thesis will contribute with providing completely new data to the broader academic community especially in Macedonian and other Western Balkan countries where regional studies are underrepresented.

Regarding the structure of the thesis, in the first chapter the theoretical and methodological consideration used for the research are elaborated. Second chapter covers the main concepts that are important for the thesis. That is the concepts of region form one side and concepts of regionalism and regionalization from another. The focus of the third chapter is related to the notion of the Balkan and emergence of the notion of Western Balkan. In the fourth chapter is used Anssi Passi theory of institutionalization of region for analyzing the Western Balkan region and its

regional identity. The fifth chapter are giving some comparative perspective of the Visegrad region and region cooperation with intention to point out that this kind of regionalization is affecting and other countries and spatial unit in Europe.

1. Theoretical and methodological approaches

1.1. Theoretical considerations

Regarding the theoretical frame of the thesis research I am using the theory of institutionalization of regions which is developed by Anssi Paasi and according to which “institutionalization of the region is the process through which regions come to being”.¹ More precisely Paasi is emphasizing that through the process of institutionalization regions actually gain their boundaries, symbolisms, institutions or even may become a significant unit for regional identification or for a purported regional identity.² Additionally for the analysis of the Western Balkan regional identity, as a very suitable concept I am considering the Paasi’s concept related to the category of regional identity. For better understanding of the complexity of the relations between these two concepts ‘region’ and ‘identity’, according to his concept, there is a need for analytical distinction between ‘identity of a region’ and ‘regional consciousness’ (or regional identity of the inhabitants, i.e. their identification with their region).³ The section devoted to the distinction between different dimensions of the regional identity will be elaborated in the second part of this sub-chapter.

According to Paasi the regions should be conceptualized as a historically contingent process but in same time also as social constructs that do not rise in a vacuum but that are made in broader social practice – regions are hence contested results of power relations.⁴ In the case of the

¹ A. Paasi, *Bounded spaces in the mobile world: Deconstructing ‘Regional Identity’*, University of Oulu, Department of Geography, Finland, 2001, p.140.

² A. Paasi, *The Resurgence of the ‘Region’ and ‘Regional Identity’: Theoretical Perspectives and Empirical Observations on Regional Dynamics in Europe*, *Review of International Studies*, in “Globalising the Regional, Regionalising the Global”, Vol. 35 (Feb., 2009), pp. 121-146.

³ A. Paasi, *The institutionalization of regions: a theoretical framework for understanding the emergence of regions and the constitution of regional identity*, “Fennia”, Vol. 164 (1986), issue 1, pp.105-146.

⁴ A. Paasi, *The Resurgence of the ‘Region’ and ‘Regional Identity’: Theoretical Perspectives and Empirical Observations on Regional Dynamics in Europe*, in “Review of International Studies: Globalising the Regional, Regionalising the Global”, Vol. 35 (Feb., 2009), pp. 121-146.

Western Balkan, I am arguing that the previous argument of Passi is actually giving an explanation to the nature of the regionalization among the Western Balkan countries. Basically it is a constructivism approach of understanding the region formation and regionalism, according to which these concepts are product of complicated and multidimensional interactions of the social actors, their different interrelations and interests, agency, other social and power relations.⁵ Therefore it is understandable the claiming that more often the traditional ideas of regions as naturally given, bounded, and historical entities are challenged.⁶ In this context is going another claiming of Passi according to which "...regions are sometimes meaningful historical units or ad hoc units created for the purpose of governance".⁷ Regions are institutional structures and processes that are perpetually 'becoming' instead of just 'being'.⁸ This kind of approach is especially communally accepted in the political science, economy, international relations where actually the term 'region- building' is used for characterizing these processes of deepening the interactions between states. It is very important to be mentioned the fact that historians and geographers consider and analyze the region as a sub-state category, while for the political, economic, international relations scientists the region is a supra-state category. As a result of these there are plenty of different understandings and approaches which leads to numerous different definitions of the term 'region'. The same situations is appearing also in the context of the term 'regional identity' where for the first, it is a sub-state and for the latter, it is a macro-category.

Furthermore Passi is arguing that "...constitutive powers of regions may originate both from the region and from the outside"⁹ which in the analysis that will follow further in this text will closely examined what kind of motivated regionalism is particularly appearing in the case of Western Balkan region. For purpose of analysis of the nature of the dynamic forces that contribute for constituting the Western Balkan region, I am considering that also suitable is the approach of the Iver Neumann according to whom there are two dominant approaches which leads to region building. One of them is driven by the internal, and the other one by the external factors, and they

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Ibid

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Ibid

are known as 'inside-out' approach focusing on cultural integration and an 'outside-in' approach focusing on geopolitics ¹⁰

For the purposes of this research as I have mentioned in previous some constructivist approach will be used.

Constructivism is theoretical approach which is characterized by its heterogeneity and that "encompasses Weberian interpretative sociology, Symbolic Interactionism, variants of Marxism, Veblenian institutionalism post-structuralism(s) and hermeneutics."¹¹

Speaking about the way how constructivists perceive the reality it should be mention the fact that "...the world should not be taken for granted as it is, because the world is a project under construction, changing constantly."¹² So the constructivist are connecting material world with two categories: social reality and scientific knowledge. "It means that knowledge is used on a daily basis for construction of reality, but at the same time knowledge in forms of theories or concepts is used by scientists to interpret social reality."¹³ According to constructivism "the construction of social reality is subject to a continuous process of learning, which allows the establishment of a connection between the origin of social facts, their unfolding and their possible future developments."¹⁴ "At any point in time and place of historical process, institutional or social facts may be socially constructed by collective understandings of the physical and the social world that are subject to authoritative (political) selection processes and thus to evolutionary change."¹⁵ Furthermore in the domain of interest of Constructivism are the state interests and identities which are considered as socially constructed categories. "It must be also mentioned that

¹⁰ I. Neumann, *A Region-Building Approach to Northern Europe*, "Review of International Studies", Vol. 20, No. 1 (Jan., 1994), pp. 53-74.

¹¹ Bozdaglioglu Y.; "Constructivism and Identity Formation: An Interactive Approach"; 2007 as cited in Ronen Palan, "A world of their making: an evaluation of the constructivist critique in International Relations"; Review of International StudVioels., 26, No. 4, 2000, pp. 575-598, p. 576;

¹² Adler E.; "Constructivism and International Relations"; Handbook of International Relations; Sage Publication; London; 2002; p.95;

¹³ Ibid; p. 95;

¹⁴ Tassinari F.; "Mare Europaeum: Baltic Sea Region Security and Cooperation from Post-Wall to Post-Enlargement Europe"; Univ. of Copenhagen; 2004;

¹⁵ Adler E.; "Seizing the Middle Ground: Constructivism in World Politics"; European Journal of International Relations (3:3); 1997; p339

constructivism gives an emphasis on processes of constructing individuals, groups and threats as "social facts" and how those constructions influence security concerns."¹⁶

Constructivist theories related to regionalism "focus on regional awareness and regional identity, on the shared sense of belonging to a particular regional community, on what has been called - cognitive regionalism. They stress the extent to which regional cohesion depends on a sustained and durable sense of community based on mutual responsiveness, trust, and high levels of what might be called - cognitive interdependence."¹⁷

Furthermore some concepts elaborated by Iver B. Neumann in his *Region Building Approach (RBA)* could be applied for the purpose of the analysis. According to Neumann there are two dominant approaches which leads to region building. One of them is driven by the internal, and the other one by the external factors, and they are known as 'inside-out' approach focusing on cultural integration and an 'outside-in' approach focusing on geopolitics¹⁸ From other side RBA as own goals has examining the ontological origins of the regions, with intention for better understanding how and why they are constituted. Neumann is arguing that regions also could be seen as imagined communities as it is for the nations according to the developed theory by Benedict Anderson. "In a complex historical analysis Anderson shows how a common linguistic space, the nation, was created through the development of new forms of mass-communication and state administrative practices and came to be experienced by its members as a community. We thus, Anderson emphasizes, distinguish members from nonmembers and are often willing to make heavy sacrifices for a community that is seen as a sovereign political entity."¹⁹

This argument Neumann formed on the fact that nation state simulates the archetypal principle for political organization, and on the genealogy of nations as imagined communities.²⁰ However Neumann is arguing that difference between nation- building and region-building is

¹⁶ Krause K., Williams M.C.; "Broadening the Agenda of Security Studies: Politics and Methods"; *International Studies Review* 2; 1996; p.

¹⁷ Hurrell A.; "Regionalism in Theoretical Perspective"; "Regionalism in World Politics: Regional Organization and International Order" (eds. Louise Fawcett L. and Hurrell A.) Oxford; 1995; p.64

¹⁸ I. Neumann, *A Region-Building Approach to Northern Europe*, "Review of International Studies", Vol. 20, No. 1 (Jan., 1994), pp. 53-74.

¹⁹ Hobolt M.; "LSE 'Europe in Question - interest politics and regional imagined communities"; Publication No. 34/2011 (edt. Dr. Joan Costa-i-Font, Mareike Kleine and others); The London School of Economics and Political Science; London; 2011; p.24

²⁰ Neumann I. B.; "A Region-Building Approach to Northern Europe"; *Review of International Studies* n. 20; 1994; p.58 ;

visible in the intentions of the actors who construct both of them. Actor in region building do not have intention to necessarily to establish a sovereign political entity which will have own "nationalism". While political actors have the role of evaluating and tailoring historical materials of various kinds upon which nations are constructed, these kind of role for building the regional history and memory have region builders. As a result, regions are essentially a product of political actors and are created by actor-generated discourses on the region. As for the discourse, regions are defined in term of "speech acts" which confirms the radically constructivist nature of the approach.²¹

As a methodological tools for describing particular speech act it is used discourse and content analysis which means that analyst with their utilization should interpret whether an issue presents a security issue.

1.2. Methodological approaches

The methodological approach of this thesis will be based on the content analysis and discourse analysis. Also will be used the Anssi Passi approach towards institutionalization of the regions, and its four stages for analyzing whether Western Balkan and Visegrad represent a regions. The necessary data for using these approach will be gathered through content and discourse analysis (political and public discourse).

The content analysis will focuses on the relevant documents related to the Western Balkan and Visegrad regional cooperation.

The discourse analysis will be related to the political and public discourse. Public discourse analysis is done from the point of view in what connotation is mentioned the term 'Western Balkans' (positive, neutral or negative) and the regional cooperation processes among countries from this region, which type of cooperation is prevailing and whether Western Balkans is considered as a region. For the purposes of the analysis the following keywords are used: *Western Balkans, region, regional cooperation, regional approach, regional cohesion, values and*

²¹ Ibid; p. 59 ;

identity. The analysis will be made in a manner of quantitative approach measuring if the key words are repetitive, that means that they have growing importance and usage, within the research period.

The political discourse analysis also will be qualitative and will focus on the official statements of Macedonian Ministry of foreign affairs and Ministry of defense as a two ministries which are most deeply included in the regional cooperation activities. The choice of these ministries is made taking in consideration the practical issue such as availability of relevant sources. Furthermore official statements from the state official from these two ministries will be analyzed. In the case of the Visegrad region the joint statements of the Ministers for foreign affairs of the four countries will be taken for analysis.

A politician or senior official that publicly expresses a judgment with respect to the state of the regional cooperation or the security situation in the region is a source that provides a fair indication of the terms by which the political establishment in that specific country is discussing the topic.²² Utilization of the discourse analysis also will be oriented to analyze official statements individually and taking all of them in a common context, using as a reference the key words related to Western Balkans.

The public discourse analysis is done through the analysis of three most circulated daily newspapers in Macedonia from the point of view in what connotation is mentioned the term 'Western Balkans' (positive, neutral or negative) and the regional cooperation processes among countries from this region, which type of cooperation is prevailing and whether Western Balkans is considered as a region. For the purposes of the analysis the same keywords are used as in the political discourse analyses, such as: *Western Balkans, region, regional cooperation, regional approach, regional cohesion, values and identity*.

²² Neumann I. B.; "A Region-Building Approach to Northern Europe"; Review of International Studies n. 20; 1994; p.

1.3.Sources

As a source for this thesis research will be used the official statements, speeches, press releases, reports from meetings from the Macedonian Ministry of foreign affairs and Ministry of defense as well as the statements and speeches from state official from both ministries. All of these official documents are available in the electronic version on the web sites of the respective Ministries.

Further as a source for the thesis research will be used the articles from the three most circulated daily newspapers in Macedonia: “Utrinski vesnik”, “Vecher” and “Dnevnik”. All the articles which are subject of examination are publicly available on the electronic archives of these newspapers.

Additionally relevant documents related to the Western Balkan regional cooperation and relevant document for the Visegrad regional cooperation will be taken in consideration for data gathering and analysis. These documents are publicly available in electronic version on the web site of European Commission, Visegrad groups and different non-governmental organization and libraries

As a secondary sources specific academic and research literature and analysis will be used. Furthermore materials from newspapers, news agencies and websites specifically related to case studies of regional cooperation in Western Balkan and Visegrad countries will be examined.

For the theoretical part of the research will be used materials related to the constructivist approach towards regionalization, region and regional identity mostly by authors as Anssi Passi Iver B. Neumann, Michael Keating and others.

Also I want to state that I’m completely aware that analyzed two regions represented linguistic heterogeneity units but also English language is unofficially lingua franca and all official documents concerning regional security cooperation in the both regions are in English language. Additionally even statements of state officials, national ministries of defense or foreign affairs are easily found in English language.

1.4.Purpose of this thesis

As a first objective of this thesis is through the Anssi Passi approach to analyze whether Western Balkan fulfill the criteria to be consider as a region. The Second objective is to find out what kind of regional identity of the Western Balkans is represented in the political discourse in Macedonia. The thesis will contribute for understanding how regional cooperation, regional cohesiveness and societal integration of Western Balkans countries is represented in the nowadays media and public discourse in Macedonia. Also one of the objectives is to be made some comparison with the region building and regional cooperation between Western Balkan and Visegrad countries as a two regions which in European and global political and academic discourse of the process of regionalization are inevitable part of used terminology.

2. Elaboration of used concepts

2.1.Region

In the literature it is noticeable that many scholars are using region, regionalization and regionalism without clearly to point out on the differences between them and also they are taking them as a granted terms. I consider that before elaborating the concept of regionalization and regionalism, it is necessary to explain what the term "region" means, because basically the other two concepts are deriving from the concept of region.

If we follow the linguistics origin of the word region then in the literature could be found that "it is steams from the Latin word "regio", which means direction. It is also derived from the Latin verb "regere" meaning "to rule" or "to command".²³

The notion of region is connected with different features and categories, which some of them are obvious and visible or a contrary some of them might be not so determined and are object of many dilemmas. Because of this it is understandable the existence of many definitions about what is a region, and their different standing points in interpretations of the reasons why some unit

²³ Söderbaum F., Timothy S.; "Theories of New Regionalism"; Palgrave Macmillan; Houndmills and New York; 2003; p.6

is considered as a region. Also not-universal stance is caused by the different dimensional approaches and scientific disciplines which researcher might be using in the observation and analysis. "In this endeavor, the literature normally converges attention to the formation of regional social linkages (language, culture, ethnicity, awareness of a common historical heritage), political linkages (political institutions, ideology, regime types) or economic linkages (preferential trade arrangements)."²⁴

One of the most common problems which appears when it comes to regions, is delineating their exact spatial borders. Sometimes the borders are geographically determined, but sometimes they are result of political and administrative processes. Their borders sometimes could be just imagined or determined by some cultural, linguistic and social features, which makes them easy to be contested. From other side there is consensus that the term refers to space, the notion of space itself can have several meanings: territorial space; political space and the space of social interaction; economic space; functional space.²⁵

Speaking about the region as a political space it could be point out that in these manner regions are understood as a spaces where different political debates and decisions are undertaken and legitimized.²⁶ Keating is stating that political dimension of the regional space is also connected to the existing of distinct media and principle in which civil society is organizing. For this argument I could point out at the example from Visegrad and Western Balkan region where already are established e- media and different civil society organization platforms which have common regional dimension.

In the attempts for political determination of the region is important to be taken in consideration the level of its political and social institutionalization, because through this process the particular unit exercises own political, economic or other interests. In political terms "region is presented as a level to build new structures of strategic and democratic governance, and to complement or even partially replace, political responsibilities and representations at the national level"²⁷. According

²⁴ Tavares R.; "The State of the Art of Regionalism - The Past, Present and Future of a Discipline"; Dept. of Peace and Development Research, Gothenburg University (PADRIGU); Sweden; 2004; p.4

²⁵ Keating M.; "Is there a Regional Level of Government in Europe?"; "Regions and Regionalism in Europe" (eds. Michael Keating M.); Cheltenham, UK and Northampton, USA; 2004; p.568

²⁶ Ibid; p. 578 -579;

²⁷ Keating M.; "The new regionalism in Western Europe. Territorial restructuring an political change"; Edward Elgar, Cheltenham; UK; 1998; p.15, pp. 383-398

to Hroch if we use as a criterion of comparison the presence or absence of political subjectivity of regions, four basic types of region emerge:

- Firstly, there are regions corresponding largely to former historical units, which played some time in the past the role of subjects in political history -like Moravia, Transylvania, Bavaria, Holland, Tuscany, Brittany...;
- Secondly, there are the traditional units of internal state-administration without international political subjectivity, but with some degree of autonomy and clear-cut frontiers, like English counties or French departements;
- Thirdly, we can understand regions as "non-political units", territories defined primarily by geographical, ethnographic, or by an almost forgotten political specificity - by various valleys, defined by mountains, as in Norway or Slovakia... In most cases the frontiers are not clear cut.
- Finally, in recent times, some newly created 'artificial' regions have been constructed by decisions from above; and consequently, their elites have had to start searching for historical background, inventing traditions - all this in order to strengthen a newly formed regional identity.²⁸

In the study of regions, then, the key dimensions center on the division of the world by levels of analysis and by the physical–functional distinction. Physical regions refer to territorial, military, and economic spaces controlled primarily by states, but functional regions are defined by non-territorial factors such as culture and the market that are often the purview of non-state actors.²⁹

Although there a different kind of regions as a "common characteristics we could mention the following one:

- a certain amount or degree of social and cultural homogeneity;
- similar political attitudes or external behavior toward third parties;

²⁸ Hroch M.; "Regional Memory: Reflections on the Role of History in (Re)constructing Regional Identity"; Charles University, Prague; p.4;

²⁹ Varyrynen R.; "Regionalism: Old and New"; University of Notre Dame and Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies, University of Helsinki; 2003; 27p;

- common political institutions, as an expression of political interdependence;
- a certain degree of economic interdependence; and
- common behavioral criteria."³⁰

According to Paasi A. regions are understood as historically contingent structures whose institutionalization is based on their territorial, symbolic and institutional shaping. Also all regions have:

- a territorial shape – boundaries that emerge in various social practices and distinguish the region and identity discourses from those of other regions...;
- a symbolic shape that manifests itself in practices such as the economy, culture/ media and governance and is used to construct narratives of identity. This shape includes the name of the region and numerous other symbols;
- a number of institutions, needed to maintain the territorial and symbolic shapes, and while they usually produce and reproduce distinctions between regions and social groups ('us'/'them')...;
- an established identity in social practices and consciousness, both internally and externally. An established region can be used by social groups and movements as a medium in a struggle over resources and power, or – at the other extreme – against the other.³¹

It is important to be mentioned that regions very often are connected and examined in the context of the notion of borders (or bounded spaces), identity and shared values, from simple reason that they have significant influence in the process of further regional institutionalization and cohesion.

The concept of region in some manner is fuzzy from the reason that it is used for spatial or territorial unit which is in the national borders of one state; or is referring to a unit which is between two or more countries – cross border region; or it is referring to several neighboring

³⁰ Kacowicz Arie M.; "Regionalization, Globalization and Nationalism: Convergent, Divergent, or Overlapping?"; 1998; p.8;

³¹ Paasi A. "Bounded spaces in the mobile world: Deconstructing 'Regional identity'"; University of Oulu, Finland; 2001; 140p;

countries- international (interstate) region or superregion. Even from the aspect of the size there are different classification of the regions. According to Hroch region could be defined as small regions (where the term "regional" means almost the same as "local" and they may be related to the "non-political regions"); sub- national regions and macro or mezzo- regions (several nations existing within the territory of a particular region, such as Central Europe, the Baltic countries or the Balkans).³² Also region could be "macro-regions refers to those groupings of quasi- (or even inter-) continental areas composed of a rather large number of (state) actors, e.g. South America, Africa or Europe; Meso-regions, on the other hand, are characterised by a smaller number of actors and more modest territorial dimensions. Meso-regions may be characterised by a formal agreement among a small number of states (e.g. the so called Visegrad Group, which is composed of the Czech and Slovak Republics, Hungary and Poland), in which case the literature refers to them as an 'interstate region'. More often, they may be characterised by a more complex combination of state and sub-state units, as in the case of the Baltic Sea Region. Micro-regions generally refer to administrative units within the state (such as Catalonia in Spain or Veneto in Italy)"³³

2.1.Regionalism and regionalisation

As a result of the constantly changing functional needs and territorial management, different reforms and tendencies, or even rising influence of the European integration regionalism and regionalisation became rising phenomenons which more and more are theoretical and empirical interesting topics for observation and examination.

Different conceptualizations and meanings which regionalism and regionalization have, are in some manner expected and understandable, because both of them as a categories are interconnected with the generic term region, which according to aforementioned definitions also possess diversity of meanings.

For the terms regionalism and regionalisation it is noticeable that in the literature very often are used together sometimes as an overlapping concepts, or as an interconnected but different ones.

³²Hroch M.; "Regional Memory: Reflections on the Role of History in (Re)constructing Regional Identity"; Charles University, Prague; p.4;

³³Neumann I. B.; "A Region-Building Approach to Northern Europe"; Review of International Studies n. 20; 1994;

"Regionalism and regionalisation of states represent a response to both territorial and functional pressures and we cannot understand the one without the other or without looking at broader transformations which states are undergoing."³⁴

Some of the theorists "define the regionalism as the ideas, identities and ideologies related to a regional project, whereas regionalisation is most often defined as the process of regional interaction creating a regional space (or the outcome)."³⁵ From other point of view regionalism could be understood "as a states-led project, whereas regionalization is seen mainly as a societal and a non-state process."³⁶

Regionalism represents a multidimensional phenomenon which could unite different kinds of interactions and ways of interdependencies. Usually it is connected with some kind of formal program of plans, activities and goals and as a result of it is institution building. "The term regionalism refers to the proneness of the governments and peoples of two or more states to establish voluntary associations and to pool together resources (material and nonmaterial) in order to create common functional and institutional arrangements. Furthermore, regionalism can be best described as a process occurring in a given geographical region by which different types of actors (states, regional institutions, societal organizations and other non-state actors) come to share certain fundamental values and norms. These actors also participate in a growing network of economic, cultural, scientific, diplomatic, political, and military interactions."³⁷

Also regionalism could be understood as an instrument for achieving some political and economic goals. "Traditionally, regionalism has been based on institutionalized intergovernmental coalitions that control access to a region."³⁸

It is noticeable that there are existing differences in the definitions which are referring to the regionalism, depending on the level where regionalism is undergoing. So if regionalism is taken

³⁴ Keating M.; "Is there a Regional Level of Government in Europe?"; "Regions and Regionalism in Europe" (eds. Michael Keating M.); Cheltenham, UK and Northampton, USA; 2004; p.xv

³⁵ Söderbaum F., Timothy S.; "Theories of New Regionalism"; Palgrave Macmillan; Houndmills and New York; 2003; p.7

³⁶ Ibid; p.7;

³⁷ Mace G. and Therien J.P.; "Introduction: Foreign Policy and Regionalism in the Americas"; Foreign Policy and Regionalism in the Americas; 1996; 1–17p.;

³⁸ Varyrynen R.; "Regionalism: Old and New"; University of Notre Dame and Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies, University of Helsinki; 2003; 43p;

at national level, then mostly is connected to expressions as decentralization and self-government which are affecting some particular sub-national units. From another point, when cooperation and integration have international character, then it is closely connected to expressions as cooperation and integration. This also is characteristic for the regionalisation.

Regionalism according to Hurrell A. could be categorized as a: social and economic regionalization; regional awareness and identity ; regional inter-state cooperation ; state-promoted regional integration ; and regional cohesion.³⁹ Among the scholars who are dealing with regionalism very usual is quoted division between old and new regionalism. The Old regionalism usually is explained as having narrow focus, where centrality was on the state and perceive such as problems solving phenomenon. From another side New regionalism could be understand as "a multidimensional form of integration which includes economic, political, social, and cultural aspects and thus goes far beyond the goal of creating region-based free trade regimes or security alliances."⁴⁰ New regionalism usually is stated that emerged in the 1980s as a new wave of widening of the European integration of that time.

Regionalisation present a tendency of region formation or as a most common element of definitions which refer to this term is that, it presents a "process" of region building. "At it's most basic it means no more than a concentration of activity — of trade, peoples, ideas, even conflict — at the regional level. This interaction may give rise to the formation of regions, and in turn to the emergence of regional actors, networks, and organisations."⁴¹ Regionalization is a "process characterized by multidimensional feature (political, economic, cultural, environmental, security etc.) and proceeds simultaneously on several levels"⁴². Also very often regionalization is conceived as a process that involves the "political ambition of establishing territorial control and regional coherence cum identity".⁴³ Furthermore "the process of regionalisation fills the region with

³⁹ Hurrell A.; "Regionalism in theoretical perspective; "Regionalism in World Politics - Regional Organization and International Order" (eds.Fawcett L. and Andrew Hurrell A.) ; Oxford University Press; 1997; p.41;

⁴⁰ Björn H.;Inotai A. and Sunkel O.; "The New Regionalism Series" (Vol. I-V); Macmillan Press; London; 1999-2001; p.17

⁴¹ Fawcett L.; "Regionalism in Historical Perspective"; "The Global Politics of Regionalism - Theory and Practice" (Mary Farrell M., Hettne B.; London; 2005; p. 25.

⁴² Hettne B.; "Globalization and the New Regionalism: The Second Great Transformation"; New York: St. Martin's Press; 1999; 17p;

⁴³ Ibid;

substance such as economic interdependence, institutional ties, political trust, and cultural belonging."⁴⁴ According to Van Houtum "region formation are legitimized on the basis of "objectified" notions of a community, common culture, shared values, a shared history and destiny, creating an illusion of an 'objective' region."⁴⁵

From the above given definitions about regionalism and regionalization it is evident that they are overlapping in some segments and it is clear that they are concepts which are complementary and follow each other. Related to the differentiation between regionalization and regionalism, it can be added that as a most simple way regionalization could be understood "as a the tendency or process to form regions and regionalism as the purposive proneness to create regional institutions and arrangements"⁴⁶

3. Western Balkan as a region

3.1. The notion of Balkan

Writing about the Balkan firstly it is important to be mention that in the academic and political discourse there are plenty of definition about what the Balkan presents, and where its borders are. This is actually the first common thing with Central Europe. But from other side Balkan in many ways could differentiated from Central Europe. Firstly from the geographical perspective Balkan is situated in the South East periphery of the European continent, and during the past was "bridge" to the Orient. The Balkan was the place where Christianity (Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox) and Muslim religion coexist for a long time. Therefore different people, religions and ideologies interact in the space of the Balkan, which resulted with variety of existing characteristics.

Related to the question where are the geographical borders of the Balkan again, we are facing with lot of opinions, but in most cases the differences are appeared from the attempts to be

⁴⁴ Varyrynen R.; "Regionalism: Old and New"; University of Notre Dame and Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies, University of Helsinki; 2003; 39p;

⁴⁵ Van Houtum, H.;"Borders of Comfort. Spatial-Economic Bordering Processes in the European Union"; 2003; pp. 37-58.

⁴⁶ Kacowicz Arie M.; "Regionalization, Globalization and Nationalism: Convergent, Divergent, or Overlapping?";1998; 10p;

delineated Northern and North Western borders of the Balkan. Other borders are delineated by the Adriatic, Ionian, Aegean and Black Sea in general. The Northern Border of the Balkan according to one of the most spread understandings, is consider the river flows of Sava and Danube rivers. However it is not so easy, to list the countries and nation which could be characterized as a Balkan. Following countries according to this determination of the borders are part of the Balkan: Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro, Kosovo, Albania, Macedonia, Greece, and Bulgaria. Most of the doubts are connected with Slovenia and Turkey, because only small parts of these countries are part of the Balkan. So should they be considered in this region? Some of the opinions are including them, and some does not. For example the broader understandings on what is a Balkan, sometimes include even those two countries, together with Romania, although it is outside of the geographical borders in previous mentioned sense. This is explained through the understanding that through the history they have deep and continuous mutual interrelations, and as a result of that they have a lot of similar cultural, social and political features. Therefore many claims are related to the understanding that they are considered as a Balkan countries.

Furthermore this kind of "broader" understanding of the Balkan is overlapping with the concept of South East Europe. The terms "*Südosteuropa*" and "*Südosteuropäische Halbinsel*" for the first time was introduced by the German geographer Theobald Fischer in 1893, and Balkan specialist Johann Georg von Hahn in 1863.⁴⁷ From this dates Balkan and South East Europe very often were used as a synonyms and overlapping concepts, although still in the political discourse South East Europe is consider as a wider (and sometimes more neutral) term.

The term Balkan Peninsula for the first time was used at the beginning of 19th century, and it was given by the German geographer August Zeune in his 1808 work "Goea."⁴⁸ From the other point word "Balkan", have its own origin from 15th century, and for the first time in the written form was used by Filippo Buonaccorsi (1437–1496), Italian humanist writer and diplomat, who in his 1490 memorandum to Pope Innocent VIII, wrote that the local people used the name "Balkan" for the mountain (which in the ancient time was known as "*Haemus*" - "*Aemus*" for the ancient Greeks and "*Haemus*" for the Romans) which divides Bulgaria from East to West and runs parallel to the Danube.⁴⁹ According to Maria Todorova, the word Balkan have Ottoman or even pre-

⁴⁷ Todorova M.; "Imagining the Balkan" —updated edition; Oxford University Press; 2009; p.27 -28;

⁴⁸ Ibid; p. 25;

⁴⁹ Ibid; p. 22;

Ottoman origin. "Word *balkan* is linked to mountain: most Ottoman and Turkish dictionaries explain it as mountain or mountain range, some specify it as wooded mountain, some as a through thickly wooded and rocky mountains."⁵⁰ On the other hand, the term *Balkan* exists as the name for two mountain ranges in the area east of the Caspian sea, heavily populated with Türkmen tribes from the eleventh century on. This has given rise to the less popular hypothesis that the name might be pre-Ottoman origin.⁵¹

In the political and more general public discourse, the term Balkan and Balkan peninsula starts to be used in the period of the Balkan wars (1912 and 1913) and after First World War (1918 onward). From this period are dating the first use of these words in some political connotation, especially in the West, that later will even connected with some negative features as primitiveness and backwardness. This was especially trigger by the raising of nationalism inspired by national awakening process of the Balkan nations, and their struggle for independent states from the Ottoman and Habsburg empires (which were the main powers for centuries at the Balkan). National movements resulted with fragmentation of the monolith political units that exist previous, on many small national states, where nationalistic tendencies led to ethnic tensions and territorial conflicts. Because of these reasons in the West public discourse appeared some particular perceptions about the Balkan with negative connotation, which usually were expressed through the term "balkanization".

As a result of the negative features that were connected to the terms Balkan and balkanization, people started to avoid the self-designation, that they are part of the Balkan. During the Cold war period, the notion of Balkan was not so present in the public and political discourse in the Balkan countries, nor in the West, because of the existing East/ West division of Europe. So in this period most of the countries from the Balkan were consider as a part of the East, or for example Yugoslavia was even consider as some buffer zone in between. From other side Greece and Turkey, were consider as a Mediterranean or western allies.

The political and economic changes that affect East Europe in the 1989, affect the Balkan too. Disintegration of Yugoslavia at the beginning of 1990s, resulted again with appearance of images for the Balkan Peninsula as a place of wars, ethnic conflicts and territorial divisions. The Balkan

⁵⁰ Ibid; p. 27

⁵¹ Ibid; p.27

started to be widely used in public discourses with negative features, so once again everyone wanted to keep distanced from the possibility to be qualified as a Balkan. Because of this there were attempts to be used the more neutral term for this part of Europe - South East Europe.

The notion of Balkan today is a reality of the public discourses in the Balkan countries. The term is used although still is reminding on some negative connotation of the conflicts from the 1990s. However it should be mention the fact that these negative connotation were mostly constructed by "outside" and by the public media of the West. Today politicians and common people are using the term Balkan as a more neutral, and mostly for the purposes of geographical determination of one of the regions at the European continent.

3.2. Emergence of the term “Western Balkan”

The term "Western Balkan" became actual in the political discourse in the Balkans and in the EU official documents especially with the "EU – Western Balkan Summit" in Thessaloniki in 2003 during the Greek Presidency with the EU Council. "From the EU perspective, the Thessaloniki Summit can be seen as a pivotal moment whereby the EU approach towards the region shifted from post-conflict stabilization and reconstruction (security) to democratic consolidation and European integration (enlargement)"⁵². But the term Western Balkan enter in the EU political terminology little bit earlier at the European council meeting in Vienna in 1998, and since then, the Western Balkans has become one of the key terms invariably used when referring to the processes related to the EU accession of Southeast European countries and their security stability.⁵³

Related to the origin of the term "Western Balkan" it is important to be mention that it could be trace even in "the end of 19th and the early 20th century. For example, in 1897, the English writer H. Thomson published a book entitled "The Outgoing Turk: Impressions of a Journey through the Western Balkans"; and in 1928, the London newspaper "The Illustrated London News"

⁵²Prifti E.; "Introduction: from stabilisation to Integration"; "The European future of the Western Balkans: Thessaloniki@10 (2003-2013)" (ed. Prifti E.); European Union Institute for Security Studies; Paris; 2013; p.15;

⁵³ Bojinovic A.; "Geographical Proximity and Historical Experience as a Basis for Active Foreign Policy Strategy of Small European States – the Case of Austria and Slovenia Regarding the Western Balkans", Politics in Central Europe 1; 2005; p.15

wrote about witchcraft in the Western Balkans."⁵⁴ The geographical term "Western Balkans" has been even more frequently used, and it still is, in scholarly works on biology, geography, archaeology and he like, dealing with various phenomena in the western part of the Balkan Peninsula.⁵⁵ According to this, Western Balkan it does not have just political, but also even older geographical connotation.

The political meaning of the term is undoubtedly constructed by the influence of European integration processes that after the turbulent 1990s finally became main driving force for Europeanization of the Western Balkan societies. Furthermore constructing of this particular region actually was inspired by the intention, countries from Western Balkan to get closer, to overcome their misunderstandings and to continue together towards achieving European values and norms. The situation in some manner is very similar to that of the beginning of the process of establishing of European communities in the 1950s, when after devastating conflicts, was established mutual cooperation between the former European rivals. Here can be mentioned and similarity inside out / outside in approach in regional cooperation where there was some kind of external force that initiate the process. In the 1950s with European communities that was USA, and in the end of 1990s with Western Balkan countries that was EU and USA.

In the first paragraph of the Thessaloniki Declaration, which was adopted at the EU – Western Balkan Summit in 2003, is stated which countries are considered as a Western Balkan. Those are Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Kosovo⁵⁶.

There is another intriguing detail that puts a question mark over the understanding of the *Western Balkans* as a geographically defined area or region: the term *Western Balkans* lacks a referential scheme necessitated by the adjective "western". There is no Eastern, Southern or Northern Balkans.⁵⁷

Furthermore there are existing doubts concerning the question whether there are some common things that will bring all countries together, because historical legacy is important for

⁵⁴ Petrovic T.; ""A long way home: Representations of the Western Balkans in Political and Media Discourses"; Mirovni inštitut; Ljubljana; 2009; p.28

⁵⁵ Ibid; p.28

⁵⁶ EU-Western Balkans Summit Declaration; Thessaloniki; 21 June 2003;

⁵⁷ Petrovic T.; ""A long way home: Representations of the Western Balkans in Political and Media Discourses"; Mirovni inštitut; Ljubljana; 2009; p.30;

defining some area as a region. The first and most recent common feature is their aspiration to be part of the EU, where being a member, means to be responsible and keen to cooperation with all other partners (which means also with the closest regional neighbors too). Although there are lot of facts which are pointing out to the turbulent past that these countries have had, also could be mentioned as a counterargument the fact that they share common communist legacy (especially the countries from ex- Yugoslavia), their facing almost the same transitional problems on the path towards democracy, or even in their farther past they share similar socio-cultural legacy as a result of Ottoman influence.

In the past several decades, the emphasis was put on the differences always than the common features, which actually caused these countries to have various misunderstandings and problems. Additionally regarding the linguistic commonalities, although every country have officially its own national language, as a result of the Slavic origin of most of them (except Albanian) the cohesiveness in this manner is even bigger than in some other "older" regions.

Regional cooperation that emerged in the region of Western Balkan countries, at the beginning was actually in some wider format (in the framework of South East Europe). One of the first initiatives was "Southeast European Cooperative Initiative" formed in 1996 on the basis of "Points of Common EU-US Understanding", provoked by the collapse of the former Communist regimes and especially of the collapse of Yugoslavia.⁵⁸ While this regional cooperation come as external initiative, the establishing of the "South-East European Cooperation Process (SEECP)", in 1996 in Sofia, Bulgaria was the own initiative of South East European countries, with intention deepening mutual trust and promoting good neighborhood policies. This cooperation platform have one year rotating presidency, which is organizing and coordinating the annual meetings for the heads of states and governments, foreign ministers and other state officials.

One of the most influence platform for regional cooperation in SEE was "Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe" established just after Kosovo crises in 1999, under initiative from EU and it had mission to promote the peace, stability, human rights, democracy etc. in SEE countries. In this initiative participated and states outside of the region and international organizations, as an observers or facilitators of the regional cooperation. In 2008 Stability Pact stop to exist, and was

⁵⁸ <http://secinet./>; 06.2015

replaced by the "Regional Cooperation Council (RCC)" which was more regional owned cooperation platform.⁵⁹

RCC was officially launched at the meeting of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the South-East European Cooperation Process (SEECP) in Sofia, on 27 February 2008 and through a regionally owned and led framework focuses on promotion and enhancement of regional cooperation in SEE and supports European and Euro-Atlantic integration of the aspiring countries. The RCC provides operational capacities to and works under the political guidance of the SEECP.⁶⁰ The RCC adopted horizontal functions of supporting, monitoring, coordinating and streamlining the regional activities with the aim of achieving enhanced effectiveness, synergy and coherence. It also helps regional initiatives to fill the gaps and reduce redundancies and overlaps.⁶¹ The RCC directly works with the following initiatives in the security priority area: the Disaster Preparedness and Prevention Initiative (DPPI), the South Eastern and Eastern Europe Clearinghouse for the Control of SALW (SEESAC), the South East Europe Defence Ministerial (SEDM), the US-Adriatic Charter, and the Centre for Security Cooperation (RACVIAC)⁶².

RCC in the moment is the most comprehensive regional body in Western Balkan region which is fostering and facilitated regional cooperation activities and regional initiatives. RCC function and structure will be elaborated further in the thesis.

Practice is showing that there are many regional initiative for cooperation activities in different fields and areas in the Western Balkan region and wider in South East Europe. Some of them are overlapping or some of them are complementary⁶³. As a result of this situation there is a lack of effectiveness in regional cooperation.

Also it is important to mention the fact that there is an impression that some of the regional initiatives have wider format than Western Balkan region. However starting from the adoption of Thessaloniki Declaration, shaping of the Western Balkan regional format started to develop and became usual cooperation grouping. For instance the Government officials from Western Balkan,

⁵⁹ www.rcc.org

⁶⁰ <http://www.rcc.int/> ; 06.2015;

⁶¹ Regional Cooperation Council; "*Strategy and work programme 2011-2013*"; Sarajevo; 2010; p.9;

⁶² Prezelj, Iztok; "Challenges of Multilateral Regional Security and Defence Cooperation in South East Europe"; European Perspectives – Journal on European Perspectives of the Western Balkans; Vol. 5 No. 29; 2013; p.92;

⁶³ For example "Comprehensive Regional Ministerial platform" have unite several regional initiatives among which is "Western Balkans Defence Policy Directors (WBDDP)" which will be elaborated further in the thesis.

regularly meet each other, or as a regional group with other high officials from other countries, International organizations or other regional groupings such as Visegrad countries (V4). In many areas of cooperation and fields from mutual interest the relations among Western Balkan countries became natural and needed.

Although at the beginning the notion of Western Balkan was not perceived as very positive, nowadays it is becoming reality and often used term, not only in the political discourse in the region but also in the wider public discourse.

3.3. Discourse analysis of the speeches and statements

In this section will be analyzed public statements from the Ministry of foreign affairs (MFA) and Ministry of defense (MDRM) of Republic of Macedonia and also respective minister's speeches regarding the Western Balkan regional cooperation and security regionalism. Moreover a particular attention will be paid to the political discourse towards the regional cohesiveness and societal integration of the countries from the Western Balkan. The public statements will be analyzed from the point of view whether the Western Balkan is mentioned, and in what context appears the term Western Balkan (positive or negative). Furthermore, what kind of cooperation is dominant in the mutual relations between the countries of this region? For th a particular attention will be paid to the political is analyses several keywords were used such as: *Western Balkans, region, regional cooperation, regional approach, regional cohesion, values and identity*. Furthermore during the analyses it was taken the assumption that when the key words appear more often, the importance of those topics proportionally is growing. This is directly connected with the speech acts of the political elite in the region who actually have the power to shape public opinion in the Western Balkan countries, regional policies and regional collective belonging/awareness.

For the purpose of the analyses, I detected and analyzed all available ministerial statements and minister's speeches from both ministries at their official web addresses.⁶⁴ At the MFA web address were available ministerial statements and minister's speeches in the time frame from 30.04.2014, till of 15.02.2016, period in which there were one Minister in position during all the

⁶⁴ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Republic of Macedonia (MFA) - <http://mfa.gov.mk/>;
Ministry of Defense of Republic of Macedonia (MDRM) - <http://www.morm.gov.mk/>;

period but there were two different Deputy Ministers. Regarding MDRM were analyzed all available ministerial statements and minister's speeches which dated from 15.02.2016 till 20.09.2011, period in which in the Ministry were changed three different Ministers and three different Deputy Ministers. In the following lines will be presented only the most detailed and most comprehensive official statements and speeches because of the space limitation of the thesis, and to avoid repetitions or illogical presentation of the facts. All in all, from the MFA web address I selected to my analyses totally 39 ministerial statements and minister's speeches which were published and publicly available. From the web-address of MDRM were analyzed 38 official statements, minister's and deputy minister's speeches.

. In general from the ministerial statements and minister's speeches it is evident that in each of them the term "Western Balkan" in most of the cases is mentioned in neutral or in positive connotation, without any case of some negative features. From the MFA web address were analyzed totally 39 ministerial statements and minister's speeches which were published and publicly available. Furthermore in every of these official statements and minister's speeches is noticeable that the terms "Macedonia" and "Western Balkan" are following each other which implicates that the political elites undoubtedly accept the fact that Macedonia is part of the Western Balkan region. Another common feature for these official statements and minister's speeches is the repeated declaration of the Macedonian officials of their engagement in the regional cooperation. For instance: "Macedonia actively advocates and contribute towards deeper regional cooperation, mutual approach towards resolving regional problems and security threats". Predominant form of regional cooperation that is presented in the statements and speeches is security, mutual assistance during European Union accession process, migration (especially with the escalation of the migrant flows through the "Balkan route" in the second half of the year 2015), then fight against terrorism, corruption, transport, energy, education etc.

Regional security cooperation in Western Balkan "is as a complex and dynamic network of initiatives, projects and processes in various security fields with various security actors of a governmental and non-governmental character"⁶⁵. For the Western Balkan countries regional security cooperation is very important taking in the consideration turbulent events from the 1990s

⁶⁵Prezelj, Iztok; "Challenges of Multilateral Regional Security and Defence Cooperation in South East Europe"; European Perspectives – Journal on European Perspectives of the Western Balkans; Vol. 5 No. 29; 2013; p.85;

and several bilateral unsolved problems between them. My explanation is that because of these kind of reasons, regional security cooperation is particular priority in the agenda of political elites from Western Balkan countries. From the point of view of Macedonian political elite this is also a case. For example in the statement from 13th February 2016 it is said that "from the aspect of security and migration crises regional cooperation is priority."⁶⁶ In another official statement from 18th September 2015 it is said that "regional security cooperation is in the focus on Macedonian foreign policy."⁶⁷ In an official statement from 23rd April 2015 is "emphasized the necessity of finding a common approach and solution to the suppression of terrorism and prevention of religious radicalization in the region."⁶⁸

There are lot of similar statements and phrases used by the high level official from the Macedonian MFA in the analyzed period.

Furthermore in many of the statements are noticeable phrases with more general connotation such as "Macedonian continuously make efforts for active regional cooperation in order to further successful integration of Western Balkan countries into the EU and NATO"⁶⁹, or in the statement from 30th April 2014, is stated that "Minister Poposki underlined Macedonia's contribution to strengthening regional cooperation in order stabilization, prosperity and Euro-Atlantic integration of the countries of the region"⁷⁰.

All of the statements and speeches are in narrative that Macedonian national interest is straitening the regional cooperation among Western Balkan countries.

The importance given to the WB regional cooperation is even more clear from the MDRM documents. In all of the official statements, minister's and deputy minister's speeches, the term

⁶⁶ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Republic of Macedonia; <http://mfa.gov.mk/index.php/mk/media-centar/soopstenija/1840-2016-02-13-17-20-32>; visited at: 15.02.2016;

⁶⁷ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Republic of Macedonia; <http://mfa.gov.mk/index.php/mk/media-centar/makedonija-vo-svetot/1590-2015-09-18-07-41-25>; visited at: 15.02.2016;

⁶⁸ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Republic of Macedonia; <http://mfa.gov.mk/index.php/mk/media-centar/soopstenija/1429-2015-04-23-14-59-50>; visited at: 15.02.2016;

⁶⁹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Republic of Macedonia <http://mfa.gov.mk/index.php/mk/media-centar/makedonija-vo-svetot/1590-2015-09-18-07-41-25>; visited at: 15.02.2016;

⁷⁰ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Republic of Macedonia; <http://mfa.gov.mk/index.php/mk/media-centar/najnovi-vesti/102-aktivnisti-nastani/218-2014-05-15-14-01-25>; visited at: 15.02.2016;

"Western Balkan" is regularly mentioned. In most of the cases it is used in positive connotation, in several cases is used in neutral connotation and there are not any cases where negative features are label to "Western Balkan". Naturally in all analyzed official statements and speeches from MDRM as a main type of regional cooperation is prevailing the security cooperation. It is noticeable that except interrelations which are usually under traditional security or army segment, also there are raising tendencies where this kind of regional cooperation is initiating or is encouraging cooperation activities in another different domains such as: crises management, medical cooperation, in education and training (not only in security or army domain but also in technical, engineering or crises management fields), in improving common regional capabilities for international peace keeping missions (military or civilian segment), in economy (especially in connecting defense industry capacities of the states from the region), air traffic control or even in gender equality. This fact actually is one of the arguments that is contributing towards the thesis that security regionalism have some "spillover" effect to the general tendency of straitening the regional cohesion process among Western Balkan countries. Furthermore as a very common phrases which is appearing in all of the official statements and speeches is the necessity of close regional cooperation, experience sharing and mutual approaches of the countries from Western Balkan in the efforts for achieving faster integration in the Euro- Atlantic security communities. As in the case of the analyzed official statements and speeches from MFA, also in the official statements and speeches from MDRM which are dated from the begging of second half of 2015, migration crises is appearing constantly and is very evident that is becoming very topical in the regional security cooperation.

According to the obtained data with the analysis of the official statements and speeches it is evident that Macedonian political elite is fully supportive towards common Western Balkan regional approach in overcoming the different security challenges, also that regional cooperation is considered as valuable precondition for regional stabilization and integration and that straitening of Western Balkan security integration is in accordance with the Macedonian national interests.

In the statement from 08th February 2016 is said that "Macedonia remains committed to contributing [...] in 2016 with the same level of contribution as in 2015 in regional security cooperation."⁷¹

From the statement from 18th June 2015 is evident that regional security cooperation is shifting its traditional frameworks and acquires further cooperation activities in new non- military fields:

*"Lessons learned and experiences have shown that developing joint regional capacities and capabilities for dealing with emergencies of non-military nature is the proper response and easiest way to overcome all the challenges we face in major natural disasters. That is why the Republic of Macedonia continuously strives for the coordination and development of capacities and capabilities for dealing with emergencies of non-military nature as a national and regional basis - said Minister Jolevski".*⁷²

Furthermore in the Minister's speech from 10th October 2014 it is stated that "the region of Western Balkan in the 1990s had really tough period, with conflict raging all over the region, however we were able to come together and to work together for a common goal: to join the EU and NATO."⁷³In the same speech it is stated that "working together [Western Balkan countries] will provide long-term stability and security, not only in the Western Balkans, but the whole European continent and the world"⁷⁴. Also I considered that as a good example of identification with the whole region is the statement in the final phrase of the speech of the Macedonian Minister: "I believe that I speak in the name of the entire region of the Western Balkans - that we are remaining strongly committed and believe that the reforms we are working on together are of great importance, not only because they will help us get closer to Euro - Atlantic integration, but more importantly, because they are important for our citizens."⁷⁵

⁷¹ Ministry of Defence of Republic of Macedonia; <http://www.morm.gov.mk/?mainnews=drzavniot-sekretar-cupovska-ristova-vo-brisel-prezentacija-na-godisnata-nacionalno-programa-za-clenstvo-vo-nato&lang=mk>; visited at: 15.02.2016;

⁷² Ministry of Defence of Republic of Macedonia; <http://www.morm.gov.mk/?mainnews=ipa-kampex-2015&lang=mk>; visited at: 15.02.2016;

⁷³ Ministry of Defence of Republic of Macedonia; <http://www.morm.gov.mk/?speeches=%D0%B3%D0%BE%D0%B2%D0%BE%D1%80-%D0%BD%D0%B0-%D0%BC%D0%B8%D0%BD%D0%B8%D1%81%D1%82%D0%B5%D1%80%D0%BE%D1%82-%D0%B7%D0%B0-%D0%BE%D0%B4%D0%B1%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%BD%D0%B0-%D0%BD-%D0%B5-%D0%B7%D0%BE%D1%80%D0%B0&lang=mk>; visited at: 15.02.2016;

⁷⁴ Ibid; visited at: 15.02.2016;

⁷⁵ Ibid; visited at: 15.02.2016;

Additionally from another Minister's speech from 9th April 2014 it is obvious that political establishment in Macedonia explicitly affirmed their commitment for common regional approach:

*"Republic of Macedonia, guided by its own national interests and strategic foreign policy priorities, continuously is an active promoter of bilateral and regional cooperation and participating in regional initiatives in all areas. Regional cooperation is an essential contribution to regional security and development, a prerequisite for progress of the Western Balkan countries towards NATO and EU and all countries makes them contributors to the Euro-Atlantic security and stability. Aware of this, the Western Balkan countries are active participants in a number of regional initiatives and they search for regional common responses for the mutual challenges and threats."*⁷⁶

In the Minister's speech from 2nd December 2013 it is said that "investing in close regional cooperation and good neighbourhood relations have no alternative on the road to integration into Euro-Atlantic structures" and "deepening and boosting the regional cooperation in all forums and at all levels has a special value in achieving the common goal of all countries in the region and contribute to the motto *"Europe, free, democratic and united"*"⁷⁷

At the "Comprehensive Regional Ministerial" held in Slovenia at 02nd and 3rd November 2013, Macedonian Minister of Defence stated that " Republic of Macedonia has been a strong promoter of regional cooperation as a basis for strengthening security and stability as well as the exchange of experiences on the road to Euro-Atlantic integration of the countries from the region (Western Balkan)"⁷⁸

The statement from 03rd September 2013 actually is informing about operationalization of one of the already agreed strategic regional aims and it is said that "because of the growing need for training of personnel in the field of public relations in the region, Macedonian Ministry of Defense established a Regional Center for Public Relations, [...]which together with The Peace Support Operations Training Centre from Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina and The Chemical,

⁷⁶ Ministry of Defence of Republic of Macedonia; <http://www.morm.gov.mk/?speeches=govor-na-mo-gjorge-marshal-centar-09-04-2014&lang=mk>; visited at: 15.02.2016;

⁷⁷ Ministry of Defence of Republic of Macedonia; <http://www.morm.gov.mk/?speeches=evroatlantskite-integracii-i-iimplikaciiite-vrz-procesot-na-budzheticiranje-na-odbranata-budva&lang=mk>; visited at: 15.02.2016;

⁷⁸ Ministry of Defence of Republic of Macedonia <http://www.morm.gov.mk/?shtit=26537-2&lang=mk>; visited at: 15.02.2016;

Biological, Radiological and Nuclear (CBRN) Training Centre in Krusevac, Serbia were accepted and promoted as a priority three centers for regional cooperation"⁷⁹

In the Minister's speech from 28th June 2013 in very clear stated that "regional cooperation is an essential contribution to regional security and development ...and Western Balkan countries are active participants in a number of regional initiatives."⁸⁰Also is stated that " in the area of regional defense cooperation have been achieved considerable and tangible results, from joint trainings, joint military units to joint participation in the operations in Afghanistan. In this context, significant project is the establishment and maintenance of a multinational brigade in Southeast Europe (SEEBRIG)"⁸¹

Continuous commitment of Republic of Macedonia actively to participate and contribute for straitening of different regional security and defence cooperation initiatives is openly stated in the Minister's speech from 29th May 2013:

"we are active participants in regional initiatives, including in the South East European Cooperation Process (SEECP), the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC), the Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA), the Energy Community Treaty, the European Common Aviation Area Agreement, South-East Europe Defense Ministerial (SEDM) Process, The US-Adriatic Charter".

Further it is stated that " last year (2012) for the first time we (Macedonia) participated in the EU Battle group concept, particularly in EUBG 2012/2. We expect in the future to join the EU BG formed from the countries of this region (Western Balkan)."⁸² It is important to be mentioned the fact that in the same Minister's speech also there is a section devoted to the regional belonging and common features of the Western Balkan countries: "geographical proximity, historical heritage, the great interdependence between countries, many friendships, strong ethnic and cultural ties speak of belonging to all the countries of one region [...]Lessons learned from the past show that regional approach enable all participants to obtain something (win-win approach). EU expansion and strong regional and bilateral cooperation are the best common responses to common

⁷⁹ Ministry of Defence of Republic of Macedonia; <http://www.morm.gov.mk/?shtit=26392&lang=mk>; visited at: 15.02.2016;

⁸⁰ Ministry of Defence of Republic of Macedonia; <http://www.morm.gov.mk/?speeches=govor-mo-na-30-megjunarodna-rabotilnica-za-globalnata-bezbednost-pariz-francija&lang=mk>; visited at: 15.02.2016;

⁸¹ Ibid; visited at: 15.02.2016;

⁸² Ministry of Defence of Republic of Macedonia; <http://www.morm.gov.mk/?speeches=govor-na-mo-gjorge-marshal-centar-09-04-2014&lang=mk>; visited at: 15.02.2016;

challenges and the biggest investment for united and prosperous Europe. Seen from our perspective, with the EU integration of Macedonia, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro and Serbia it will be possible to be speak for United Europe and a stronger EU as a global actor on the international stage."⁸³

At the annual meeting of Forum for Western Balkans Defence Cooperation (SEEC), at 31st October 2012, the Deputy Minister of MORM in his speech stated that "...Republic of Macedonia continuously supports the idea and work towards the development and promotion of regional and bilateral cooperation with countries in the region. The best proof of this is the active participation in all regional initiatives and forms of cooperation."⁸⁴ Also at one of the conferences organized in the framework of Forum for Western Balkans Defence Cooperation (SEEC) at 3rd July 2012, state secretary from the MDRM emphasized that "regional projects and activities are giving huge contribution to building the trust and cooperation between countries in the region and there are in line with common interests and goals."⁸⁵

In the context of deepening regional security cooperation is also the statement of the Minister of Defence from 21st November 2011 according to which Republic of Macedonia and the Western Balkans have to find a suitable approach for applying the concept of "smart defence" at regional level and in the future development of regional operational capabilities.⁸⁶ In the same Minister's speech was said that "besides sharing the same values and goals, we share national challenges in reform process in security sector, joint training has become a regular practice, and further joint contribution to the international peace operations viable plan., and ... the connection of the countries through regional cooperation mechanisms such as South-East Europe Defense Ministerial (SEDM) Process and South-Eastern Europe Brigade (SEEBRIG) is an advantage / benefit for the entire region."⁸⁷

⁸³ Ibid; visited at: 15.02.2016;

⁸⁴ Ministry of Defence of Republic of Macedonia; <http://www.morm.gov.mk/?mainnews=20974&lang=mk>; visited at: 15.02.2016;

⁸⁵ Ministry of Defence of Republic of Macedonia; <http://www.morm.gov.mk/?mainnews=konferencija-na-see-clearinghouse-2012&lang=mk>; visited at: 15.02.2016;

⁸⁶ Ministry of Defence of Republic of Macedonia; <http://www.morm.gov.mk/?speeches=govor-na-mo-besimi-na-tribinata-na-evro-atlanskiot-sovet-na-makedonija&lang=mk>; visited at: 15.02.2016;

⁸⁷ Ibid; visited at: 15.02.2016;

In the speech of Deputy Minister from 17th November 2011, regarding the regional integration and regional cooperation of the Western Balkan countries was said that:

"...all Western Balkan countries have common interests and goals: peace and security, democratic and economic development, stability, regional cooperation and integration into Euro-Atlantic structures. The countries of the region believe there is no alternative to the policy of good neighbourhood relations, bilateral and multilateral cooperation, mutual understanding and trust... and that ...regional defense cooperation is becoming constantly deeper and wider. It includes permanent political consultations at all levels, joint trainings, formation of regional training centers, formation of joint military units (SEEBRIG) to joint participation in international peace operations."⁸⁸

From aforementioned official statements and speeches it is evident that discourse was not change although there were different Ministers and Deputy Ministers in the office of MDRM. During the whole period that was analyzed, constantly regional cooperation among Western Balkan countries was and still is considered as a priority, valuable asset and natural consequences of the shared mutual interests.

⁸⁸ Ministry of Defence of Republic of Macedonia; <http://www.morm.gov.mk/?mainnews=regionalna-konferencija-na-tema-regionalni-bezbednosni-dinamiki-vo-zapaden-balkan&lang=mk>; visited at: 15.02.2016;

3.4. Media discourse about regional security cooperation and notion of regional community identity

This sub-chapter will focus on the media discourse presented in the three most reading Macedonia daily newspapers regarding the topic of regional cooperation in Western Balkans countries with special emphasis on the nature of the regionalization and the types of regional cooperation. For the analysis it was important to be understood how regional cooperation, regional cohesiveness and societal integration of Western Balkans countries is represented in the nowadays media and public discourse in Macedonia. Taking in consideration that the daily newspapers are one of the most powerful shapers of the public opinion in every society, for the purposes of this research I have analyzed the articles from the three most circulated Macedonian daily newspapers with intention to find out what are the similarities and differences between the political and the media discourse in Macedonia regarding the regionalization in Western Balkans region.

The analysis is done from the point of view in what connotation is mentioned Western Balkans (positive, neutral or negative) and the regional cooperation processes among countries from this region, which type of cooperation is prevailing and whether Western Balkans **is** considered as a region. For the purposes of the analysis the same keywords are used as in the sub-chapter for analyzing the official political discourse, such as: *Western Balkans, region, regional cooperation, regional approach, regional cohesion, values and identity*.. Furthermore the same assumption was taken, that when the key words appear more often, the importance of those topics proportionally is growing. Furthermore if some topic are more often represented at the pages of newspapers, it is an indicator that particular topics have bigger importance and contributed to the overall public awareness for them.

Analysis was done on the articles from three most circulated daily newspapers published in Macedonia, “Utrinski vesnik”, “Večer” and “Dnevnik” in the time frame from 15.02.2014 till 15.02.2016. Articles were search through archive section on the web-pages of the three daily newspapers. Also will be presented most detailed newspaper articles because of the space limitation, to be avoid repetitions or illogical presentation of the facts.

Firstly the articles from the daily newspaper “Utrinski vesnik” were analyzed. “Utrinski vesnik” (Утрински весник/ Morning newspaper (Eng. translation)) is a daily newspaper

in Republic of Macedonia. "Target group is the intellectual and the business community. The average page number is 28-32"⁸⁹ The first number of the newspaper was published at 23rd June 1999 in Skopje⁹⁰. From 2004 till 2012 "Utrinski vesnik" was owned by the Media Print Macedonia (MPM) which was in dominant ownership of German Media Group WAZ – *Westdeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* based in Essen, Germany. From the end of 2012 Media Print Macedonia (MPM) was bought by three domestic companies"⁹¹ (these companies actually are in ownership of persons who are part of the business elite in Macedonia). Information which are presented at its pages are considered as a relevant and reliable and regarding the information which are presented on the newspaper's section for regional and international matters also could be consider as a neutral and independent.

Through the archive section on the daily newspaper "Utrinski vesnik" 43 articles were detected and analyzed. In general from the analyzed articles it is noticeable that the term "Western Balkans" in most of the cases is mentioned in neutral, or in a positive connotation. During the analysis of the articles from newspaper "Utrinski vesnik" there were not found any cases in which some negative features were labeled to this term. According to the analyzed articles following regional field are prevailing: cooperation in the field of economy, security, European integration, transport and energy networks, terrorism and radicalism. Furthermore from the articles published from September onwards, cooperation activities related to migrant crises and measures for overcoming the consequences of this crises are far more represented from the other types of cooperation. Also it is noticeable the practice that in the articles, when various comparison are made, as usual counterparts for comparing are taken Macedonia and the other Western Balkans countries. Additionally in the articles as a common practice is established the use of the terms "Western Balkans" and "Western Balkans region" for referring to the countries from the neighborhood of Macedonia.

As I have mentioned previously in the articles from the September onwards are prevailing the regional cooperation activities related to the migrant and refugees flows through the

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰Utrinski vesnik; <http://mpm.com.mk/utrinski-inner-en.nspj>; visited at 10.02.2016;

⁹¹Ibid.

"Balkan route". For example in one of the articles related to the migrant crises from 23rd November 2015 is written that:

*“Strengthening and effective national and regional cooperation at all levels, harmonization of legislative frameworks, conducting regular meetings between agencies from different countries and increasing the human resources, equipment and technical means are part of the recommendations for preventing and dealing with human trafficking, migrant smuggling and other cross-border crimes identified in the final report of the regional project "Straitening the fight against human trafficking and migrant smuggling in the Western Balkans.”*⁹²

Also from the article from 13th November 2015⁹³ which is devoted to the Ministerial Summit in the format "Western Balkans – Visegrad group", regional cooperation related to the refuge and migrant crises among Western Balkans countries is elaborated in details. Additionally in the same article, the text is referring to several other types of regional cooperation among Western Balkans countries and between Western Balkans and Visegrad countries. For example in the article is stated that:

*“Today in the presence of the journalist from the region was signed a document for establishing the Western Balkans Fund as a concrete step towards enhancing the regional cooperation of Macedonia, Serbia, Albania, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo, following the example of V4 (Visegrad group), which was created in 1991. The first year the Western Balkans Fund will be chaired by Tirana.”*⁹⁴

In the article from 11th November 2015 is referring to the statement of the President of Republic of Macedonia which highlighted that "Benelux, Visegrad Group, the Nordic Council, the Baltic Council, which are quite active nowadays [...] became an inspiration and encouragement for the countries in our region in 1997 to start the Process of cooperation in Southeast Europe."⁹⁵ Also in the same article there is a critical overview on the current situation with regional cooperation according to which many of the regional initiatives just “retained the form, but lost the essence of regional cooperation, which is reduced to declarations without actions, very beautiful desires without serious intentions for their implementation.”⁹⁶

One of the articles from 22nd October 2015 is devoted to the activities connected with ‘Comprehensive Regional Ministerial (CRM) meeting’ and ‘South-East Europe Defense

⁹² Utrinski vesnik; <http://www.utrinski.mk/default.asp?ItemID=19691D59D0CC8E4A9371F101AA47337D>; visited at 15.02.2016;

⁹³ Utrinski vesnik; <http://www.utrinski.mk/default.asp?ItemID=EB001372E96A8E41B957F896E1B87FCC>; visited at 15.02.2016;

⁹⁴ Ibid; visited at 15.02.2016;

⁹⁵ Utrinski vesnik; <http://www.utrinski.mk/default.asp?ItemID=C24E7A57FA21854A8AC90B802F4A76B0>; visited at 15.02.2016;

⁹⁶ Ibid; visited at 15.02.2016;

Ministerial (SEDM) Process'. In the article further it is written that these processes are "excellent forum for regional cooperation in the field of security challenges."⁹⁷

Deepening of the regional cooperation is presented in the article from 18th September 2015 in which is written that "Ministers of science from the countries from Western Balkans have signed an agreement in Split for a 'Western Balkans Center for Research and Innovation', which includes Croatia, Macedonia, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Kosovo and Serbia, and the partner in the project is the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC)."⁹⁸ Further it is stated that:

"the establishment of the Center started in 2009, with signing of the 'Declaration for common cooperation in science and innovation' in Sarajevo. After in 2013 in Zagreb followed the adoption of 'The Declaration on regional strategy for research and development innovation', developed in joint coordination with the World Bank, the European Commission, RCC and the seven countries from the region"⁹⁹

From the article it is interesting to notice that Croatia is still considered as a Western Balkans although is a full member of EU.

The article from 27th August 2015 is referring to the 'Western Balkans Summit' and is informing that Macedonia is represented at very high official level by the Prime minister, Deputy Prime minister, Minister for Foreign affairs and Minister for Economy. The article very extensively is explaining the activities on the 'Western Balkans Summit' from where it can be better understand all the segments in which Western Balkans countries is cooperating. For example it is written that:

"...session of the Heads of Governments will be focused on the economic situation and reform process in the Western Balkans, youth and education, and energy and transport connectivity. After completion of the work session the Prime ministers of the Western Balkans countries will sign a Joint Declaration on the establishment of the Regional Cooperation Office for the youth of the Western Balkans.

The session of the Foreign Ministers ...will be thematically focused on regional cooperation, open issues and youth mobility in the Western Balkans, solving the problem of refugees and religious dialogue and combating extremism."¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ Utrinski vesnik; <http://www.utrinski.mk/default.asp?ItemID=BE75057F45DA67488FD0683F4007BD9C>; visited at 15.02.2016;

⁹⁸ Utrinski vesnik; <http://www.utrinski.mk/default.asp?ItemID=AB09C6C047061741AFCD6662740EA080>; visited at 15.02.2016;

⁹⁹ Ibid; visited at 15.02.2016;

¹⁰⁰ Utrinski vesnik; <http://www.utrinski.mk/default.asp?ItemID=B25A65DFBABAB342912750A19A94052C>; visited at 15.02.2016;

There is also a separate section devoted to the regional economic cooperation activities which were topic of discussion on the Western Balkans Summit. Regarding this regional economic activities are written following things:

“Economic segment of the conference will be consisted of two main themes: economic prosperity and connectivity and dual vocational training, within which will be overview the possibilities for improvement of economic policies, structural reforms, improving human and physical capital, industrial capacities, business environment and trade integration in order to encourage the competitiveness and ensuring long-term economic growth.”¹⁰¹

Additionally in the article are explained the regional cooperation activities towards EU integration process, regional efforts for developing transport network and plans for straightening the energy security:

“It is expected to be adopted and a joint statement on the Summit which will be emphasized that the countries from Western Balkans should not be blocked on the EU path. Serbia, Macedonia, Albania, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo in the statement will be called upon to resolve all outstanding bilateral issues, and to submit annual reports on the progress of the plan.

It is achieved an agreement on six transport and four energy projects which the EU should support from IPA funds in the amount of 200 million euros.”¹⁰²

Two more articles from 26th and 20th August 2015 are devoted to the Western Balkans Summit and in very similar way they referred to the already mentioned topics.

In the article from 01st July 2015 is elaborated the engagement of ambassadors from Visegrad countries in Macedonia for promoting the concept of Visegrad regional cooperation in Macedonia and the region of Western Balkans. Visegrad group is described as a “successful model for regional cooperation.”¹⁰³ Further is written that according to the ambassadors of the four countries

“...Visegrad group, above all, will work on the transformation and EU integration of Macedonia and the whole region, and that it does not mean only political support but also support with project activities. The biggest success, is the creation of the Western Balkans Fund following the example of the International Visegrad Fund, which will implement projects for regional cooperation, mobility of citizens and good

¹⁰¹ Ibid; visited at 15.02.2016;

¹⁰² Ibid; visited at 15.02.2016;

¹⁰³ Utrinski vesnik; <http://www.utrinski.mk/default.asp?ItemID=23A263927016DD4887DC8FC2DDF6A3B0>; visited at 15.02.2016;

neighbourhood relations. ...Balkan countries will be involved in common events (together with Visegrad countries) related to environmental protection and improvement of the judiciary."¹⁰⁴

In the article from 04th May 2015 it is written that foreign ministers of the six countries from the Western Balkans region will be participated on the celebration of 'Day of the Regional Cooperation' in Brussels and that as "organizer of the conference is RCC and the Balkan Trust for Democracy which will present a new report 'Balkan Barometer' made based on comprehensive research of public opinion in the region"¹⁰⁵

Extensive and detail interview with the Secretary General of the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) is presented in the article from 03rd March 2015¹⁰⁶ in which many aspect from Western Balkans region and regional cooperation initiatives are touch upon. Topics as regional cooperation activities and relations in economy, EU integration process of Western Balkans countries, necessity of more efficient activities for regional cooperation and common approaches towards regional problems are explained.

In the article published at 03rd March 2015 analysis was made of the situation of the economic potential of the regional cooperation and possibility that this kind of approach will bring the countries of Western Balkans towards the global economy. In the analysis very well are concluded main challenges in the process of harmonization of the common regional interests. For example in one of the paragraphs of the article it is written that:

*"Does the countries of the region need to compete individually at the global markets or, better is to align their economic policies in order to have a better position and finally, to make both individually and collectively better results? Or is it better every country in the region to act as a free shooter, or give preference to regional cooperation? Of course, if you ask politicians, their answer is known in advance. They are all about developing good neighbouring relations, regional projects and so on, but experience is showing that many times in practice behind declarative statements are entailing or are adopted many moves and measures which weighed heavily on more protectionism, putting barriers and forcing domestic producers at the expense of those in the neighborhood, even when it is detrimental to their own customers."*¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ Utrinski vesnik; <http://www.utrinski.mk/default.asp?ItemID=23A263927016DD4887DC8FC2DDF6A3B0>; visited at 15.02.2016;

¹⁰⁵ Utrinski vesnik; <http://www.utrinski.mk/default.asp?ItemID=663F169ABF54134BB22F1BA76308862A>; visited at 15.02.2016;

¹⁰⁶ Utrinski vesnik; <http://www.utrinski.mk/default.asp?ItemID=2131152A27C3C647BBBF380B4BF38548>; visited at 15.02.2016;

¹⁰⁷ Utrinski vesnik; <http://www.utrinski.mk/default.asp?ItemID=AE4E9CA9F465EA49A2F31A777F16476A>; visited at 15.02.2016;

Process of initiating and practical operationalization of the regional cooperation activities in the security domain are covered in the articles published at 26th February¹⁰⁸ and 17th January¹⁰⁹ 2015. The first mentioned article was referring to regional efforts for initiating of crises management cooperation activities by the national armies and respective national agencies in natural disaster situations from Western Balkans countries. The second article is informing for the signing of the ‘Agreement for join army medical teams from the Western Balkans countries’. In this (second) article is stated that “the Balkan Medical Forces headquartered is in Macedonia, and its aim is to improve and further strengthen national and regional military medical capacity to support the civilian community and interoperability in this segment with UN, NATO and the EU forces.”¹¹⁰

“Večer” (“Вечер” / “Evening”(Eng. translation)) is a daily newspaper in Republic of Macedonia. The first number of the newspaper was published at 11th November 1963 in Skopje and it is second oldest newspaper in Macedonia. From 2006 it is in ownership of "Andreski business group" and from then it is consider as a pro-governmental supportive and it has a right wing and conservative slant. Information which are presented at its pages very often could reflect the pro-governmental views on the current domestic, regional and international events and developments.

For the purpose of the analysis were detected and analyzed 63 articles. From the analyzed articles it can be concluded that the term “Western Balkans” mostly is labeled with neutral or positive features, and there are not any cases where this term is presenter in negative connotation. Regarding the forms in which regionalization is appearing and dominant forms of regional cooperation which are presented in the articles published in the daily newspaper “Večer”, the situation is similar to the articles from daily newspaper “Utrinski vesnik”. Predominate regional cooperation is the cooperation in the achieving EU accession criteria, then regional security cooperation activities, economy, energy, transport network etc. The regional cooperation related

¹⁰⁸ Utrinski vesnik; <http://www.utrinski.mk/default.asp?ItemID=B3780DD0AAE98B43B2BF49CE91C58D1F>; visited at 15.02.2016;

¹⁰⁹ Utrinski vesnik; <http://www.utrinski.mk/default.asp?ItemID=3A6BD9109A63624080BAAA54048F7D07>; visited at 15.02.2016;

¹¹⁰ Ibid; visited at 15.02.2016;

to overcoming the problems with refugee and migrant flows is also predominantly represented at the newspaper's pages starting from end of September 2015. Something which was very common feature for the analyzed articles from this newspaper is the fact that very often although the title of the article was related to "Western Balkans" or "regional cooperation", significant number of lines from the articles were devoted either:

- to the governmental efforts for improving the conditions in the particular field of interest;
- what are the last achievements of the Macedonian government in the related field; or
- how Macedonian official representative defended Macedonian interests at the regional meetings.

As a result of these in the articles of "Večer" very often the focus was shifted from regional cooperation and Western Balkans to the current situations and political struggles of political parties in Macedonia.

In the context of the growing regional cooperation for managing the refugee and migrant crises, in the article from 10th December 2015 is written that "...migrant crises currently is the biggest challenge in whole Europe and only through regional cooperation on higher institutional level problems could be settle."¹¹¹

The topics of migration and EU enlargement processes are covered in the article from 12th November 2015. This article is related actually to the Summit "Visegrad 4 and Western Balkans" held at 13th November 2015 in Prague and among the other cooperation activities in the article is explained the formation of the 'Western Balkans Fund':

*"...one of the main events is the signing the Agreement for formation of the Western Balkans Fund by Macedonia, Serbia, Albania, Montenegro, BiH and Kosovo as a concrete step towards enhancing regional cooperation, following the example of the Visegrad group which was established in 1991."*¹¹²

In the article from 22nd October 2015 there are information about Western Balkans regional security cooperation and actually is referring to the Western Balkans regional meetings in the format of Comprehensive Regional Ministerial (CRM) and South-East Europe Defense Ministerial

¹¹¹ Večer; <http://vecer.mk/makedonija/eu-da-ne-dozvoli-begalskata-kriza-da-se-reshava-parcijalno>; visited at 17.02.2016;

¹¹² Večer; <http://vecer.mk/svet/evropski-samit-i-sostanok-na-shefovi-na-diplomatii-od-trinaeset-zemji>; visited at 17.02.2016;

(SEDM) Process. In the article for example is written that "...CRM and SEDM are proofed as excellent forums for regional cooperation in the field of security challenges."¹¹³

Furthermore the commitment of Macedonia towards regional cooperation and regional initiatives in different fields and various levels is the topic of an article from 16th October 2015 in which is written that "...Macedonia remains committed to its strategic determination to join the European Union and NATO ...and will actively participate in all processes of regional cooperation in South East Europe."¹¹⁴ The article referred to the speech of the President of Macedonian Parliament and is written in connotation that Macedonia is reliable regional partner and contributor.

In the period of 05th till 13th October there is a series of articles¹¹⁵ devoted to the role of Macedonia in the regional efforts for maintaining the regional security and keeping the commitments for humanistic approach for overcoming the problems with refugee and migrant crises. Also among the other things in the articles extensively is explained the necessity for unified approach towards migrant crises by all countries in the Western Balkans region and the need of close coordination and support by EU.

One of the articles from 15th September 2015 is informing about the energy security and energy infrastructure of the Western Balkans countries. It is written that Western Balkans countries "...must to create functional energy market that will offer affordable and reliable supply ... more efficient use of energy, renewable energy sources and encouraging investment in energy infrastructure."¹¹⁶ The term "energy security" have growing use in the media and public discourse and is pointing out on the new, multidimensional understanding of security. Energy security and energy infrastructure of the countries from Western Balkans region are also covered in several

¹¹³ Vecher; <http://vecer.mk/makedonija/procesot-sedm-e-dokaz-za-demokratskiot-kapacitet-na-regionot>; visited at 17.02.2016;

¹¹⁴ Vecher; <http://vecer.mk/makedonija/integracijata-vo-eu-e-strateshka-opredelba-na-makedonija>; visited at 17.02.2016;

¹¹⁵ Vecher; <http://vecer.mk/makedonija/eu-odluchi-kje-vi-dademe-pari-i-kje-ve-sovetuivame-kako-so-begalcite>; <http://vecer.mk/makedonija/poposki-i-chavkov-so-evropskite-kolegi-kje-debatiraat-za-migrantskata-ruta>; <http://vecer.mk/makedonija/balkanska-konferencija-za-begalcite-vo-luksemburg-bez-zheshki-tochki>; etc.; visited at 17.02.2016;

¹¹⁶ Vecher; <http://vecer.mk/ekonomija/na-balkanot-mu-e-potreben-funkcionalen-energetski-pazar>; visited at 17.02.2016;

other articles where is explained the current situation in this filed and necessity of further regional efforts.¹¹⁷

In two articles from 28th and 27th August 2015 extensively is covered the ‘Western Balkans Summit’ and the all activities and meetings conducted during the Summit. For example it is written that:

“with a clear European perspective of the Western Balkans, this region is closest to the EU, not only in geographical sense, but in the sense of values and aspirations. To be achieved a progress, it is clear that local leaders must put aside domestic rivalries and to focus on common interests of their countries, which are regional cooperation and European perspective.”¹¹⁸

Furthermore the text of the articles also are referring to the statement of the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy according to which

“...this region can and should be integrated into European networks. Traffic networks must be improve on key routes. Also, energy networks must be improved and to be improved their capacities. We believe that the Vienna Declaration adopted yesterday sent strong message of support for the European perspective, regional cooperation, for mutual connectivity of the region and improvement of the socio-economic conditions for all, including the youth. ... EU and Western Balkans share the same space and the same interests - we believe that we can also share the same European future.”¹¹⁹

At 23rd June 2015 there is an extensive article devoted to the Visegrad group regional cooperation and possibility for undertaking the positive experience by Western Balkans countries in their efforts for closer regional cooperation and mutual understanding. The article also presents the views and recommendation from the Slovak ambassador in Macedonia regarding the possible developments in regional cooperation among Western Balkans countries and between Western Balkans and Visegrad countries. I consider that is interesting to be mention one of the statements written in the article which stated that

“...Visegrad group, so called V4, which over 20 years has successfully promoted the cooperation of the four member states: Poland, Hungary, Slovakia and Czech Republic. This model of cooperation is an excellent example for the countries of the Western Balkans. For this purpose, this year during the presidency

¹¹⁷ Vecher; <http://vecer.mk/ekonomija/zemjite-od-zapaden-balkan-poblisku-do-eu-preku-regionalni-energetski-proekti>; <http://vecer.mk/ekonomija/dva-proekta-od-makedonija-vo-regionalna-inicijativa-za-gasno-povrzuvanje-0>; etc.; visited at 17.02.2016;

¹¹⁸ Vecher; <http://vecer.mk/balkan/balkane-bravo>; visited at 17.02.2016;

¹¹⁹ Ibid; visited at 17.02.2016;

of Slovakia in the Visegrad group was initiated the establishment of the Western Balkans Fund, which is practically the counterpart of the International Visegrad Fund which is the only institution of this group.”¹²⁰

The necessity of deeper and more efficient regional cooperation is elaborated in the article from 15th June 2015 which is related to the regional ministerial meeting of Central European Initiative (CEI) and Western Balkans countries that was held in Macedonia.¹²¹ This meeting was covered in other articles too and it was presented as important for Macedonia and the efforts for more comprehensive regional cooperation and regional cohesion.

In the article from 26th May 2015 in details is explained the Western Balkans regional security cooperation in different regional formats. In the article is written that as a result of the problematic past of the Balkan, “the countries of the region have established the process of meetings of defense ministers (SEDM), which have aims to improve the cooperation among the countries in the area of defense and security. On the meetings of the ministers are agreed various initiatives that can contribute for boosting the regional security.”¹²² Further the explanation is going in direction that Macedonia with all available resource is fully committed to the development and straitening the regional security cooperation activities. Regional security cooperation is covered in two others articles from 29th and 27th April in which is written about regional security cooperation in the field of terrorism and radicalism, cooperation between national armies, regional joined army units and their international peacekeeping capabilities.¹²³¹²⁴

In the period between January and April 2015 there are dozen short articles which are related to the Western Balkans regional cooperation in the development of the infrastructure, employment, youth employment, joint regional tourism offers, joint effort for judicial reforms etc. This is actually just a confirmation that in the media discourse term ‘Western Balkans’ and the process of regionalization are presented as very usual and common things and that Macedonia

¹²⁰ Večer; <http://vecer.mk/makedonija/solidarnosta-i-fleksibilnost-se-model-za-uspeh-i-vo-zapaden-balkan>; visited at 17.02.2016;

¹²¹ Večer; <http://vecer.mk/makedonija/brod-so-penta-gi-odnese-ministrice-na-ruchek-vo-dalga>; visited at 17.02.2016;

¹²² Večer; <http://vecer.mk/makedonija/balkanot-so-zaednichki-sili-da-se-spravuva-so-terorizmot-0>; visited at 17.02.2016;

¹²³ Večer; <http://vecer.mk/makedonija/jankuloska-balkanot-soochen-so-fenomenot-stranski-teroristichki-borci>; visited at 17.02.2016;

¹²⁴ Večer; <http://vecer.mk/makedonija/kje-go-poddrzhime-chlenstvoto-na-republika-makedonija-pred-voeniot-komitet-na-nato>; visited at 17.02.2016;

public constantly is exposed to the information for different regional cooperation activities and regional initiatives in the Western Balkans.

On the end I just want to point out to two other articles from 17th and 19th January 2015 in which briefly is written about Macedonian involvement in the regional security cooperation and participating of Macedonian army in the joined army medical units.¹²⁵¹²⁶

“Dnevnik” (ДНЕВНИК/ Daily (Eng. translation)) is a daily and most widely circulated newspaper in Republic of Macedonia. It’s the only newspaper which had reach circulation of 100000 copies¹²⁷ per day, but last 2015 it had average circulation of about 25 000 copies¹²⁸ daily. Furthermore “Dnevnik” has it the most visited newspaper site in Macedonia with approximately 30 000 visitors per day.¹²⁹ According to the last survey regarding the popularity of public media in Macedonia, which was conducted during the September and October 2015, on the question which daily newspaper do you read most often for political news? Most of the interviewees answered “Dnevnik”¹³⁰ When it comes of the political stance of the newspaper, the public perception is that “Dnevnik” is the most neutral newspaper in Macedonia.¹³¹ The newspaper was founded in 1996 and the first edition was published in 20th March same year. It has a particular emphasis on politics. Currently the owner of the newspaper is Media Print Macedonia (MPM).

During the analysis, 95 articles were taken for consideration and comprehensively analyzed. As one of the first things that are coming from the analysis is the fact that the process of regional cooperation and the use of the term “Western Balkan” is appearing quite more often in the newspaper “Dnevnik” compared with the two previous analyzed newspapers. In the analyzed period there are at least two articles per day published in the daily editions of “Dnevnik” in which

¹²⁵ Večer; <http://vecer.mk/makedonija/makedonija-nikogash-ne-bila-poblisku-do-nato>; visited at 17.02.2016;

¹²⁶ Večer; <http://vecer.mk/makedonija/makedonija-del-od-balkanski-medicinski-sili>; visited at 17.02.2016;

¹²⁷ Dnevnik; <http://www.dnevnik.mk/>; visited at 20.02.2016.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ The survey was carried out by International Republican Institute (Washington DC based nonprofit, nonpartisan organization committed to advancing freedom and democracy worldwide) through face to face interviews from 29th September and 5th October, 2015, on a sample of 1106 interviewees, <http://www.iri.org/>.

¹³¹ According to the surveys from 2006 till 2016 conducted from Brima Gallup Macedonia (part of Brima Gallup International - a private, independent research agency that conducts public opinion and market and media surveys. But the details about survey’s methodology is not provided. <http://www.brima.com.mk/index.html>.

the topic is closely related to the process of regionalization or in which the term “Western Balkan” is used. Regarding the areas of regional cooperation which are mostly represented in the texts, as most frequently presented are the security issues, economic and development cooperation, EU integration processes and challenges, regional infrastructural connectivity, regional relations. Similar as in the case of the two previous newspapers, the regional problems and challenges related to the migration flows through ‘Balkan route’¹³² and the ways of possible solutions of these problems are predominant especially after June 2015.

Regarding the features that are usually labeled to the term “Western Balkan” from the analysis as a conclusion could be said that in most of the articles the term is used in neutral connotation and in few cases with positive ones. In contrast of the previous two newspaper in “Dnevnik” there were some article in which have been used some negative features, metaphors or stereotypes relate to the term “Western Balkan”. This was especially case in the articles published in the newspaper from an individual experts. Furthermore from the analysis of the articles from the newspaper “Dnevnik” was noticeable the same tendencies as in the previously analyzed newspaper where the terms “Macedonia” and “Western Balkan” where used simultaneously and followed each other. In the articles very often when some political, economic and other societal conditions or problems which are appearing in Macedonian society and state were presented, they also have been compared with some similar conditions and problems with the rest of the Western Balkan countries. In the following lines will follow briefly explanation and analysis just on those articles text’s where very explicitly are used the key words which are used for the purpose of public discourse analysis. However this does not mean that other articles are not taken in consideration but a contrary they will be used in the overall process of detection of the main features of Western Balkan regional cooperation and for making final conclusions.

In the detected articles published during February and January 2016 the only topic related to the regional cooperation is the necessity of finding out solution for the migration flows towards EU via ‘Balkan route’. In these articles very often is repeated that Western Balkan countries cannot cope individually with these kind of security and humanitarian challenges but there is a need for mutual regional cooperation and close coordination with the EU partners. In one of these articles

¹³² ‘Balkan route’ – a land route through Greece, Macedonia, or Albania, Serbia, or BiH, Croatia used by irregular migrants to enter the EU.

are presented and the joint efforts of Western Balkan and Visegrad countries towards preventing the migrant influx and border guard management. For instance in the article from 15th February 2016 is written that:

“Today in Prague, Hungary, Slovakia, Czech Republic and Poland, as the Visegrad Group, Macedonia and Serbia establish bilateral aid in order sealing the border with Greece to prevent migrant influx along the Western Balkan route. We remain united in dealing with this situation.

...EU Commissioner for Enlargement Negotiations Johannes Hahn, stated that migration by its nature is a regional issue and he indicated that the EU is ready to continue to assist to those Western Balkan countries which are facing with similar challenges.”¹³³

The migration flows as a regional challenge is also presented in the text of the article from 22nd January 2016 in which is written that “the main focus in EU and Western Balkans is the migrant crises that is going on in the moment.”¹³⁴ In the same article it is given a short overview of the political situation in the Western Balkan countries and their place in the European and geo-political matters. Further the author of the article has written that Western Balkan is a name given by the EU and USA which are trying to ‘europeanize’ these countries and help them to overcome the ‘balkanization’. The ‘balkanization’ in the article is used with intention to point out on the ongoing political crises in the Western Balkan countries and their laziness, pessimism and uncivilized manners. This article is one of the few in which I found out that term ‘balkanization’ is used in these three Macedonian newspapers. In same article has been mentioned and the Visegrad countries as a product of EU and USA and their geo-political interests.

The article from 04th December 2015 is referring to the meeting between the Presidents of the National Assemblies of Czech Republic and Macedonia and big part of the article’s text is devoted to the migrant crises. Some of the presented views are the following ones:

“Visegrad group countries does not supported the proposal of Brussels about concentrated mandatory quotas for migrants.

Czech Republic supports a comprehensive solution of the migrant crisis.

¹³³ Dnevnik; <http://www.dnevnik.mk/default.asp?ItemID=5AEDA1A4FA5F3944BDC00494DD043DAF>; visited at 20.02.2016.

¹³⁴ Dnevnik; <http://www.dnevnik.mk/default.asp?ItemID=1AC48494B2D41942B8CDF9BD901E8E9C>; visited at 20.02.2016.

*Hence it is clear that Western Balkan countries, including Macedonia must be part of that solution.*¹³⁵

However in the some article regarding the EU integration process it is stated that ‘Western Balkan is a part of the Europe and without this region Europe cannot be whole’. Interesting is the statement given by the President of Czech Chamber of Deputies that ‘Macedonia maybe is a small country but important part of the Western Balkan region’. Which means that from Czech perspective undoubtedly Macedonia is an integral part of the Western Balkan region. As one more thing which the article’s text is referring is that the President of Czech Chamber of Deputies shared the experience with Macedonian colleagues that Czech Republic has with the Visegrad regional cooperation. The Visegrad regional cooperation is presented as a very positive and good role model which can be followed by the Western Balkan countries. In this context it has been mentioned the establishing of the Western Balkan Fund following the example of Visegrad countries and their International Visegrad Fund. Also in the text is written that President of Czech Chamber of Deputies once again repeated that “the Visegrad fully supports the integration of the Western Balkans.”¹³⁶

The necessity of more comprehensive and efficient regional cooperation has been mentioned in the article from 26th November 2015 in which is stated that “the process of EU accession of the Western Balkan countries probably in future will continue in some kind of common regional format.”¹³⁷

Deepening and developing of the regional economic, energy, touristic and educational activities and various initiatives are explanted in the texts of the articles from 10th and 6th December 2015.¹³⁸ These two articles are refereeing to the ongoing process of improving of the mutual connectivity among the Western Balkan countries at various levels and areas.

In the article from 6th November 2015 migrant crises, the challenges which brings for the Western Balkan region as well as the challenges and necessity for faster EU accession has been

¹³⁵ Dnevnik; <http://www.dnevnik.mk/default.asp?ItemID=3DFE5AC459705444B2215551F17E87B9>; visited at 20.02.2016.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Dnevnik; <http://www.dnevnik.mk/default.asp?ItemID=FEFB0A80E328B5419F47C2286D029916>; visited at 20.02.2016.

¹³⁸ Dnevnik; <http://www.dnevnik.mk/default.asp?ItemID=E6C018A1D5B8FA40A9028FA6E92DEFDA>; <http://www.dnevnik.mk/default.asp?ItemID=DCFDC9BACC59E418EF2D1CA50CEC145>; visited at 20.02.2016.

put in to the focus. In the text of this article also is mentioned that the “for many Germans the Balkan is still a powder keg” which in a way is pointing out on the stereotyping (especially typical for 1990s) of the Western Balkan countries.¹³⁹

The articles from 15th October and 25th September very critically are referring to the regional relations among the Western Balkan countries.¹⁴⁰ The focus is basically put on the regional problems from the past which still are burdening the relations between some of the countries (especially between Serbia and Kosovo, and Serbia and Croatia) as well as the current EU integration processes of the whole region. However it is stated that both the problems from the past and current problems such as migration crises and terrorist threats should be settled mutually at regional level. Very similar argument have been presented also in the text of the article from 31st August 2015 according to which bilateral disputes should not be obstacle for the EU integration of the ‘WB6’ (‘Western Balkan 6’ - Albania, BiH, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia).¹⁴¹ In the article has been used the abbreviation ‘WB6’ which refers to the all countries from the region and which in the public and political discourse also slowly is starting to be used. It is very similar to the abbreviation of the Visegrad countries - “V4” or the Baltic countries - ‘B3’. Furthermore in this article is stated that ‘Western Balkan Summit’ which should be held in Vienna is a good possibility Western Balkan countries to show mature political culture and to works towards better infrastructural connected region and region which very soon will be part of the European system of values.¹⁴² Many articles from the end of August and beginning of September were dedicated to the ‘Western Balkan Summit’ held in Vienna. One of the articles in which the Summit is extensively covered with all main meetings and statements, is the article from 29th August 2015.¹⁴³ The Summit main intention was to show commitment for the process of further EU enlargement towards Western Balkan countries and in same time to influence on the

¹³⁹ Dnevnik; <http://www.dnevnik.mk/default.asp?ItemID=7590FD593A4657469B3D7CD65D427295>; visited at 20.02.2016.

¹⁴⁰ Dnevnik; <http://www.dnevnik.mk/default.asp?ItemID=4EAD1F73E9B59648847CD8C1ECDDD50A>; <http://www.dnevnik.mk/default.asp?ItemID=ABB6D18628067540847B0DDE3C66B560>; visited at 20.02.2016.

¹⁴¹ Dnevnik; <http://www.dnevnik.mk/default.asp?ItemID=75E32A312BA97B41AB8D8EA71ACF1BB5>; visited at 20.02.2016.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Dnevnik; <http://www.dnevnik.mk/default.asp?ItemID=377442AC9323A04B942E16BDD7B073F2>; visited at 20.02.2016.

acceleration of the EU integration of these countries. In the article beside previous statements is written that:

With clearly set European perspective, Western Balkans region is closest to the EU not only in terms of geographical location but also in the sense of values and aspirations. The citizens of the region wants improved domestic socioeconomic conditions, strengthened rule of law and accountability, improved relationships inside their countries, as well as with their neighbors and the EU.

To make progress, it is clear that the leaders at local levels must put aside the rivalries and to focus on the common interests in their countries or regional cooperation and European perspective.

In this regard it is particularly good example that in the last period the Western Balkan leaders shown political will and leadership to put aside the differences of the past. They agreed to build bridges not only physically, but bridges of peace and reconciliation.

EU and Western Balkans share the same space and the same interests, and we believe that we can share the same European future.”¹⁴⁴

The article published at 01st September 2015 in details preset the importance for regional cohesion of the ongoing infrastructural project or projects which in near future will be started. These project should contribute for better road, rail and energy connectivity among Western Balkan countries and improvement of their connection with pan European infrastructural networks.¹⁴⁵

Close cooperation and experience sharing between Visegrad and Western Balkan countries is the topic which is covered in several articles published in the analysed period in the newspaper “Dnevnik”. In the article from 30th July 2015 in most detail way is explained how Visegrad countries contribute their regional experience of cooperation in the framework of International Visegrad Fund also to be transferred among the Western Balkan countries. According to the article:

“The creation of a Western Balkan Fund, which is established by Macedonia, Serbia, Albania, Montenegro, BiH and Kosovo, it is a concrete step towards enhanced regional cooperation following the example of the Visegrad Group, which was created in 1991. This group is constituted by Hungary, Slovakia, Czech Republic and Poland, and these countries in 2000 founded the International Visegrad Fund, which now has an annual budget of 8 million euros.

...Visegrad Fund is an international organization based in Bratislava, which is funded by the four states. The purpose of the fund is to assist and promote development and closer cooperation between citizens and institutions in the region, and among the V4. It is expected the Fund for the Western Balkans to have the same goals.”¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Dnevnik; <http://www.dnevnik.mk/default.asp?ItemID=6D082239101E284688519558299E8380>; visited at 20.02.2016.

¹⁴⁶ Dnevnik; <http://www.dnevnik.mk/default.asp?ItemID=7AEF83984DE8DD4DB3D80A890435742A>; visited at 20.02.2016.

The statement of the Former ambassador of Hungary Prof. Dr. *István Gyarmati* is presented also in the article according to whom:

“Visegrad model is most suitable for the Western Balkan countries, because it is very little institutionalized, have little bureaucracy and a lot of cooperation. For successfulness of the cooperation of the so-called group ‘WB6’, he proposes to be introduce rotating presidency, to be established the Fund, to be formed small teams in the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and to begin with the regular meetings.”¹⁴⁷

For the necessity of straightening of the regional cooperation and cohesion and for accelerating the EU accession process among the Western Balkan countries is written in very detail way in the article published at 22nd July 2015. Also preparations and expectations for the ‘Western Balkan Summit’ in Vienna are presented in the article’s text. It is interesting that in the article was made a parallel between the EU council meeting in Thessaloniki (2003) and the upcoming Western Balkan Summit’ in Vienna (2015). The main points from this article are that this Summit in Vienna cannot allowed just declarative statements and lack of implementation of the program activities as it was the case of Thessaloniki declaration. EU integration process of Western Balkan countries cannot wait anymore and EU should undertake concrete actions for acceleration of the whole process. In the article is presented and the statement from the Austrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs according to which:

“Key issues at the Summit in Vienna will be the infrastructure and the connections. Another issue will be regional cooperation and the need to be reconsidered the bilateral disputes. Nobody expected that these problems will be solved quickly, but what we need, is these problems to be channeled, that appropriate mechanisms for settlement of these disputes to be found, and these problems not to reflect on the enlargement process. Special focus will be given to the perspectives of young people.”¹⁴⁸

From the article which is published at 27th June 2015 could be seen that even from perspective of Chinese foreign policy, Macedonia is part of the Western Balkan region and actually that Western Balkan is considered as a region. These means that not only for EU’s or USA foreign

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Dnevnik; <http://www.dnevnik.mk/default.asp?ItemID=7B0E82FAE9E2C0408A62D6566D87F2D0>; visited at 20.02.2016.

practice but even for other countries the term ‘Western Balkan’ is considered as a signifier for these region.¹⁴⁹

In the article from 25th June is presented the statement of the Macedonian Deputy Prime Minister which one per week published articles for a particular topic in the newspaper “Dnevnik”. In this article his calling for the necessity of accomplishment of the goals of the Thessaloniki declaration from 2003 regarding the EU integration of the Western Balkan countries. Two others things which are especially emphasis in the articles are the necessity of mutual regional economic development and the necessity the disputes from the past between the countries from the region to be overcome.

The articles from 19th June and 13th May 2015 are dealing with the issues of regional security and the security threats for the Western Balkan countries. Further in the articles are presented statements that Western Balkan region has need of deeper security cooperation at all levels with intention to cope with the rising treats and challenges related to violet extremism and radicalism, phenomenon of foreign fighters, terrorist acts etc. Also is stated that there is a need for increasing the mutual trust among the security institutions from the region.¹⁵⁰

Macedonian and regional efforts towards European integration processes are covered in details in the articles from 07th and 27th May. In both articles are presented the problems which at regional level slow down the EU accession and stressed the need of regional efforts for overcoming the existing bilateral problems as soon as possible between some of the Western Balkan countries. For example the article from 27th May is referring to the Conference which was held in Skopje, Macedonia related to the EU integration process of the Western Balkan countries but also in the article’s text closely are presented the views of the German ambassador in Macedonia. In the text it is stated that:

“The prospects of EU membership for the Western Balkans are real, but many challenges stands on their European path. Germany has been and will be a strong supporter of bringing the region to the EU. The road to the EU is not easy, it knows to be steep and exhausting. Reform is not only a matter of laws. They needed to go deeper and to really influence the way how various institutions operate, parliament, judiciary, political and institutional culture and the whole society. Democratic principles, legislation, good governance should

¹⁴⁹ Dnevnik; <http://www.dnevnik.mk/default.asp?ItemID=A228F09BFB5E0448B1C7965409B91AF7>; visited at 20.02.2016.

¹⁵⁰ Dnevnik; <http://www.dnevnik.mk/default.asp?ItemID=D7A3BBFC88F70D48B0652354CFB2C280>; visited at 20.02.2016.

be promoted in a sustainable way. They must to become a real values of the society, according to which the country is functioning. It also means implementation. We know that there will be challenges, but we encourage the national authorities and people in the region not to lose momentum. Germany's support is sincere, reliable and consistent and Western Balkan partners which support western values and who will remain on the path of reform can count on it.

The Western Balkan Conference in Berlin from August 2014 was initiated with the intention to bring the region closely to EU and to strengthen cooperation between countries in the region. That shows why connectivity is put into focus of the intensive preparations of the region. The expansion of the regional transport network and its connectivity with the European will enable the region to progress towards its European future”¹⁵¹.

The unemployment, especially among the youth and the inclusion in the Western Balkan societies are one of the topics presented in several articles. The focus of the articles from 30th and 16th April is related to the following:

“At the two-day regional conference for employment and social inclusion in Southeast Europe and Turkey, held in Skopje it was said that one of the challenges that the Western Balkan countries are facing is the high levels of unemployment. Governments past two decades have created policies to open more jobs, but requires joint efforts of states to improve the situation. Creating growth rich in jobs is the key solution for deleting the nickname that this region carries as ‘poor periphery of Europe.’”¹⁵²

From the article could be seen that the term ‘Western Balkan’ is associated with some negative image. Furthermore there are additional articles in which negative features are connected to the term ‘Western Balkan’. In most explicit way that is made in the article published at 08th April 2015 in which ongoing regional misunderstandings, existing bilateral problems, and also additional negative features as for example nationalistic tendencies among some of the politicians in the region are put in correlation with the term ‘Western Balkan’. In the article more precisely is stated that:

“EU commission condemn the provocative statements of the Albanian prime minister and once again reconfirm the support for regional cooperation, reconciliation and good neighborhood relations among the Western Balkan countries. The countries from the region have a clear European perspective provided by the EU at the highest level. All partners in the region themselves confirmed their commitment to these goals and determination to meet the necessary measures, such as respecting the principles and basics of the EU standards.”¹⁵³

¹⁵¹ Dnevnik; <http://www.dnevnik.mk/default.asp?ItemID=34DAED0D417B0A4D947D3C6F4517598E>; visited at 20.02.2016.

¹⁵² Dnevnik; <http://www.dnevnik.mk/default.asp?ItemID=F6FE39E464661F4BB16051D5321919BD>; visited at 20.02.2016.

¹⁵³ Dnevnik; <http://www.dnevnik.mk/default.asp?ItemID=88E361D49DFDC247BEC94D768E010E16>; visited at 20.02.2016.

Speaking about the negative connotation related to the term ‘Western Balkan’ in two articles published at 26th March and 12nd February 2015 which are written by the Macedonian Deputy Prime Minister it is stated that Macedonian and Western Balkan countries are faced with a choice to choose between the European peace, stability and development from one side and the ‘black hole’ called ‘balkanization’ from the other. Further in the text from 26th March is stated that Western Balkan countries should overcome mutual disputes and work together towards political dialogue, functional democratic institutions and functional democracy.¹⁵⁴ From other side in the text from 12nd February it is stated that Western Balkan countries, in very typical ‘Balkan style’ instead of working hard towards EU integration, they are still trapped in some irrational bilateral disputes which on the end do not help anyhow for the improvement of socio- economic conditions of their citizens. It is very interesting fact that from the analyzed articles from all three newspapers, it appeared that only Macedonian Deputy Prime Minister from all Macedonian high official state representatives used the term ‘Western Balkan’ in some negative connotation, or is pointing out on some stereotypes.

Regional security problems and challenges are present constantly in the articles in the newspaper “Dnevnik” and they usually refer to the problems with public safety, drug and human trafficking, problems with radicalization and the phenomenon of foreign fighters etc. Although ethnic tension were mentioned several times in all of the cases is exclude the possibility for repletion of the events from the past because all of the countries are dedicated to the development of regional cooperation and EU integrations. Also these articles very often referred to some regional conference dedicated to some of the current security challenges in the Western Balkan and about the necessity of mutual regional approach for their prevention and suppression.¹⁵⁵

Additionally the topics related to EU integration and the mechanisms for fostering the regional cooperation among the Western Balkan countries is another topic which is usually presented on the pages of the newspaper “Dnevnik”. The regional cooperation in lot of cases is point out as irreplaceable component for successful EU integration. For example the article from 16th February

¹⁵⁴ Dnevnik; <http://www.dnevnik.mk/default.asp?ItemID=FC33228868F3F641A7401AAEC82CB15E> ; visited at 20.02.2016.

¹⁵⁵ Dnevnik; <http://www.dnevnik.mk/default.asp?ItemID=35383AC87A33F44FBDCA8E83D0322B42>; <http://www.dnevnik.mk/default.asp?ItemID=FA8858D85846BB4AAFC7A69583197F95>; visited at 20.02.2016.

is speaking about the visit of the Commissioner for European Neighborhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations to the Western Balkan countries and is stated that:

Western Balkan countries have achieved great progress, which is recognized by the European Commission. However additional things should be done and some challenges should be tackle depending on the specific situation of each country. There must be a clear priorities for improving the economic development of the countries in terms of increasing the activities in the business sector and improve the overall situation in the economy. Ensuring the rule of law, fight against corruption, non-discriminations, regional cooperation are one of the indispensable criteria for becoming a part of EU.”¹⁵⁶

Taking in consideration the aforementioned statements and findings regarding the similarities and difference between the political and public discourse media discourse in Macedonia related to the process of regionalization and regional cooperation in the Western Balkan, as a concluding remarks could be point out several features. First the terms ‘Western Balkan’ and ‘Western Balkan region’ are very frequently used and they appeared almost at daily basis in the articles of official statements. This means that both of the terms are part of the political and public discourse in Macedonia and very often used in the daily practices of the citizens. Furthermore it could be said that in both discourses are present a strong unanimity on the importance on the Western Balkan regional cooperation. In both discourse the term ‘Western Balkan’ is labeled mostly with neutral features although there were few cases in public discourse where some negative features of stereotypes associated the Western Balkan’ or ‘Western Balkan region’ with poverty, laziness, lawlessness, non-civilized. Furthermore in the analyzed article during the given period only in two cases was mentioned the term ‘balkanisation’.

From the analysis is noticeable the tendencies according to which the terms “Macedonia” and “Western Balkan” where used simultaneously and followed each other. Also in all cases where some comparisons on some particular features were made as a first counterparts of Macedonia where taken the rest of the Western Balkan countries. It is evident that for the political elites, inside and outside of the region, the Western Balkan presents a region composed by countries which shared common goals and principles and which already achieved a lot in their mutual cooperation and their path towards Europe. However still there is a space for improvements, for undertaking

¹⁵⁶Dnevnik; <http://www.dnevnik.mk/default.asp?ItemID=E1FA82720768F14B8A3ED7EC7CDDAADB>; visited at 20.02.2016.

further steps for overcoming the existing mutual problem and for fostering the cooperation especially in the domain of the security, economy and EU integrations.

4. Western Balkan as a region and its regional identity

In this sub-chapter will be analyzed (scrutinize) the 'regionness' of the Western Balkan, and will be answered few questions, such as: does the Western Balkan presents a region? and what kind of region? and whether there is something that emerge or could be considered as a regional identity in the process of regionalization among the countries from this part of Europe.

Anssi Passi theory of institutionalization of regions explain the establishing and development of the regions through 4 stages. The theory of institutionalization is consisted of the following 4 stages or elements: A territorial shape are the boundaries that emerge in various social practices and distinguish the region and identity discourses from those of other regions; Symbolic shaping refers to the process of naming and the creation of additional symbols that normally both express and strengthen the idea of the existence of a specific region and regional identity; Institutional shaping is part and parcel of the emergence of territorial and symbolic shape and this refers to the development of informal and formal institutions that are needed to produce and reproduce other shapes; and the fourth is established identity in social practices and consciousness.¹⁵⁷ Further for the understanding the nature of the Western Balkan regional identity I am finding as a very useful Passi's analytical distinction of the regional identity on to two different understanding 'identity of a region' and 'regional consciousness' (or regional identity of the inhabitants, i.e. their identification with their region).¹⁵⁸ For Passi regions are both a historical contingent and socially constructed concepts.¹⁵⁹ One of my claims is that in the case of the Western

¹⁵⁷ A. Paasi, *The Resurgence of the 'Region' and 'Regional Identity': Theoretical Perspectives and Empirical Observations on Regional Dynamics in Europe*, in "Review of International Studies: Globalising the Regional, Regionalising the Global", Vol. 35 (Feb., 2009), pp. 121-146.

¹⁵⁸ A. Paasi, *The institutionalization of regions: a theoretical framework for understanding the emergence of regions and the constitution of regional identity*, "Fennia", Vol. 164 (1986), issue 1, pp.105-146.

¹⁵⁹ A. Paasi, *The Resurgence of the 'Region' and 'Regional Identity': Theoretical Perspectives and Empirical Observations on Regional Dynamics in Europe*, in "Review of International Studies: Globalising the Regional, Regionalising the Global", Vol. 35 (Feb., 2009), pp. 121-146.

Balkan, the regionalization is basically from a constructivist nature, where different social actors and their power shaped the regional space. For instance in this context is going the argument of Passi according to which “regions are sometimes meaningful historical units or ad hoc units created for the purpose of governance”.¹⁶⁰ Furthermore Passi is arguing that “...constitutive powers of regions may originate both from the region and from the outside”¹⁶¹

Speaking about the complexity and multidimensionality of the term ‘region’, Michael Keating is emphasizing that regions are emerging as a result of for different reasons such as: “...historic resonance or provide a focus for the identity of its inhabitants. It may represent a landscape, an architecture or a style of cooking. There is often a cultural element, perhaps represented by a distinct language or dialect. Beyond this, a region may sustain a distinct civil society, a range of social institutions. It can be an economic unit, based either on a single type of production or an integrated production system. It may be, and increasingly is, a unit of government and administration. Finally, all these meanings may or may not coincide, to a greater or lesser degree.”¹⁶² Furthermore his is arguing that in a situation when “...‘geographical’ elements such as nature or landscape, economic cohesion, cultural identity, administrative apparatus, popular identity and territorial mobilization coincide in space” a strong regionalism can appeared.¹⁶³

These kind of “...spatial ideas are doubtless attractive to politicians and planners who see the region and regional identity as new magic words for developing economy through culture and as important cohesive elements for social life.”¹⁶⁴ “Planners, politicians, entrepreneurs and developers effectively lean on regions in organizing and governing the spatiality of social and political life, and often exploit the narratives of regional identities.”¹⁶⁵ This can lead to some explanations of the current trends in Europe and in some other parts of the world why region, regional identity and regionalization dominate in the academic, public and political discourse and more and more affects the daily life of the ordinary people.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid

¹⁶¹ Ibid

¹⁶² M. Keating, *Regions and Regionalism in Europe*, 2004, pp. xi.

¹⁶³ M. Keating, 'The New Regionalism', 2010, p. 10.

¹⁶⁴ A. Paasi, *The Resurgence of the ‘Region’ and ‘Regional Identity’: Theoretical Perspectives and Empirical Observations on Regional Dynamics in Europe*, in “*Review of International Studies: Globalising the Regional, Regionalising the Global*”, Vol. 35 (Feb., 2009), pp. 121-146.

¹⁶⁵ M. Tewdwr-Jones and P. Allmendinger (eds), *Territory, Identity and Spatial Planning*, London, UK, 2006.

Also Passi is arguing that:

“...an analytical distinction between 'old' and 'new' regions helps to understand the nature of the 'region-building' process in the European context. The former sees regions as having normally emerged along with the history, have gradually become established parts of governance, may be meaningful entities for citizens and may therefore be important sources of regional identity and even emotions ...In contrast, 'new regions' are typically created as ad hoc projects that aim at developing or increasing the competitiveness of the spatial unit in question.”¹⁶⁶

Because of the nature and features that Western Balkan region has, it could be situated in the category of ‘new’ region. Passi is stating that creation of the ‘new’ region usually follows the pattern of firstly setting of “...political, economic or cultural discourses are created concerning the possibility of a region. Such ideas are then introduced into plans and maps and ultimately regions may become materialised so that they have an effect on the actions of citizens and on broader social practices.”¹⁶⁷

Speaking about ‘old’ and ‘new’ regions Passi is also referring to the ‘old’ and ‘new’ regionalism. “While old regionalism emerged along with the rise of European integration, new regionalism has gained currency in the context of globalising region system. Current 'new regionalism' is not confined merely to formal inter-state regional organisations and institutions, but is characterised by multidimensionality, complexity, fluidity and non-conformity and by the fact that it involves a variety of state and non-state actors that often come together in rather informal ways.”¹⁶⁸ Keating also add that “...‘new regionalism’ was seen as an instrument in an emerging territorial economic policy. It paved the way to the current rescaling of the global system and, apart from the EC/EU, the ‘new regionalism’ soon expanded to cover other supra-state formations, which demonstrate mainly economic and political interests associated with global capitalism.”¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁶ A. Paasi, *The Resurgence of the ‘Region’ and ‘Regional Identity’: Theoretical Perspectives and Empirical Observations on Regional Dynamics in Europe*, in “*Review of International Studies: Globalising the Regional, Regionalising the Global*”, Vol. 35 (Feb., 2009), pp. 121-146.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid

¹⁶⁸ Ibid

¹⁶⁹ M. Keating, 'The New Regionalism', 2010, p. 10.

Regionalism is increasingly based on practices and discourses that take place in and through various spatial scales, and that may be crucial in the institutionalisation of new scales.¹⁷⁰

In the past few decades European spaces were exposed to various tendencies of spatial re-scaling which resulted with re-enforcing, constructing or even inventing completely new regions at different scales, from supra-national, sub-national to cross border level. The territory of the Balkans or South East Europe was not an exception so in the past three decades and especially after dissolution of Yugoslavia the process of regionalization affected the countries of this region and it has gained more and more dynamics and importance. But at the beginning of the 1990s not only that all countries of the Balkans were faced with drastic political, economic and social transformation processes, their mutual relations also additionally were burdened with strong animosity (among some of them even with armed hostilities), political rivalries and non-communications. The case of the Western Balkan countries had different path than the regional processes that started for instance in the Central Europe or the Baltic region where also at the beginnings of the 1990s similar enormous transformation occurred. These processes in the Western Balkan (or Balkans) were reversed, with negative tendencies and in many ways destructive. In the Central Europe and the Baltics after adoption of democratic values and principles, were followed by different regional initiatives and process, but in the Western Balkan from a position of deeply economical, financial and infrastructural connection, especially among the ex-Yugoslav countries, the region was faced with political fragmentation, economic decline, segregation and rise of corruption and organised crime. The first visible steps regarding more regional based approach in Western Balkan followed at the end of the 1990s when with support and in some extent under outside pressure (mainly by EU and USA) regionalization was adopted as peacebuilding mechanism and instrument for straitening the neighboring relations and regional cohesion. At the beginning there were evident tendencies of distrust and low levels of interest towards the regional cooperation. Also it was noticeable that the political elites in the Western Balkan countries preferred the interactions and cooperation with other regional groupings and formats in Europe (EU, NATO, CEFTA etc.) than for instance regional interactions and initiatives with the neighboring countries from the Balkans, which actually were almost marginalized.

¹⁷⁰ A. Paasi, *The Resurgence of the 'Region' and 'Regional Identity': Theoretical Perspectives and Empirical Observations on Regional Dynamics in Europe*, in "Review of International Studies: Globalising the Regional, Regionalising the Global", Vol. 35 (Feb., 2009), p9, pp. 121-146.

However the pressure of neoliberal concepts, Europeanisation and more specifically EU integration normativism, contributed too, Western Balkan countries slowly but with positive progression to develop their ‘regional awareness’ and to understand the benefits of the adopting the regional approaches in settling their needs, interests and problems.

Passi’s theory of institutionalization of regions is based on four elements or stages that one region have and “which do not neatly follow each other and their order can vary; in most cases such processes occur simultaneously:

1. ***A territorial shape*** – boundaries that emerge in various social practices and distinguish the region and identity discourses from those of other regions. The functions and meanings of boundaries vary in the sense that some spatial practices are bounded/exclusive while others are not.

2. ***A symbolic shape*** that manifests itself in practices such as the economy, culture/ media and governance and is used to construct narratives of identity. This shape includes the name of the region and numerous other symbols.

3. A number of ***institutions***, needed to maintain the territorial and symbolic shapes, and while they usually produce and reproduce distinctions between regions and social groups (‘us’/‘them’), these institutions may just as well be located outside the region.

4. ***An established identity in social practices and consciousness***, both internally and externally. An established region can be used by social groups and movements as a medium in a struggle over resources and power, or – at the other extreme – against the other. Actors involved in these struggles often use identity among their arguments.”¹⁷¹

In the following lines I will apply this four elements or stages in the case of Western Balkan and through analysis to investigate whether regionalism among the Western Balkan countries led to region building and region formation.

Regarding the first element or stage of Passi’s theory – the territorial shape, as I mentioned in the sub chapter for the emergence of the term ‘Western Balkan’, in the Thessaloniki Declaration from the EU – Western Balkan Summit from 2003, is very clearly stated which countries are

¹⁷¹ A. Paasi, *Bounded spaces in the mobile world: Deconstructing ‘Regional Identity’*, University of Oulu, Department of Geography, Finland, 2001, p.140.

considered as a Western Balkan. Therefore the boundaries of the Western Balkan region correspond with the state borders of the Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), Croatia, Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro. After the unilateral declared independence in 2008 and Kosovo started to be indicated as a separate regional actor. According to Paasi "...the existence of a region always draws on a certain territorial shape that emerges along with history ...or is simply decided ad hoc (new regions)."¹⁷² In the case of the Western Balkan is obvious that the term 'Western Balkan' and the boundaries of this region could be label as "ad hoc" and constructed by some kind of pressure from outside. EU and its normative power and conditionality convinced the political elites from the respective countries of the necessity of the regional approach and cooperation. Europeanization and EU integration processes helped to be overcome nationalist antagonisms and ethno-national agenda of the political elites from the region and to be replaced by democratization, reconstruction, development, and regional cooperation.

For understanding how these particular seven countries started to be labeled as Western Balkan and to be considered as a regional format is necessary to be taken in consideration a set of several intervene factors and circumstances. These factors and circumstances are product of the turbulent past of this region in the past three decades, the EU involvement in the process of the post-conflict stabilization and the process of EU integration of these countries. While other countries from Central and Eastern Europe were moving towards European values and norms, Western Balkan was source of instability and undemocratic tendencies, with possibility of spillover effect of these negativities in other countries and regions in Europe. It is important to be mention that among some of the Western Balkan countries during the 1990s existed strong enmity, for instance between Serbia, Croatia and BiH, as a result of the wars in Croatia and BiH during the period from 1992 till 1995, then between Serbia and Montenegro (in that time FR Yugoslavia) from one side and Albania regarding the armed conflict in Kosovo 1998/1999 and between Macedonia and Kosovo during the armed conflict in Macedonia and border incidents during 2001. EU realized the danger of the slow democratization of the Western Balkan countries, which actually were lacking behind the Central European countries in the EU integrations processes. With intention Western Balkan countries to be engaged more deeply in the EU accession process were launched Stabilization and

¹⁷² A. Paasi, *The Resurgence of the 'Region' and 'Regional Identity': Theoretical Perspectives and Empirical Observations on Regional Dynamics in Europe*, in "Review of International Studies: Globalising the Regional, Regionalising the Global", Vol. 35 (Feb., 2009), p134, pp. 121-146.

Association agreements (SAA) by the EU Commission as a part of the EU Stabilization and Association Process according to which regional approach and regional cooperation was considered as an inevitable principle and valuable asset. Starting from the 1998 and officially from 2003, EU institutions started to refer to these countries as a part of one regional format and to label them under a common denominator 'Western Balkan'. The term and the representation of the countries as a Western Balkan started to be widely used in the political and public discourse.

The process of regionalization and shaping or delineation of the regional boundaries was very political, elitist and power driven by the national political actors and stake holders from the Western Balkan countries which were faced with a strong influence of different kind of actors from outside of the region. Because of this there were and still there are a lot of critics and different opinions related to the real nature of the process of regionalization in the Western Balkan, and in the literature among the scholars very often can be meet dilemmas such as: Is it a process which is solely imposed by outside factors? Is there any regional ownership of the regional cooperation initiatives and activities? ...Does the Western Balkan countries willing or capable for developing their regional cooperation framework by their own? etc. However in the aftermath of the conflict that existed between some of the countries, there was a need political elites of Western Balkan countries to be exposed to some outside pressures with intention peace and cooperation to prevail.

Passi is also speaking for distinction between 'soft' and 'hard' boundaries of the region and characterized them as an open or closed for accepting other countries in the region.¹⁷³ Putting this in the context of the Western Balkan case in some extent I can point out on Kosovo when practically new actor started to be labeled as a regional actor, or on the case of Croatia when with the EU accession started to appeared doubts does Croatia still is considering as a Western Balkan country.

According to Passi "symbolic shaping refers to the process of naming and the creation of additional symbols that normally both express and strengthen the idea of the existence of a specific

¹⁷³ A. Paasi, *The Resurgence of the 'Region' and 'Regional Identity': Theoretical Perspectives and Empirical Observations on Regional Dynamics in Europe*, in "Review of International Studies: Globalising the Regional, Regionalising the Global", Vol. 35 (Feb., 2009), p134 , pp. 121-146.

region and regional identity.”¹⁷⁴ He connected the naming of the regions with some cultural, historical and political interest and expression of power relations.¹⁷⁵ In the case of Western Balkan the naming was a significant political issue, a product of the political elites mainly from the EU institutional bureaucracy. After the tragic wars and traumatic experiences from the armed conflicts that occurred the former republics of Yugoslavia there was a need for new denominator, a signifier for the countries which in the western discourse before 1990 were known as Yugoslavia and after the beginning of the armed conflicts were dominantly represented in connection with the term ‘balkanization’, term fill out with negative connotations and associated with violence, barbarity, backwardness¹⁷⁶ and also with ethnic cleansing, bloody wars, segregation. As a result of this among the Western Balkan countries there was an evident ‘escape syndrome’ which resulted countries to avoid their signification with the term ‘Balkan’ and to related distorted perception of the regional cooperation.¹⁷⁷ Therefore Yugoslavia, ex- Yugoslavia or Balkan as an essential signifier was a *persona non grata* for the majority of the local actors so there was a need for a social representation which would replace these social elaboration with a new understanding of the regional state of affairs.¹⁷⁸ EU has understand the necessity of the regional cooperation among the Western Balkan countries on the path towards their accession in the Euro-Atlantic processes so there was a need also for a common regional denominator which will be more neutral than the term ‘Balkan’, and more narrow than South East Europe which included all the countries from the Balkan peninsula.

“The Commission set to institutionalise the social representation of the western Balkan via formal organs and procedures that would take on the task of formalising a loose regional concept into an identifiable international signifier.”¹⁷⁹ The most important EU institutionalization step that contributed towards shaping the countries in one regional format was the introducing the

¹⁷⁴ A. Paasi, *The Resurgence of the ‘Region’ and ‘Regional Identity’: Theoretical Perspectives and Empirical Observations on Regional Dynamics in Europe*, in “*Review of International Studies: Globalising the Regional, Regionalising the Global*”, Vol. 35 (Feb., 2009), p135 , pp. 121-146.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ M. Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1997.

¹⁷⁷ I. Prezelj, *Challenges of Multilateral Regional Security and Defence Cooperation in South East Europe*, in “*European Perspectives – Journal on European Perspectives of the Western Balkans*”, Vol. 5 No. 2(9), p.99, pp 83 - 112, 2013.

¹⁷⁸ C. Marazopoulos, *Constructing the Western Balkan: understanding the European Commission’s regional approach from a constructivist perspective*, University of Bath, p.133, 2013.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid, p177.

“*Stabilisation and Association Agreements*”¹⁸⁰ in 1999 which represented a special type of agreements similar to the “European Agreements” signed at the beginning of 1990s with the countries from Central and East Europe, and which were introduced as a preparation of the Western Balkan countries for their EU accession. Therefore starting from the 1999 and especially after the meeting of the European Council in Thessaloniki in 2003, the term “Western Balkan” evidently incorporating a geographical dimension in its own nature, started to be introduced in the international and regional politics as a signifier for the countries and the societies from this part of the Balkan and Europe.

The symbolic stage “is more explicitly associated with the consciousness of the inhabitants than the first one, as the emergence of the symbolic significance of regions, i.e. the formation and reproduction of structures of expectations, depends crucially on the communication-based relationship between institutional and individual practices.”¹⁸¹ As one of the major “function of symbol systems in all societies and groups is to legitimate, reinforce and celebrate the status quo - both the existence of the social per se and the particular disposition of roles, values, identities, privileges and so on in that place and time”.¹⁸² With regard to regions, territorial symbols are usually more or less abstract expressions of group solidarity embodying the actions of political, economic and cultural institutions etc., in the continuing reproduction and legitimation of the system of practices and institutions that characterize the region concerned.¹⁸³

In the case of the Western Balkan it was evident that “set of EU specific norms and values became prevalent in the mutual relations among the countries of the region and main driver to the deepening of the regional cohesion.”¹⁸⁴ Western Balkan countries openly committed and accepted the EU fundamental values such as respecting the “human dignity and human rights, freedom,

¹⁸⁰ *Relations with the Western Balkans*, Council of the European Union, Conclusions of the General Affairs: Interim report on work regarding reconstruction assistance to former Yugoslavia, in particular with regard to Kosovo and (ii) Information on elements suggested for 22 February GAC Conclusions. Western Balkans Working Group no. 6035/99, 1999.

¹⁸¹ A. Paasi, *The institutionalization of regions: a theoretical framework for understanding the emergence of regions and the constitution of regional identity*, “Fennia”, Vol. 164 (1986), issue 1, p. 125, pp.105-146.

¹⁸² M. Bernice (1981), *A Sociology of Contemporary Cultural Change*, Basil Blackwell, p. 272., Oxford, UK.

¹⁸³ A. Paasi, *The institutionalization of regions: a theoretical framework for understanding the emergence of regions and the constitution of regional identity*, “Fennia”, Vol. 164 (1986), issue 1, p. 125, pp.105-146.

¹⁸⁴ C. Marazopoulos, *Constructing the Western Balkan: understanding the European Commission’s regional approach from a constructivist perspective*, University of Bath, p.31, 2013.

democracy, equality and the rule of law”¹⁸⁵ in their efforts in the process of establishing democratic societies, achieving the EU accession, and setting mutual peaceful relations. Western Balkan political elites in the development of the regional approach and outlook, started to be more pragmatic, to look for a common interests (shifting from national to more regional) and even to incorporate some notions for common regional identity with intention to enhance the legitimization for constituting the region. Or as Passi is arguing that “symbolism also renders possible the representation, signification and legitimation of the regional ‘reality’ that exists outside immediate daily experience.”¹⁸⁶

“Regional symbols and meanings often bring together the past, present and future of a region, and they have a key role in making the region a meaningful unit for social and economic life both ‘inside’ and ‘outside’. The key function of symbols is to produce and reproduce social integration and socio-spatial distinction.”¹⁸⁷ Furthermore Passi is mentioning also a “formal symbols such as flags or coats of arms or more mundane symbols such as the naming of regional foods, birds, or songs.”¹⁸⁸ These kinds of features maybe are more common for the regions at sub state level, but for the macro regions they are less common. As a best example for a macro region which have own formal symbols which are visible and widely accepted by the political elites and the citizens is EU which have its own flag, its own official anthem, its own motto or even its own ‘flag day (Europe day – 9th May)’. In the case of the Western Balkan still there are not any strongly accepted or visible formal symbols which represented the region as a whole. The closest thing which can refer as a common formal symbol maybe are some different logos which usually depicted the geographical shape of the region together with some variation of the EU flag. This can be consider as one of the arguments which claims that Western Balkan is an ad hoc region without strong develop sense of common belonging or togetherness. However speaking about the symbols such as naming of regional foods, birds, or songs it can be said that there are typical common “cuisine, eating habits, interpersonal communication, social etiquette- belong to the realm

¹⁸⁵ Treaty on European Union (TEU) and the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), article 21, 2009;

¹⁸⁶ A. Passi, K. Zimmerbauer, *Theory and practice of the region: a contextual analysis of the transformation of Finnish regions*, University of Oulu, 2011, p. 167.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid, p.167.

¹⁸⁸ A. Paasi, *The Resurgence of the ‘Region’ and ‘Regional Identity’: Theoretical Perspectives and Empirical Observations on Regional Dynamics in Europe*, in “*Review of International Studies: Globalising the Regional, Regionalising the Global*”, Vol. 35 (Feb., 2009), p.135, pp. 121-146.

of customary practices, which are part of the practical and symbolic universe of culture.”¹⁸⁹ Furthermore there are also strong similarities which exist-in architecture and manners, celebrations, holidays, attitudes, and household organization.¹⁹⁰

As a result of the common regional efforts in the tourism sector with intention for increasing the numbers of tourists in the Western Balkan countries there are already existing common tourist campaigns in which some traditions, dishes and songs are label as a Western Balkan. Although this is as a result of the marketing and economical purposes of the Western Balkan countries people from inside and outside of the region are exposed on daily basis on these kind of labeling and representation of the features of these countries that they simply start to accept the use of the adjective ‘Western Balkan’ as a denomination for particular things and features.

It is important to be mention and the fact that there are actually some dilemmas in sense that some features which are typically for the Western Balkan countries in same time are unique and they are different from the countries from other parts and region in Europe, but compare with the other countries on the Balkan, are present strong similarities.

As a third stage or element Passi is speaking about institutional shaping of the region. According to him under the institutional shaping is understand “development of informal and formal institutions that are needed to produce and reproduce the other two shapes, territorial and symbolic.”¹⁹¹The institutional shaping also have occurred in the Western Balkan, both at informal and formal level where governmental and non-governmental institutions and bodies emerged as a result of the agency of different social, political, economic actors for tackling divergent regional problems. Passi furthermore is elaborating that “the development of institutions refers not only to formal establishment (e.g. mass media, education) but also to local or non-local practices in the spheres of politics, economics, legislation, administration, etc., as a consequence of which the regional unit concerned attains a specific name, social organizations and institutions which are linked with it through their identification apparatus (territorial symbolism), function and/ or areas

¹⁸⁹A. Kiossev, *The Dark Intimacy: Maps, Identities, Acts of Identification*, in D. I. Bjelić and O. Savić (eds), *Balkan as metaphor : between globalization and fragmentation*, Cambridge, p.169, pp165 – 191, 2002.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid, p.170

¹⁹¹ A. Paasi, *The Resurgence of the ‘Region’ and ‘Regional Identity’: Theoretical Perspectives and Empirical Observations on Regional Dynamics in Europe*, in “*Review of International Studies: Globalising the Regional, Regionalising the Global*”, Vol. 35 (Feb., 2009), p.135, pp. 121-146.

of influence (market areas, for instance).”¹⁹² Regional institutions have been regarded as highly significant in recent regional development literature where the concept 'institutional thickness' has been used to depict not only the existence of such institutions as firms, financial institutions, chambers of commerce, local authorities, innovation centers, educational establishments, etc. but above all their interaction and networking both inside the region and externally.¹⁹³ For the Western Balkan regarding the regional 'institutional thickness' there were and still are typical several features. From the existing regional institutions and bodies, both governmental and non – governmental is evident that most of them are dealing with the security issues, economic development, crime prevention, interethnic relations, minorities, infrastructure, civil society and other forms. Security predominance among the regional institutions could be explained through the fact that in the past the region was affected with several armed conflicts so there was and still is a strong need for building the mutual trust and mutual regional approaches for stabilization and development. As in the case in the Southeast Europe as a wider format, in the Western Balkan too “no supranational authority has been created, no ceding of sovereignty has been involved, and no body of common laws and obligations has been established.”¹⁹⁴ This kind of low level of official regional institutionalization where does not exist some supranational body is one of the common features with the Visegrad group. At the beginning of the establishing of the regional cooperation formats and institutions at the end of the 1990s was evident that there is a overlapping of the cooperation network and institutions between Southeast European and Western Balkan format. This tendency is still present nowadays, but there are more and more initiatives and institutions which particularly are dealing only with the Western Balkan countries and their mutual regional cooperation. Western Balkan ‘institutional thickness’ never was a problem and there were and still are plenty of regional institutional and cooperation mechanisms. However the real problems was the low efficiency of the established institutional frameworks, the overlapping in the fields of

¹⁹² A. Paasi, *The institutionalization of regions: a theoretical framework for understanding the emergence of regions and the constitution of regional identity*, “Fennia”, Vol. 164 (1986), issue 1, p. 126, pp.105-146.

¹⁹³ A. Paasi, *The Resurgence of the ‘Region’ and ‘Regional Identity’: Theoretical Perspectives and Empirical Observations on Regional Dynamics in Europe*, in “*Review of International Studies: Globalising the Regional, Regionalising the Global*”, Vol. 35 (Feb., 2009), p.135, pp. 121-146.

¹⁹⁴ R. Dwan, Introduction in: R. Dwan (ed). *Building security in Europe’s new borderlands: sub regional cooperation in the wider Europe*, EastWest Institute ,New York, USA,1999, p.1.

cooperation and wide spread phenomenon of ‘rhetorical regionalism’¹⁹⁵ which only leads to declarative regional initiatives, merely political statements and ‘empty’ declarations. The most serious effort this problem to be overcome was with the establishing the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) which has been design to work towards deeper coordination between different regional actors and regional bodies, to strengthen the regional cooperation and facilitate the regional mechanisms with low-cost activities and high impact on regional confidence building.¹⁹⁶ The establishing of the Regional Cooperation Council in 2009 was widely perceived as a positive step for overtaking the initiative for regional cooperation by the Western Balkan countries its self. These means that there was a shift regarding the regional ownership of the cooperation initiatives and mechanisms and change from ‘inside-out’ approach to the ‘outside-in’ approach, according to which internal factors in the region building process started to be stronger and with bigger influence than the external. Additionally related to other specificities of the institutional stage in the Western Balkan it could be said that the at the begging it was mainly elites driven by the relevant political actors from the region or outside the region. Also it was a top down process, primarily affecting the security domain, then economic cooperation and development and after resulting with a ‘spillover effect’ on many others regional areas and fields. Institutionalization also resulted with establishing a regional bodies and networks of civil society organizations, educational institutions, cultural funds, economic chambers, common clusters of industries, innovations centers etc. which means that this stage resulted with multidimensional effects affecting all the layers in the Western Balkan societies. For instance nowadays there are different networks of regional civil society institutions and bodies which are active in specific areas and which contain in their naming the term ‘Western Balkan’, producing in that way some regional social practices. Despite the fact that there are proliferation of regional initiatives and networks of institutions in various policy areas “a comparative assessment of strategic documents of countries in the region showed that regional stability and security represents a joint and fundamental national interest for all countries and regional cooperation is a necessary tool for achieving a better future.”¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁵ I. Prezelj, *Challenges of Multilateral Regional Security and Defence Cooperation* in South East Europe, in “*European Perspectives – Journal on European Perspectives of the Western Balkans*”, Vol. 5 No. 2(9), p.103, pp 83 - 112, 2013.

¹⁹⁶ Regional Cooperation Council; <http://www.rcc.int/pages>;

¹⁹⁷ F. Gazdag, L. Poti, J. Takacs and P. Talas, *Assessment of the security in the Western Balkans and a comparative analysis of the threat perception in the countries of the region, regional threat analysis* in I. Gyarmati and D. Stančić

“The sphere of institutions undertakes to maintain the process which aims at reproducing the idea of a common consciousness among the people. The reproduction of symbolic dimensions of space consists of the production and consumption of space, which manifest themselves as being interwoven in institutional practices in the field of communication.”¹⁹⁸ Furthermore the development of the institutional stage in Western Balkan contributing to the strengthening of the “feeling of togetherness” amongst the citizens of the countries from the region which eventually can result to the development of the regional identity. The identity of some specific region does not normally emerge suddenly, but, being a part of the transformation process of the region, is spread over a long time.¹⁹⁹

The dynamic of the emergence of the regional institutions and initiatives in Western Balkan and South East Europe mainly could be divided in two major waves. “The first wave in 1996 led to the establishment of the SEECP (South-East Europe Cooperation Process), the SECI (South-East European Cooperative Initiative) and the SEDM (Southeast Europe Defence Ministerial). The second wave after the war in Kosovo led to establishment of the Stability Pact for South East Europe and the SEEI (South East Europe Initiative). The former was transformed into the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) in 2008.”²⁰⁰

Regarding the fourth stage Passi is arguing that this phase in the institutionalization of the region is related to the “establishing an identity in social practices and consciousness, both internally and externally.”²⁰¹ This stage actually leads to the accepting the region as “part of the regional system and broader social consciousness.”²⁰² Passi is emphasize that this fourth stage have different meanings at various spatial scales. At the supra-state level it is the institutional functioning of the unit that gives it legitimacy. The establishment of a state territory requires that

(eds) “Study on the assessment of regional security threats and challenges in the Western Balkans”, DCAF, Geneva, 2007. pp.9-56.

¹⁹⁸ A. Paasi, *The institutionalization of regions: a theoretical framework for understanding the emergence of regions and the constitution of regional identity*, “Fennia”, Vol. 164 (1986), issue 1, p. 126, pp.105-146.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid, p.126.

²⁰⁰ I. Prezelj, *Challenges of Multilateral Regional Security and Defence Cooperation in South East Europe*, in “European Perspectives – Journal on European Perspectives of the Western Balkans”, Vol. 5 No. 2(9), p.85, pp 83 - 112, 2013.

²⁰¹ A. Paasi, *Bounded spaces in the mobile world: Deconstructing ‘Regional Identity’*, University of Oulu, Department of Geography, Finland, 2001, p.140.

²⁰² A. Paasi, *The Resurgence of the ‘Region’ and ‘Regional Identity’: Theoretical Perspectives and Empirical Observations on Regional Dynamics in Europe*, in “Review of International Studies: Globalising the Regional, Regionalising the Global”, Vol. 35 (Feb., 2009), p.136, pp. 121-146.

the sovereignty of this unit is recognized. At sub-national level such establishment is normally based on gaining an administrative status in the broader regional system.²⁰³ Speaking about the Western Balkan region in the context of the fourth stage of the Passi's theory of institutionalization of regions there are some features that point out that the process of regionalisation in the case of Western Balkan, slowly but with progressive tendency is obtaining some elements of social consciousness and notion of identity. For instance Western Balkan is already establish signifier and regional format not only in the EU regional approach and policies, but also in the other international relations practices. Countries from this region in the Western Balkan format have common meetings with other regional groupings such as Visegrad group, Benelux countries, Baltic or Nordic countries. Furthermore there are already established practices of many international organizations and institutions which refer to the countries from this part of the Balkans as a Western Balkan region.²⁰⁴ Many regional initiatives and regional bodies are constituted and are taking the term 'Western Balkan' as an integral part of their name clearly showing the regional character of its nature.²⁰⁵ Furthermore one of the argument of the Passi that one of the main interest for establishing of the regions is the struggle over power and resources (which manifests itself most typically in regional policy) and they are then reproduced in discourses and social practices (in politics, economy, media/culture, education) is very evident in the case of the Western Balkan regions where different actors (governmental or non- governmental) using the regional networks and bodies are competing with other regional groups, countries, institutions and bodies for financial resources from different funds (most typical example EU Funds for pre-accession support), attracting investors for common regional infrastructural projects etc.

Assuming the institutionalization of regions to be a continuous socio-spatial process, the culmination point and the most formal feature promulgated by the institutions of society is undoubtedly the gaining of an 'administrative role' in the spatial structure of the society, which integrates the region with the general system of public administrative practices.²⁰⁶ These kind

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ EU, CoE, OSCE and many others.

²⁰⁵ For example: The Western Balkans Enterprise Development & Innovation Facility (WB EDIF); the Western Balkans Research and Innovation Centre (WISE); Western Balkan Fund; Forum for Western Balkans Defence Cooperation (SEEC); Western Balkans Defence Intelligence Chiefs (WEBADIC); European Western Balkan (on line magazine); and several others.

²⁰⁶ A. Paasi, *The institutionalization of regions: a theoretical framework for understanding the emergence of regions and the constitution of regional identity*, "Fennia", Vol. 164 (1986), issue 1, p. 130, pp.105-146.

of administrative role of the Western Balkan region are still under developing and not so visible in the perceptions among the ordinary people, as for example among political, diplomatic or state administrative circles. However the tendencies is obviously moving in that direction, so for example students from the countries of the region have possibility to apply for regional innovation funds and one of the preconditions is being a student at some of the universities from Western Balkan region. These kind of practices have in some other areas such as different kind of scholarships, project grants, entrepreneurship funds etc. As administrative units, regions can also acquire another function from the perspective of power relations, as the material expression of the ends to which state power is applied.²⁰⁷

Paasi is connecting this stage from the institutionalization of the region with the process of developing an identity of the particular region, a concept which is usually associated with the inhabitants of a certain region, and thus, when taken superficially, is analogous to the concept of regional consciousness. This kind of identity comprises not only a material basis (e.g. nature, landscapes, culture, economic system) but also a "mental sphere" of the region.²⁰⁸

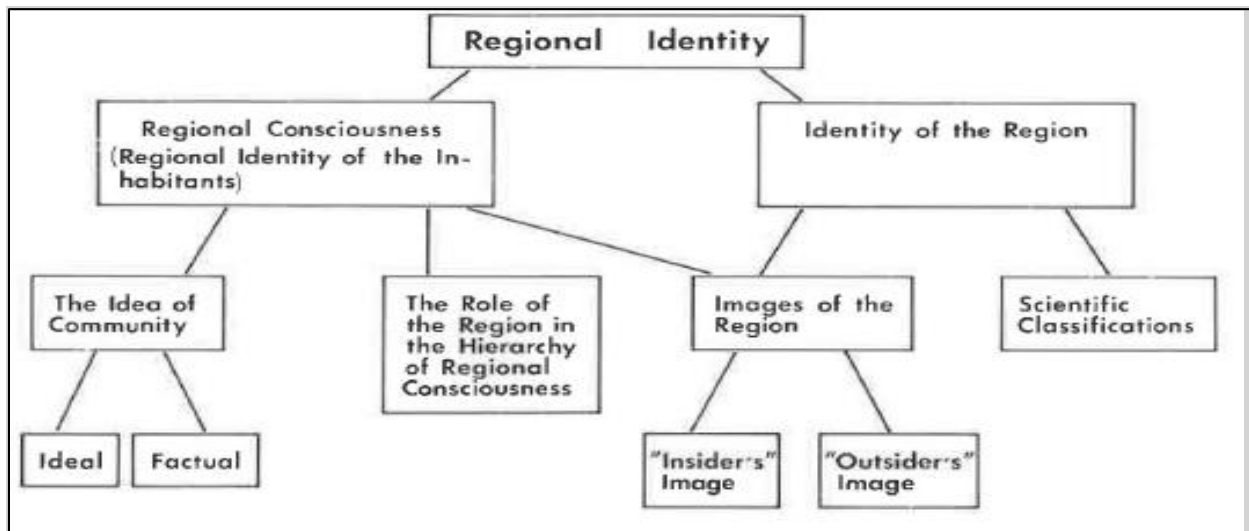


Table 1: A. Paasi, *The institutionalization of regions: a theoretical framework for understanding the emergence of regions and the constitution of regional identity*. "Fennia". Vol. 164 (1986). issue 1. pp.105-146.

²⁰⁷ C. Gore, *Regions in Question, Space, Development Theory and Regional Policy*, Methuen, London, 1984.

²⁰⁸ A. Paasi, *The institutionalization of regions: a theoretical framework for understanding the emergence of regions and the constitution of regional identity*, "Fennia", Vol. 164 (1986), issue 1, p. 130, pp.105-146.

5. Visegrad as a region

5.1. The notion of Central Europe

The necessity to be explain the concept of Central Europe I am finding in the argument that Visegrad countries are inevitable bounded for this concept and because of that I will emphasis some of its main features. Speaking about Central Europe as a notion or as a region, is raising different dilemmas and questions. There are a lot of scholarly discussions from historical, geographical, political, or other affiliation, which are pointing out on the different understandings on what is Central Europe, what is representing and could Central Europe be perceived as a separate region. Also should be mention that Central Europe as a concept has long roots of appearance and development.

According to some historical views, Central Europe is one of the "three Europes"²⁰⁹ (West, Central and East). This kind of partition of Europe, or more precisely the process of constructing this kind of division, in the human mental maps it was especially boosted by the economic and cultural development (or even dominance) of Western European countries and spreading of their influence eastward on the continent. Therefore, constructing a this kind of perception how Europe could be divided, actually replace the older North/ South line of division of Europe, where the South was perceived as civilized, and the North as a barbarian one. Central Europe in this context emerged as a space where the influence of the western European civilizations and the Russian tsarist empire were mixed and interacted.

Another interesting concept for the notion of Central Europe is the concept of "Mitteleuropa", which included and inspired different historical, political and cultural connotations, connected to the territory of Central Europe. It is a concept which appears in 19th century and which is connected mostly with attempts of Habsburg and latter of German hegemony in Central Europe (which means that territories settled with German speaking inhabitant were consider as a part). Habsburg vision about Central Europe was constructed more around the notion of multi ethnic Danubian Empire under domination of the monarchs of Habsburg's house. From other side, Friedrich Naumann, a German liberal politician in his book "*Mittleuropa*" from 1915,

²⁰⁹ Braudel F; preface to Szucs J.; "Les trois Europes"; Paris; 1990;

elaborated his concept and understanding of Central Europe, according to which it is necessary, nations from Central Europe to be united and cooperate in one union. This kind of Central (Mid) European Union actually will be result of political and economic voluntary integration of all nation in this region where leading force will be the German core and lingua franca will be exactly the German language.²¹⁰

But with the weakening of the influence of the Austro- Hungarian empire and later its dissolution and defeat of the German empire in the First World War this concepts were in some matter replaced by other understandings of Central Europe, which was non Germanic and appeared in interwar period of 20th century. It was the space that includes all countries from Finland till Greece, and was actually introduce by Czech eminent statesmen, Thomas Masaryk who said that Central Europe is "peculiar zone of small nation with right of self-determination."²¹¹ Furthermore from the interwar period there is one more understanding of Central Europe, according to which German influence is omitted and it is perceive as a French inspire concept. It is actually connected with the formation of the alliance in 1920/1921, between newly constituted countries of Czechoslovakia and Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenians with Kingdom of Romania. With formation of this alliance, openly supported by France, German and Austrian influence in Central Europe, was supposed to be eliminated. However with the rising influence of the Nazi party in Germany and beginning of the Second World War, Germans one more time tried to reorganize Central Europe, according to their understandings and interests. In the period just after the Second World War, the space of Central Europe was dominated by the rising influence of the Soviet Union, which resulted actually with the incorporation of the countries from this region to the ideological and political space of the Soviets. Because Soviet Union was considered as an Eastern Europe, also these countries actually started to be perceived as such.

Also useful division which is related to the discussion about concept of Central Europe is division of East-Central Europe and West-Central Europe (Ostmitteleuropa und Westmitteleuropa) which was something proclaimed by polish historian Oskar Halecki in the era of the Cold war.

²¹⁰ Naumann F.; "Mitteleuropa" (English translation by Meredith M. C. - 1917); New York, 1917;

²¹¹ Todorova M.; " Imagining the Balkan" —updated edition; Oxford University Press; 2009; p.150

Appearance of the idea for a distinctiveness of Central Europe as a separate historic and cultural identity or also as political entity, reemerge again in the public discourse in the late 1970s and early 1980s. In this period notion of Central Europe it is noticeable that was built as something different and opposing to the Soviet or more precisely Russian influence and communist oppression.

It is important to be mentioned that before Central Europe to become interesting for the political realm, it was somehow firstly reinvented in cultural domain. "The great vogue over Central Europe began in the early 1980s with the almost simultaneous publication of three works by well-known authors representing the voices of the three countries claiming partnership in the idea: Jenő Szűcs, Czesław Miłosz and Milan Kundera."²¹² These three intellectuals from Hungary, Poland and Czechoslovakia with their dissident writings, raised the public awareness about Central European spirit at the academic and political level.

Jenő Szűcs is important because incorporated and explained the concepts of occidentalism and central - europeanism giving an additional input on the question of Central European problem. Additionally his work could be understand as influential on the further claims towards existing of the three separate historic regions in Europe. In his essay from 1981 he used the term East-Central Europe, as something between East and West, but with noticeable stronger social, cultural and historical affiliations of East-Central Europe to West Europe.

Czesław Miłosz and Milan Kundera through their literature work and essays, from the same period as a Szűcs, contributed for developing the idea of Central Europeanness and distinctiveness from the Eastern Europe (especially from Russia).

Kundera in his famous essay "The Tragedy of Central Europe" is speaking about Central Europe as something that in political manner is close to the East, but in cultural and historical manner is closer to the West. It is famous his phrase that Central Europe is actually "an Occident kidnapped" by the Soviets. For him Central Europe have undouble different identity from the Soviet or Russian one, which according to him maybe is not even European.²¹³

²¹² Ibid; p.156;

²¹³ Kundera M.; "The Tragedy of Central Europe"; 1984;

Czeslaw Milosz also point out on the Central Europe as a opposition to the communist system, something that have own cultural and social symbols and which originated from the legacy of Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth.

Therefore, with using the cultural approach, these two authors from one side, and from another, historical approach by Szűcs J., gave impetus towards the notion of Central Europe as a region and identity, although the countries of Central Europe in political, ideological and economical aspect still were part of Eastern Bloch or Eastern Europe. "The post-1989 world gave the Central European idea for the first time the chance to actualize itself as a region-building opportunity."²¹⁴

Thus with collapse of the Soviet Union and Warsaw Pact, followed drastically political, economic and social changes, which enabled multidimensional space reshaping, of former Eastern Europe. The term Central Europe has started to be used more explicitly for the countries as Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary. Although nowadays still there are not any strictly determined borders of Central Europe or universal definition which countries could be consider as such, but previous mentioned four, represented undouble the core of Central Europe.

5.2. Emergence of Visegrad Group

With the decline of the political and economic power of Soviet Union, the nations from Central and Eastern Europe start openly to express their demands for more democratic and liberal societies based on the human rights and liberties. The changes of the political regimes and their de-communization started almost in all Central and Easter European countries in the 1989 and resulted with disappearance of the decade's long line, which so sharply splited the European continent on West and East. In that time political leaders of Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary realized the necessity of a common approach in conducting determined efforts to deal with new realities and overcoming the existing treats and challenges in the already ex-Soviet space of influence. Dissidents' groups and intellectuals from these countries, already had some mutual cooperation and contact even before the fall of the communist regimes, so after the political

²¹⁴ Todorova M.; " Imagining the Balkan" —updated edition; Oxford University Press; 2009; p.169;

changes that occurred, these "dissidents" now from the position as a state officials, very logically sought the need for mutual cooperation of their states.

The initiative came from the first democratic president of Czechoslovakia, Václav Havel who in Bratislava on 9th of April 1990, hosted the presidents, prime ministers and foreign ministers of Poland and Hungary. But on this meeting as observers, also participated and ministers of foreign affairs of Austria, Italy and Yugoslavia. Although the meeting was manifestation for common walking towards democratic transformation, the meeting did not resulted with any particular result. On the next meeting in Budapest ,on 15th of February 1991, symbolically at the Visegrad Castle²¹⁵ near Budapest, was signed the "Declaration on cooperation between the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic, the Republic of Poland and the Republic of Hungary in striving for European integration" (also known as Visegrad Declaration). This was actually the official document by which was established Visegrad group²¹⁶. In the Declaration is stated that this kind of cooperation is stems from "traditional, historically shaped system of mutual contacts, cultural and spiritual heritage and common roots of religious traditions."²¹⁷

Visegrad group was not institutionalized in any way, so it was in a manner, informal forum for different levels of state officials from the four countries. At the begging the group had positive effects especially in the negotiation for dismantling of Easter Bloc institutions (as Warsaw Pact) and retreat of the Soviet forces from these countries. After the initial initiative starting from 1993 till 1998, was a period where Visegrad Group lose the dynamics, mostly because of the understanding of some political figures, that these cooperation is not very useful (Slovak authoritarian Prime Minister Vladimir Mečiar, Czech Prime Minister Václav Klaus) or some misunderstandings between group members (from example for the situation of minorities between Hungary and Slovakia).Nevertheless it should be mentioned that even in these period there was a some kind of cooperation at a lower level of state officials.

²¹⁵ In the year 1335,the Kings of Poland, Bohemia and Hungary met in Visegrad and made several treaties about regional peace and trade routes (Veselý Z.; "Historical Dimension of Mutual Relationships of Visegrad Members"; "Internal Cohesion of the Visegrad Group" ed. Juraj Marušiak J.; Institute of Political Science, Slovak Academy of Sciences; Publishing House of the Slovak Academy of Sciences; Bratislava; 2013; p. 19

²¹⁶ With the dissolution of Czech and Slovak Federal Republic in 1993, Visegrad group, became group of 4 members and was known also as Visegrad Four (V4);

²¹⁷ Visegrad Declaration; 1991;

With the political changes that happened in Slovakia in 1999, Visegrad group return on the regional agenda thanks to the new Slovak leadership. There were established several new rules of conducting a more efficient cooperation. For example was constituted "the rotating presidency, the structure of the annual meetings on the highest and ministerial levels, and the posts of the "national V4 coordinators", who are responsible for the day-to-day agenda of the V4. Thus the V4 developed a quasi-institutional framework which supports it in times of domestic political difficulties or bilateral issues."²¹⁸ Establishment of the International Visegrad Fund (IVF) also was as a result of this wave of initiation efforts. It represented first form of institutionalization of the Visegrad cooperation and was established in 2000 with own headquarters in Bratislava, Slovak Republic. "The purpose of the fund is to facilitate and promote the development of closer cooperation among citizens and institutions in the region, as well as between the V4 region and other countries, especially in the Western Balkan and Eastern Partnership regions."²¹⁹ With the functioning of IVF, cooperation in education, culture and civil society become very divers which actually leads to bigger internal and external visibility of the Visegrad group.

Visegrad cooperation also found positive effects in the Euro-Atlantic integration processes, as a platform of exchanging experience between the four states. All Visegrad countries in 2004 became full member states of the European Union (EU), and with that they accomplished their most important goal to "return" to Europe. After becoming an EU member states, Visegrad countries continued with their cooperation, especially regarding different areas in the process of adopting Union's "acquis communautaire". However there is a perception that Visegrad countries for particular issues does not have common stance, especially in the working bodies and institution of EU, but this was never actually a goal of the group per se.

As a result of the rising influence of Russia and other global threats, Visegrad countries realized that deeper coordination, regarding the regional strategic issues is a necessity. This was evident especially during the gas crises in 2008 and 2009; in the necessity for common approach in helping the neighboring countries towards their path to European family; escalation of the Ukraine crises in 2014 etc.

²¹⁸Kořan M.; "The Visegrad Group on the Threshold of Its Third Decade: A Central European Hub?"; "Regional and International Relations of Central Europe" (eds. Šabič Z. and Drulák P.); Palgrave Macmillan; 2012; p. 207;

²¹⁹ <http://visegradfund.org/>; 06.2015

Since the EU accession in 2004 there has been a gradual increase of the numbers of V4 meetings, consultations, and projects at political, diplomatic, bureaucratic, and public levels. We can say that during the last decade, the V4 countries increased the level of their mutual interdependency because of the multiple channels of inter-ministerial cooperation, and also that they increased the level of institutionalization because of the formalization of the frame work of the V4's interactions.²²⁰

5.3. Content analysis of strategic documents related to Visegrad regional cooperation

The first Declaration on cooperation between the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic, the Republic of Poland and the Republic of Hungary was signed in 1991 in Visegrad as a joint commitment for striving to European Integration.²²¹

As the main reasons for this joint action which are mentioned in the declaration are the “similarity of the situation that has evolved over the past decades has determined for these three countries convergent basic objectives: full restitution of state independence, democracy and freedom, elimination of all existing social, economic and spiritual aspects of the totalitarian system, construction of a parliamentary democracy, a modern State of Law, respect for human rights and freedoms, creation of a modern free market economy, full involvement in the European political and economic system, as well as the system of security and legislation.”²²²

As a main reason for this joint action were the common challenges the countries were facing after the collapse of Communism regime. The most important factors fostering the collaboration was the need to overturn the communist past and to achieve, including societal transformation and integration into the European society. Therefore the main idea for these countries after the collapse of the Soviet Union was to be “back to Europe”.

²²⁰ Kořan M.; "The Visegrad Group on the Threshold of Its Third Decade: A Central European Hub?"; "Regional and International Relations of Central Europe" (eds. Šabič Z. and Drulák P.); Palgrave Macmillan; 2012; p. 20

²²¹ The Visegrad Agreement was signed in 1991, by Hungary, Poland and Czechoslovakia (from 1993, after the split of Czechoslovakia the Slovak Republic was taken as a new member).

²²² Visegrad Declaration 1991, Available at: <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/>

The Declaration gives a confirmation for the shared history, tradition and cultural and spiritual heritage:

A favorable basis for intensive development of cooperation is ensured by the similar character of the significant changes occurring in these countries, their traditional, historically shaped system of mutual contacts, cultural and spiritual heritage and common roots of religious traditions. The diverse and rich cultures of these nations also embody the fundamental values of the achievements of European thought. The mutual spiritual, cultural and economic influences exerted over a long period of time, resulting from the fact of proximity, could support cooperation based on natural historical development.²²³

After accession to the EU, the prime ministers of the V4 countries assembled on 12 May 2004 in Kroměříž, Czech Republic and signed the so-called Kroměříž Declaration on the state and future of the cooperation. It was stated that „the key objectives set in the 1991 Visegrad Declaration have been achieved“and the determination to „continue developing the cooperation of the Visegrad Group countries“ within the EU and NATO was emphasized. While maintaining and developing the V4 cooperation, the commitment to cooperate with the nearest partners in the region of Central Europe was noted, as well as with other regional groupings in Europe.²²⁴

On 15th February 2011, the prime ministers of the four countries signed the so-called Bratislava Declaration at the same time marking the 20-year anniversary of the cooperation. In this document it is especially noted that the importance of the V4 cooperation was recognized to be especially in “implementing EU key priorities and programs“and in the contribution to the „political and economic integration in Europe, including EU and NATO enlargement” and “to enhance the visibility of the Visegrad Group in third countries both through deeper V4 cooperation within the Common Foreign and Security Policy of the EU and through activities beyond the Union level. The V4 countries will be more determined in translating their unique transitional experience and political perspective into the EU's external policies”.²²⁵

Despite some differences – the culture and values of the countries are quite similar and promoting (rather than hindering) cooperation. No cultural feature, in terms of differences, is so crucial as to influence the activities of the group in a substantial way.

²²³ Visegrad Declaration 1991, Available at: <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/>

²²⁴ Visegrad Declaration 2004 (or Kroměříž Declaration). Available at: <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/documents/visegrad-declarations/visegrad-declaration-110412-1>

²²⁵ The Bratislava Declaration, Available at: <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/2011/the-bratislava>

5.4 Content analysis of the speeches and statements

In this part I will analyze the Joint statements, Press releases, Reports of the joint meetings of ministers for foreign affairs of the V4 countries and joint declaration of the Visegrad Group from 2009 until the beginning of 2016. All of the official documents are available on the web-page of the Visegrad group. As a most mentioned topics of discussion were economic cooperation and security. As an important joint action the Visegrad group each year has a special meeting dedicated to the Western Balkan emphasizing the importance of the regional cooperation.

In 2009 as a most important and crucial standpoint about the importance of the regional cooperation was taken during the meeting of the foreign ministers of the Visegrad Group specially dedicated to the Western Balkans. On this meeting according to the reports “the ministers acknowledged the crucial role European and Euro-Atlantic integration played in the transformation of Central Europe and wish to see the enlargement policy fostering stability and prosperity in the same manner in the Western Balkans”.²²⁶ On this special ministerial meeting dedicated to the Western Balkans, they have noted that “the region is geographically encircled by the European Union and the upcoming entry of Croatia into the EU will give further impetus to the process of integration and encouragement to the applicant countries to carry out reforms”.²²⁷ The Visegrad group countries demonstrated their understanding for the importance of the Thessaloniki Agenda as well as of the political and legal framework the Stabilization and Association Process provides for the region. Drawing lessons from their own experience, the members of the Visegrad Group also stress the importance of the countries of the region working together and encourage them to fully explore the opportunities of regional cooperation.²²⁸ On this meeting, the Visegrad Group expressed readiness to promote the integration of the countries of the Western Balkans throughout the next presidencies of the EU, including the handling of their membership applications. They noted that “connecting road, rail and energy networks among the countries of the region and between the region and the EU should be a high priority for all sides. This could help the

²²⁶ The Visegrad Group stands ready to promote the integration of the countries of the Western Balkans, <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/2009/the-visegrad-group>

²²⁷ Ibid

²²⁸ Ibid.

integration of the Western Balkans into European economy benefiting both the countries of the region and the member states of the Union”.²²⁹

In the same year the Prime Ministers of the Visegrad group met in Wieliczka at the Summit of the Prime Ministers of the Visegrad Group (V4) countries. The meeting was convened on the occasion of the official end of the Polish Visegrad Group Presidency and its handover to Hungary, which chaired the V4 in the next 12 months.²³⁰ On this meeting the V4 achievements on European scale during the Polish Presidency were emphasized and noted the importance of the role of the V4+ format of cooperation which has proven to be a useful and appreciated tool for spreading in the wider Central Europe. The Polish Prime Minister underlined the importance of close cooperation of the V4 with successive EU Presidencies as it allows both a direct dialogue and a better understanding of the concept of solidarity among 27 Member States. It serves also the purpose to voice V4's perspective on several issues on European agenda.²³¹ The importance of strengthening the Visegrad identity was emphasized by the Hungarian Prime minister at that time, Gordon Bajnai, he outlined the major priorities of the upcoming Hungarian V4 Presidency focusing on the challenges for the region as regards the current EU agenda and stated: “From the regional perspective Hungary would like to continue the works of its predecessors on the cohesion of V4 internal cooperation and wishes to strengthen the V4 identity for all V4 citizens through more visible actions.”²³² Furthermore, the Heads of Governments discussed the role of the International Visegrad Fund, the sole V4 institution. Its activities were highly valued and have contributed to the integration of local V4 communities and have allowed the flow of youth among V4 countries and bordering regions (together with Western Balkan and Eastern neighborhood countries). It has been assessed that the International Visegrad Fund should be one of the most important tools for the development of cooperation of V4 countries with other partners.²³³ The Heads of Governments of the V4 countries have jointly assessed that “common initiatives of V4 countries in reaction to current EU policy's challenges allowed the V4 to become an active player on the European arena. The energy-climate package negotiations or the inauguration of Eastern Partnership can serve as

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ Press Release of the Polish V4 presidency after the Official Summit of the Prime Ministers of the Visegrad Group Countries, Available at: <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/2009/press-release-of-the>.

²³¹ Ibid.

²³² Ibid

²³³ Ibid.

examples of endeavours on which we can further build. The V4 Prime Ministers discussed the issue of a closer cooperation of V4 EU Permanent Representations for the benefit of future EU Presidencies of the remaining V4 countries.”²³⁴ In addition at the same meeting the Prime ministers of the V4 countries discussed the energy security question with special emphasis on the regional context and exchanged views on the progress of preparations to COP-15 in Copenhagen.

In 2009 the Visegrad group had two-day meeting devoted to the economic crisis, energy cooperation and further enlargement of the EU and NATO.²³⁵

On the meeting about the Western Balkans in 2010 among the other things it was noted that: “After 20 years of successful activities, the V4 is open to share its know-how on efficient regional cooperation and on coordination of EU and NATO integration efforts. The Visegrad Group remains committed to promoting the integration efforts of the Western Balkan countries within bilateral and multilateral frameworks. V4 stands ready to assist the Western Balkan countries in their integration processes by transfer of relevant expertise, consultations on efficient management of IPA funds, twinning projects, joint research and student programs, and V4 twinning projects in areas such as energy security, transport, and infrastructure networks, Roma integration and others.”²³⁶

As a confirmation of the Visegrad group joint action and coherence in 2011 there are few statements where the Visegrad group countries have showed strong we-ness and regional cohesion. They step out in one voice for important issues during this period. Examples of this cohesions can be found in the following statements: Common Declaration of Germany and the Visegrad Group on the EU Southern Neighbourhood Policy (March 3, 2011), The Visegrad Group and Germany Foreign Ministers Statement on the Eastern Partnership, Bratislava, March 3, 2011, Communiqué of the Prime Ministers of the Visegrad Group (Bratislava, 15 February 2011), Statement of the Foreign Ministers of the Visegrad Group countries and Germany on the assassination of the Minister of Minorities in the Government of Pakistan, Mr. Shahbaz Bhatti (Bratislava, March 3, 2011

²³⁴ Ibid.

²³⁵ Meeting of Presidents of the Visegrad Group Countries, Available at: <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/2009/meeting-of-presidents-of>

²³⁶ Visegrad Group Ministerial Statement on the Western Balkans, 2010. Available at: <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/2010/visegrad-group>

During the meeting specially dedicated to the Western Balkans in 2011 a special guests were invited, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Slovenia, the European Commissioner for Enlargement and Neighbourhood Policy and the European External Action Service Managing Director for Europe and Central Asia. On this meeting the Visegrad Group countries expressed their will to strengthen relations between the V4 and the Western Balkans. They noted that in this context they will use various instruments at the disposal of the International Visegrad Fund including the “Visegrad+ programme”. The Visegrad Group countries also expressed their readiness to share their experience of regional cooperation gained through the work of the International Visegrad Fund. They noted that “this particular form of V4 cooperation has led to the enhancement of bilateral and regional people-to-people contacts and to the development of a very practical dimension of the V4 format. The interaction through the International Visegrad Fund has provided the Visegrad Group countries with an opportunity to intensify cooperation at the local level as well as to promote confidence-building among neighbours.”²³⁷ In this regard, the Visegrad Group countries suggested that the Western Balkan should look upon the positive example of the International Visegrad Fund and establish a similar mechanism for cooperation between the state institutions and civil society organizations. ²³⁸

The Visegrad Group countries also suggested that such a regional instrument should be guided by the same principles as the International Visegrad Fund—i.e., European democratic values and principles; regional ownership and responsibility; non-political, non-partisan, non-religious character; inclusiveness for all partners; focus on community-level projects and flexibility in defining common interests and goals. In case the idea meets with a positive response from the Western Balkan countries, the Visegrad Group is ready to assist with its experience in creating a fund designed for the Western Balkans.²³⁹

The ministers responsible for energy of the Visegrad Group countries in 2011 supported further development of regional cooperation in the energy sector.

During this summit the V4 officials stressed the need to increase the energy cooperation in the region of the Visegrad Four Group (V4), the need to further develop the regional energy sector as

²³⁷ Joint Statement of the Visegrad Group and Slovenia on the Western Balkans, Available at: <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/calendar/2011/joint-statement-of-the>.

²³⁸ Ibid.

²³⁹ Ibid.

part of the EU energy market, and for highlight the importance of the V4 region in the European Union. They emphasized the role of the Visegrad region in the Commission Communication "Energy infrastructure priorities for 2020 and beyond" (COM(2010) 677 final), which determines the main priorities of the European Union in terms of infrastructure and proposes the establishment of a High Level Group on North-South Energy Interconnections in Central Eastern Europe. In this regard it is estimated that V4 Working Groups should establish common positions to be represented in the proposed High Level Group on North-South Energy Interconnections in Central-Eastern Europe and its working groups, enhancing mutual cooperation in all areas of energy, and energy security in particular, and developing rules of cooperation in elaborating common V4 opinions in the context of EU institutions and initiatives, endorsing the view that all necessary infrastructures, which would allow physical access to at least two different gas sources from outside of the European Union, should be implemented in the broader Visegrad region in order to alleviate single source dependency, as well as development of cooperation through joint projects and exchange of information on energy policies, as well as on related areas, particularly national legal and regulatory frameworks.²⁴⁰

In 2012 the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Visegrad Group (V4) and the Benelux countries (B3) have made a joint statement calling on the government of Ukraine to improve rule of law and respect for human rights in the country.²⁴¹

In 2012 on the summit for the Western Balkans the V4 countries presented a new initiative V4—Western Balkans Expert Network on Rule of Law and Fundamental Rights, an expert-level network between the V4 countries and Western Balkans partners could be set up in order to support better reform processes, exchange ideas and provide technical assistance. The Visegrad Group reaffirmed its intention to cooperate closely with the Western Balkans partners in the future. This will also include further informal meetings of V4 ministers of foreign affairs with their counterparts from the region.²⁴²

²⁴⁰ Declaration of V4 Energy Ministers, Available at: <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/2011/declaration-of-v4-energy>

²⁴¹ Joint Statement by the Visegrad Group and the Benelux countries on the situation in Ukraine, <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/calendar/2012/joint-statement-by-the>.

²⁴² Joint Statement of the Visegrad Group on the Western Balkans, Available at: <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/calendar/2012/joint-statement-of-the>

The 2012 Poland Presidency of the Visegrad Group (V4) report gives short explanation on the V4 priorities and the importance of the regional cooperation. It is noted that as regards energy security, intensifying the process of building a regional V4 natural gas market was identified as a priority. Recognizing the fact that existing cooperation on integrating the infrastructure had been successful, the Polish Presidency suggested that a more vigorous debate about integrating V4 national natural gas markets be launched and a plan to establish a common natural gas market in the region be drafted. The Polish Presidency also saw a more intensive security and defence cooperation, which was one of the topics discussed by the V4 prime ministers with the German chancellor and the French president. The meeting reaffirmed the desire to develop defence and military cooperation based, among other things, on regional cooperation mechanisms, including the Visegrad Group and the Weimar Triangle. According to this report even though the Visegrad Group is primarily an informal political bloc, economic cooperation is an important factor in its operation.²⁴³

In 2013 Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Visegrad, Nordic and Baltic countries met in Gdańsk during the meeting, they agreed that Northern and Central European states must work actively towards strengthening the European Union and Europe as a whole. It was highlighted that in order to better use the potential of such co-operation necessary steps should be taken to improve transport and energy connections between these regions.²⁴⁴

²⁴³ Executive summary ,Polish Presidency of the Visegrad Group, Available at: <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/>

²⁴⁴ Co-Chair's Statement from the Meeting of Foreign Ministers of the Visegrad, Nordic and Baltic states; Gdańsk, February 20, 2013. Available at: <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/documents/official-statements/meeting-of-foreign>

Conclusion

The process of region building is undergoing in the Western Balkan countries. After the turbulent period of armed conflicts and civil wars regional cooperation was adopted as an instrument for stabilization of the region and also as a very important precondition for EU accession. EU was and still is an actor which is giving strong support of the regional initiatives in the region. The term 'Western Balkans' become a widely used signifier for the countries of the region and it became a part of the common ordinary practices at various levels. There are many governmental or non-governmental organization and bodies which consist this term in their naming.

Through the analysis of Passi's approach for institutionalization of the regions, could be mention that Western Balkan possess some elements or already have entered in some of the four staged explained by the theory of institutionalization of the regions. Regarding the territorial and symbolic shape Western Balkan have relatively stable regional borders although only regarding the Croatia exist some doubts is it or is it not a part of the Western Balkan region. Regarding the symbolic shaping could be concluded that there are not strongly accepted or visible formal symbols which are used as a representation of the Western Balkan region, but some logos are already in use and represent various regional initiatives or bodies. Also some campaigns mainly organized by tourist associations from the countries from the region are promoting some regional 'Western Balkan meals, dances, music etc. Speaking about the Intuition shaping of the Western Balkan region could be mentioned that these stage is especially developed in the region because a big variety of governmental and non-governmental institutions and bodies emerged as a result of the agency of different social, political, economic actors for tackling divergent regional problems. The only problem is the effectiveness of the cooperation and not the size of the 'institutional thickness'. Western Balkan also has entered or possess some features that could be related to the fourth stage - the establishing an identity in social practices and consciousness, both internally and externally. The term became signifier both internally and externally so Western Balkan regional format is a commonly used in the different discourses and practices.

Regarding what kind of identity is presented in the Macedonian political and public discourse, Western Balkan regional identity could be qualified as an 'identity of region' because

there are not strong indications that the people are feel that belong to the Western Balkan. There is a sapce for further examination on this segment of Western Balkan regional identity.

The terms ‘Western mutual relations and ’ and ‘Western Balkan regional cooperation’ are very commonly used in the Macedonian political and public discourse. Western Balkan regional cooperation in Macedonian political and public discourse is presented as very positive and necessary process which is closely connected to the European accession efforts. From the analyzed official statements and speeches is evident that for Macedonian state official regional cooperation is a favorable instruments for maintaining the peace in the region, for achieving own national interest and for accelerating the Macedonian integration in the EU. Analysis is showing that Macedonian state official in their statement and speeches related to the security, economic of EU integration issues always are referring to the necessity of regional approach for tackling the current security challenges, or improvement of wellbeing and living standard of the citizens of all Western Balkan countries or necessity for mutual support and not blocking actions among the Western Balkan countries on their path towards EU.

Related to the public discourse it is evident that ‘Western Balkan’ as a term is also commonly used mostly in neutral way although there were some cases when it was used together with some stereotypes. Western Balkan regional cooperation are widely covered in the articles and on daily basis Macedonian citizens are informed about regional issues and regional cooperation activities.

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