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TÜRKİYE-SERBIA RAPPROCHEMENT AND THE BALKAN PEACE PLATFORM: TESTING BALANCING ROLE

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A New Phase in Türkiye–Serbia Relations

Türkiye □□□□□□ ties have entered a qualitatively new phase marked by institutionalized high □□□□□ dialogue, expanding trade and investment, and concrete connectivity projects such as the Belgrade □□□□□□□□ highway, alongside growing cooperation in the defense industry and security □□□□□□□ fields. This dense agenda, formalized through joint declarations and high □□□□□ cooperation mechanisms, signals that the relationship is no longer episodic, but structured around long-term sectoral commitments.[1]

Vučićs emphatically positive tone, portraying Türkiye as an extremely important partner and President Erdoğan as a regional and even global leader, reinforces the perception of Türkiye as a major political, economic, and military reference point in the Balkans. Such framing from Belgrade matters because it comes from a country that maintains close ties with both the EU and other external actors, thereby amplifying the message that Türkiye is a power that must be factored into any serious regional calculus.[2]

This bilateral opening dovetails with Türkiyes long □□□□ objective of being a central, not peripheral, player in Balkan stability, complementing its activism in Bosnia □□□□□□□□□□ and Kosovo and bolstering its claim to be an inseparable part of the region rather than an outside stakeholder.[3]

Bosnia-Herzegovina, EU Missteps, and the Emerging Space

The qualitative deepening of Türkiye □□□□□□ relations acquires additional significance when viewed against the backdrop of the European Unions protracted and often inconsistent engagement with Bosnia-Herzegovina and the wider Balkans. Over the past decade, the enlargement process has slowed markedly, conditionality has been applied unevenly, and key initiatives on Bosnias constitutional and institutional reform have either stalled or produced meager results. This combination of delayed integration, fragmented policy approaches, and unfulfilled expectations has contributed to widespread frustration among local elites and societies, undermining the EUs image as the primary anchor of

stability and transformation.[4]

In this environment, a perceptible legitimacy and governance vacuum has emerged, which non □□□ actors are increasingly able to exploit or, more benignly, to fill. Türkiyes recent diplomatic activism □□□□□□□□□□ by its upgraded relationship with Serbia and parallel initiatives in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo □□□□ thus be interpreted as a response to genuine regional demand for alternative channels of dialogue and support. At the same time, these moves clearly serve Türkiyes strategic interest in enhancing its diplomatic weight, allowing it to translate historical ties and economic presence into structured influence over the evolving security order in the Balkans.[5]

The Balkan Peace Platform and Türkiyes Mediation Claim

Building on this emerging vacuum and Türkiyes upgraded ties with Belgrade, the Balkan Peace Platform represents the most visible attempt to translate Türkiyes bilateral capital into a region □□□□□ dialogue framework. Convened in Istanbul and bringing together political, academic and civil society representatives from across the Balkans, the platform is explicitly framed around the goals of de □□□□□□□□□□ confidence □□□□□□□□ and exploring practical avenues for cooperation. Its Istanbul setting is not merely logistical, but emblematic of Türkiyes claim to be both geographically and historically embedded in the Balkans, rather than acting as a detached facilitator.[6]

The inclusion □□□□□□□ or indirect □□□ stakeholders linked to both Kosovo and Serbia, as well as to Bosnia-Herzegovinas internal divisions, underscores the ambition to create a format where mutually distrustful actors can at least share a common discursive space. Türkiyes role in making such encounters politically acceptable is crucial, as it relies on the same network of dense, cross □□□□□□□ relationships that underpin its rapprochement with Serbia and long □□□□□□□□ ties to Bosniak and Kosovar actors. This approach mirrors Türkiyes broader foreign policy pattern of convening adversaries in other theatres □□□□□ the Middle East to the Black Sea □□□ leveraging a combination of strategic ambiguity, economic incentives, and security cooperation.[7]

At the same time, the Balkan Peace Platform has attracted criticism from commentators who view it less as disinterested mediation and more as an instrument for projecting Turkish influence into a region where other external actors are perceived to be retreating or underperforming. From this perspective, the initiative is seen as simultaneously filling a diplomatic gap and institutionalizing Türkiyes role as an indispensable gatekeeper in the evolving security and governance architecture of the Balkans.

Scope and Limits of Türkiyes Balancing Act

Taken together, Türkiyes parallel engagement with Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia, and Kosovo suggests a deliberate strategy of positioning itself as a stabilizing, rather than polarizing, actor in the Balkans. By upgrading ties with Belgrade while maintaining

long □□□□□□□□ relations with Bosniak and Kosovar partners and sponsoring multilateral platforms in Istanbul, Türkiye increases its capacity to shape agendas and reduce the risk of exclusionary alignments. This potential, however, depends critically on sustaining a minimum level of trust among all sides; any perception that Türkiye is sliding too far toward one camp would quickly erode its claimed role as a balancer.[8]

At the same time, the room for maneuver opened by EU missteps and the current legitimacy vacuum is neither unlimited nor permanent. A more assertive and coherent EU policy, intensified great □□□□□ competition, or renewed local crises could all narrow Türkiyes options and expose the structural limits of its activist diplomacy. In this sense, the present Türkiye □□□□□□ rapprochement and the Balkan Peace Platform together constitute a revealing test case of Türkiyes aspiration to act as an inseparable Balkan actor and a genuine mediator, rather than a merely opportunistic external stakeholder.

*Picture: AA and Caspian Post

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