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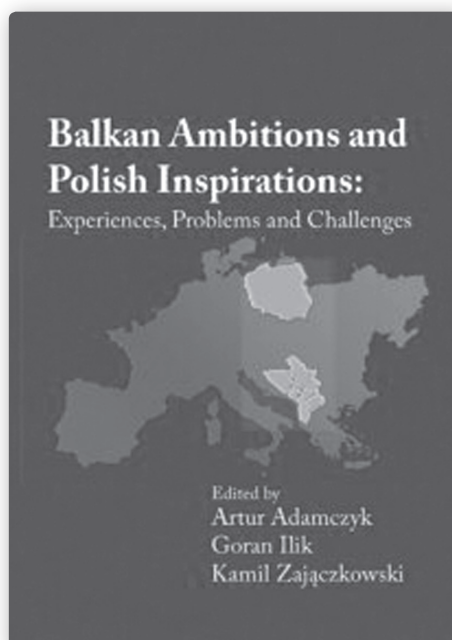
**Artur Adamczyk, Goran Ilik, Kamil Zajączkowski (Eds.)
BALKAN AMBITIONS AND POLISH INSPIRATIONS:
EXPERIENCES, PROBLEMS, AND CHALLENGES**

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Poland's strategic interest in fostering robust and amicable relations with the countries of the Western Balkans underscores its commitment to promoting stability, prosperity, and democratic governance in Southeast Europe. Western Balkans region occupies a pivotal geopolitical position at the crossroads of Europe. Poland recognizes the significance of fully incorporating the Western Balkans into Euro-Atlantic structures as a means of consolidating regional security and countering external influences that may pose threats to European stability, including Poland itself.

The integration of the Western Balkans into Euro-Atlantic structures not only offers the prospect of bringing stability to a region historically marred by conflicts but also serves to diminish the influence of external actors, particularly Russia. Poland perceives the accession of Western Balkan states to institutions such as NATO and the European Union as essential for weakening Russian influence in the region and bolstering



its own strategic position as a significant player in Central and Eastern Europe.

Poland's engagement with the Western Balkans extends beyond geopolitical considerations to encompass shared values, historical ties, and practical cooperation. Since 2015, Poland has intensified its diplomatic outreach and bilateral relations

with countries in the region, actively supporting their Euro-Atlantic aspirations through various initiatives. These efforts include Poland's membership in the informal Group of Friends of EU Enlargement and its active role within the Visegrad Group, aimed at facilitating the accession process and fostering regional cooperation.

Moreover, Poland's hosting of key summits such as the Berlin Process Summit underscores its commitment to advancing Western Balkan integration with the European Union. By sharing its own successful transformation experience and serving as a role model for aspiring EU members, Poland seeks to contribute to the consolidation of democratic governance, economic development, and regional stability in the Western Balkans.

In this context, the publication of anthology titled "Balkan ambitions and Polish inspirations: experiences, problems and challenges", featuring 17 articles by both Polish and Balkan authors, serves as a testament to Poland's dedication to supporting the Western Balkans' European integration journey.

This anthology underscores the multifaceted nature of Poland's engagement with the region and its commitment to promoting stability, prosperity, and democratic governance in Southeast Europe. Conversely, the anthology also highlights a number of challenges and issues

that are currently being faced by several Western Balkan countries. The subsequent section provides a concise examination of each article included in the anthology as well as a brief analysis of each article contained in the anthology.

1. **(Lack of) Strategy of the EU Towards the Western Balkans** authored by Kamil Zajączkowski argues that the effectiveness and reliability of a strategy that relies on conditionality and the transformative power of the EU, along with the process of Europeanisation in the region, have been demonstrated to be inadequate.
2. **Relations with the Balkans as a Part of Poland's Foreign Policy** authored by Arthur Adamczyk and Olga Barburska sheds light on Poland's highly reserved and passive approach towards the Balkans, putting forward the proposition that Polish diplomacy should extend extensive support exclusively in the areas where it has achieved notable accomplishments.
3. **Poland and NATO. Lessons for Balkans** authored by Malgorzata Bonikowska and Agnieszka Ostrowska examines Poland's experiences with NATO and draws parallels with the Western Balkans' aspirations for Euro-Atlantic integration.
4. **The Balance of Poland's Participation in the European**

- Union's Development Policy** authored by Katarzyna Kolodziejczyk highlights the interplay between Poland's participation in the EU development policy and its development cooperation policy is analyzed, shedding light on the repercussions that Poland faces as a result of engaging in the EU development policy.
5. **The Systemic Transformation in Poland – Determinants and Limitations** authored by Jacek Wojnicki – speaks about transformation in Poland following 1989, a year that is widely acknowledged as the commencement of profound changes and a turning point, which transpired through three significant stages.
 6. **Poland's Trade Relations with the European Union and Investment Flows in the Integration Process** authored by Malgorzata Dziembala – Analyzes Poland's membership in the EU which has proven to be mutually advantageous. It is undeniable that Poland has witnessed numerous positive effects as a result of this partnership. However, there is still much work to be done in order to modernize the structure of Polish exports and increase the proportion of innovative products.
 7. **Poland's Success in Attracting Foreign Direct Investment: Determinants and Prospects** authored by Aleksandra Borowicz evaluates and deliberates on Poland's status as a recipient of foreign direct investment (FDI) and ascertains the primary factors that contribute to its appeal.
 8. **The Support for Start-ups in Central and Eastern Europe and the Growing Importance of Poland's Ecosystem** authored by Anna Maslon – Oracz and Katarzyna Kacperczyk highlights Poland's sophisticated institutional and regulatory infrastructure aimed at aiding start-ups, along with its financial capability to stimulate innovation in the Western Balkans.
 9. **Poland's Experience and Influence in Shaping the Western Balkans' Future** authored by Elena Tilovska Kechedji highlights how can Poland's rich experiences and diverse range of experiences, as a valuable resource in their pursuit of peace, stability, and reconciliation can serve as a guiding compass, illuminating the path towards fostering amicable relations among neighboring nations.
 10. **The Great Power Game in the Balkans** authored by Bogdan J. Goralczyk argues that the establishment of stability in the Balkans region is intricately linked to the implementation of a resolute EU policy that prioritizes enlargement. This can be achieved through the provision of eco-

conomic aid and strategic investments in the region's economy.

11. **Between National Identity and National Culture. A View from the Balkans** authored by Marko Babic speaks about how diverse strategies are employed to examine nationalism as a dominant narrative in the region, which exerts a lasting influence on both societal groups and political culture necessary for the establishment of nations, the promotion of democracy, and, ultimately, legitimate aspirations for European Union membership.
12. **Towards Closer Balkan Cooperation: The Case of the V4 and the Challenges of the Eurointegration Process** authored by Goran Ilik concludes that the SEECP serves as a manifestation of regional cooperation, driven by a resolute ambition to secure full membership in both the EU and NATO for all its constituent nations. Nevertheless, this cooperation remains in a nascent stage, demanding significant investments in member solidarity and a robust political determination to foster collective progress. Additionally, a deeper involvement of the civil sector and the provision of sustainable and independent financial resources are imperative for the SEECP's future functioning.

13. **Challenges in Relations Between Serbia and the European Union** authored by Ivan Ilic and Dimitrije Andrejic speaks about various challenges that the Republic of Serbia encounters throughout its European integration process, with a particular emphasis on the issue of aligning the foreign policy of Serbia with that of the European Union in the face of sanctions imposed on the Russian Federation. In addition, it addresses the task of fulfilling the requirements and ultimately concluding the Chapter 35 negotiations, which entail the normalization of relations between Serbia and Kosovo as stipulated in the European Union's Negotiating Framework for accession talks with Serbia and it also highlights the growing Euroscepticism in the Republic of Serbia, while underscoring the significance of European integration.
14. **Reform in the Public Administration System in North Macedonia** authored by Mladen Karadjoski and Sasho Dodovski argues that the EU accession process faces a significant challenge in the form of reforming the Macedonian public administration and the judicial system. This article aims to identify the most effective approach to reforming the Macedonian public administration, considering past

experiences, the current state of affairs, and future development expectations, predictions, and recommendations.

15. **Risk Factors for Religious Radicalism and Violent Religious Extremism – the Case of the Republic of North Macedonia** authored by Ice Iljevski, Angelina Stanojoska and Kire Babanoski aims to shed light on the predicament societies confront in recognizing the risk factors associated with religious radicalization. These risk factors play a pivotal role in fostering violent religious extremism and terrorism. Moreover, the article examines the integration of these risk factors into national strategies devised to counter extremism and terrorism.
16. **Election Regulations: How Can Citizen Involvement Be Increased? The Macedonian Case** authored by Bojana Naumovska endeavours to present a novel framework that is expected to enhance the participation of North Macedonia's populace

in the electoral procedure in the forthcoming years.

17. **The Effectiveness and Perspectives of the Macedonian Regional Development Policy: Lessons from Poland** authored by Milka Dimitrovska emphasizes why a thorough analysis of the Polish and EU elements, in conjunction with additional comparative research, would yield significant advantages for the enhancement of the Macedonian regional policy, which is expected to entail a lengthy and intricate process.

“Balkan Ambitions and Polish Involvements” emerges as a substantial scholarly contribution that illuminates Poland's involvement with the Western Balkans and its wider implications for European integration. Through its diverse range of insights and perspectives, it serves as a valuable resource for scholars, policymakers, and practitioners of regional cooperation and peace, stability, and prosperity in Western Balkans, Southeast Europe and beyond.