

The War in Ukraine: Stabilising or destabilising the Balkans?

During the modern era, the Balkans have historically been of geostrategic importance for great powers. Over the centuries, the region was balancing between the East (Russian Empire/Soviet Union/Russia) and West (Western Europe/USA). With the fall of the Berlin Wall and the beginning of the enlargement of the European Union (EU) towards the east, the geostrategic importance of the Balkans has started to decrease, marginalising at the same time the role of other international actors in the region. While there were and are singular attempts by China, Russia, and Arab states to gain more influence in the area, the region's commitment to the EU and vice versa, although oscillating, was not significantly questioned. The war in Ukraine has challenged this status quo twofold. On the one hand, it confronts the EU with the failure of its enlargement and security policy during the last two decades, which enabled other international actors to widen their influence and destabilise the Balkans. On the other hand, and indirectly related to it, the conflict revealed that – in the absence of a clear perspective for the EU – single states in the Balkans make their calculations regarding the war in Ukraine, and this way destabilising the region additionally.

Biography

Dr. Irena Ristić is a researcher at the Institute of Social Sciences in Belgrade/Serbia (www.idn.org.rs). She obtained her PhD in South-Eastern European history at the University of Regensburg/Germany, and her research focuses on the dynamics of state and nation-building processes both in 19th-century Serbia and the post-Yugoslav states with a special interest in the origins of anti-west/anti-EU sentiments, nationalism and the causes of the disintegration of Yugoslavia. Recent publications are on the internal and external obstacles of the EU integration of the Western Balkans, the impact of international criminal tribunals on institutions/institutional reforms, and the contemporary political left in Europe. She had longer visiting stays in Vienna (IWM), Regensburg (IOS) and Florence (EUI).