

# The Shifting Alliances And Militarisation Of The Western Balkans



03-25-2025 ~ In September 2024, a well-known media outlet from Albania reached out to me for my perspective on a recent

€2.7 billion [deal](#) between France and Serbia, signed by Presidents Macron and Vučić, to provide the Serbian army with 12 Rafale fighter jets. Over the prior years, Serbia had received military supplies from Russia, China, Iran, and other countries, making it the most militarised power in the Western Balkans. My response did not satisfy the editor, and it was never published. This is what I stated at the time:

‘Unfortunately, it’s not just former President Trump; the French president also often acts as an arms dealer. This means that, alongside the global and regional arms race, we are witnessing top state leaders prioritising the profits of the military-industrial complex over peaceful coexistence among nations.

In Macedonia, we vividly recall when an over-indebted Greece unnecessarily purchased French submarines to gain [favour] with Paris in the [name dispute with Skopje](#). Likewise, during the pandemic, President [Emmanuel] Macron rushed to [Zagreb](#) to sign a major arms deal with the Croatian government. The Croatian public - including President [Zoran] Milanović, who was bypassed on this occasion - was outraged by the enormous expense of what was seen as a non-urgent purchase of Rafale fighter jets. Experts argued that the deal was more about securing political support for Croatia’s Schengen accession and bolstering Prime Minister [Andrej] Plenković’s ambitions in Brussels.

Similarly, in 2021, Serbia reacted strongly when its western neighbour, Croatia, disturbed the regional military balance. Now, Serbia’s latest arms acquisition has triggered concern in Kosovo and Albania, fueling fears of military superiority. This is precisely what arms deals do: they create insecurity, provoke counter-reactions, and escalate demands for further militarisation.

I also tend to believe that [Serbian President Aleksandar] Vučić follows

Plenković's footsteps. He is effectively purchasing political support from France, an historic ally, in an attempt to downplay Serbia's ties with non-Western partners. The ultimate outcome remains the same: excessive military spending, political manoeuvring disguised as diplomacy, and a redirection of resources away from the fundamental needs of citizens. Meanwhile, these deals only deepen instability, fear, and regional insecurity'.

At the time of that exchange (in 2024), the 'divorce' within the political West was not as evident as it is today (Trump was about to come back in office). But nowadays, NATO is struggling with its mission, particularly as it deals with a member (the U.S.) it can no longer fully trust. The EU has declared its ambition with an [€800 billion](#) project aimed at strengthening the defence industry of its member states. Meanwhile, the U.S. is pursuing its own, unclear plans - whether it's Elon Musk's Pentagon involvement or the development of a new Iron Dome or maybe peacemaking and a tariff war.

However, the European periphery - commonly referred to as the Western Balkans - is beginning to shift in unexpected ways. The signing of a trilateral security cooperation agreement on 18 March between two NATO members (Albania and Croatia) and Kosovo, whose international status remains unresolved, has raised eyebrows and discomfort. Serbia reacted sharply, despite being internally shaken by months of [student protests](#), political crises, and escalating tensions in [Republika Srpska](#). Reports [suggest](#) that Vučić is contemplating a similar security pact with Hungarian President Viktor Orbán.

In Macedonia, the situation is completely unclear. No official statements have provided a detailed stance on regional developments - aside from the vague [assertion](#) that 'we stand with President Trump'. The Croatian-Albanian-Kosovo security alliance places Macedonia in a difficult position. The country has a significant Albanian minority that has traditionally held pro-American sentiments (though historically aligned with the Democrats). Their attitude has been crucial for domestic stability since the [ethnic conflict of 2001](#) and the imposition of a power-sharing system. Aligning with the Serbia-Hungary-US (under Trump) axis would be a move the Macedonian government lacks the courage to make. Joining the trilateral initiative would worsen not only internal divisions but also enrage the Serbian neighbour. In short, this new regional security configuration could leave Macedonia caught between a rock and a hard place, as it is only logical to expect a strengthening of the Albanian factor under [Tirana's leadership](#) - now

potentially even on a military level.

Historically, Macedonia has been referred to as the '[powder keg of the Balkans](#)' or the 'apple of discord'. Yet now, it is the broader European periphery that is experiencing unexpected frictions and unplanned shifts.

The Kosovo defence minister [stated](#), 'We are demonstrating that together, we will not allow anyone to destabilize the region. I thank the ministers of Albania and Croatia for this initiative and believe that this agreement is the first trilateral one in the region. Once again, this declaration is a signal to any country that seeks to destabilize the situation: we are united, and we expect others to join us'. Through this agreement, Kosovo is effectively being ushered into a segment of NATO through the back door. But the critical questions remain: *Who exactly is the alleged destabilising force? Where are the threats truly coming from? And more importantly, can these threats genuinely be resolved with weapons?*

The militarisation fever is spreading faster than COVID-19, and it's not difficult to foresee that the consequences could be far more dramatic than the pandemic - especially in a region where frozen conflicts and unhealed wounds from the 1990s still linger.

*By Biljana Vankovska*

*Author Bio:* This article was produced by [Globetrotter](#). Biljana Vankovska is a professor of political science and international relations at Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje, a member of the Transnational Foundation of Peace and Future Research (TFF) in Lund, Sweden, and the most influential public intellectual in Macedonia.

*Source:* Globetrotter