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ANALYSIS OF INTERESTS IN THE CONTEXT OF SECURITY NEEDS. THE EXAMPLE OF 'CORRIDOR NO.8'

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***Summary:** This article proposes a methodology to identify key actors within the network of interests arising from specific challenges. Drawing from Niklas Luhmann's concept, this analysis emphasizes the importance of societal connections. An example is presented regarding the development of interests related to the construction of Corridor No. 8, as a challenge to regional security in the Balkans.*

***Key words:** security, interests, Corridor No.8, Balkans, international relationships*

INTRODUCTION

One of the evolutionary features of the human species is its highly developed ability not only to react to stimuli but also to anticipate their effects and to plan and execute actions in advance. This evolutionary specificity is particularly evident in the field of security (individual, national, international, broad, etc.). This anticipatory ability is especially critical in the domain of security, where planning ahead can mitigate potential threats. This perspective proposes a methodology to analyze interests within the network of relationships that emerge among states in response to specific circumstances. The aim is to enrich the tools for navigating the diverse and surprising world of international security. An illustrative example focuses on the uncertainties surrounding Corridor No. 8, related to regional security. However, due to its close link to social connectivity, the analysis promises actionable results at both a higher level (such as in the realm of general security) and at a lower systemic level (such as the distribution of roles within a state's society).

The subject of the study is the interests of active actors within the network of international relations. The object is national security, as viewed from the analyst's perspective. The scientific approach applied is logical. This concept is by no means new; since ancient times, it has been understood that interests have almost always driven the behavioural activity of individuals, societies, and states.

In the context of interest distribution, the difference compared to the circumstances of the 20th century is noticeable. Over the last three decades, at least two factors have changed to a new qualitative level:

– We now know significantly more about social systems like society and their capacities, and

– Thanks to intensive communication, information about the interests, intentions, and plans of participants in a given situation is accessible much faster and over greater distances than during medieval times. All this justifies the focus of research attention on analysing interests. Additionally, it makes this analysis a relevant option for overcoming uncertainty in relationships and guiding actions in response to contemporary risks and challenges.

In this work, the analysis is developed in the field of security. However, judging by the broad range of information accessible from media sources, the subject of interest is suitable for overcoming uncertainty in other domains, such as economics, politics, etc. The proposed analysis is relevant to the work of experts in international security, diplomacy, politics, and economics. The methodology is qualitative in nature. As one of the contemporary social theories, Niklas Luhmann's concepts of communication within social systems are utilized. Media materials, which describe actions in specific cases and statements about intentions regarding such actions, serve as sources of information.

The organization of the approach presented here aims to demonstrate at least two important specifics:

– Today, information spreads quickly enough to be useful for all – politicians, security experts, and wide circles within the respective media audience.

– Society is becoming an increasingly active factor in addressing issues in the realm of both internal and external state policies.

1. ABOUT INTERESTS AND THE CONCEPT OF NIKLAS LUHMANN

The object-subject configuration of scientific inquiry is not accidental. National security is based on state interests (Ninov, 2021, s. 14). It is hardly a secret that, compared to the last decades of the past century, the connections between people, societies, and states have become more complex. The economic and political ambitions are increasingly becoming more extensive, encompassing more areas of everyday life and spreading to ever more distant territories. The formation of interests on a supranational level is becoming increasingly necessary from a strategic perspective (Berchev, 2024). Projects from the distant past, abandoned due to technological or other limitations, are re-emerging, new plans are born, and new ambitions arise. In this context, the case of Corridor 8 is intriguing, as it brings together interests that have existed for centuries.

In parallel with these novelties, principles that uphold society have remained unchanged over the centuries. Today's social theories are so advanced that they turn these principles into a useful basis for analyzing current events, identifying supporters and opponents, and uncovering latent challenges in the otherwise complex and dynamic relations of the contemporary 21st-century world. One guiding principle deserving of research attention, especially in the context of security, is the study of interests. History and human development show that interests have long been recognized as arguments (in the mathematical sense) of the function of goals. Furthermore, interests are inextricably linked to the social system in which they develop and manifest.

• **Interests**

Even in Antiquity, sophists emerged who were known for their ability to prove or disprove anything based on “*interests and circumstances*” (Spirkin, 2006, s. 49) and provoke corresponding actions. Later, Aristotle examined the foundations of the state and reached the conclusion that “*the goals, interests, and nature of people’s actions*” (Spirkin, 2006, s.64) depend on the material situation of the person or group. In parallel, the philosopher warned that when “*economic individualism prevails, it threatens the interests of the whole, and the state should intervene in the relevant area*” (Spirkin, 2006, s. 65). In the 17th century, Thomas Hobbes warned that private interests arise within society, which obstructs the attainment of complete truth (Spirkin, 2006, s. 111).

In the social projection, the discovery by materialist philosophers, who studied existence in the 19th and 20th centuries, is significant. They wrote that “*material production and the community of interests form the basis of the connections between people in society*” (Spirkin, 2006, s. 265). These philosophers defined social connections as dependencies between phenomena, directed toward a specific relationship (Spirkin, 2006, s. 265).

Even this brief theoretical review shows that:

- there is a direct, unequivocal dependency between interest and its holder, i.e., behind every interest stands one or more clearly defined holders (Aristotle; T. Hobbes);
- there is a dependency between interests and circumstances (Aristotle);
- interests that develop in society are a factor in the development of the state (Aristotle);
- interests depend on the connectedness within the social group – in this analysis, society (materialist philosophers).

These characteristics reveal interest as an integral part of the role of actors within the state-society system, as well as a stimulus for instrumental action. In this stimulus, individual traits of the holder intersect with the collective pressure of the group and environmental factors. Moreover, the dependency on circumstances and the link to the holder suggest that interest

analysis provides a temporary picture, which changes with every shift in circumstances. This feature is not a drawback, as environmental (circumstantial) changes are visible to all members of society. Thus, the analyst has an accessible indicator, signalling when the established model of interest comparison should be updated or when a new model needs to be created if necessary.

From the perspective of national and international security, the demonstrated integrative understanding of interests allows the results of the relevant analysis to encompass a broader field and address the overall state of the state/society system, rather than being limited to just economic, political, or other specific areas of activity.¹

• **Niklas Luhmann's theory of social systems**

The proposed analytical approach highlights the direct dependency between societal interests and connections (as explored by philosophers studying genesis). This attribute suggests that Niklas Luhmann's Theory of Social Systems is a suitable conceptual framework for interest-based analysis. According to the well-known sociologist, in a social system, the defining elements are the connections between actors rather than the actors themselves (Luhmann, 1997; Luhmann, 1986). This perspective closely aligns with modern political neorealism concepts, where the focus is more on the relationships between international relations subjects rather than on the subjects themselves (Stefanov, Vidin, Zaharieva, Pantev, 2001). This similarity implies that, for analysing interests in the context of security needs, a conceptual framework prioritizing connections between actors within the state-society system is essential. This is because there is a direct dependency between interests and connectedness in society (as highlighted by philosophers who study existence).

This conceptual alignment indicates that, when analysing interests, attention should be directed not so much to the qualities of the holders as to the qualities of the connections (linkages) in which they are embedded and which they form. In his theoretical work on communication, Niklas Luhmann formulated an additional principle that is essential for this work: people primarily discuss their preferences (interests) (Luhmann, 1987).

2. PROPOSAL FOR AN INTEREST ANALYSIS METHODOLOGY FOR SECURITY NEEDS

Following the theoretical overview in the previous section and the selection of a conceptual framework, the following methodology for conducting an Interest Analysis is proposed:

¹International security is understood as a triad of national security, regional security, and global security (Stefanov, Vidin, Zaharieva, Pantev, 2001, pp. 190-191).

1) Identify a specific circumstance as a challenge in the context of security.

This step is typical as it is logical for any study to begin with a problem or unknown factor that needs to be discovered and resolved. Practical experience shows that this step should not be overlooked, as defining the problem can sometimes be more challenging than discovering that such a problem exists. In the proposed interest-based analysis, identified problems are associated with a specific circumstance that poses a security challenge.

2) Analyse the already identified circumstance and the factors that draw interest to it.

This step requires a display of heuristic thinking. It is logical to explore historical, political, economic, socio-cultural, and other factors underlying the emergence of the challenge.

3) Identification of players in the game of interests.

At first glance, the connections (relations) that develop around a specific circumstance affecting regional security should be internal to the state and should also include neighbouring states. In today's world, dominated by intense communication, it should be considered that a physical boundary between states in a set of players in a given issue is not necessary. Today, political, economic, and other interests span the globe, unhindered by mountains, rivers, seas, or oceans. Developed nations, for example are typical cases as they often demonstrate and pursue ambitions to impose interests worldwide.

4) Differentiating interests as positive, negative, and neutral.

Interests can be broadly categorized as positive, negative, or neutral, based on their alignment with the challenge being analyzed. The complexity lies in the fact that within each of these subsets, elements (interests) of varying manifestation and purpose may exist concurrently. For instance, a city might need a new hospital. Supporters of this idea (with a positive interest) may be numerous, but each advocates for their own proposal on the hospital's location, creating competition, which should be accounted for in the similar analysis.

5) Formulating action plans to advance the interests of the analyst.

It is a misconception to think that positive interests should be encouraged, negative ones suppressed, and neutral ones left unattended. Unlike the game of chess (often used as a metaphor for politics), social relations are far more complex. Players with neutral interests, for instance, could be attracted as supporters of the interest being advanced or nudged towards opposing those with negative interests. The options are diverse, and choosing the right approach is not easy to predict. Thus, a universal solution might be to consistently monitor all players in the game, observing the dynamics and equilibrium of their interests as the challenge evolves.

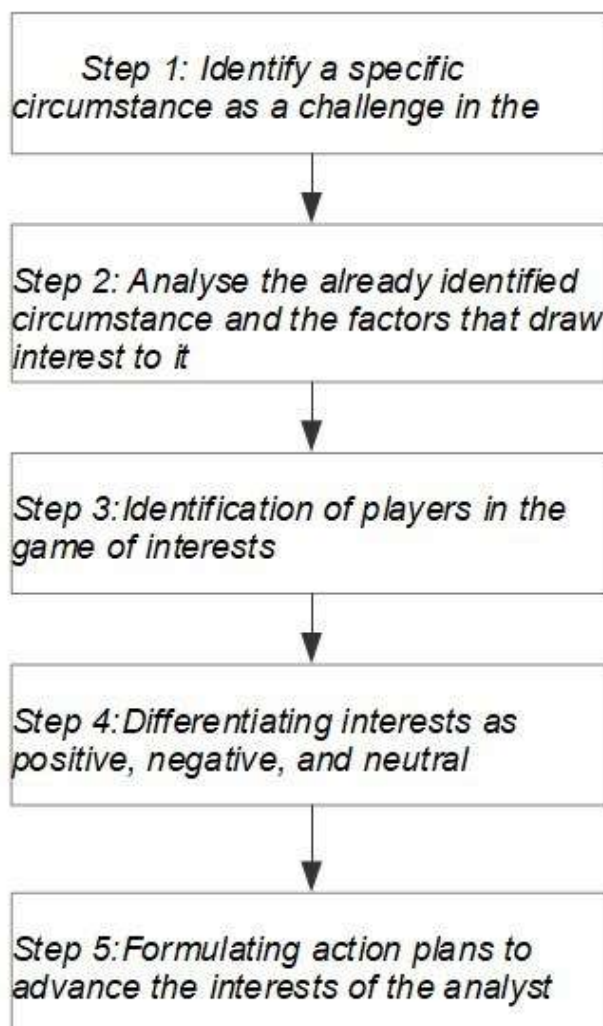
METHODOLOGY FOR INTEREST ANALYSIS IN THE CONTEXT OF THE NEEDS OF SECURITY

Figure 1. Proposal for a Methodology for Interests Analysis in the Context of the Needs of Security

3. CORRIDOR No. 8

Corridor No. 8 runs through: Bari/Brindisi (Italy) – Durrës/Vlorë (Albania) – Tirana (Albania) – Kafasan (North Macedonia) – Skopje (North Macedonia) – Sofia (Bulgaria) – Plovdiv (Bulgaria) – Varna/Burgas (Bulgaria). It includes 1270 km of railway infrastructure and 960 km of highways. Corridor No. 8 is a key route connecting European countries along the east-west axis to global trade networks. It holds significant importance for EU countries and is included in the plans for construction and funding by

the European Community. This makes it a focal point for intersecting various interests. Here is the analysis of these interests:

1) Identify Corridor No. 8 as a challenge, in the context of security.

The interests surrounding Corridor No. 8 are not straightforward. It is evident that this route has existed for thousands of years. Along this path, the Romans (and likely even before them) built their fortresses, traveled with goods and other cargo, and people gradually settled in these areas. A significant part of the route from Bari (Apulia, Italy) to Bitola (North Macedonia) is historically known as Via Egnatia. Today, there is still a notable concentration of people, military, economic, and cultural opportunities along this route. This historical significance ensures that Corridor No. 8 is deeply rooted in the collective mind of the region's populations. At the same time, after the trials of historical development, following World War I, World War II, and the Cold War, parts of the infrastructure of the Corridor remain unbuilt to this day.

Therefore, there is a challenge that hinders:

– Social impact: Lack of infrastructure hampers communication among Italy, Albania, North Macedonia, and Bulgaria, as well as Turkey and Kosovo, which are nearby;

– Transport disruption: The route interrupts the Adriatic-Black Sea corridor that has existed for centuries;

– Economic challenges: This affects not only regional economies but also the wider European and global economic landscape, as it disrupts Balkan and transcontinental logistics between Europe and Asia;

– Security risks: A security corridor for military purposes (military infrastructure) has not been established for the states in the region, but also for NATO, as all the countries along the route are members of this organization.

2) Analyse the already identified circumstance and the factors that draw interest to it.

In Bulgaria, the earliest proposal for developing part of the Corridor No.8 route (Radomir – Kyustendil – Gyueshevo railway) dates back to 1897. Following the Russo-Turkish War (1877–1879), a partial plan was drawn in 1904, when the Ottoman Empire committed to completing the segment through Kumanovo and Kriva Palanka (now in North Macedonia). Despite significant support from European nations and the EU, parts of Corridor No. 8 remain incomplete today.

In 1991, a meeting was held to establish the West-East transport corridor, which involved the ministers of Albania, Bulgaria, and the Republic of Macedonia (later joined by Italy, Turkey, and Greece).

In 1994 and 1997, at the Pan-European Transport Ministers' Conference, Corridor No. 8 was included as part of the system of pan-European transport corridors (Katsarov, 2018).

In 1998, the Main Multilateral Agreement on International Transport for the Development of the Europe-Caucasus Corridor was signed, increasing the significance of Corridor No. 8 for the global economy, as it provides a direct route from Southern Europe to the Caucasus, Central Asia, and the Far East (Petrov, 2004).

In 2017, a Bulgarian-Macedonian agreement was signed in Skopje prioritizing the construction of Corridor No. 8 (Petrov, 2004).

The historical development, as well as the result of step 1), shows that the interests surrounding Corridor No. 8 are provoked and develop within the framework of:

- Difficult communication between societies;
- The threat of generating geostrategic interests that are contrary to the interests of the EU and NATO;
- Missed benefits for the security of the Balkans and the EU.

3) Identification of players in the game of interests.

The result of step 2) shows that from a Western European perspective, the goal of constructing Corridor No. 8 is:

- Connecting the southern part of the Western Balkans with the EU (economy, politics, culture, markets);
- Ensuring stability (security) in this less developed region;
- Demonopolisation of the Athens-Belgrade axis (North – South) as the only one for the Balkans;
- Expanding the connectivity of the EU with the Caucasus, Central Asia, and the Far East (Agreement of 1998).

It is evident that the interests surrounding Corridor No. 8 are far from being limited to the interests of the countries along the route (Italy, Albania, North Macedonia, Bulgaria). In addition to the EU member states, the involvement of NATO situates it as a key actor in regional security, given that the countries in the region are members and are oriented toward this organization. Russia also emerges as a significant actor with a keen interest, particularly since, during the conflict in Ukraine, it has no interest in the establishment of a corridor for NATO's military security along Corridor No. 8.

The Athens-Belgrade axis reveals that corridor 8 falls into specific competition with Corridor 10 (Salzburg-Budapest – Belgrade – Skopje-Thessalonica). Therefore, as actors in the network of interests, the countries Austria, Hungary, Serbia, Republic of North Macedonia and Greece should be involved.

The listed considerations indicate that the key actors with significant interests are the following countries and organizations:

- the countries along the route (Italy, Albania, Republic of North Macedonia, Bulgaria);

- the countries whose interests fall within the scope of Corridor 10 are: Austria, Hungary, Serbia, Republic of North Macedonia, Greece;
- the countries entering the Caucasus, Central Asia and the Far East and bound by this route. These are mainly Turkey, China and Russia;
- the countries in the region and others whose interests affect the ties with NATO, as well as the organization itself: Serbia, Russia, NATO.

The interests suggest dividing the key actors into the following categories: positive interests (Greece, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia); active positive interests (Albania, Bulgaria, Italy, Turkey, EU, NATO); endangered interests (Republic of North Macedonia); negative interests (Serbia, Russia, Hungary, China).

4) *Differentiating interests as positive, negative, and neutral.*

The result of step 3) shows a much broader range of participants in the network of interests formed by the Corridor No. 8 challenge. Due to the presence of competition, it is expected that some of these interests will contradict each other. Here are the interests of some of the countries, mainly represented through media materials:

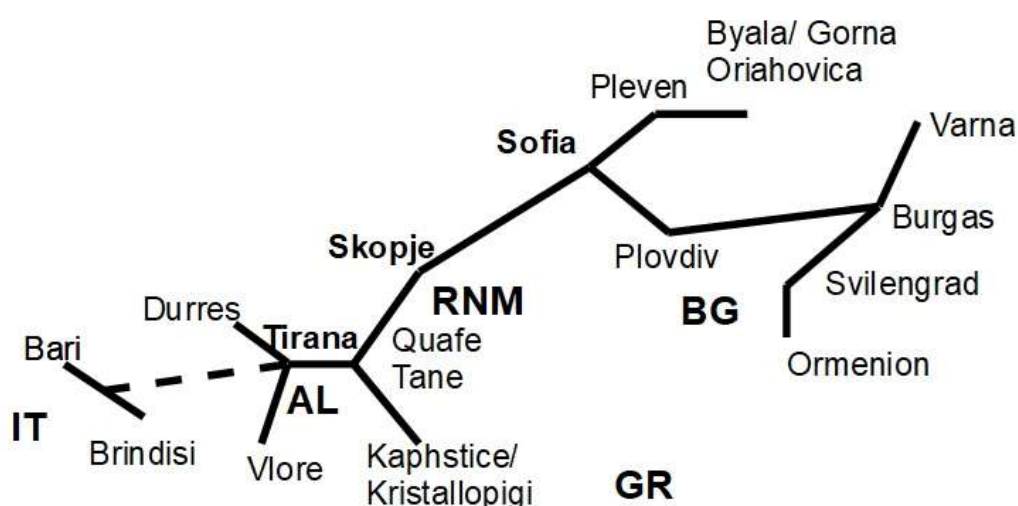


Figure 2. Routes along Corridor No.8 (Source of the diagram for Corridor No.8: Reina, 2023)

- Serbia: It is necessary to consider that the transport corridor along the Athens-Belgrade axis (European Corridor No. 10, which includes: Salzburg – Budapest – Belgrade – Skopje – Thessalonica) has been functioning for years. This suggests that layers of economic, political, and other dependencies have accumulated there, which resist the smoothing of Corridor No. 8. This process is particularly evident in the politics of the Republic of Serbia. Serbia leverages the historical context that, during the Cold War, until 1991, NM was a federative part of the Socialist Federal

Republic of Yugoslavia, dominated by Serbian influence. To a significant extent, Serbia retains this influence today and exerts pressure to redirect EU funds allocated for Corridor No. 8 toward Corridor No. 10 (Milcheva, 2024);

– Russia: Russia is directly interested in the transport of Caspian oil to Europe. Furthermore, especially during the military actions in Ukraine, Russia has an interest in preventing the establishment of a military-logistical corridor along Corridor No. 8. The actions of the state demonstrate an active effort to impose these interests. It is a well-known fact that Russia exploits great Serbian interests to distance Serbia, Republic of North Macedonia, and other countries from the EU (Milcheva, 2024). Additionally, the numerous wars over the centuries show that Russia seeks access to the Adriatic Sea to bypass the Black Sea, the Aegean Sea;

– Turkey: Turkey is a natural geographic crossroads for the Caucasus, Central Asia, and the Far East. It is known that until 2018, the country invested over 50 billion USD in railway and other infrastructure leading to the Balkans (Katsarov, 2018);

– Caucasias (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia): The Caucasian countries have an interest in using the route through Corridor No. 8 to realize energy, economic, and other connections. Therefore, they should be included among the actors expressing a positive interest in the project;

– China: In China, an initiative for a New Silk Road (Belt and Road) is emerging. Evidence of active interest from the Chinese side is that the port of Piraeus has been leased by the Chinese operator COSCO, while the port of Thessalonica has been taken over by a German-Chinese consortium (Katsarov, 2018);

– Hungary: The role of Hungary is interesting, as Hungary, with Russian and Chinese assistance, is trying to divert the executive power in Republic of North Macedonia from the construction of Corridor No. 8 to Corridor No. 10. Notably, in 2013, Chinese President Xi Jinping visited Russia, and then, in May 2024, he visited France, Serbia, and Hungary. Immediately afterwards, the executive power in Republic of North Macedonia made an attempt to redirect the €560 million allocated by the EU for the construction of Corridor No. 8 toward Corridor No. 10 (Milcheva, 2024). Public opinion in Republic of North Macedonia is being shaped with various side arguments, such as the claim that the Corridor No. 8 project is difficult to implement or that it is threatened by corruption (Zekoli, april 2023). Attention is also drawn to a publication on the investigative journalism site Square.

“This July, Hungary announced a €500 million loan for North Macedonia ... He (Hristijan Mickoski) immediately denied it would come from Russia or China, claiming a European country would provide it.” (Mercedezs, September, 2024).

The approach is interesting because China's involvement raises doubts about attempts to entangle the Republic of North Macedonia in a debt trap. China is not far from such a policy, as seen, for example, in 2023 in Laos.

– Republic of North Macedonia: As a border region of Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY), the Republic of North Macedonia emerged from Yugoslavia in 1991 with underdeveloped road infrastructure and economy. Due to this, the Republic of North Macedonia is particularly sensitive to the funding of Corridor No. 8, and it is evident that Russia and China are taking advantage of this circumstance. Furthermore, in recent years, some political parties have been fostering anti-Bulgarian sentiments in the society of Republic of North Macedonia, suggesting a withdrawal of public support for connecting projects like Corridor No. 8. It is widely known that Bulgaria is blocking Republic of North Macedonia's EU membership due to its anti-Bulgarian policies. Consequently, there exists a favorable ground in RNM for the non-implementation of the European transport project Corridor No. 8;

The interests of the other countries along Corridor No. 8 are more clearly expressed:

– Albania: Despite its isolation during the Cold War, which left the country with an underdeveloped economy and road infrastructure, Albania is fulfilling its part of Corridor No. 8 because the priorities are different. In a statement, Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama outlined these priorities: Corridor No. 8 provides a connection to European Corridors No. 4 and No. 10; it shortens the link between Tirana and Tetovo (an area with a predominantly Albanian population in North Macedonia); and it ensures a security corridor for NATO and the region (24 chasa, 2024);

– Bulgaria: The country is a member of the EU and NATO and is actively pursuing policies to develop connections with Western Europe and other countries in the region. There is a close, historically determined relationship between the societies in Bulgaria and North Macedonia. Therefore, the construction of Corridor No. 8 is a priority for the state;

– Italy: Italy is only at the beginning of the route, but it has important interests in the construction of Corridor No. 8. The reason is that the Corridor is not just a railway line or a highway. This corridor also involves the development of energy and information connectivity, among other things. Corridor No. 8 provides Italy with an energy connection through the relevant electricity and gas transmission lines. Additionally, it ensures connectivity for the populations in border areas, some of which have strong cultural ties but are separated by the sea. An example is the Apulia region, which is culturally and historically connected to Albania.

The analysis from step 4 does not claim to cover the full range of actors who have an active or potential interest in the construction of Corridor No. 8. The study has focused on those countries that express their interests in a

visible manner in the public domain. The presentation allows for the distribution of interests by country into four groups:

- positive interests: These are the countries involved in the construction of Corridor No. 8, but due to distance or other reasons, they are not taking active actions;
- active positive interests: The countries with active actions in support of the construction of Corridor 8;
- endangered interests: In this subset falls RNM, because its actions hinder the construction of Corridor No. 8, and because it serves as a conduit for interests that contradict the interests of the EU;
- negative interests: These are the countries with interests against the construction of Corridor 8 .

Table 1. Positive, actively positive, endangered and negative interests regarding Corridor No. 8

positive interests	Greece, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia
active positive interests	Albania, Bulgaria, Italy, Turkey, EU, NATO
endangered interests	Republic of North Macedonia
negative interests	Serbia, Russia, Hungary, China

In the perspective of the conceptual framework, the network of connections is:

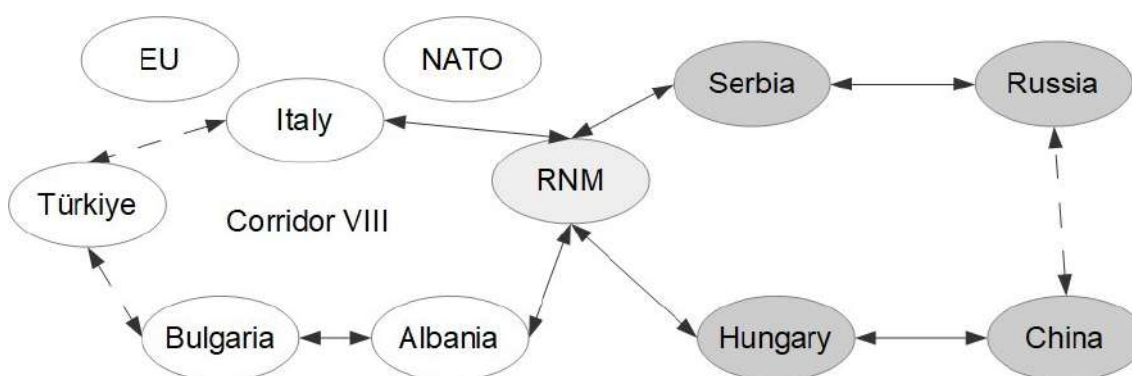


Figure 3. Network of Connections of Interest along Corridor 8

5) *Formulating action plans to advance the interests of the analyst.*

The analysis of interests regarding Corridor No. 8 focuses on the security challenges facing the Republic of North Macedonia. The country is

under active pressure from Serbia, China, Russia, and Hungary. Russia directly pursues its interests in North Macedonia and through Serbia. China, not without Russia's involvement, advances its interests through Hungary. The inclusion of Hungary among the actors actively interested in the construction of Corridor No. 8 reveals the effectiveness and potential of the proposed Interest Analysis for security needs.

The shown development is not in the interest of Bulgaria and the other EU countries. It is also not in the interest of Albania and Turkey. From this perspective, there is a need for strict control over the European funds allocated for the construction of Corridor No. 8 to overcome the challenges. In attempts to block the project, the Macedonian executive authority seeks to create negative public opinion towards the construction of Corridor No. 8. This situation requires active public diplomacy directed at society in the Republic of North Macedonia. From Bulgaria's standpoint, such public diplomacy is even more necessary due to the promotion of anti-Bulgarian sentiment among the population of the Republic of North Macedonia. Public diplomacy towards Hungarian civil society also appears essential, as civil society serves as a natural corrective to the policies of the executive authority.

The analysis from step 4) also shows that a more cautious approach is needed towards Chinese investments, loans, etc., in European countries.

CONCLUSION

With the intensification of communication in the modern world and the emphasis on the connections between players in the ensemble of social relations, interests emerge as a criterion that encompasses both personal and group motives developing within the state-society system.

A clear relationship exists between interests, their holders, and the surrounding circumstances. This makes the analysis applicable to a wide range of challenges not only for states but also for smaller or larger social conglomerates.

A facilitation circumstance is the clarification by N. Luhmann that people prefer to talk about their interests. Therefore, the proposed Analysis of Interests gains high predictability, as it demonstrates predictability in the actions of the studied actors.

The approach in the proposed Analysis of interests for security needs corresponds to neorealist trends in politics and sociology in the 21st century.

The example of Corridor No. 8 shows that the proposed Interest Analysis for security needs yields effective results. Corridor No.8 attracts the interests of not only European countries. Strengthening partnerships between the EU, NATO, and regional actors is essential to mitigate security risks and advance the development of Corridor No. 8 as a stabilizing force in the Balkans.

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