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EURO-ATLANTIC INTEGRATION OF SERBIA – OBSTACLES AND PRIORITIES¹

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Contemporary Serbia is engaged in two significant political processes: the membership to the European Union and admission to the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation. The cooperation with the EU was established in the 90s of 20 century, and than slowly evolved. Serbia become an official candidate in 2009 and in January 2014th the accession negotiations has started. Main obstacles and challenges are: the conflict over Kosovo, cooperation with ICTY and Serbian-Croatian unresolved issues.

Secondly, Serbia is cooperating with NATO in the area of security policy devoted to prevention of interethnic relations, peace building and security sector reforms. In 2006, the country joined the Partnership for Peace. The main barriers still remain the status of Kosovo and a memory of the 78-day air campaign in 1999.

Thirdly, Serbia is also collaborating with Russia in economic, military and energy sector, in ex: Serbia has had an observer status in the Collective Security Treaty Organisation from 2013.

Key words: Republic of Serbia; NATO; UE; Russia.

The Republic of Serbia constructed its foreign policy on four pillars which are: cooperation with Russia, European Union, USA and China[1]. Serbia seems to be divided between the European Union, NATO and Russia. On one hand, there is a striving for democracy and cooperation with Euro-Atlantic structures. While on the other hand, Serbia collaborates with Russia. Moreover, Serbia is still in the process of transition in crucial branches such as: defence policy, judiciary, civil administration and economic policy.

This article is divided into two parts. The first is devoted to the process of integration of Serbia with the EU. The author will analyze the priorities, challenges and obstacles of integration. Additionally, statistics showing levels of endorsement of the EU by Serbian citizens, will be presented. The second part will take into account Serbia-NATO cooperation. For this component it is significant to stress: president Tomislav Nikolić's stance towards NATO, aspects of Serbian relations with Kosovo and areas of cooperation with NATO. Moreover, arguments for and against NATO membership/cooperation as well as cooperation between Serbia and Russia, will be presented.

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Serbia and the EU

The history of Serbian accession to the European Union began in 1997, when the EU established the political and economic development of bilateral relations in the Balkan region. In 1999, the EU proposed the new Stabilisation and Association Process for the five countries of Southeastern Europe (BiH, Croatia, Macedonia, Albania, Serbia and Montenegro). A year later these countries become potential candidates for EU membership. In 2008, Serbia signed the Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) with official application for EU membership coming on 22 December, 2009. It then waited one year to open negotiations mainly due to the R. Mladić² case. Moreover, in the same year travel to the EU became easier for citizens of Serbia because of a visa liberalisation agreement. In June 2010, EU member states decided to start the ratification process of the SAA, and on 1 March 2012, the European Council confirmed Serbia as a candidate country. The key year for Serbia was 2013, when the European Council agreed to open accession negotiations with Serbia, and in September the SAA entered into force along with the so-called «screening» process. The next key point was on 21 January 2014, where the first Intergovernmental Conference signalled the formal start of Serbia's accession negotiations [2; 3].

Obstacles, challenges and priorities for integration

Nonetheless, becoming an EU member is a lengthy process, which involves cooperation mainly in the area of politics and economy. Serbia's relations with neighbours such as Kosovo, Croatia and Montenegro plays a crucial role in the Western Balkan region. In comparison to the Republic of Croatia, which joined the EU in July 2013, there are several factors that pose delays for Serbia's integration. The most significant point of consideration are relations between Kosovo and Serbia. Serbia still has not acknowledged Kosovo as an independent state. It is worth mentioning that, according to the Serbian constitution of 2006, Kosovo still exists as an Autonomous Province of Serbia (the same status has Vojvodina). Kosovo, which has been acknowledged as a separate state, has existed since 2008. In the period between 2008–2012, the Serbian minority in Kosovo was opposed to elections there and they have boycotted them since. In November 2013, the Kosovo elections went smoothly and, for the first time, both the Serbian and Albanian community voted. The Serbian government supported and encouraged the Serbian community to participate in these elections in order to ensure the implementation of the Brussels agreement. During elections there were no serious incidents, with only right-wing parties and nationalist movements calling for a boycott. This situation can be seen as a real breakthrough in Belgrade-Priština mutual relations, but nevertheless, the question of North Kosovo remains open. This is also a real step forward on the way to European structures and NATO cooperation [4; 5].

² Ratko Mladić was accused of crimes against humanity (mainly connected with Srebrenica massacre and Siege of Sarajevo) during Yugoslav conflict in 90s of 20th century. His trial was taken before the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia in the Hague. He was a general in Yugoslavia's Peoples Army and Chief of Staff of Army of Republika Srpska. He was arrested in 2011th.

Croatia can serve as a good example for Serbia on how to join to the EU. However, Zagreb-Belgrade relations are still tense; mainly in the area of regulations on the Serbian minority in Croatia and the Croatian minority in Serbia. Additionally, these mutual relations are loaded with unresolved issues that come from the conflict era of the 1990s, such as: return of refugees, aspects of missing people, restitution of private property, mutual prosecution of genocide (the genocide of Serbs in Jasenovac during Second World War and the genocide of Croats during Balkan Wars in the 1990s) and questionable aspects of the borderland between Serbia and Croatia. Moreover, controversy around operations «Flash» and «Storm» (against the Republic of Serbian Krajina) and the disputable status of cultural heritage in Croatia, pose lots of problems that are important for Serbia's EU accession [6]. The green light appeared in 2010, with the development of relations between Serbia and Croatia. In that year, the Serbian parliament condemned crimes in Srebrenica and the President of Croatia, Ivo Josipović and the Serbian President Boris Tadić, met in Osijek, Vukovar and Ovčare. In the third town Tadić apologized for the killing of 200 Croats during the war and the Croatian President agreed that in Paulin Dvor (close to Osijek) crimes were committed by Croatian soldiers. Between 2010 and 2013, relations between Belgrade and Zagreb improved, with both sides willing to engage in peaceful discourse. According to Vesna Pušić, Croatia's minister of international affairs, Croatia does not want to hamper the access of Serbia to the EU [7].

Another issue was Montenegrin aspirations for independence from Serbia. The peaceful process of the secession of Montenegro did not appeal to Serbia. In 2002, Montenegro accepted a new currency, the Euro. In 2006, the Government adopted the «Memorandum of Agreement between the Republic of Montenegro and the Republic of Serbia on Consular Protection and Services to the Citizens of Montenegro». By this agreement Serbia provides consular services to Montenegrin citizens on the territory of states in which Montenegro has no mission. Two years later Montenegro recognized the independence of Kosovo. Presently, Montenegro is on route to join the UE and NATO. There are also some misunderstandings between Serbia and Montenegro related to language, religion (the Montenegrin Orthodox Church that is not recognised by the Serbian Orthodox Church), Montenegrin identity and the problem of the Serbian national minority in Montenegro. Nevertheless, relations between Serbia and Montenegro seem to be fine and are developing in a positive direction.

Another obstacle for joining the European Union was cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia. The beginning of the cooperation started in 2000, when the former President of Yugoslavia, Slobodan Milošević, was handed over to the ICTY. This, after Radovan Karadžić, the President of Republika Srpska, had been arrested in 2008. In 2011, former Bosnian Serb commander Ratko Mladić (accused of genocide in Srebrenica) and the former Croatian Serb leader, Goran Hadžić, were also arrested. As was Stojan Župljanin, who had commanded the Bosnian Serb police during the war. Serbia continues to cooperate with the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia.

European Commissioner for Enlargement and Neighbourhood Policy, Štefan Füle, stated in October 2013 that, regardless of any obstacles for Serbia, it had been a historic year. Serbia has improved and made progress in the normalisation of relations with Kosovo. He also announced the first Intergovernmental conference on Serbia's accession by January 2014 [8]. Undoubtedly Serbia is on the way to building positive regional cooperation. Besides, according to the European Commission's «Key findings of the Progress Report on Serbia» from 16 October 2013, Serbia fulfilled the political criteria (such as: contacts with neighbouring countries) [9].

Truly demanding priorities for 2014 were internal problems such as implementing reforms in the areas of: the judiciary system, public administration reform, the fight against corruption and organised crime, media freedom and the protection of minorities (mainly the improvement of the status of the Roma). Additionally, some efforts should be made towards the protection of sexual minorities such as the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and inter-sex population. This would present a good chance to show respect for fundamental human rights. In the economic area, there are still reforms demanded in the business environment and the improvement of property rights. Serbia also should intensify efforts in the field of environmental protection and the energy sector. The biggest priority is strengthening democratic institutions and continuously implementing the Copenhagen criteria, which were established twenty years ago [10].

Statistics

It is worth emphasising that, according to a poll conducted by the government's Office for European Integrations in August 2013, as much 50 % of the Serbian population would say «yes» to the process of European integration. The statistics also showed that 24 % would say «no», 19 % would not vote at all and 8% are not sure how they would vote. What are the reasons stated for supporting EU membership? From the social point of view these are: perspectives for movement inside the EU (44%), better future for young people (41 %), more work opportunities (38 %) and access to European funds (33 %) [11].

NATO and Serbia

The situation in Serbia – NATO relations are different and much more complicated than is the case with the EU. Flicking through newspapers it seems that Serbian society is not well informed about what mission and goals are represented by NATO, what NATO implies and what kind of security cooperation with it would represent. The beginning of cooperation started in 2001, when NATO and the newly elected government of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, cooperated in crisis-management operations in southern Serbia.

During his mandate as the President of the Republic of Serbia, Boris Tadić (Democratic Party – DP), took a real step towards NATO. In 2006, the country joined the Partnership for Peace and a NATO Military Liaison Office in Belgrade was established. The first signs of cooperation were seen when, in 2007, thanks to PfP funding, 1.4 million anti-personnel landmines were removed from Serbian territory.

Two years later, Belgrade agreed to its first Individual Partnership Programme with NATO. It seemed that from this point Serbia has become an active participant in the PfP.

A huge milestone was reached in 2010, when Boris Tadić and NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen met in New York, to open its mission to NATO. A year later the North Atlantic Council approved Serbia's Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP) in which NATO can provide assistance in reforms and deepen political consultation and bilateral cooperation. NATO, through IPAP, supports Serbian defence reforms and simplification of Serbian participation in activities within the framework of the Partnership for Peace programme. Anders Fogh Rasmussen (NATO's General Secretary) said in 2011, «Serbia's future lies in peaceful cooperation with its neighbours and with the European Union and NATO. [...] We have made good progress these past few years in developing a sound basis for partnership and cooperation. It is now up to Serbia to decide if it wants to move forwards in its cooperation with NATO, and how fast» [12; 13].

During the Wales Summit in September 2014, leaders of NATO renewed their support for the Atlantic integration of Serbia and countries in the Western Balkans region. Likewise, Serbia's deepened cooperation with NATO, through IPAP, was agreed in January 2015 [14; 15]. Then in February 2015, Serbian Prime Minister Aleksandar Vučić met with Jens Stoltenberg, NATO Secretary General, during a Security Conference in Munich. Key aspects, such as the presence of KFOR in Kosovo and NATO's guarantees for the safety of Serbs in KiM, were confirmed. Additionally, the Serbian prime minister stressed that Serbia would apply all efforts to preserve political and economic stability in the region. Whereas Jens Stoltenberg underlined the further strengthening of Serbia-NATO relations, while welcomed the Belgrade-Priština dialogue and reforms carried out by the Serbian government [16].

The stance of new president Tomislav Nikolić

The next step in Serbia-NATO mutual relations was seen on 20 May 2012, when two significant events took place. First was the meeting of the North Atlantic Council, held in Chicago to adopt the Chicago Summit Declaration. In this declaration, Serbia's Euro-Atlantic integration was supported. Belgrade was encouraged to continue on its path to NATO through the deepening of political dialogue and practical cooperation. Moreover, Serbia was called to support further efforts in the area of defence reforms and maintaining peace and stability in Kosovo.

Secondly, Serbia's citizens elected a new president, Tomislav Nikolić, to replace Boris Tadić, who had held the office from 2004 to 2012. Boris Tadić and his Democratic Party were described as pro European Union, but in the case of NATO, he was rather more reserved. Thus, during his mandate, he did not try hard to persuade public opinion towards NATO membership. The second politician Tomislav Nikolić, from the Serbian Progressive Party (SPS), acknowledged after election that Serbia should be a member of the EU, but on the question of Serbian security, preferred relations with Moscow. His stance was supported by his travel to Moscow to meet with Vladimir Putin before his inauguration. The Serbian president declared a neutral

policy and ironically stressed that he would have to accept the sovereignty of Abkhazia and South Ossetia in revenge for the independence of Kosovo. Moreover, he did not recognise the massacre of Bosnian Muslims at Srebrenica in 1995, as an act of genocide. Nikolić was recognised as a follower of Serbian nationalist and extremist ideology propagated by Vojislav Šešelj, who is still the leader of the Serbian Radical Party (SRS), and who also faces charges of crimes against humanity at the ICTY. It is worth mentioning that in 2008, Nikolić became the leader of the Serbian Progressive Party, which was formed by a group of former SRS members. But a few months later, in September 2012, Nikolić stated in New York that Serbia is ready for dialogue and is open to new cooperation with NATO, but not including membership. Both politicians have yet to give a clear message as to whether Serbia should be a member of NATO, and what kind of alternative security policy it should choose [17].

Relations with Kosovo

Kosovo is a flash point in NATO's dialogue with Serbia. The Alliance intervened militarily in early 1999, deploying the NATO-led Kosovo peacekeeping force (KFOR) in order to guarantee security in Kosovo (KFOR works on the basis of UN Security Council Resolution 1244). The bombing of Serbia is also seen as an example of a non-humanitarian action against the rules of international law. This opinion makes for division in the international community, as well as forming a strong argument against NATO in Serbia. Until last year, the Serbia-Kosovo border was controlled by EULEX and KFOR because Northern Kosovo remains uncertain. What is more, after gaining sovereignty in 2008, there have been a number of incidents. In September 2011, eight Americans and one German were attacked when they attempted to shut down uncontrolled roads used by Serbs. In April 2012, a bomb hit a house in Mitrovica and killed a Kosovar Albanian. Another incident took place in Zvečane, where NATO soldiers removed Serb barricades, resulting in clashes in which the Serbs shot at American-led KFOR troops [17]. The action was justified by Anders Fogh Rasmussen as self-defence. In 2013, the next step forward for security and peace in the region was taken. The General Secretary of NATO welcomed the Belgrade-Priština Agreement on Normalisation, which was eventually concluded. Furthermore, at the Chicago Summit, allied leaders called on Serbia to support further efforts towards the consolidation of peace and the maintaining of stability in Kosovo [18].

Areas of cooperation with NATO

There are several key areas of cooperation between NATO and Serbia, such as: security cooperation, defence and security sector reform, science, the environment and public information. Security cooperation is focused on cooperation between the Serbian armed forces and KFOR; based on the Kumanovo Agreement from 1999. Additionally, in 2005, Serbia allowed allied forces serving as part of KFOR to pass through Serbian territory. Moreover, Serbia's Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear (CBRN) Training Centre in Kruševac opened its activities to allies and partners in 2013. In the area of defence and security sector reform; Serbia joined the

PfP Planning and Review Process (PARP) in 2007. One of the tasks of PARP is the implementation of multinational training, exercises and operations [12; 13].

The promotion of transparent democratic control over the armed forces also plays a vital role. To which, three NATO/PfP Trust Fund projects were established in Serbia. The first project (completed in 2003) included the destroying of 28,000 surplus small arms and light weapons. The second covered the destruction of 1.4 million landmines (completed in 2007). While the third assisted discharged defence personnel in Serbia in starting small businesses (completed in 2011). A fourth project was started in 2013, and is focused on the destruction of approximately 2,000 tonnes of surplus ammunition and explosives. It is also important to mention that Serbia is an immense arms exporter in South Eastern Europe. Its products, such as infantry weapons and uniforms, are sold to Libya, Iraq, Canada and the USA. Undoubtedly, NATO membership would allow Serbia to develop this industry.

In the field of science and the environment, Serbia's scientists and experts are working in the area of defence against chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN) agents, as well as counter-terrorism, environmental security and disaster forecasting in the prevention of natural catastrophes. In the area of public information, Serbia and NATO attempt to improve public access to information regarding the benefits of cooperation with NATO [12; 13].

For and against NATO

What are the main political arguments of NATO proponents in Serbia for joining the organisation? First of all, to be a part of EU, it is required to be the part of the PfP and then NATO. So, Serbia should learn from the experience of Central and East European states which have taken the same route. Secondly, like other countries from Southern and Eastern Europe, Serbia should strive for NATO membership. Slovenia has been a member since 2004, Croatia and Albania since 2009. The next argument is that collective defence is cheaper than a neutral position. Fourthly, being a member of a security organisation means greater stability and defence in case of aggression. Finally, Serbia would be grouped with the strongest and richest countries in the world, which cannot be bad for the security and integrity of Serbia.

What about counterarguments? There are a huge number of opponents on the political stage in Serbia. Their main argument against NATO is connected with collective memory of the 78-day air campaign in 1999, and the alliance's support in creating an independent Kosovo. Secondly, NATO is seen in the public realm as an untrustworthy organisation, with many politicians doubting the real intentions of the North Atlantic Alliance. That NATO is an organisation that seem to represent democratic values, was refuted by the 1999 aggression against Serbia, and now is perceived as an aggressive military alliance looking to achieve its goals in every corner of the world [13]. Another point of contention is mutual relations with Russia, who tried to support Serbia during the conflicts in Yugoslavia. One alternative for Serbia could be the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), formed in 1992, which unites six member states: Russia (which plays a key role in the military pact), Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Significantly, Serbia

gained observer status at the Parliamentary Assembly of the CSTO in 2013 [19; 20]. In 2015, during a meeting with Jens Stoltenberg in Munich, the Serbian Prime Minister Aleksandar Vučić, stated that Serbia maintains good relations with both NATO and Russia, and also mentioned that he believed that both sides can help to keep the political stability in Serbia [21].

Conclusion

Contemporary Serbia is engaged in two significant political processes. The case of European integration is still under way and Serbia achieved some of the fundamental requirements. It seems that Serbia is ready to talk about Euro integration. The real challenge for Serbia is to decide what is the key direction in foreign and defence policy and whether military neutrality is beneficial. Kosovo is still existing problem, but normalisation between Priština and Belgrade are going on. Additionally, the main challenges are stagnation in development, as well as the possibility of populist voices gaining power, while demonstrating to Serb citizens that the European Union and NATO, want to support transition and democracy in the Serbian state. Serbia is also trying to keep good relations with both: strategic ally Russia and with the USA. Putin's veto against recognition of the independence of Kosovo and the economic support, more associated as the addiction of Serbia from Gazprom's oil and gas supplies, has strong impact on the decisions held by the Serbian government and the EU and the North Atlantic Alliance.

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ЄВРО-АТЛАНТИЧНА ІНТЕГРАЦІЯ СЕРБІЇ – ПЕРЕШКОДИ ТА ПРІОРИТЕТИ

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Сучасна Сербія бере участь у двох важливих політичних процесах, таких як членство в Європейському Союзі та приєднання до НАТО. Відносини з ЄС були започатковані вже в 90-х роках ХХ ст. і поступово розвивалися. Сербія стала офіційним кандидатом на членство в ЄС 2009 р., а в січні 2014 р. розпочала переговори щодо вступу. До головних перешкод належали відносини Сербія–Косово, співпраця з Міжнародним судом та сербсько-хорватські відносини.

Республіка Сербія співпрацює з НАТО в галузі політики безпеки, пов'язаної з поліпшенням міжнародних відносин, побудовою миру та реформами в секторі безпеки. Головним бар'єром у двосторонніх відносинах залишається проблема Косова та пам'ять про 78-денні повітряні нальоти на Сербію 1999 р.

Крім того, Сербія співпрацює з Росією у військовій, економічній та енергетичній галузях, а з 2013 р. має статус спостерігача в Організації договору про колективну безпеку. Двосторонні відносини з Росією помітно впливають на євроатлантичні відносини Сербії.

Ключові слова: Республіка Сербія; НАТО; ЄС; Росія.