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ORCID: 0009-0008-3629-6567
ORCID: 0000-0003-1383-7339
ORCID: 0009-0005-5414-4557
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Marko Golubović*

Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Serbia

Rajko Petrović**

Institute of European Studies, Belgrade

Radiša Saković***

Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Serbia

A MODEL FOR IDENTIFYING SEPARATIST TENDENCIES: A PRACTICAL AND THEORETICAL APPROACH

Resume

Looking at the evolutionary process from the original human community to the present day, people have constantly sought freedom. Thus far, the best organizational solution to achieve such a need has been found in the formation of the state, as the key guarantor of the collective's survival. However, there are numerous collectives that currently lack their own state, and their rights are partially or (not) fully recognized within another state. Many achieve their struggle for freedom through peaceful means, negotiating with official institutions or changing the entire state system in a democratic and legal manner. However, there are also groups that endanger the territorial integrity and sovereignty of their parent states, and in order to achieve their interests, use violent means, thereby threatening peace, stability, and security. The primary goal of this study is to develop a general model that might enable the identification

* E-mail address: marko.golubovic@mod.gov.rs.

** E-mail address: rajko.petrovic@ies.rs.

*** E-mail address: radisa.sakovic@mov.gov.rs.

of separatist tendencies in sensitive areas of the world, regardless of the form of state organization. Additionally, the application of the model will be demonstrated through the example of the Republic of Serbia, one of the states with experience in combating separatist tendencies.

Keywords: separatism, Republic of Serbia, security, challenges, risks, threats

INTRODUCTION

Separatism is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that has been studied by scholars across a range of disciplines, including political science, security and defence, sociology, and anthropology. One of the challenges in understanding separatist tendencies is that they can be driven by a wide range of factors that interact with each other in complex ways. These factors can include political grievances, economic disparities, cultural identity, historical legacies, and external factors, among others. Moreover, the specific nature and intensity of these factors can vary widely across different contexts, making it difficult to develop comprehensive theories or models of separatism.

Therefore, the questions arise how to determine which security phenomena should be classified as separatist, as well as which separatist tendencies are of greater intensity and priority in relation to others, and which are used exclusively for populist purposes, without currently having serious implications for state security.

Given the above, the main goal of this paper is directed towards the development of a general model that might enable the identification of separatist tendencies in sensitive areas of the world, regardless of the form of government, as well as to demonstrate the application of this model through the example of the Republic of Serbia, as one of the countries with experience in combating separatist tendencies.

Officially, one of the main threat to national security of the Republic of Serbia is represented by separatist aspirations that are fully manifested in the territory of the Serbian Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija (hereinafter: SAP K&M), and which appear in various forms in other parts of the Republic of Serbia (Golubović and Saković 2023, 11).

In the first part of the paper, we'll analyze the concept of separatism and its key phases. After that, a model will be presented that may be used to identify and determine the intensity of separatist tendencies. Finally,

the model will be applied to selected tendencies in the Republic of Serbia, and certain solutions derived from model application will be proposed.

THE CONCEPT OF SEPARATISM

The concept of separatism presents a challenge for theorists due to its ambiguity. The mere fact that in the last 200 years there were around 403 separatist movements in the world and that at least 60 of them are still active, writes volumes supporting the complexity of these phenomena (Griffiths 2017, 205). Some of them are well-known and widely-agreed examples of separatism (Rae 2019), such as the Scottish, Catalan, Irish, Flemish (Xhardez 2020, 138), while others are less known to both the wider and expert public, such as the Hungarian irredentism in southern Slovakia or the beginnings of Moravian separatism in the Czech Republic.

Actions viewed as separatist from one angle may be perceived as struggles for freedom and human rights from another (Muro 2018, 20). Various theories of secession, such as nationalist, plebiscitary, and corrective justice theories, attempt to answer the question of who has the right to self-determination (Petrović 2022, 348–349). Some authors even tried explaining the issue in a simplistic way, claiming that parents [states] have the freedom to raise their children [citizens] as they choose, as long as they are not negligent or abusive; but if they are grossly incompetent or malicious, the authorities (international community) have a duty to intervene (Wellman 2005, 63). However, none are universally accepted as the foundation upon which the principle of the right to self-determination should be based.

Either separatism or secessionism – as an identical but more politically correct term – is neither simple nor easy to define. Cambridge Dictionary defines separatism as “the attempt to achieve political, territorial, cultural, ethnic, or religious autonomy from a larger group, entity, or country” (Cambridge Dictionary 2023). On the other hand, the Oxford Dictionary defines separatists as “a member of a group of people within a country who want to separate from the rest of the country and form their own government” (Oxford Dictionary 2023).

Furthermore, broader definitions of separatism define it as “an attempt to achieve political, territorial, cultural, ethnic, or religious autonomy in relation to a larger group, entity, or state” (Oxford Reference 2019). Such definitions put autonomy movements in an unfavorable position, given that demands for autonomy *per se* should not be considered

as separatist aspirations. Krnetić believes that “secession is a process in which a new, sovereign entity is created at the international level” (Krnetić 2017, 14), while Crawford defines secession as “the creation of a state with the help of threat force despite the absence of permission from the former holder of sovereignty” (Pavković 2012, 5).

As can be observed, most definitions focus on two key elements of separatism – the existence of a group/collective with a certain distinctiveness and their desire to separate from the majority by achieving autonomy (political independence) or complete secession (full independence). In order to differentiate between various forms of separatism, some scholars propose a distinction between general separatism and separatist tendencies. The latter is characterized by a psychological inclination to distance oneself from a larger group, without necessarily pursuing secessionist actions in order to achieve absolute political independence (Pang and Jiang 2019, 23).

Additionally, separatist aspirations manifest themselves in different phases. A separatist group never instantaneously embarks on creating parallel security forces and institutions. It is a process that typically involves phased action. The phases of separatism can be divided into four phases: 1) the identity formation phase; 2) the group mobilization phase; 3) the (un)armed conflict phase; and 4) the phase of international recognition, which may not necessarily occur in a precise order (Krause 2022, 789–780). Some authors also discuss other phases such as the language, culture, and history suppression phase, the open persecution phase of the group, or the genocide phase (Ryabinin 2017, 7), while others (Tilly 2004, 4) provide an alternative understanding of the phases associated with the sequential progression of the separatist movements (WUNC framework).

Secessionism can be formally suppressed at any stage, but the task becomes increasingly difficult and less likely to succeed as it progresses through its phases. The ideal goal of any state, in addition to the absence of separatist tendencies, is to suppress them at an early stage, preferably during the identity formation phase when they are still rather weak. The phases of secessionism also represent a type of potential suppression points that the state can exploit in its fight against separatism.

Active and potential separatist tendencies in Europe, parts of North Africa, and the Middle East can be seen in Figure 1. Although incomplete, the map shows the number of active and potential separatist tendencies that countries are facing, further emphasizing the complexity of

the right to self-determination, which is deeply embedded in the fabric of the present international security system (Roth 2023, 459).

Figure 1 – Map of active and potential separatist tendencies in Europe and parts of North Africa and the Middle East



Source: Reddit 2020.

No analytical framework or model is perfect and cannot meet the challenges posed with absolute precision. Nevertheless, it is possible to establish a general model that will serve as an auxiliary analytical tool to clearly distinguish between separatism and other forms of security challenges, risks, and threats to the state, and to gain a deeper understanding of the essence of a particular separatist group.

MODEL FOR IDENTIFYING SEPARATIST TENDENCIES (MIST)

Continuously and effectively monitoring security phenomena, including separatism, is very difficult to maintain in practice, given the numerous factors that influence them. Such analyses may often typically provide overly generalized, bureaucratic, un-integrated, and insufficiently clear information to decision-makers. Therefore, there is a need

for developing a model that identifies and integrates all key factors of separatist activities and identifies the root causes and consequences of separatist actions, as well as presenting significant findings in a visual and easily understandable manner.

The Model for identifying separatist tendencies (hereinafter: MIST), developed by the authors', serves as an analytical tool for identifying separatist tendencies. It comprehensively represents the factors that contribute to the manifestation of separatist tendencies that impact specific security phenomena. The model enables easier understanding of potential or established separatist phenomena, their causes, consequences, and possible solutions in an integrated and comprehensive manner.

It is composed of factors that influence the manifestation of separatist tendencies, including their specific values and intensities, as well as the overall intensity of these tendencies based on a predetermined scale. It is important to note that the model presented in this paper is intended to be purely theoretical, offering a conceptual basis for understanding and analyzing separatist tendencies and their influencing factors. A blank example of the model can be seen in

Table 1– Model for identifying separatist tendencies (MIST)

Model for identifying separatist tendencies (MIST)			
No.	Factors that influence the manifestation of separatist tendencies	Value	Factor intensity
1.	Perception		
2.	Historical factors		
3.	Grouping		
4.	National regulatory framework		
5.	International legal framework		
6.	Other separatist tendencies		
7.	Parent state / Home country		
8.	Political agenda		
9.	Leader		
10.	Population		
11.	Ethnicity		
12.	Religion		
13.	Culture		
14.	Language		
15.	Foreign influence		
16.	Symbols		
17.	Violation of rights		

18.	Economic prosperity		
19.	Diaspora communities		
20.	Lobbying power		
21.	Civil disobedience		
22.	Violent tactics		
23.	Soft power		
24.	Migration patterns		
25.	Territorial claims		
26.	State fragility		
27.	Miscellaneous factors		
The overall intensity of manifestation of separatist tendencies			

Source: Processed by the authors'

The factors that influence the manifestation of separatist tendencies are phenomena that in some way affect the expression of separatist tendencies. They are preconditions that can lead to secession, but those are not exclusively or ultimate factors. Also, these factors can be grouped into different categories based on their nature and impact. These categories include economic factors, political factors, identity factors, historical factors etc.

For the model to be applicable, it should not be rigidly applied, but rather modular and open to interventions when necessary. This is extremely important to note, given that analytical teams sometimes tend to cling to the form imposed by bureaucratic constraints on analysts when conducting analytical process. Due to these constraints, numerous analytical errors (Clark 2019, 32–40) occur, thus demanding creation of an open analytical model that can be adjusted to deeper and more accurate data processing.

Having this necessity in mind, the 27th “Miscellaneous factors” are defined in order to allow changes and additions to the model, as well as its further improvements and modifications to make it more reliable.

The explanation for the factors that influence the manifestation of separatist tendencies, along with examples, can be seen in Table 2. It is important to note that all examples provided in this paper are intended to serve as theoretical illustrations rather than empirical evidence. Due to the extensive scope of researching and validating each specific example, the focus of this work is to present a conceptual framework rather than conduct an exhaustive analysis of individual cases. Therefore, these examples should be understood as hypothetical scenarios and should not be regarded as definitive facts or conclusive evidence.

Table 2 – Explanation of the factors that influence the manifestation of separatist tendencies

Explanation of the factors that influence the manifestation of separatist tendencies		
No.	Factor	Explanation
1.	Perception	Subjective perception of the separatist group on the necessity of expressing separatist demands. Despite the state’s efforts to improve the position of certain groups, there are those who will always advocate for separatist aspirations (Agneman 2021, 35), regardless of economic prosperity, given that they concern ethnic, religious, or other issues as supreme (e.g. Serbs in Republic of Srpska).
2.	Historical factors	The existence of constant repetition of oppression towards a group by the state throughout history, along with the collective memory (Roehner and Rahilly 2016, 163–167) of such oppression. This concerns historical circumstances that create a collective fear within the group towards the state, given that it has shown itself to be oppressive throughout history (e.g. the Kurds in Turkiye). This factor can be subjective or objective – e.g. persecution and discrimination may be perceived by the certain community or it can be realized through segregation, suppression of language, faith or culture, expulsion or genocide.
3.	Grouping	The existence of a territory where members of a separatist group are clustered, and which can be easily separated from the parent state (e.g. simple territories such as the Vranje or so-called “Preševo Valley” or SAP K&M), is important in understanding separatism in spatial context (Kobayashi 2020). Such spaces, municipalities, counties etc. usually have a significant majority of a group or a community which is minority from the perspective of entire country.
4.	National regulatory framework	The existence of a national normative or legal framework that allows for the declaration of independence in a legal manner within a state (e.g. Northern Ireland). However it should be noted here that such a framework is usually not voluntary but rather enforced a result of conflict resolution.

5.	International legal framework	The existence of an international legal framework that allows for the right to self-determination under more or less clearly determined conditions when such rights may be established and guaranteed (e.g. the United Nations Charter). These are usually the cases when an international entity such as UN, EU, NATO, CSTO etc. intervenes as a mediator between two or more sides of conflict.
6.	Other separatist tendencies	The existence of different separatist movements within a single country, when actions of one can incite other separatist groups (such as the separatism in the territory of SAP K&M and its influence on Albanian and Bosniak separatism). This is highlighted by research (Lewis 2022, 15) which points to the existence of a direct link between exposure to separatism and support for separatist groups.
7.	Parent state / Home country	The existence of a separatist group's home state and its actions against the territorial integrity and sovereignty of another state. For instance, the Kurdish separatist movement lacks a parent state, while Albanian separatists do have one, which provides them with greater material and diplomatic support. This imbalance in external backing could influence the effectiveness of the separatist group's activities and its ability to challenge the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the target state.
8.	Political agenda	The presence of clearly stated separatist demands in the political programs of the key political parties representing separatist groups, or the existence of autonomy demands within political or other programs (e.g. political programs of Bosniak parties in the Republic of Serbia). Autonomy demands rarely lead to long-term settlement of their grievances, as separatists often use concept of autonomy as a stepping stone towards achieving full independence and sovereignty over their desired territory.

9.	Leader	<p>The existence of a charismatic leader responsible for group cohesion and maintaining hierarchical structure as well as mobilizing significant number of supporters. Some leaders, such as the late Bosniak leader Muamer Zukorlić, can have a positive influence on reducing tensions within their group, in addition to their demands for autonomy, by being loyal and cooperative to the parent state (in this example Republic of Serbia). This is sometimes the case in initial phases of emerging separatist movement, but can also be seen in later stages, after initial radical approach. These tactics are usually used for strengthening of leaders' influence and cautious furthering of their personal political ambitions. Some of these leaders establish their authority on initial radicalization so they could later be seen as "peace-makers" and "constructive mediators", while others may start from milder positions and then gradually progress towards radicalization of their rhetoric, points and demands. Therefore, psycho-ideological profile of a leader is one of crucial elements in analysis since a movement subjugated to a will of a single leader may at some point or the other significantly deviate from its ideology and practices.</p>
10.	Population	<p>The attitudes of a group's members towards loyalty to their parent state. However, measuring this factor is a complex task, as direct surveys of individuals could create unease among them. Therefore, alternative methods to assess attitudes towards loyalty can be employed, such as operative work of security agencies, OSINT (especially social networks analysis), attitudes towards military service and mobilization response rates, tax compliance and expert evaluations, among others. For instance, the current majority opinion among the Hungarian minority in SAP Vojvodina, indicates a lack of their interest in joining Hungary, but this does not necessarily guarantee their loyalty to the Republic of Serbia. Also, there is a factor to be considered that significant portion of Hungarians in Serbia isn't fluent in Serbian language. Furthermore, most of them as well as significant number of Serbs born in SAP Vojvodina have taken Hungarian citizenship in order to have better access to EU countries. Model of dual citizenship may present a factor for itself when it comes to separatist tendencies analytics since this opens an important question of divided loyalties, especially in case of conflict.</p>

11.	Ethnicity	The existence of an ethnic group that is different from the majority and creates a sense of otherness and distinctiveness among members of a separatist group (e.g. the Albanian ethnicity and its relationship with the Serbian ethnicity). In addition to ethnicity, ethno-nationalist separatism employs the concept of historical statehood or at least territorial right, which is desirable but not the most important element used to legitimize separatist aspirations, as ethnic unity always takes the key element (Voronovici 2020, 299).
12.	Religion	The presence of religious affiliation that differs from the majority religion and creates a sense of otherness and uniqueness among the members of a separatist group (e.g. the Uyghurs in the People's Republic of China, who are predominantly of the Islamic faith).
13.	Culture	The presence of a distinct culture that differs from the predominant one, and which, despite a potentially shared ethnicity, creates a sense of otherness and distinctiveness among members of a separatist group (e.g. the Vojvodina or Montenegrin distinct cultures within the Serbian ethnic group).
14.	Language	The existence of a distinct language that differs from the commonly spoken language and creates a sense of otherness or similarity among members of a separatist group (e.g. Albanian or Bosniak language, where the former creates a sense of otherness and the latter creates a sense of similarity that can be leveraged to ease tensions by emphasizing linguistic affiliation; also, the example of the Basque language, an isolate language that differs significantly from all other languages on the Iberian Peninsula). These phenomena are influenced by ethno-linguistic policies that have an impact on separatist aspirations, as best seen in the case of Ukraine (Medvedev et al. 2019, 111).
15.	Foreign influence	The actions of foreign intelligence and security services within a country aimed at using separatist groups for the purpose of achieving the national interests of another state, such as the influence of the Russian Federation on Russian separatists in Ukraine or the past German and Italian fascist influence on Croatian separatists in former Kingdom of Yugoslavia.

16.	Symbols	The existence of a culture of clear expression of national, religious, and other symbols (flags, coats of arms, and other emblems) that indicate a sense of distinctiveness and potential disloyalty to the state (e.g. emphasizing Catalan symbols and opposing the use of symbols of Kingdom of Spain).
17.	Violation of rights	The objective existence of the violation of basic human and minority rights by the state (e.g. the violation of the rights of Russians in Ukraine). It is important to note that state repression is one of the main drivers of separatist tendencies (Kingsbury 2021, 48–49). As mentioned before government oppression may also be a subjective or perceived but even as such it still makes a powerful drive for development of separatist notions and narratives.
18.	Economic prosperity	The economic prosperity of separatist groups is reflected through various economic indicators of well-being such as the overall prosperity of citizens in the state, the median income of households in the group, the average income per capita, the Gini coefficient, and other indicators (e.g. economic inequality between Scots and English). This is supported by research that shows a direct impact of regional development and economic well-being on support for separatist groups (Gehring and Schneider 2020, 16). Sometimes the regions prone to separatism might have their own micro economy based on local and legal production and services, but it can also be financed through semi legal or illegal activities. Crime is often a big contributor to financing terrorism or separatism especially since parent state is perceived as illegitimate and oppressive, therefore making its laws insignificant and obsolete in the light of fight for “national liberation”.
19.	Diaspora communities	Especially important factor is the existence of strong, dedicated and active diaspora that can support separatist tendencies through financial, political, and other means (e.g. the traditionally strong Armenian diaspora supporting the efforts of Nagorno–Karabakh to separate from Azerbaijan and join Armenia).
20.	Lobbying power	The existence of a strong lobbying group abroad, which advocates on behalf of separatist groups before major powers or other significant actors, such as the Albanian lobbyists within the USA.

21.	Civil disobedience	The level of civil disobedience, such as protests, boycotts of elections etc, needs to be measured with great caution as civil disobedience can arise both from objective dissatisfaction with the state of affairs in the country, and as a part of separatist aspirations (for example, civil disobedience without separatist tendencies includes the Martin Luther King Jr. movement, while an example of civil disobedience with elements of separatism is the mass Albanian demonstrations in 1981 in SAP K&M).
22.	Violent tactics	The level of civil disobedience demonstrated through violent methods such as attacking police, military and other security units of the state, using Molotov cocktails, stones, and other dangerous objects during protests, terrorism, etc. The willingness to use violent methods usually implies the readiness of separatist groups to engage in armed rebellion if given the opportunity (e.g. the Basque separatism and ETA's activities in Spain).
23.	Soft power	This factor concerns the ability of a separatist group to shape the preferences of others within the group or among citizens within or outside the state through soft power. It involves the ability to achieve the desired state of autonomy or independence without using force, but rather through social and cultural influence, news manipulation, persuasion and the attractiveness of the idea. The examples of Scottish and Irish separatisms illustrates this concept, as the strong soft power of the Scottish and Irish people, implemented through cinema, myths, culture, and music that gained a worldwide support. Additionally, a state can use soft power to address separatist tendencies, for instance, through education (Luknar 2022, 88).
24.	Migration patterns	The existence of certain migration patterns that lead to the radicalization of another group and creating a sense of insecurity (for instance, the increased migration/return of Serbs to the territory of the SAP K&M, which has further radicalized separatist aspirations among the Albanian population).
25.	Territorial claims	The existence of direct or indirect territorial claims to a specific part of territory or territories by a particular group or state (e.g. territorial claims of Armenia and Azerbaijan on Nagorno-Karabakh or Russia's claims on territories of Ukraine).

26.	State fragility	The existence of a weakened state that is unable to establish complete control over its territory (for example, African states that lack the institutional capacity to maintain control over their own territory).
27.	Miscellaneous factors	Other specific factors that can influence manifestation of separatist tendencies, taking into account that each separatist group is unique.

Source: Adapted from (Agneman 2021, 35); (Roehner and Rahilly 2016, 163–167); (Kobayashi 2020); (Lewis 2022, 15); (Voronovici 2020, 299); (Medvedev et al. 2019, 111); (Kingsbury 2021, 48–49); (Gehring and Schneider 2020, 16), and (Luknar 2022, 88).

In order for the model to be successful, it is necessary to determine the coefficient of value for each factor, which will be used to calculate the intensity of each specific factor. The coefficient values of separatist tendencies, developed by the authors⁷, expressed in points (ranging from 0 – no impact, 3 – moderate impact, to 5 – strong impact), can be seen in Table 3.

Table 3 – Coefficients of values for factors that influence the manifestation of separatist tendencies

Coefficients of values for factors that influence the manifestation of separatist tendencies				
No.	Factor	Value		
		0 (no impact)	3 (moderate impact)	5 (strong impact)

1.	Perception	There is no established subjective perception of the group (e.g. the Romandy in Switzerland).	The subjective perception of the group exists, but it is assessed to be susceptible to changes in different situations (e.g. improvement of economic prosperity).	A clear ¹ subjective perception of the group exists regarding the necessity of separatist tendencies regardless of the current situation and consequences (e.g. Serbs in Republic of Srpska).
2.	Historical factors	The group has not been oppressed throughout the history of the state's existence.	The group has suffered a certain form of oppression, but without crimes against humanity.	The group has been intensively oppressed on various grounds throughout the history of the state, through the use of persecution, ethnic cleansing, genocide, and other crimes against humanity.

¹ Determining the subjective feelings of a particular group is extremely difficult. Therefore, as with most of the factors mentioned, an assessment is made by analysts and experts based on available information and various analytical methods. Such an assessment can never be entirely accurate, which is why it is necessary to develop several different scenarios of separatist tendencies and the consequences of different state policies towards them. Furthermore, it is crucial to emphasize that a more sophisticated scientific methodology is essential for a comprehensive examination of these factors, which needs to be developed in further studies.

3.	Grouping	Members of the group are not concentrated in a specific area of the territory, but rather scattered throughout the entire state (e.g. Tamils in Sri Lanka and Roma).	The existence of a territory where members of the group are concentrated, but it is not easily divisible or separable from the parent state (e.g. Republic of Srpska).	The existence of a clearly divisible territory, which can be easily separated and where members of the group are clustered (e.g. Albanians in the so-called “Preševo Valley”).
4.	National regulatory framework	Secession is illegal according to the national legal framework of the state.	There is an established national normative or legal framework that allows groups the right to self-determination, but under certain conditions (e.g. the Belfast Agreement or the status of Quebec).	There is a clearly established national normative or legal framework that allows groups the right to self-determination without any special conditions.
5.	International legal framework	There are no clearly defined conditions under international law when the right to self-determination is allowed (e.g. the United Nations Charter).	Group can rely on certain interpretations of international courts decisions or opinions regarding the right to self-determination (e.g. advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice on the Declaration of Independence of Kosovo*).	The conditions under which the right to self-determination is in accordance with international law are clear and unambiguous (currently non-existent).

6.	Other separatist tendencies	There are no other separatist movements within the territory of the state, nor in the surrounding areas.	There are other separatist movements within the state, but these groups are involved in some form of conflict (e.g. the Khalistani, Naga, and Tamil movements in India and Sri Lanka).	There are other separatist movements in the territory of the state which support each other (mutual support for Catalan and Basque separatism).
7.	Parent state / Home country	A separatist group does not have its own state and relies on its own strength or the support of the international community (e.g. the Kurds and the Basques).	A separatist group may have a parent state, but it relies on its own resources or international support, which can grow to become the homeland state's support if national interests demand it (e.g. Republic of Serbia and Republic of Srpska).	A separatist group has a parent state that indirectly or directly supports it (e.g. Republic of Albania support to Albanian irredentism).
8.	Political agenda	In the political programs of relevant political parties, there are no demands for autonomy or separatist demands from the groups.	In the political programs of relevant political parties, there are demands for autonomy (e.g. Bosniak parties in the Republic of Serbia).	In the political program of relevant political parties, there are clearly expressed separatist demands (e.g. Scottish National Party).

9.	Leader	A separatist group is without a leader or divided among several uncoordinated groups (e.g. current separatist movements in Northern Ireland).	There is a charismatic leader who leads the group, but currently cooperates and coordinates their activities with the state and is ready for the group’s deradicalization (e.g. Bosniak leaders in the so-called “Sandžak” region).	There is a charismatic leader who leads the group, with exceptional ability to mobilize masses, to whom group members unquestionably believe (e.g. Mahatma Gandhi and Alija Izetbegović).
10.	Population	Only a small number of members of the group share separatist tendencies and they are not dependent on other factors (e.g. Hungarians in the Republic of Serbia).	Approximately 50% of the group’s members hold separatist tendencies that are influenced by other factors (e.g. Moldovans are currently divided on the issue of joining Romania, but the percentage in favor is increasing due to Russia’s actions in Ukraine and their approach to Transnistria).	Two-thirds of the group’s members are unequivocally in favor of independence (e.g. Albanians in SAP K&M or Russians in Crimea).

11.	Ethnicity	There is no separate ethnicity that is distinct and different from the majority (e.g. Libyan factions).	The existence of “emerging ethnic identity” which is still part of the majority ethnicity, but which under certain conditions can develop into a separate one (e.g. “Vojvodina” ethnicity).	The existence of an ethnicity that is different from the majority and creates a sense of otherness and uniqueness (e.g. Albanian ethnicity in the Republic of Serbia).
12.	Religion	Members of separatist groups share the same religious affiliation as the majority population (e.g. Catalans and Basques).	The existence of a religious affiliation that differs from the majority religion, but which <i>per se</i> does not create a sense of otherness or distinctiveness (e.g. Tamil separatism).	The existence of a religious affiliation that differs from the majority religion and creates a sense of otherness and distinctiveness (e.g. Uyghurs in the PR China).
13.	Culture	There is no separate culture that is different from the predominantly represented culture.	The existence of a separate culture that is distinct from the culturally dominant one, and which, despite potentially sharing the same ethnicity, creates a sense of otherness and uniqueness (e.g. the Vojvodina and Herzegovinian cultures).	The existence of a completely different culture compared to the majority (e.g. Hungarians in Transylvania).

14.	Language	<p>Members of a separatist group either speak the same language as the majority population or the language of the separatist group is recognized as an official language of the state (e.g. French, Dutch, and German languages in the Kingdom of Belgium).</p>	<p>The existence of a distinct language that is partially similar to the majority language, which can serve as an instrument under certain conditions to emphasize similarities between different groups (e.g. Bosniak, Croatian, and Serbian language).</p>	<p>The existence of a distinct language that differs from the majority language and creates a sense of otherness or similarity (e.g. Albanian and Basque language).</p>
15.	Foreign influence	<p>There is no foreign support for the separatist group (e.g. the secessionist Cabinda within the Republic of Angola).</p>	<p>The support of a foreign factor to a separatist group is not expressed at a level where the consequences of such support are significant for the group (e.g. Russian support for Republic of Srpska).</p>	<p>The existence of foreign support for a separatist group (e.g. USA support for Albanian separatism).</p>

16.	Symbols	The separatist group lacks clearly developed symbols.	The separatist group possesses symbols, but lacks a culture of constant and intensive expression of the same (e.g. Vojvodina).	The existence of a culture characterized by clear and intense expression of national, religious, and other symbols, which indicate the existence of distinctiveness and potential disloyalty to the state (e.g. Russians in Ukraine).
17.	Violation of rights	The state does not endanger basic human and minority rights (e.g. the situation of Hawaii within the USA).	The state intermittently violates human and minority rights (e.g. contemporary policy of the Republic of Croatia towards Serbs).	The state flagrantly and extensively violates the fundamental human and minority rights of a group, leading to the radicalization of the population (e.g. Myanmar and its human rights violations in Rakhine).
18.	Economic prosperity	Members of the separatist group enjoy good economic prosperity (e.g. Flanders within the Kingdom of Belgium).	Separatist group members, as well as the majority population, experience poor economic conditions (e.g. Serbs, Bosniaks, and Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina).	Members of the separatist group are of poor economic state, while members of the majority population are relatively more prosperous (e.g. Kurds in Turkiye).

19.	Diaspora communities	There is no active diaspora.	The existence of a diaspora that, under certain conditions, could potentially sponsor a separatist group (e.g. the Irish diaspora).	The existence of an active diaspora that provides support for separatist aspirations of a group through financial, political, and other means (e.g. Albanian diaspora).
20.	Lobbying power	The separatist group lacks lobbying power.	The separatist group has an underdeveloped lobbying group (e.g. Kurds).	The separatist group has exceptional lobbying potential with broad reach and other relevant factors (e.g. Albanian lobby).
21.	Civil disobedience	The separatist group does not exhibit civil disobedience.	The separatist group occasionally displays civil disobedience (e.g. Quebec).	The separatist group practices a high level of civil disobedience (e.g. Catalonia).
22.	Violent tactics	The separatist group employs peaceful means and refrains from using violence (e.g. Scottish independence movement).	The separatist group occasionally resorts to violence (e.g. Albanians in the so-called "Preševo Valley").	The separatist group engages in intensive use of violence (e.g. the former Chechen and Irish secessionism).

23.	Soft power	The separatist group lacks soft power (e.g. Serbian independence movement in Bosnia and Herzegovina).	The separatist group in question exhibits a partial capacity for exercising soft power (e.g. Bosniak separatism in the so-called “Sandžak”).	The separatist group possesses an exceptional capability of soft power (e.g. Scottish separatism).
24.	Migration patterns	A specific pattern of migration does not exist.	Certain migration patterns do exist, but they are of low intensity (e.g. the return of displaced Bosniaks to the territory of Republic of Srpska).	The existence of certain migration patterns may lead to the radicalization and perceived threat of another group (e.g. settlement of Muslims in Kashmir during the 20th century).
25.	Territorial claims	There are no direct or indirect territorial claims made on a specific part of the territory.	Existence of indirectly expressed territorial claims over a specific portion of territory (e.g. the region of so-called “Sandžak”).	The existence of unequivocally stated territorial claims on a certain area (e.g. Kurdistan encompasses territories of Turkiye, Syria, Iraq, and Iran).
26.	State fragility	The state is fully capable of maintaining control over its entire territory.	A state is not in full control over a certain portion of its territory (e.g. the Republic of Serbia in regard to SAP K&M).	The state is incapable of maintaining control over large portions of its territory (e.g. Nigeria).
27.	Miscellaneous factors	The existence of specific factors unique to a particular separatist group. Assign 0, 3, or 5 points for each additional factor based on the expert assessment of the analyst.		

Source: Processed by the authors’.

After the identified factors and their coefficient values have been determined, they are then scaled. The scale of the intensity of separatist tendencies can be observed in Table 4.

Table 4 – Scale of intensity of separatist tendencies

Scale of intensity of separatist tendencies		
The intensity scale	Value	Explanation
Minimum (not excluded)	0–15	There is no established separatist presence, but it may emerge under certain conditions.
Low	16–45	There are separatist groups and actions in their early or initial stages (potential phase of identity formation).
Medium	46–70	There are separatist activities in the developed initial phases, with the potential for further intensification through the consolidation of separatist forces (the potential mobilization phase).
High	71–90	Separatist actions become open and public and require an immediate response from the state (potential phase of (un)armed conflict).
Very high	91 +	Separatist groups begin to create parallel institutions and forces, where in this phase preventive action is impossible (potential phase of international recognition).

Source: Processed by the authors’.

By using the model, it is possible to determine several key parameters, such as: 1) Key factors that influence certain separatist tendencies, as well as their intensity of manifestation; 2) A scale of the intensity of a specific separatist tendency can be obtained by adding up the values determined by the analyst based on specific factors; 3) Regular monitoring of various security phenomena within the state and their filtering through the model can identify separatist groups in early stages that need to be monitored; 4) Based on the analysis of integrated data, it is possible to map key factors that influence separatist tendencies (causes), which can be further elaborated through various analytical methods. Thus, potential solutions can be identified.²

² If the analysis determines that there is a significant influence of the economic well-being factor and its correlation with the growth of separatist tendencies, it is possible to direct the analytical team towards the development of scenarios in which the behavior of the separatist group will be analyzed in the case of improved

In the following sections of this paper, we will elaborate on the model by providing examples of selected separatist tendencies within the Republic of Serbia.

APPLICATION OF MIST IN THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA

To present the implementation of the model, it is necessary to start with certain assumptions regarding the key separatist tendencies. This includes irredentist tendencies (Figure 2) towards the territory of the Republic of Serbia, which can be defined as a strategy of individuals or groups at the national and international level with the goal of unifying all territories where members of a particular group reside into a single political entity (Malbašić and Trbojević 2020, 39).

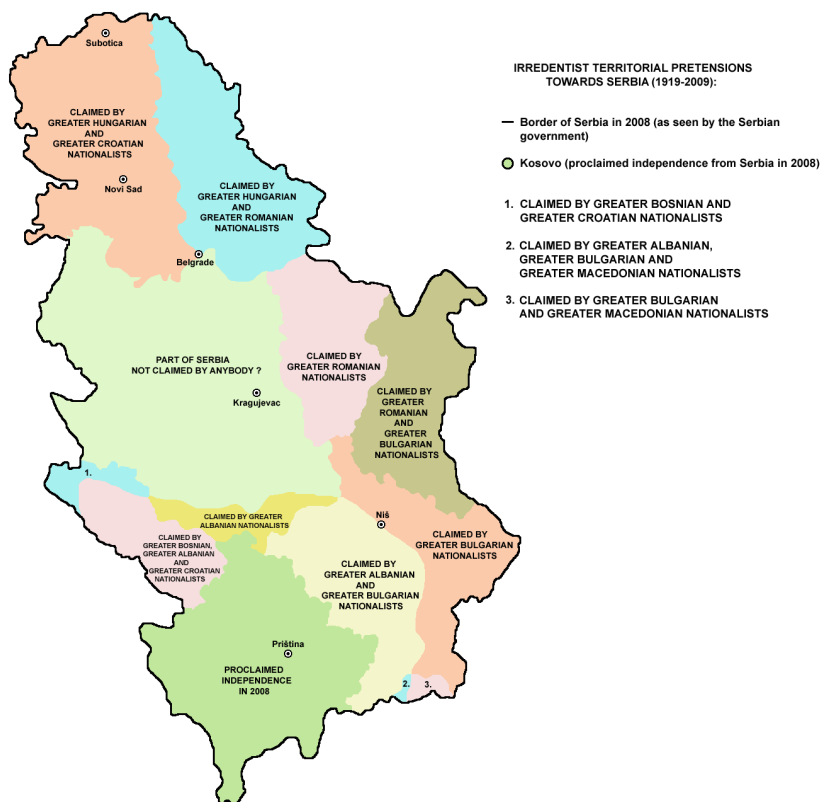
It is thus estimated that there are two significant separatist tendencies identified in the Republic of Serbia. The first is Bosniak separatism, primarily observed in the Raška–Polimlje region, often referred to as the “Sandžak”. The second is Albanian separatism, which manifests in the municipalities of Preševo and Bujanovac. These municipalities, along with Medveđa, where the population is predominantly Serbian, collectively make up the region known as the “Preševo Valley”.

There are also other factors in the Republic of Serbia that are currently of very low intensity and which, at least in the short and medium term, do not pose a threat to the security of the Republic of Serbia. One such factor is the Hungarian factor, which tends to manifest in areas where Hungarians form the majority population, particularly in the northern part of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina (Vojvodina). The presence of a significant Hungarian population in these areas contributes to a distinct regional identity. Another noteworthy factor is the Vojvodina factor, primarily embraced by a small number of citizens of the Republic of Serbia who perceive Vojvodina as a distinct element within the state. This perspective fosters the development of a “Vojvodinian” identity separate from the broader Serbian national identity.³

economic conditions. Therefore, it is possible to develop certain policies such as equal regional development or decentralization, which potentially could calm down separatist tendencies and give the state more time for preparation.

³ The Vojvodina factor can be identified among an extremely small number of citizens with extremist views of different ethnic affiliations, as well as certain political parties such as the League of Social Democrats of Vojvodina. They tend to radicalize the polarization of citizens of the Republic of Serbia, who, due to exposure to radical political extremes, accept the political options of right and left populism

Figure 2 – Irredentist territorial pretensions towards Serbia



Source: Panonian 2009.

Separatist tendencies in SAP K&M will not be considered, as they are already fully expressed and require separate research, but they still constitute separatism in its “terminal phase” of semi–frozen conflict. Therefore, focus of this paper are separatist tendencies in the so–called “Sandžak region” and Vranjska or so–called “Preševo Valley”.

In addition, the potential application of the model in analyzing certain security phenomena that could potentially develop into open separatist actions in the long term will be presented. Thus, the “Vojvodina factor” will be incorporated into the model to illustrate how it can

as the “lesser evil”. In other words, citizens of the Republic of Serbia become more loyal to the state the longer they are exposed to political extremes, and the intentions and consequences of the actions of the Vojvodina factor, as well as their loyalty, are questionable.

contribute to better understanding of a particular security phenomenon and its classification.

Application of the model in the analysis of Bosniak and Albanian separatism in Serbia

In Table 5, it is possible to see the application of the model in the example of Bosniak separatism in the so-called “Sandžak region” in the Republic of Serbia, where factor intensity for each factor has been assessed by the authors’ based on the framework presented in Table 3.

Table 5 – Application of MIST in the example of Bosniak separatism in the Republic of Serbia

Application of MIST in the example of Bosniak separatism in the Republic of Serbia			
No.	Factors that influence the manifestation of separatist tendencies	Value	Factor intensity
1.	Perception	5	Strong impact
2.	Historical factors	5	Strong impact
3.	Grouping	5	Strong impact
4.	National regulatory framework	0	No impact
5.	International legal framework	3	Moderate impact
6.	Other separatist tendencies	5	Strong impact
7.	Parent state / Home country	3	Moderate impact
8.	Political agenda	3	Moderate impact
9.	Leader	3	Moderate impact
10.	Population	3	Moderate impact
11.	Ethnicity	5	Strong impact
12.	Religion	5	Strong impact
13.	Culture	3	Moderate impact
14.	Language	3	Moderate impact
15.	Foreign influence	3	Moderate impact
16.	Symbols	3	Moderate impact
17.	Violation of rights	0	No impact
18.	Economic prosperity	3	Moderate impact
19.	Diaspora communities	3	Moderate impact
20.	Lobbying power	3	Moderate impact
21.	Civil disobedience	0	No impact
22.	Violent tactics	0	No impact
23.	Soft power	3	Moderate impact
24.	Migration patterns	0	No impact

25.	Territorial claims	3	Moderate impact
26.	State fragility	3	Moderate impact
27.	Miscellaneous factors	0	No impact
The overall intensity of manifestation of separatist tendencies		75	High

Source: Processed by the authors’.

By applying the model in the example of Bosniak separatism, the overall intensity of separatist tendencies has been determined to be 75 points, which represents the initial phase of the “HIGH” intensity scale. Thus, an intensification of non-violent resistance can be expected, where armed resistance is unlikely, but cannot be ruled out in case of the crisis overflow from the SAP K&M to the so-called “Preševo Valley” and the so-called “Sandžak”, as well as in case of the influence of foreign factors.

In other words, the Bosniak factor is increasingly showing open separatist tendencies, disguised as demands for autonomy and regionalization under the auspices of European Union, with the aim of permanent separation of the region of Raška, so-called “Sandžak” from the Republic of Serbia, as well as a part of it in Montenegro, and its creation as a separate “European region”, which would be a separate federal unit outside the composition of the Republic of Serbia and Montenegro in the hypothetical case of European Union federalization.

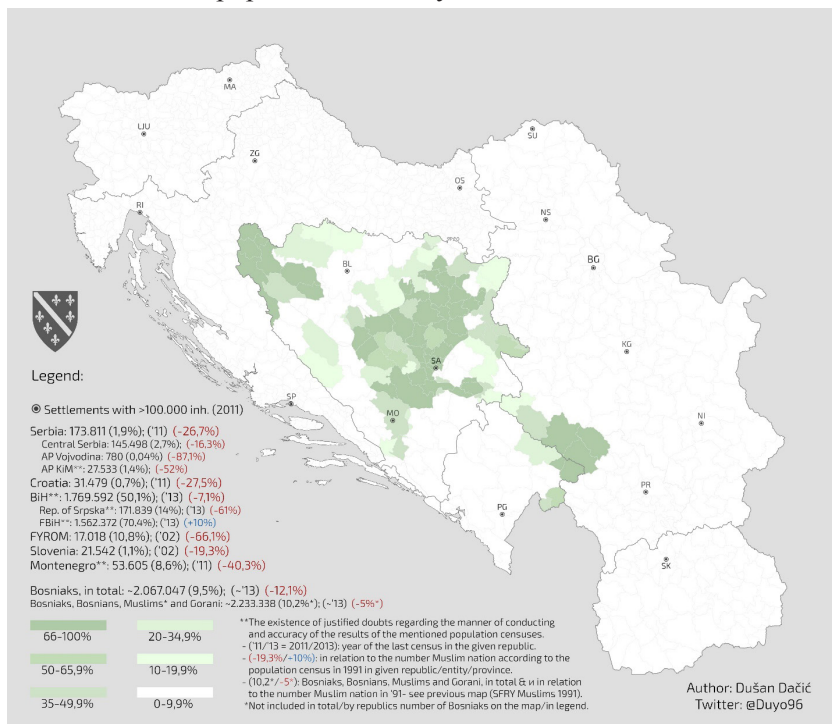
Taking the above into consideration, Bosniak separatism is long-term oriented, and its manifestation will be intensified by the potential accession of the Republic of Serbia and Montenegro to the European Union. However, the European Union, at least currently, does not support separatist groups on its territory. This is only possible in the case of the regionalization of the European Union, which gives Bosniak separatists the opportunity to lobby within European institutions at a higher level than the current one.

In the future, an intensification of demands for autonomy in the so-called “Sandžak” region can be expected without a direct violation of the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the Republic of Serbia. The idea is to use subtle separatism under the guise of autonomy demands to bring the Republic of Serbia to a *fait accompli* where, as a member of the European Union, it will be more susceptible to demands for regionalization and other potential “European regions” within the country. This strategy is likely to involve lobbying within European institutions at a higher level than is currently possible. This could be viewed as a form of political subversion or manipulation of state institutions by non-state actors.

On the other hand, Bosniak separatism could put Bosniaks living in the so-called “Sandžak” in an extremely dangerous position that could result in isolation in every form. This is because it is extremely difficult, both geographically and in every other way, to connect the region with a corridor that would ensure the effective functioning of Bosnia and Herzegovina with the “Sandžak” in its composition (see figure 2), so the most rational solution might be the creation of a “European region”.

Ethnic enclaves in the region are highly complex formations, and the solution of merging with Bosnia and Herzegovina could only be achieved through war or ethnic cleansing, which makes this scenario highly unlikely. Almost all previous attempts to achieve ethnic homogeneity as a condition for statehood have ended in tragedy (Dubnov and Robson 2019, 27).

Figure 3 – Bosniaks in the territory of the former Yugoslavia according to the 2002/11/13 population census year



Source: Dačić 2022.

In Table 6, it is possible to see the application of the model using the example of Albanian separatism in the so-called “Preševo Valley”

in the Republic of Serbia, where factor intensity for each factor has been assessed by the authors' based on the framework presented in Table 3.

Table 6 – Application of MIST on the example of Albanian separatism in the Republic of Serbia

Application of MIST on the example of Albanian separatism in the Republic of Serbia			
No.	Factors that influence the manifestation of separatist tendencies	Value	Factor intensity
1.	Perception	3	Moderate impact
2.	Historical factors	3	Moderate impact
3.	Grouping	5	Strong impact
4.	National regulatory framework	0	No impact
5.	International legal framework	3	Moderate impact
6.	Other separatist tendencies	5	Strong impact
7.	Parent state / Home country	5	Strong impact
8.	Political agenda	3	Moderate impact
9.	Leader	0	No impact
10.	Population	3	Moderate impact
11.	Ethnicity	5	Strong impact
12.	Religion	5	Strong impact
13.	Culture	5	Strong impact
14.	Language	5	Strong impact
15.	Foreign influence	5	Strong impact
16.	Symbols	5	Strong impact
17.	Violation of rights	0	No impact
18.	Economic prosperity	3	Moderate impact
19.	Diaspora communities	5	Strong impact
20.	Lobbying power	5	Strong impact
21.	Civil disobedience	3	Moderate impact
22.	Violent tactics	3	Moderate impact
23.	Soft power	3	Moderate impact
24.	Migration patterns	0	No impact
25.	Territorial claims	5	Strong impact
26.	State fragility	3	Moderate impact
27.	Miscellaneous factors	0	No impact
The overall intensity of manifestation of separatist tendencies		90	High

Source: Processed by the authors'.

Using the model on the example of Albanian separatism, a total intensity of separatist tendencies was determined to be 90 points, representing the highest phase of the “HIGH” intensity scale, extremely close to the “VERY HIGH” intensity scale where state preventive policies are no longer effective. As a result, there is a potential transition from non-armed to armed insurrection, terrorist actions, and demands for international recognition in a certain form.

In other words, the Albanian factor in the political discourse displays open separatist tendencies, almost at the level of creating parallel institutions. In contrast to the subtler and more planned Bosniak separatism, Albanian separatism in the so-called “Preševo Valley” aims to include the mentioned region in negotiations between Belgrade and Priština (Politika 2023), in order to achieve a territorial exchange or a certain degree of autonomy for the region. This would limit the action of the Republic of Serbia in the “Preševo Valley” in the long run and ultimately lead to the further creation of the so-called “Greater Albania”.

In contrast to the situation in the so-called “Sandžak”, separatism in the so-called “Preševo Valley” is much easier to manifest in the form of demands for a demilitarized zone, followed by the granting of a special status, and ultimately the concrete separation of the region from the Republic of Serbia. This is due to the fact that this region is easily connectable with the region of the SAP K&M, so the problem of corridors and ethnic enclaves does not exist. It is important to note that the so-called “Preševo Valley” has already experienced an escalation of armed conflicts, which were successfully neutralized by the Republic of Serbia. However, escalation of similar conflicts shouldn't be ruled out in near future.

Application of MIST in the analysis of the Vojvodina factor in Serbia

In the public discourse of the Republic of Serbia, it is often assumed that if the issue of SAP K&M is not resolved, separatist tendencies will spread to other regions. Among other legitimate regions (such as the so-called “Sandžak” and the so-called “Preševo Valley”), Vojvodina is also frequently mentioned as a separatist issue that is being analyzed.

Using the Vojvodina example, we will demonstrate how the model can help understand a certain security phenomenon that is not fully developed and needs to be classified in a certain way. The assumption of

political leaders, as well as analysts, that there are separatist tendencies in Vojvodina, can be the reason for numerous analytical errors, where analytical material is prepared based on a pre-determined conclusion, in order to justify the recipient's views. To reduce the impact of random interpretation of security phenomena and their incorrect definitions, it is possible to apply the model to resolve any misunderstandings. In this way, the analysis of the Vojvodina factor through the model can be seen in Table 7, where factor intensity for each factor has been assessed by the authors' based on the framework presented in Table 3.

Table 7 – Application of MIST in the example of the Vojvodina factor in the Republic of Serbia

Application of MIST in the example of the Vojvodina factor in the Republic of Serbia			
No.	Factors that influence the manifestation of separatist tendencies	Value	Factor intensity
1.	Perception	0	No impact
2.	Historical factors	0	No impact
3.	Grouping	0	No impact
4.	National regulatory framework	0	No impact
5.	International legal framework	3	Moderate impact
6.	Other separatist tendencies	3	Moderate impact
7.	Parent state / Home country	0	No impact
8.	Political agenda	3	Moderate impact
9.	Leader	0	No impact
10.	Population	0	No impact
11.	Ethnicity	3	Moderate impact
12.	Religion	0	No impact
13.	Culture	3	Moderate impact
14.	Language	0	No impact
15.	Foreign influence	0	No impact
16.	Symbols	3	Moderate impact
17.	Violation of rights	0	No impact
18.	Economic prosperity	3	Moderate impact
19.	Diaspora communities	0	No impact
20.	Lobbying power	0	No impact
21.	Civil disobedience	0	No impact
22.	Violent tactics	0	No impact
23.	Soft power	0	No impact

24.	Migration patterns	0	No impact
25.	Territorial claims	0	No impact
26.	State fragility	3	Moderate impact
27.	Miscellaneous factors	0	No impact
The overall intensity of manifestation of separatist tendencies		24	Low

Source: *Processed by the authors*’.

By applying the model on the example of the Vojvodina factor, the total intensity of separatist tendencies was determined to be 24 points, which represents the initial phase of the “LOW” intensity scale. This indicates the existence of potential (in this case, low probability) for the early stage in forming of a separate identity.

Based on this framework, we can conclude that there is a potential for the creation of Vojvodina separatist tendencies in the case of stronger polarization of citizens of the Republic of Serbia and the strengthening of national disunity caused by artificial divisions.

Without applying the model, the Vojvodina factor could be classified as a separatist tendency, considering the theatrical performances of the political leaders, as well as the political benefits that certain political actors may have with right-wing populist discourse in the public. However, by analyzing specific factors, it has been determined that the Vojvodina factor should not be disregarded as a security phenomenon, but that it should not currently be classified as a region with significant separatist tendencies.

This could intensify in the long term in the case of neglecting national unity by the state, which can create necessary distinctiveness and otherness in relation to the Republic of Serbia. A similar example can be found in the Herzegovinian factor, which, if not channeled in the right way by the state, might have long-term detrimental consequences similar to the consequences of the creation of the contemporary Montenegrin national corpus. However, Herzegovinian type of separatism is highly unlikely since both from historical and actual perspective there is a strong sense of Serbian identity without specific forms that were present in Montenegro for centuries.

PROPOSED SOLUTIONS DERIVED FROM MODEL APPLICATION

Several key factors can be identified as contributing to Bosniak extremism, including ethnic and religious radicalization and extremism. This is influenced by historical circumstances that have shaped the perception of the region's population. Furthermore, the concentration of the Bosniak population in a specific territory creates the potential for separation from Serbia and Montenegro, with the aim of establishing a European region.

Another factor to consider is the impact of Albanian separatism in the SAP K&M and the so-called "Preševo Valley" on the situation in the "Sandžak" region. The influence of foreign factors, particularly Turkiye, has the potential to destabilize the Republic of Serbia by providing support to Bosniak separatism. Additionally, the general economic situation in the Republic of Serbia plays a role in shaping the overall environment.

On the other hand, there are several potential factors that the Republic of Serbia can utilize in addressing Bosniak separatism. Firstly, the similarity between the Bosniak and Serbian language and culture serves as a basis for fostering stronger bonds and closeness between the two peoples. Building upon these shared elements can contribute to a sense of unity and understanding.

Secondly, the exceptional cooperation between Bosniak leaders and the Republic of Serbia presents an opportunity for constructive engagement and dialogue. By nurturing this cooperation, mutual interests can be pursued, and potential sources of tension can be mitigated.

Thirdly, the Republic of Serbia's positive and productive collaboration with the Republic of Turkiye, driven by common economic interests in the Balkans, provides an additional leverage point. This cooperation can contribute to regional stability and facilitate diplomatic efforts aimed at addressing separatist aspirations.

Furthermore, the Republic of Serbia's current approach towards the Bosniak community deserves recognition. The state's firm stance against all forms of ethnic and religious extremism reinforces the importance of tolerance, respect, and the rejection of divisive ideologies.

In addition, the Republic of Srpska and Montenegro can serve as instruments of pressure for the Republic of Serbia in case of foreign support for separatist aspirations within its borders.⁴

When it comes to Albanian separatism, we can separate several key factors that contribute to Albanian separatism. Firstly, ethnic and religious radicalization and extremism play a significant role in fueling separatist sentiments. These factors contribute to a sense of division and polarization within the Albanian population, leading to the pursuit of separatist agendas.

Secondly, historical circumstances, particularly the impact of war events in the SAP K&M and the territory of the so-called “Preševo Valley,” have shaped the perceptions of the population in the region. These events have influenced the collective memory and identity, fostering a desire for separation from the Republic of Serbia.

The concentration of the Albanian population in a distinct territory that is geographically separable from the rest of Serbia provides another underlying cause of separatism. This concentration creates a sense of distinctiveness and fosters aspirations for integration into the concept of a “Greater Albania.”

Furthermore, the unresolved issue of the SAP K&M poses a significant challenge. The lack of a comprehensive resolution and the ongoing political complexities contribute to the persistence of separatist tendencies.

The extremely strong influence of foreign factors, including the Albanian diaspora and their lobbying efforts towards major global powers, plays a significant role in promoting and supporting separatist aspirations. These external influences further exacerbate the separatist sentiment and contribute to the pursuit of a “Greater Albania” agenda.

Lastly, the existence of “sponsor states,” including the majority of western states and the Republic of Albania, indirectly supports the creation of a “Greater Albania” and provides logistical and financial

⁴ The international legal framework is also one of the strong levers that the Republic of Serbia can use, especially after the intervention of the Russian Federation in Ukraine. However, this example shows the sensitivity of this lever to geopolitical power games and double standards. Therefore, this lever is not mentioned, considering that it has become negligible due to the continuous violation of international law by major powers. In other words, the Republic of Serbia can invoke international law as much as it wants, but in the end, great powers will act in accordance with their national interests. If they want a special region like the so-called “Sandžak”, it will happen regardless of the international legal framework.

assistance to separatist actors. The example of the Fund for the so-called “Preševo Valley” highlights the external support received by separatist movements.

The Republic of Serbia possesses certain potential leverage that can be utilized in addressing Albanian separatism. Firstly, the dependence of the Albanian separatist movement on foreign factors, particularly the influence and interests of major powers, primarily the United States, plays a significant role in shaping the dynamics of the separatist movement. Understanding and effectively managing these external factors can provide the Republic of Serbia with leverage in mitigating the impact of separatist aspirations.

The current attitude of the Republic of Serbia towards the Albanian community is crucial. The state emphasizes the importance of sanctioning all forms of ethnic and religious extremism, while simultaneously displaying a high level of tolerance for the violation of the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia by Albanian political leaders in the so-called “Preševo Valley”. This approach allows for a delicate balance where the state does not oppress the separatist group directly, potentially influencing their motivations and actions.

The Republic of Serbia can also draw upon strategic partnerships with neighboring countries, including the Republic of North Macedonia, Montenegro, and Greece, to counter Albanian separatism. These nations share similar concerns and face similar separatist aspirations, enabling collaborative efforts to suppress and address separatist tendencies in the region.

Furthermore, the Republic of Srpska and Montenegro serve as instruments of pressure that the Republic of Serbia can employ in response to external support for separatist aspirations within its borders. The influence and actions of foreign factors can be met with coordinated responses and countermeasures, utilizing these strategic alliances to protect the territorial integrity and stability of the Republic of Serbia.

If key actors from all sides demonstrate political will, several key policies can be implemented to reconcile seemingly irreconcilable parties and pave the way for a solution. Firstly, it is essential to strengthen national unity by actively suppressing any form of polarization and division within the nation. This includes countering artificial political and other divisions that may be instigated by foreign factors or by the

state itself. The focus should be on fostering a sense of shared identity and common purpose.⁵

A crucial aspect of the solution lies in implementing genuine decentralization within the Republic of Serbia at the level of municipal self-government units. Decentralization should be based on administrative and functional considerations rather than religious or ethnic divisions. Reforming the current electoral law of the Republic of Serbia is necessary to reduce the influence of partitocracy and enhance the democratic process.

A “zero tolerance” policy should be adopted towards any form of ethnic and religious extremism, firmly addressing and confronting such ideologies and actions. This approach sends a clear message that such divisive behavior will not be tolerated within the Republic of Serbia.

Creating more favorable economic conditions is paramount to improve the well-being of all citizens. This involves promoting balanced regional development, implementing measures to reduce taxes, enhancing infrastructure connectivity, and fostering entrepreneurship to stimulate economic growth and prosperity.

The development of analytical capacities within the national security system of the Republic of Serbia is crucial. Strengthening these capacities will enable improved prevention policies, enhancing the state’s ability to identify and address potential challenges and threats to security. Additionally, other preventive (hard) policies should be considered, including the withdrawal of investments from regions where separatist tendencies emerge, enhancing security and military capacities, actively

⁵ Strengthening of national unity prevents the creation of new identities and suppresses secessionism before it appears. Currently, the existence of peculiarities in the form of Herzegovinian, Vojvodinian, and others should be directed towards the centralization of the same in one Serbian identity, with complete respect for the peculiarities that each of them brings. However, for the strengthening of national unity, joint action of all state authorities and citizens is necessary, who would through the education system and similar activity, fight against prejudices (the attitude towards Serbs refugees in the Republic of Serbia and the attitude towards Serbs from the Republic of Serbia outside its borders) and point out the importance of Serbian in relation to special regional identities. The primary reason for the current distancing of regional identities, besides the influence of the foreign factor, is the lack of an integrated policy that would actively work on bringing together and integrating all Serbian peculiarities into one. That policy would certainly have positive effects given that the differences within the Serbian ethnic and national corpus in the Balkans are far less and trivial than some other examples (Romanian, Hungarian, Croatian, etc.).

fragmenting secessionist groups, and supporting the emergence of alternative secessionist movements that focus on autonomy building.

The solutions in question do not represent the final strategy that the state should apply in the fight against separatism, as creating such a strategy would require a serious commitment from the state and the involvement of the entire society in the process of its development.

CONCLUSION

In the first part of the paper, the concept of separatism and its phases were defined in order to successfully distinguish it from other similar security phenomena. The second part of the paper presented the MIST, which may be used for the identification of specific separatist tendencies and important vectors that affect them. In the third part of the paper possible applications of the model were shown through concrete examples of Bosniak and Albanian separatism in Republic of Serbia, as well as the way in which it can serve as an auxiliary tool in defining a particular phenomenon using the example of the Vojvodina factor.

The application of the model has determined that the most serious separatist tendency in the Republic of Serbia is present within Albanian separatism, which is at the threshold of very high intensity of action and represents a kind of point of no return for the separatist group. When separatist tendencies reach a very high intensity of action, we come to a situation in which the state can either regain control over its part of the territory by force or accept the demands of the separatist group. Returning to the previous situation is almost impossible, considering that the critical mass is present in the separatist group to such an extent that the perception of the population changes, and it can only be pacified, but never “tamed”.

On the other hand, the so-called “Sandžak” has the potential to be used for an attempt to disintegrate the Orthodox Christian and Serbian corpus. This stems from the fact that Bosniak separatism is primarily manifested on a religious, and then ethnic basis. Thus, legitimate dissatisfaction of the Bosniak people with the overall situation in the Republic of Serbia could be exploited by powerful Islamist and terrorist groups, which would not be directed towards directly threatening the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the Republic of Serbia, but would be used as an instrument for sowing fear in European states, as well as

a gathering place for certain terrorist groups in Bosnia and Herzegovina and SAP K&M.

At the end of the paper, key solutions in fighting against separatist tendencies were proposed that, according to the authors' estimation, would have the greatest impact on giving effective answers to separatist actions.

Based on the presented analysis, it seems clear that some volatile regions in the Republic of Serbia require urgent attention and finding of comprehensive solutions. The problems in these regions have been perpetuated by a variety of factors, including economic stagnation, political manipulation, and ethnic tensions. Failure to address these challenges will only lead to further destabilization, which could be exploited by domestic and foreign actors for their own gain. It is crucial that all parties involved work together to find sustainable and equitable solutions that will promote stability and prosperity for all.

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Марко Голубовић*

Министарство одбране Републике Србије

Рајко Петровић**

Институт за европске студије, Београд

Радиша Саковић***

Министарство одбране Републике Србије

МОДЕЛ ИДЕНТИФИКАЦИЈЕ СЕПАРАТИСТИЧКИХ ТЕЖЊИ: ПРАКТИЧНИ И ТЕОРЕТСКИ ПРИСТУП

Сажетак

Географски положај Републике Србије, њена историја, као и припадање региону Југоисточне Европе, стављају је у незавидан положај када су у питању војни и невојни изазови, ризици и претње безбедности државе. Једне од таквих претњи представљају и сепаратистичке тежње у Републици Србији које су у потпуности испољене на територији Аутономне Покрајине Косово и Метохија, а које се у различитим облицима појављују и у осталим деловима Републике Србије. Основни циљ рада јесте стварање модела којим ће се на једном месту идентификовати сепаратистичке тежње на територији Републике Србије, утврдити њихов интензитет, као и разрадити кључни узроци и последице, али и изложити потенцијална решења.

Применом Методе идентификације сепаратистичких тежњи (МИСТ) утврђене су две кључне сепаратистичке тежње, од којих је бошњачки сепаратизам у Рашко–полимској области (тзв. Санџак) у раној фази развоја ка (не)оружаном отпору, док је албански сепаратизам у тзв. „Прешевској долини“ у касној фази (не)оружаног отпора са тенденцијом преласка на стварање паралелних безбедносних институција и захтевања међународног признања или одређеног вида специјалног статуса. Поред наведеног, анализиран

* Имејл- адреса: marko.golubovic@mod.gov.rs.

** Имејл- адреса: rajko.petrovic@ies.rs.

*** Имејл- адреса: radisa.sakovic@mov.gov.rs.

је и војвођански фактор, где је утврђено да исти има потенцијал преливања ка фази стварања идентитета, што потенцијално представља рану фазу сепаратистичког деловања.

На крају рада предложени су и одређени начини борбе Републике Србије против сепаратистичких тежњи. Поменута решења су само нека од кључних који би, по процени аутора заснованој на примени МИСТ–а, имала највећи утицај на решење сепаратистичких деловања.

За стварање свеобухватног решења неопходан је заједнички наступ свих институција Републике Србије, међународне заједнице, политичка воља, као и воља становништва која у доста случајева зависи од воље политичких лидера различитих заједница. У супротном, кризни региони Републике Србије ће и даље остати подложни инструментализацији и злоупотреби од стране, како домаћих политичких актера, тако и великих сила.

Кључне речи: сепаратизам, Република Србија, безбедност, изазови, ризици, претње

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