

Russia and Serbia in the contemporary world: Bilateral relations, challenges and opportunities

Editors

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RUSSIA AND SERBIA
IN THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD:
Bilateral relations, challenges
and opportunities

Bogdan Stojanović, Ph.D.
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Belgrade, 2020

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https://doi.org/10.18485/iipe_ru_sr.2020

Publisher

Institute of International Politics and Economics, Belgrade

For the Publisher

Professor Branislav Đorđević,
Director of the Institute of International Politics and Economics

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Language editor

Maja Nikolić

Layout

Sanja Balović

Cover design

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Printed by

NS Mala Knjiga+, Novi Sad

ISBN 978-86-7067-278-9

This publication was financially supported by NIS a.d. Novi Sad.

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FOREWORD

Today, the Russian-Serbian strategic partnership is on the rise, with a trust-based high-level political dialogue performing an essential role. Friendly relations between our countries are rooted in the spiritual and civilizational kinship between our peoples, as well as in our centuries-long shared history, including the heroic struggle during World War II that led to our common Victory over Nazism. Cherishing these precious traditions, Moscow and Belgrade are genuinely committed to fostering close bilateral cooperation in the political, economic, security, humanitarian and cultural areas, to the benefit of both nations and in the interests of strengthening peace and stability in the Balkans and beyond.

It is gratifying to note that academic communities in Russia and Serbia recognize the significance of their analytical engagement for further comprehensive development of fruitful inter-state collaboration.

Welcoming this new publication of the Belgrade Institute of International Politics and Economics, I hope that it will not only facilitate a constructive and insightful discussion between the researchers in Russia and Serbia, but also kindle lively scholarly interest worldwide and, therefore, pave the way for a deeper exploration of the matters concerned.

I would like to extend sincere appreciation to everyone who invested their efforts in the project and wish them every success in their future creative endeavors.

Ambassador of the Russian Federation
to the Republic of Serbia
Alexander Botsan-Kharchenko

INTRODUCTION

Relations between Russia and Serbia viewed through the prism of the size of the territory and the economic, political, and military power, do not provide adequate insight into the depth of the connection between the two countries and peoples. Russia, as the largest country in the world, the largest exporter of gas, the second-largest exporter and the third-largest oil producer, historically a great power and nuclear superpower, plays a more significant role in the modern world compared to relatively small Serbia. The historical influence that Russia had in the Balkans and the allied relationship with Serbia left a deep mark on the modern relations between the two countries, but also on Russian foreign policy, in which the “Balkan vector” currently represents a significant segment.

The processes of developing multipolarity in international relations take place in the economic and political spheres, while in the military field, multipolarity has never ceased to exist. In these processes, Russia has a leading role as a state whose foreign policy matrix includes the strengthening of international law, the abolition of arbitrariness, and the creation of alternative security and economic arrangements at the planetary level.

Russia’s power has undoubtedly grown and spilled over beyond the sphere of the former territory of the Soviet Union, which is best evidenced by the activities in Syria. Serbia, as a declaratively neutral state and one of the few European countries outside NATO, burdened by the problem posed by the self-proclaimed independence of one part of its territory, represents an arena of conflict of different worldviews in modern international relations. The key challenges relate to the relatively frequently asked questions of NATO and the European Union enlargement, views on Kosovo’s self-proclaimed independence, but also some new ones such as Chinese influence in the Balkans, 5G technology, sanctioning Russia for incorporating Crimea, and many others.

The above-stated reasons indicate the need for a more profound analysis of Russian-Serbian relations, Russia’s influence in the Balkans, Eurasian

integration, and geopolitical tendencies viewed from different angles. Primarily from the perspective of a great power that projects its strength on a global level, and then from the perception of Serbia, a small European country that has no global pretensions, but its primary goals are the preservation of sovereignty, territorial integrity, and economic prosperity.

The collection of papers "Russia and Serbia in Contemporary World: bilateral relations, challenges and opportunities", which was created as yet another indicator in a series of fruitful cooperation between the Institute of International Politics and Economics and the Embassy of the Russian Federation in Serbia, is an expression of the need for deeper research. It is divided into three chapters in which the authors analyse different parts of the mosaic.

The first and most extensive chapter deals with bilateral and multilateral frameworks of cooperation. Russian and Serbian foreign ministers, Sergei Lavrov and Ivica Dacic open a discussion on one of the most significant regional issues, but also the axis of cooperation in finding a solution to the problem of Kosovo and Metohija. Miroslav Mladenovic and Elena Ponomareva analyse the Balkan vector of Russian foreign policy in the context of Serbia. Natasa Stanojevic discusses the potentials of Serbian exports to Russia and the impact on the course of Eurasian economic integration. Asya Pentegova analyses political, economic, and cultural cooperation between Belarus and the Western Balkans from the angle of relations with Serbia. In her work, Yulia Bulannikova deals with the impact of the problems of Kosovo and Metohija on Serbian-Albanian relations in general. Petar Stanojevic and Zoran Jeftic address an important topic of cooperation between Russia and Serbia in the oil and gas sector. The paper of Dragan Petrovic, who has been researching the relations between Russia and Serbia since the time of the so-called "Eastern Question" to this day, is the last in the chapter.

The second chapter entitled "Images and Perceptions", analyses the nonmaterial elements of the Russian-Serbian relations and the strength of intangible factors in the Balkans. The chapter begins with the paper of Evgeny Pashentsev, who researches the Russian information presence in the Balkans. In his paper, Ivan Surma explains the expansion of that presence, while Aleksandar Mitic analyses the image of Russia in the Serbian media. At the end of the chapter, Milos Petrovic gives a comprehensive analysis of the permanence and transience of political concepts and predicts the future abandonment of the "Western Balkans" construct.

The third, and last chapter in the collection, deals with Eurasia from the aspect of geopolitics and security science. Milomir Stepic writes about the new challenges for Serbia brought by the new Eurasian integration processes, in which there are significant differences in the approach of Russia and China. Andrey Malov analyses the growing trend of conflict relations in Europe and the necessity of a productive dialogue between the West and Russia. Olga Shishkina tries to prove the hypothesis of growing competition between the European Union and China, on the one hand, and Russia and the EU, on the other, by showing that the conflict between China and Russia can be avoided in Central, Eastern and Southeastern Europe. Through the prism of geopolitics, Dusan Prorokovic tries to answer the question of whether the United States can regain the position of global leader it had before 2008, for which control of Eurasia is crucial. Finally, Ana Jović-Lazic considers the potential for overcoming the crisis in the relationship between Russia and the European Union.

The authors, in addition to explaining various phenomena of the broad topic of Russian-Serbian relations and Russia's influence in the Balkans and globally, try to predict future tendencies of still active processes. Different integration processes in Eurasia, undefined and unpredictable relations between the EU and Russia, Russia and China, as well as the network of the various influences of the great powers in the Balkans, make scientific analysis a very demanding undertaking. By exploring historical, economic, political, military, and social factors, the authors have been able to contribute to a more profound understanding of these complicated relations. Hence, for the scientific and professional public, as well as for all other readers, the collection of papers represents extremely useful material for gaining an objective illustration of Russian-Serbian relations, Russia's foreign policy in the Balkans, and the comprehensive understanding of global geopolitical trends in which Russia has a significant role.

Prof. Dr. Branislav Djordjevic
Director of the Institute of International Politics and Economics

THE KOSOVO KNOT: IS A FAIR SOLUTION POSSIBLE?¹

Public discussions about possible outcomes of the Kosovo knot have become noticeably livelier recently. The United States and the EU are striving to make themselves an indispensable part of the settlement and are competing for the leading role in this process. In addition, as it happened before, they often disregard the opinions of other stakeholders, which fact calls into question the very possibility of finding a fair solution. Looking back into the recent past and analysing the regrettable consequences of external interference in the region's affairs is something that must be done if we want to avoid making more mistakes. We also believe it is important to provide a general assessment of the current state of affairs and to outline our fundamental approaches to the Kosovo settlement.

The unresolved Kosovo problem has for over 20 years been an obstacle to a full-fledged stabilisation in the Western Balkan region and given rise to more outbursts of tension. The time bomb was laid at a time when the Western allies that bombed Yugoslavia in 1999 set the goal of ensuring the region's independence in circumvention of international law. It was done under a cynical front of "multivariance," meaning it would be done either

¹ Article co-authored by Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and First Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of the Republic of Serbia Ivica Dacic published in Rossiyskaya Gazeta and Serbian Kurir on June 18, 2020/

https://www.mid.ru/en/diverse/-/asset_publisher/zwI2FuDbhJx9/content/sov-mestnaa-stat-a-ministra-inostrannyh-del-rossijskoj-federacii-s-v-lavrova-i-pervogo-zamestitela-predsdatela-pravitel-stva-ministra-inostrannyh-del-?_101_INSTANCE_zwI2FuDbhJx9_redirect=https%253A%252F%252Fwww.mid.ru%252Fen%252Fdiverse%253Fp_p_id%253D101_INSTANCE_zwI2FuDbhJx9%2526p_p_lifecycle%253D0%2526p_p_state%253Dnormal%2526p_p_mode%253Dview%2526p_p_col_id%253Dcolumn-1%2526p_p_col_pos%253D2%2526p_p_col_count%253D6

with or without Belgrade's consent. In other words, Serbia's opinion was ignored from day one. Such a flawed approach in flagrant violation of UNSCR 1244 is aimed solely at satisfying the Kosovars' separatist aspirations.

In 2008, when "independence" was announced in Pristina by way of accomplished fact, persistent attempts were made to talk Moscow and Belgrade into believing that the negotiating potential had been exhausted. Russia's and Serbia's calls, including at the highest level, to continue the talks and stick to the international law and UNSCR 1244 were ignored. A couple of years later, the developments had the parties resume the dialogue. Brussels acted as a mediator, and the UN General Assembly approved it by Resolution 64/298 in 2010.

Since then, the international community could see on many occasions that the only way to find a viable settlement was to do so while observing UNSCR 1244 with a balanced and genuine consideration of the stakeholders' interests.

The concept of Kosovo's self-proclaimed "sovereignty" fell through. It is not supported either in the Balkans, or in Europe, or other parts of the world for that matter. About half of the UN member states do not recognise Kosovo's "statehood" and the number of such countries is growing. More and more capitals are realising the danger (including for themselves) of the precedent created by Kosovo involving external military interference in the affairs of an independent state under far-fetched pretexts.

The failure of Kosovo's independence can be clearly seen from the situation in that region.

Kosovo is in the grips of political chaos. Local parties are mired in a bitter fight for power; scheming, mutual accusations and clan feuds amid economic downfall and rampant crime. Under these circumstances, the "state building" which the local leaders and their external sponsors love to talk about turned into a sham.

The wide presence in Kosovo of criminal elements associated with terrorist groups in the Middle East, primarily Syria, as well as with criminal gangs in the Balkans and other parts of Europe, means that the region with its rich historical and cultural heritage is becoming a den of thieves and criminals of all stripes.

Should this be any surprise with former Kosovo Liberation Army ringleaders holed up as Pristina's ruling elite? To investigate the atrocities, including murders and abductions for the purpose of illicit trafficking of human organs committed by some of them, a special court was created at the

EU initiative following a report by PACE member Dick Marty. We are still waiting for this judicial body to go live and bring charges against the criminals.

International presence should be beneficial for normalising the situation. Unfortunately, this is not happening. For years, the Kosovo Force has been passive in ensuring Serbs' security, which is their main mission. One of the consequences of this inactivity is the aggravation of the situation with preserving the relics of the Serbian Orthodox Church located in this region. Energetic and targeted efforts of UNESCO, the OSCE and the Council of Europe are needed to guarantee their safety.

The effectiveness of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), whose mandate is defined by UNSCR 1244, also leaves much to be desired. It is difficult to expect anything different when Pristina shamelessly disregards this Security Council resolution. The West, however, has turned a blind eye to the Kosovars' brazen behaviour and downplays the incidents of intimidation of UN personnel.

The fact that Camp Bondsteel was usurped is causing our concern. It was created as a peacekeeping base but turned into an off-limits training site for the Kosovo "armed forces", which causes our deep concern. In fact, it's an attempt to whitewash the Kosovo Liberation Army, which started the war in the late 1990s that led to the region breaking away from Serbia.

The question about the NATO countries' liability for using munitions with depleted uranium during the 1999 bombing in Serbia, especially Kosovo, remains open. The local population continues to suffer en masse from the radioactive contamination, and international peacekeepers have also felt its debilitating effect. A recent court ruling in France has confirmed that the NATO aggression left a deadly and lasting mark on Serbia.

Irresponsible politicians with their Great Albania rhetoric regularly add fuel to the flames of this smoldering conflict. Their Western colleagues are in no hurry to censure the activists who are broadcasting the ideas of Great Albania from Pristina and Tirana. Meanwhile, the destructive potential of this ideology is capable of burying the system of regional stability that took decades to build.

Over the past few months, the EU and the United States have been vigorously campaigning for resuming a dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina. Of course, we are supportive of the political methods of settlement, but we believe that the talks should be based on the principle of bona fide implementation of previous agreements. The key principle is creating a full-fledged Community of Kosovo Serbian Municipalities (CKSM) endowed with

the appropriate authority. The EU's direct responsibility as an intermediary in the negotiating process is to have the Kosovo authorities fulfill their obligations. So far, no progress has been made in creating the CKSM.

Prior to the new phase in the dialogue, it was necessary to revoke the anti-Serb discriminatory measures introduced by the Pristina authorities in recent years. As a mediator, the EU must ensure that the Kosovars will not resume this vicious practice.

Let's hope that the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell and the EU Special Representative for the Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue Miroslav Lajcak will act as honest brokers.

At the same time, we note that Serbia's admission to the EU is still used by some as a lever to exert pressure on Belgrade in matters of recognising Kosovo's "independence." It turns out that to become an EU member, the applicant state must give away a chunk of its territory. Those behind this absurd demand see a certain threat in the possible adjustment of the Kosovo administrative line. Such a concern seems all the more hypocritical if you think about who and how dismembered Yugoslavia.

Regardless, Russia and Serbia continue to believe that it is necessary to comply with UNSCR 1244. The search for a compromise during the negotiating process is the exclusive prerogative of Belgrade and Pristina. They must articulate and adopt the final decision to be approved by the UN Security Council. Moscow will agree only with a settlement that Belgrade will accept.

With regard to external assistance to the talks, it should be impartial in monitoring compliance with the international legal framework for dialogue without imposing ready-made solutions.

Moscow and Belgrade are strategic partners. Our aim is to deepen mutually beneficial cooperation in a wide range of areas. This approach will not be affected by Serbia's plan to negotiate accession to the EU. Serbia will continue to promote its ties with Russia and the EAEU.

We will continue to work closely to achieve settlement in Kosovo based on respect for UN Security Council Resolution 1244.

Sergej Lavrov and Ivica Dačić

BILATERAL AND MULTILATERAL FRAMEWORK FOR COOPERATION

BALKAN VECTOR OF RUSSIAN FOREIGN (PUBLIC) POLICY: THE EXAMPLE OF SERBIA¹

Miroslav Mladenović

Elena Georgievna Ponomareva²

Abstract: Neither in the current nor the previous concepts of the foreign policy of the Russian Federation, there are no specific provisions related to the countries of the Balkans, including Serbia.

In terms of regional priorities, the focus is on the CIS and Eurasian integration; India and the People's Republic of China particularly stand out.

Judging by official documents and concepts, Russia has no special interest in the countries of the Balkan region. Although this statement is obvious, the conclusion that the area of the Balkans, including Serbia, is out of the real focus of the foreign policy of the Russian Federation would certainly be incorrect.

In addition to the official, there is also an unofficial component of the political activity of each country, and in addition to state, there is also an extensive system of non-state, i.e., public policy and diplomacy. There is a reminder here of De Gaulle's famous remark that "Politics is too serious a matter to be left to politicians".

Public diplomacy, however, should not be understood as a self-contained sphere of activity independent of the state. Every authority wants to create a

¹ A broader version of the role of Russian "soft power" in the Balkans: Елена Пономарева, Мирослав Младенович, Публичная дипломатия России: балканское направление, Международная жизнь апрель 2016, Москва, ISSN 0130-9625, стр. 151-166;

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favourable image for itself, which facilitates solving many economic and geopolitical tasks. In this sense, Russia is no exception. A more serious approach to the problem of public diplomacy by the Russian state has been evident since the third presidential term of V. Putin, that is, from the second decade of the 21st century. In this paper, the focus will be on the less visible levers of Russian foreign policy towards the Balkan region, and above all in relation to Serbia.

Keywords: Serbia, Russia, public diplomacy, soft power, foreign policy.

Public diplomacy

In the conditions of global (political, economic, information and other) transformations, public diplomacy, as one of the most efficient foreign policy practices, has an increasingly important place. Under the impressive development of technical and information sciences and policies, both external and internal policy inevitably becomes more transparent and increasingly accessible to non-state and non-traditional actors.

“Four centuries ago, Niccolo Machiavelli advised the rulers in Italy that it was more important they were feared rather than loved. But in today’s world, it is best if you can do both. Winning hearts and minds has always been important, but it is of particular importance in the global information age. Information is power, and modern information technology spreads information much wider than ever before in history. However, political leaders have taken very little time to understand how the nature of power has changed, and have paid particularly little attention to ways of incorporating soft aspects into their strategies for gaining power”.³

In order for these observations of Joseph Nye to be realized, it is necessary to include network and information components in the system of foreign policy. The main elements of that complex are not only politicians and other state subjects but also the media, non-governmental organizations, scientific and educational institutions, bearers of culture and sports, and users of social networks. Paraphrasing the words of Charles de Gaulle, we can say: “Politics is too serious a matter to be left to politicians”.

³ Joseph Nye, *Soft Power*, Public Affairs, New York, 2004, p. 1.

However, it would be wrong to understand public diplomacy as a completely independent sphere of activity, separate from the state. Every country is very interested in creating a favourable image of itself. It is a precondition for solving the main political, economic, and other tasks and the realization of state interests.

In this sense, Russia is no exception. The decree of the President of Russia of May 7, 2012, "On measures for the implementation of the foreign policy course of the Russian Federation", especially emphasizes the interest of the state in improving the efficiency of foreign policy in the new conditions.⁴

The document points to the need for the state to "use the resource of public diplomacy more efficiently, involve civil society in the foreign policy process, strengthen interaction with the Chamber of Commerce of the Russian Federation, the non-profit organization "Fund for Support of Public Diplomacy AM Gorchakov" and other non-governmental organizations, and to cooperate with them during their wide participation in the activities of world forums of expert-political dialogue and international humanitarian cooperation".

Although especially, in the beginning, public diplomacy was understood not only, and not so much, as a state but as a public phenomenon, it was and has remained, an important implementer of the national interests of a certain country. Therefore, the deeper meaning of public diplomacy is the creation of a special synergy of government and social initiatives.

The main difference in the essential meaning of classical and public diplomacy, therefore, is not their goal. It is common for both of these activities. The difference is in the subject who realizes those goals. In public diplomacy, the state is not the main bearer of activities, but "the impetuous part of society, including every citizen who is not indifferent to what and how is happening in Russia and abroad".⁵

⁴ Указ Президента РФ от 7 мая 2012 г. «О мерах по реализации внешнеполитического курса Российской Федерации» // URL: <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/15256>, (seen 04.09.2020)

⁵ Фонд поддержки публичной дипломатии им. А.М.Горчакова // URL: <http://gorchakovfund.ru/about/>, (seen 06.09.2020)

“Soft power” as an element of public diplomacy

It is interesting to note that in the United States, the term “soft power” was coined in academia and then purposefully introduced into the political traffic at a high level.

In contrast, in Russia, the path of “enthronement of soft power” was the opposite. The idea of the need and possibility of applying the instruments of “soft power” came from political leaders, and then it was accepted by members of the academic community.

Perhaps this difference and the fact that the theory and practice overlap much more directly in the West than in the East is also essential to the realization of accepted ideas.

As it is known, the custom of transition from science to politics, from politics to intelligence institutions, from intelligence bureaus to science, etc. – is widely present in the West. The goal of such actions is – the widest possible placement and realization of the interests of a certain elite group. In particular, Dr. Nye’s theoretical achievements have a clear practical significance, i.e., they are aimed at securing and spreading, as much as possible, of the dominant influence of the West, primarily the United States, on all major processes in the world.

In the Bill Clinton Administration, Nye was the Assistant Secretary of Defence for International Security Affairs in the Pentagon; in the period 1993-1994, he was the Head of the National Intelligence Council of the United States. In addition, he was a member of the Executive Committee of the Three Member Committee, which meets periodically in the Council on Foreign Relations. Moreover, Professor Nye managed the EastWest Institute for Security Research and the International Institute for Strategic Research. After Obama had become the head of state, he was involved in the work of the Center for the New American Security and the Project for the Reform of the National Security of the USA.⁶

As for Russia’s “soft power”, before it entered into the fundamental state foreign policy documents, it was promoted in the speeches of the representatives of the Russian government.

⁶ See more in: Мирослав Младеновић, Јелена Пономарева, *Теорија и пракса “шарених револуција”*, Социолошки преглед, Београд, RS ISSN 0085-6320, UDK 316, 2012, вол. 46, бр. 4, стр. 513–533;

On the eve of the Moscow Conference of Compatriots Living Abroad, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, Sergei Lavrov, gave an interview to the Rossiyskaya Gazeta newspaper. In that interview, among other things, he pointed out that: "In modern conditions, the so-called soft power is gaining in importance. It is the ability to influence the surrounding world with the help of its own civilizational, humanitarian-cultural, foreign policy, and other attractions. It seems that the spectrum of our diverse ties with compatriots should be built with respect for these factors".⁷

A slightly more detailed elaboration of the term "soft power" appeared on the pages of the newspaper Moscow News from February 27, 2012, in article V. Putin, entitled "Russia and the changing world." Along with the thesis on the effectiveness of "soft power" in the foreign policy of the globalization era, the author also warned of the dark side of this concept.

In this regard, V. Putin writes: "The concept of "soft power" is increasingly being used – a set of instruments and methods for achieving foreign policy goals without the use of weapons, but with the help of information and other levers of action. Unfortunately, these methods are often employed to develop and provoke extremism, separatism, nationalism, manipulation of public opinion, and direct interference in the domestic politics of sovereign states.

It is necessary to clearly separate what is freedom of speech and regular political activity, and where illegal instruments of "soft power" are used. The civilized work of humanitarian and charitable non-governmental organizations, including those that criticize the current government, is to be welcomed. However, the activities of "pseudo-NGOs" and other structures that, with the external support destabilize the situation in certain countries must not be allowed".⁸

After these initiatives of the highest representatives of the government, important documents regulating the use of "soft power" institutions were adopted.

⁷ Сергей Лавров, интервью "РГ".30.10.2008 [Электронный ресурс] // Российская газета. <http://rg.ru/2008/10/30/lavrov.html> (seen: 09.09.2020).

⁸ Путин В. Россия и меняющийся мир [Электронный ресурс] // Московские новости. Режим доступа – <http://www.mn.ru/politics/78738> (seen: 09.09.2020)

The importance and role of public diplomacy in the promotion of Russian interests and the position of the state are described in detail in the Concept of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation from 2013 and additionally emphasized in the new version of the Concept from 2016. With this document, “soft power” is defined as an indispensable part of modern international politics, and its official definition was introduced.

Specifically, the document states that “within public diplomacy, Russia will strive to ensure an objective perception of itself in the world, develop its own effective means of informational influence on public opinion abroad, ensure the strengthening of the position of the Russian media in the global information space, providing them with necessary state support, and it will actively participate in international cooperation in the information sphere and take the necessary measures to prevent information activities aimed at violating its sovereignty and security”.⁹

According to the new Concept, “soft power” is “a complex instrument for solving foreign policy tasks, based on the possibilities of civil society, information-communication, humanitarian and other methods and techniques, as an alternative to classical diplomacy”.

In the same document, the possible negative sides of the use of “soft power” mechanisms were highlighted: “... strengthening global competition and accumulation of crisis potential leads to the risk of destructive and illegal use of “soft power” and abuse of the concept of human rights due to political pressure on sovereign states, interference in their internal affairs, destabilization of the situation, manipulation of public opinion and awareness, including the financing of humanitarian projects, and projects related to the protection of human rights abroad”. The second part of Article 20 of the Concept essentially coincides with the theses from the mentioned Putin’s pre-election article “Russia and the changing world”. In that paper, he called for a clear distinction between the civilized work of humanitarian and charitable non-governmental organizations and the illegal instruments of “soft power” acting through “pseudo-NGOs”, supported from abroad to destabilize the situation in certain countries. The Concept also envisages

⁹ Концепция внешней политики Российской Федерации, утвержденная Президентом В. В. Путиным 12 февраля 2013 г. // URL: <http://www.mid.ru/bdomp/ns-osndoc.nsf/info/c32577ca0017434944257b160051bf7f>, (seen 04.09.2020)

improvement of the system of application of “soft power” and sets the tasks for finding optimal forms of activity in that area.

Special attention is devoted to “soft power” instruments, which must be actively used in foreign policy. In a special section, entitled: “Information support of foreign policy activity”, the importance of using the means of public diplomacy and information and communication technologies is emphasized. According to the text of this document, these tools should, first of all, contribute to the creation of a positive image of Russia, which corresponds to the authority of its culture, education, science, sports, level of civil society development, as well as participation in assistance programs for developing countries (Article 39), and second, to provide the wider world public with complete and accurate information on the country’s attitudes towards major international issues, foreign policy initiatives and actions of the Russian Federation, on the processes and plans of its internal socio-economic development and achievements of Russian culture and science (Article 40).

Formally, the main actors in public diplomacy do not belong to the so-called “foreign policy triad”: the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Army and the special services, and are not directly connected with the state as a political institution. In other words, most subjects of public diplomacy are not in the public service, although professional diplomats can be involved in the process of promoting the country’s humanitarian initiatives. On the contrary, it is very important that diplomatic missions abroad be included in the social life of the receiving country and contribute to the development of cultural ties.

In addition to the cultural attaché who directly deals with these types of cooperation, other diplomats, including the ambassador, can attend scientific symposia and conferences and actively cooperate with media houses and social networks. However, this is just the tip of a huge iceberg called “public diplomacy”. Its strength is determined by the quantity and quality of overall humanitarian contacts in all spheres of social life.

As already mentioned, the new Concept, in fact, retains all important provisions related to the necessity of using the “soft power” instruments as part of the basic tasks undertaken to ensure national interests and the realization of strategic national priorities of the Russian Federation. Among the most important activities through which the set tasks should be realized are:

- comprehensive effective protection of the rights and legitimate interests of Russian citizens and compatriots living abroad on various grounds;
- strengthening the role of Russia in the global humanitarian space, spreading and strengthening the position of the Russian language in the world, popularization of the values of national culture, national historical heritage and cultural identity of the Russian people, the Russian educational system and science and consolidation of the Russian diaspora;
- strengthening the position of the Russian media and mass communication in the global information space and bringing the Russian point of view on international processes to the broadest circles of world society;
- support for the development of constructive dialogue and partnership in the interest of reaching agreement and mutual enrichment of different cultures and civilizations.

The document also emphasizes that the use of the “soft power” instruments is becoming an integral part of modern international politics in solving foreign policy tasks; above all, the possibilities of civil society, information-communication, humanitarian and other methods and technologies, which complement traditional diplomatic methods.¹⁰

Based on all relevant documents, it can be concluded that there are several important actors in the sphere of “soft power”. The most noticeable, according to the results of work and presence in the international community, is Rossotrudnichestvo. Its basic tasks are related to strengthening international ties in the humanitarian sphere, as well as forming a positive image of Russia abroad. The main activities of this organization are: support and spread of the Russian language in the world, popularization of Russian science, culture and education, work with compatriots abroad, and implementation of measures in the field of international cooperation and people’s diplomacy. Representative offices of this organization operate in a hundred countries around the world.

Similar functions are performed by several other organizations, such as the Fund “Русский мир” (Russian World), the movement “ Мир без нацизма” (The World without Nazism), the Fund for Support and Protection

¹⁰ Концепция внешней политики Российской Федерации (2016), <https://interaffairs.ru/news/show/16503>, (seen 09.09.2020).

of the Rights of Citizens Abroad, the Fund for Cooperation with the Russian-speaking Foreign Press, etc. The newer Russian expert platform in the field of international relations is the international discussion club “Валдай”. It is an international intellectual forum where open dialogue between experts, politicians, journalists, and other representatives of various social circles is conducted.

The next important institution is the A.M. Gorchakov Fund, as a non-governmental organization dealing with the support of public diplomacy, cooperation with other non-governmental organizations in their participation in international activities, as well as the involvement of civil society institutions in foreign policy processes.

As a result of an active effort to ensure Russia’s increased presence in the world information system, the international information channel Russia Today was formed.

The main purpose of the activity of this channel is to place the Russian position on the key problems of the world community, as well as to inform the global public opinion about the events in Russia.

The National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation until 2020¹¹ specifies that in the new conditions, within the framework of international cooperation, Russia should apply multi-vector diplomacy, as well as a pragmatic policy that will enable increased opportunities for the Russian Federation to strengthen its influence on the international scene (Article 9).

To achieve this goal, Russian foreign policy should be active and, at the same time, predictable and open, and should strive to find agreements and common interests with other countries based on bilateral and multilateral mutually beneficial partnerships (Article 89).

If Russia really wants to become practically (not only ideologically and normatively) the main driving factor of integration, especially in the Eurasian space, it must devote far more attention to the application of adequate “soft power” technologies. This, above all, means:

¹¹ Стратегия национальной безопасности Российской Федерации до 2020 года [Электронный ресурс]//Совет безопасности РФ, <http://www.scrf.gov.ru/documents/99.html>, (seen 09.09.2020)

1. Creating a system of priority information zones. According to the Concept of Russia's Foreign Policy, these are the CIS countries and the "near abroad";
2. Application of the so-called new tactics of presence in the information space. This means, among other things, that the broadcasting of information should not be based only on the activities of Russian PIS (Public Information Services), but also on the engagement of partner information houses on the basis of a well-designed work plan and a signed joint agreement;
3. Raising the "quality" of information activities with the aim of "conquering" the audience in conditions of very fierce competition in the information market;
4. Diversification of program contents in terms of their adaptation to the different (target) groups, i.e., audience segments. An illustrative example in this regard is the programs of Western PIS aimed at extending their own goals towards the female population in the Middle East. These activities were especially fruitful in Egypt and Libya. The "liberated" woman became one of the most important subjects and participants in the "revolutionary" events of 2011.

However, as pointed out above, the use of "soft power" systems can have different directions. If the goal of Western countries was to destroy traditional Islamic societies, Russia, in the process of Eurasian integration, must use this resource in an integrative and stabilizing direction.

5. Regular application of the methodology for assessing the effectiveness of the program to monitor the size of the audience and the most important and useful content in order to make appropriate corrections and shift the focus;
6. Cross (mutual) advertising of programmes that are informative and important for the image. For example, regional stations advertise the Russian media and vice versa. Media monitoring in the CIS countries indicates the need for a greater Russian presence in the information space of the region. A special problem is the former positions have been largely lost, and the media market is flooded with competitors. In order to return to the information space of the near and far abroad, it is

necessary to ensure the media toolkit becomes a true integration resource of Russia.¹²

Without diminishing the importance of traditional PIS, it is necessary to keep in mind that the largest part of the youth audience expects an interactive role in the media. This part of society is important for all holders of “soft power” because working with young people is considered “investing in the future”. In the example of Russia, there is another additional motive in that regard, and that is the effort not to allow a complete cessation of its influence in countries that were once together. In that sense, the focus of information activities must be transferred to various forms of Internet journalism. It is especially important all these resources are used not only in Russian but also in the languages of the target audience. Within the process of building the image of the country, it is very important to use bright positive examples of athletes, actors, and artists with whom one can always find a positive correlation with regard to life in a once common state.

In the era of information technology, the use of social networks becomes the basis for building the country’s image as well as the realization of other political and social goals. The analysis of the work of social networks enables the formation of a kind of hierarchy, both in terms of the degree of influence on the audience, and in terms of technological applicability. Based on that, the appropriate strategy and methodology of information performance are defined.

The phenomenon of the human self-organization through interaction in the virtual sphere has been well elaborated by the American sociologist Howard Rheingold. In ten years, Rheingold believes, all the main centres where people live will be equipped with numerous interconnected microcircuits. This means an immediate and uninterrupted connection will be provided between individuals and groups around the world. In this way, the formation of a “smart crowd” whose ability to communicate surpasses all previous forms of communication will occur.¹³

¹² Елена Арляпова, *Сербия и ЕАЭС: партнерство на расстоянии*, Экономические стратегии, Москва, № 5-6, 2015, стр. 2-11.

¹³ Говард Рейнгольд, *Умная толпа: новая социальная революция*, (перевод с англ. А. Гарькавой), Торговый дом ГРАНД : Фаир пресс, Москва, 2006.

In his famous book, the trilogy: "The Information Age: Economics, Society and Culture", Manuel Castells analyses the transformation of power relations in the context of new communication circumstances.¹⁴ The fact is that the Internet, the activity of social networks, and blogging have fundamentally changed the relations within the political processes and overall social relations.

The modern era, according to Castells, is characterized by the so-called IT mode of production in which the basic source of productivity is the technology of generating knowledge, information processing, and symbolic communications. Such production corresponds to globalization, decentralization, and the transition from large economic giants to a flexible network structure of enterprises. It corresponds to the social practice that gives birth to the activity of the social network-based society. Contemporary culture, as part of society, is becoming a "culture of real virtuality", strictly determined by global interactive electronic communication systems by which reality is completely captured and replaced by a virtual expression displayed on the screen. This imaginary and presented world assimilates all special forms, expressions and specifics, and forms its own structure and logic. The primary purpose of the fight in these new conditions, according to the author, is to fight for involvement and participation in the creation of that new integrated communication system. In this system, there are different levels of "information government", at the top of which, for now, is the United States. Analysing the practice in a large area and the most important countries in the world, he, along with a very critical analysis of the period of "Yeltsin's Russia", does not deny the possibility of modern Russia to find its significant (adequate) place in the world of a new social reality.¹⁵

After all, what we presently call "soft power" was extremely present in the USSR. Even the creator of the concept of "soft power" pointed to the significant presence of these instruments:

"The Soviet Union has also spent billions on active public diplomacy programs that included promoting its high culture, broadcasting,

¹⁴ Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society, the Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture, Vol. I*. Cambridge, MA; Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1996.

¹⁵ See more in: Мирослав Младеновић, Јелена Пономарева, «Мека моћ» Русије – као услов успеха евроазијске интеграције, Српска политичка мисао број 1/2016 год. 23. vol. 51, Београд, УДК 327::911.3(497)"19/20", стр. 11-29;

spreading misinformation about the West, and sponsoring anti-nuclear protests, peacekeeping missions, and youth organizations”.¹⁶

In an effort to become a significant subject of international relations again and analogous to real overall potentials to become an active integrating force in the Eurasian space, Russia must pay more attention to the activation of “soft power” resources. It is, at the same time, a necessary condition and the element of its integration potential, but also a significant barrier against various disintegration actions of other countries directed against it. One possibility is to base the cooperation with other countries not only on relations with the authorities of partner countries but also with their civil society.

Russia’s “soft power”

If we talk about the current state of “soft power” of Russia, we must conclude it is not at an enviable level. According to numerous analyses and rankings of countries on this basis, with all the restrictions on the relativity of such actions, we can see that its position is quite low. According to the rating of *Softpower30*, Russia ranks 26th.¹⁷ In contrast, according to the rating of *Elcano’s Global Presence Report 2017 Soft presence*, the Russian Federation is in seventh place out of a total of 80.¹⁸ According to the methodology of *Monocle’s Soft Power Survey 2016/17*, Russia is not on the list of 25 countries.¹⁹ Undoubtedly, the difference in the method of assessment conditioned such positions of Russia on different lists. However, in order to relativise this problem and look more realistically at the place of Russian “soft power” in the world, the table below shows the comparative position of Russia, the United States, France, and the People’s Republic of China.

¹⁶ (Joseph Nye, *Soft Power*, Public Affairs, New York, 2004, p.73)

¹⁷ Portland soft power 30 // <http://softpower30.portland-communications.com> (seen: 10.09.2020)

¹⁸ Elcano’s Global Presence Report 2017 // <http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org> (seen: 10.09.2020)

¹⁹ Soft Power Survey 2016/17 // <https://monocle.com>. (seen: 10.09.2020)

Country	Portland Softpower (30 places)	Monocle's Soft Power Survey (25 places)	Elcano's Global Presence (80 places)
Russian Federation	26	(not in first 25)	7
USA	2	1	1
France	1	5	5
PR China	25	20	2

The Table is based on the idea of: Виктор Володин, Лилия Рожкова, Ольга Сальникова, «Мягкая сила» в Мировом сообществе и внешней политике России, М: Право и управление. XXI век, №3(44)/2017.

Also, the analysis of the very elements of Russia's "soft power", their condition, and real influence indicate that there is still a lot of room for the practical realization of latent possibilities in that area.

Components of Russia's "soft power"

ELEMENTS OF "SOFT POWER"	ITS INFLUENCE
1. Export reputation	Low in most markets, although there are exceptions
2. Reputation of state governing	Low, and this trend continues
3. The quality of the human factor	Ambivalent
4. Tourism development	Low
5. Innovation and immigration	Attractive for some CIS countries and countries of the "global south"
6. Historical past	Rather big
7. Culture	Elitist: high impact, but fragmented; Mass: non-competitive with some exceptions
8. Business conditions	Complex with great risks
9. Popularity of media production	Decreased abroad compared to the USSR
10. Language prevalence	Stable, in areas of demand for the Russian language; downward trend (exceptions some neighboring countries)

11. Attitude towards foreign policy	Complex and changeable, depending on the changes in the policy itself
12. Development of science	Acceptance and realistic picture – contradictory
13. Reputation of highly professional services: - education, _____ - medicine, _____ - finance, _____ - law, _____	- The downward trend; - Not so high; - Not so high; - Low

Source: Виктор Володин, Лилия Рожкова, Ольга Сальникова, «Мягкая сила» в Мировом сообществе и внешней политике России, М: Право и управление. XXI век, №3(44)/2017.

In essence, these indicators show that Russia has not used its potentials enough. Its possibilities to become a significant factor in the application of “soft power” in international relations are based not solely on the geoclimatic distribution, huge natural and human resources, and intellectual potential of citizens but also on culture, tradition, and vast historical experience.²⁰

The heroic defence in the Second World War and the decisive contribution to the defeat of fascism and Nazism, as well as the subsequent support for decolonization, have strongly strengthened the prestige, reputation, and soft power of the USSR. Despite the beginning of the Cold War and the rapid change in the image of the USSR in the Western media, the popularity of the communist leader did not decline too much because America, and not the USSR, dropped two nuclear bombs on Japan. To the prestige of the USSR even contributed the change at the head of the CP and the arrival of Khrushchev, who, to some extent, opened the country and started some kind of reforms. The culmination of the growth of the soft power of the Soviets was sending the first satellite and especially the first man into space. In the fifties and sixties, the USSR was well ahead of America in space programs, which, with the continuation of rapid development, was

²⁰ See more in: Мирослав Младеновић, Јелена Пономарева, Кина-Америка-Русија – глобални троугао 21. века, Социолошки преглед, Београд, бр. 4, вол. 45, 2011, стр. 459-476.

regarded in the world as a kind of confirmation that the USSR (or communism) was a technologically more advanced and “progressive” side in the conflict.²¹

Russia and the Balkans

Based on the most important documents regulating the classical and even public foreign policy activities of the Russian Federation, including the use of “soft power”, it follows that the Balkans, as well as Serbia, do not belong to its priorities. Despite that, history confirms the Balkans was and remained a special geopolitical and geoeconomic zone for Russia, in which the interests of practically all major subjects of international relations still clash today. The fact is that, despite the collapse of bipolarism, the struggle for influence in various parts of the world is not weakening, but, on the contrary, it is “accompanied by increased turbulence at the global and regional level”.

Growing competition in the political, economic and information spheres requires Russia to make serious efforts to maintain its influence in the region and seek effective methods of foreign policy. This, among other things, implies the diversification of communications with different social segments of the Balkan countries, which is impossible without the use of public diplomacy instruments and the elements of “soft power”.²²

Certainly, all theoretical considerations and normative assumptions about public diplomacy would not make sense if there were no concrete activities in that domain. Within a large number of NGOs committed to improving Russia’s image in the Balkans, the most active institutions are, however, Rossotrudnichestvo, Russian World, and the Gorchakov Fund. Even an extremely superficial analysis may show that this is insufficient to ensure serious competition with the appropriate institutions of Western provenance.

²¹ Миша Ђурковић, Русија и откривање меке моћи, Национални интерес, Година IV, vol. 4, Број 1-3/2008. стр. 25-54

²² See more in: Елена Пономарева, Балканский вектор российской энерго-дипломатии, Геополитика, Февраль 5th, 2013 | <http://www.geopolitics.ru/2013/02/balkanskij-vektor-rossijskoj-energodiplotatii/> (seen: 10.09.2020)

Undoubtedly, there are possibilities for Russia to assume a more worthy position in the world again. Whether the respective potentials will be translated into practical solutions depends on a large number of factors, mostly on the ability of the forces that steer Russian society to coordinate joint action on the path of revitalizing the state as one of the most influential subjects in the modern international community.

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EURASIAN ECONOMIC INTEGRATION AND THE POSSIBILITY OF INCREASING SERBIA'S EXPORTS TO RUSSIA

Nataša Stanojević¹

Abstract: The purpose of this paper is to determine the effects of Serbian participation in the Eurasian economic integration processes on the export to the Russian Federation. The general hypothesis is that these benefits far outweigh the gains provided by the formal aspects of the agreement (customs rates, exemption lists, etc.). These assumptions are proven by statistical analysis and construction of an extended gravity model. The gravity model has determined the effects of several factors on Russia's imports. These are the size of import markets and the distance from Russia, as common elements, but also dummy variables related to membership in Eurasian integrations, the BRICS and the SCO. The model and coefficients were then applied to the Russian Federation's imports from Serbia, and the results showed that Serbia's accession to the EAEU could increase exports to Russia by almost a third. These expected positive effects are not the result of amendments to the agreement, but of the additional opening of a large Russian market to partner countries for the sake of strengthening alliances and influence in these countries.

Keywords: Eurasian integrations, commodity trade, Serbia, Russia, gravity model.

Introduction

A trade agreement strengthening is a crucial component of the contemporary global economy. These agreements are considered beneficial

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The paper presents findings of a study developed as a part of the research project "Serbia and challenges in international relations in 2020", financed by the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia, and conducted by the Institute of International Politics and Economics, Belgrade.

in many economic aspects: trade, FDI, growth, unemployment, and other impetus to the improvement of partner countries' economies. The ultimate objective of these agreements is to reduce the barriers to the circulation of goods, services, capital, labor, and more.

The reasons for the involvement of countries in economic integration processes are very different. Some see trade agreements as a basis for strategic alliances, and hence implicitly as a form part of security arrangements. International trade is the most preferred economic factor to grow and deepen the integration process of countries. Smaller open economies, such as Serbian, see trade agreements with larger partners as a way of obtaining more security for their access to larger country markets (Whalley, 1998, p. 63).

Despite the multidirectional foreign economic policy of Serbia, the main feature of its foreign trade is the constant, rapid growth of the trade deficit and a limited number of export partners. A new, particularly aggravating circumstance is the increasing trade protectionism that has been growing dramatically since the global financial crisis. It is vital for small open economies and their corporations to have access to large markets such as the EU, China, the USA, and Russia. Potentially, any increase in export volume and access to new markets has a great significance for the Serbian economy.

Serbia has had special trade relations with Russia since the period of the former Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) and signed free trade agreements in 2000. Serbia is joining the wider Eurasian integration processes with the agreements with Belarus from 2009 and Kazakhstan from 2010, which were by then in the Customs Union with Russia. The new agreement with the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), in the formal sense, offers Serbia only slightly more favorable conditions for free trade than those that Serbia already has had based on three existing agreements. The list of products exempted from the free trade regime when imported from Serbia is slightly expanded, almost identical to previous agreements. At first glance, the new form of co-operation seems to reflect more political rapprochement than the financial benefits of increasing exports.

In this paper, on the contrary, the hypothesis that the benefits of Eurasian integrations (EAI) far outweigh the gains expected from the formal aspects of the agreement (tariffs, quotas, lists of exceptions, and the like) is advocated. The agreement between Serbia and the EAEU signed at the end of 2019 can significantly strengthen economic ties with Russia and increase

exports to this large market. This hypothesis includes the assumption that Serbia's involvement in the Eurasian integration process has a special, much greater impact on economic relations with Russia than the 2000 bilateral free trade agreement with Russia. This is indicated by data showing strong growth in exports of Serbia, Armenia, Uzbekistan and other countries to the Russian market, not since the signing of the FTA agreement with Russia, but since inclusion in broader forms of integration or agreements that preceded the EAEU.

An indicator of this hypothesis is the fact that the Russian Federation does not need imports from the Eurasian integration member states. The Russian economy has been developing and diversifying rapidly since 2000. Industrial production far exceeds partner countries in terms of volume, diversity, and technological level. Agriculture has been achieving amazing results since 2009 and is approaching food self-sufficiency opportunities. However, Russian imports from Belarus, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and even Serbia are disproportionately large in relation to the strength of these economies. Every step of the member states deeper into integration seems to lead to Russia opening up most of its huge market to partner countries. This is done not because of the economic need for goods from these more developed economies, but for the sake of strengthening alliances and influence in these countries. It is, therefore, a non-economic factor and the informal impact of the EAI accession on exports to Russia.

The aim of this study is to quantify and measure this informal impact of the EAI membership on Russian imports of goods from partner countries. The next goal is to apply the obtained coefficients to Serbian exports to Russia in order to determine its potential increase.

The single-country gravity model will be applied to the imports of the Russian Federation. The model will be extended with three dummy variables for regional economic integrations: Eurasian integration forms (EAI), Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa group (BRICS), and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO).

The survey includes data for the period 2000-2018. The composition of data is the panel data. More precisely, these are two panels with two different samples of trade partners with Russia. The first sample includes data on Russian imports from 15 countries with which it is connected by some form of integration. The second sample was expanded with the largest 20 import partners not included in the first sample, i.e., a total of 24 countries.

Literature review

Theoretical assumptions about the importance of economic integration agreements are the subject of a relatively small number of books and papers, given the growing number and importance of these forms of international cooperation. Some of the most significant are Whalley (1998), Kohl (2013), Czerewacz-Filipowicz and Konopelko (2017), and others. They explore the different motives and interests of countries in joining regional economic integrations. The findings of these and other studies can be reduced to the following advantages of economic integration:

- reduce costs for both consumers and producers;
- improved availability of goods and services;
- increase trade between the countries involved in the agreement;
- encourage employment;
- ensure the more dynamic economic development of member states;
- provide new employment opportunities based on market expansion, technology sharing, and cross-border investment;
- provide political cooperation among member countries.

The theoretical basis of the methodological approach of this research is broad and branched. Since the gravity equation was introduced by Tinbergen (1962) and Linnemann (1966), it has been used in hundreds of papers for estimating the determinants of bilateral trade. This concept was further developed, among others, by Anderson (1979), Bergstrand (1985), and Helpman et al. (2008).

To analyze the effects of regional integrations, researchers typically add dummy variables for participation in regional arrangements (Hamilton and Winters 1992, Frankel and Wei 1993, Eichengreen and Irwin, 1998). A positive coefficient on dummy variables indicates that two countries, both of which participate in the same preferential arrangement, trade more with one another than predicted by their incomes, population, and distance.

Some of the most comprehensive works on the Eurasian integration processes are the papers of Vymyatnina and Antonova (2014), Czerewacz-Filipowicz and Konopelko (2017), Wilson (2017) and Vinokurov (2018). The most significant empirical research that combines the same subject and methodology as this research are the papers of Head and Mayer (2014), and

Baier, Bergstrand, and Feng (2014) who used the gravity equation with EIA dummies to determine the welfare gains from EIAs.

Economic relations between Russia and Serbia

Serbia in the Eurasian economic integration processes

‘The chronology of Serbia’s free trade agreements demonstrates that during the entire period following the collapse of Yugoslavia, Serbia conducted a multidirectional foreign economic policy, developing relations with both its western and eastern partners’ (Lisovolik, Chimiris, 2018, p. 6). Serbia has been a member of the Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA). It has preferential customs regimes with the European Union, the United States, and the Eurasian Economic Union. Also, Serbia has concluded bilateral free trade agreements with Turkey and the members of the European Free Trade Association – EFTA (Norway, Switzerland, Iceland, and Liechtenstein) (Development Agency of Serbia, 2017). Serbia is also a beneficiary of Japan’s preferential duties on importation to Japan.

The motives for joining economic integration are very different in large economies that are at the center of integration processes and in small, less developed countries. Serbia, as a typical representative of this second group, cannot stay out of international economic flows. Its motive to get involved in all available integration processes is perhaps the most conventional objective. Namely, the country’s participation in any trade negotiation is triggered by the ‘idea that through reciprocal exchanges of concessions on trade barriers there will be improvements in market access from which all parties to the negotiation will benefit’ (Whalley, 1998, p. 71).

The EAEU commenced operations on 1 January 2015, but its origin can already be seen as early as in the first part of the 1990s (Eurasian Customs Union – EACU), through the Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC), the Commonwealth of Independent States Free Trade Area (CISFTA), etc. The elements identified as priorities in the process of creating the EAEU are enabling the free movement of capital and financial market integration, the unification of business principles, enabling freedom of movement, the unification of tax systems, and monetary policy (Czerewacz-Filipowicz, Konopelko, 2017, p. 36). ‘The EAEU provides for free movement of goods,

services, capital and labor, pursues coordinated, harmonized and single policy in the sectors determined by the Treaty and international agreements within the Union' (EAEU, 2015). A free trade agreement with the EAEU countries will grant free access to new markets and could improve the terms of trade with the Russian Federation. The result of the EAEU so far is the growth of the volume of trade in goods by the EAEU member states in 2017 and 2018 after a significant fall in 2016 (Eurasian Development Bank, 2017, 2019).

The intergovernmental free trade agreement between Russia and Serbia (then the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia) signed in August 2000 was Russia's first agreement with a country outside its region aimed at liberalizing the foreign trade regime. Serbia's strategic goal was to increase employment, achieve production and financial stability by stimulating and expanding mutual trade relations (Stanojevic, 2014, p. 263). The agreement stipulates that goods that can be proven to originate from Serbia (more than 50% of the content from Serbia) are not subject to customs duties when intended for the Russian market unless exempted from the free trade regime. Serbia then joined the wider Eurasian integration processes. It signed a free trade agreement with Belarus in 2009 and Kazakhstan in 2010, as members of the Customs Union with the Russian Federation.

The Free Trade Agreement between the Republic of Serbia and the Eurasian Economic Union and its member states was signed on 25 October 2019 and ratified on 24 February 2020. This agreement complements the free trade agreement signed in 2000. Also, the list of products from Serbia that can be exported to the territory of the EAEU duty-free was expanded. Conveniences are provided for the export of some types of cheese, alcoholic beverages (fruit brandy and brandy), and cigarettes originating from Serbia to the EAEU market. Quotas for exports of goods that are not on the list of exceptions have also been increased. The free trade agreement with the EAEU replaced the existing free trade agreements that Serbia had with Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan. This document enables Serbia to export about 95.5% of domestic products to the EAEU countries without paying customs duties.

Therefore, the agreement with the EAEU offers Serbia somewhat more favorable conditions for free trade than those that Serbia already has based on the existing agreements. An alliance with the EAEU will also give Serbia a platform for entering new markets of the CIS countries, Armenia and Kyrgyzstan. The establishment of a free trade agreement between Serbia

and the EAEU countries could promote the so-called 'second-level import substitution' (Lisovolik and Chimiris, 2018, p. 24), which means that with dropping shares of third countries on the markets of Serbia and the EAEU, more opportunities open up for increasing the share of national manufacturers and service providers. Lisovolik and Chimiris (2018, p. 23) highlight another potential advantage: 'entering into an FTA with the EAEU will expand (Serbia's) opportunities to enter new markets in Asia, such as the ASEAN, with which the EAEU is building trade alliances.'

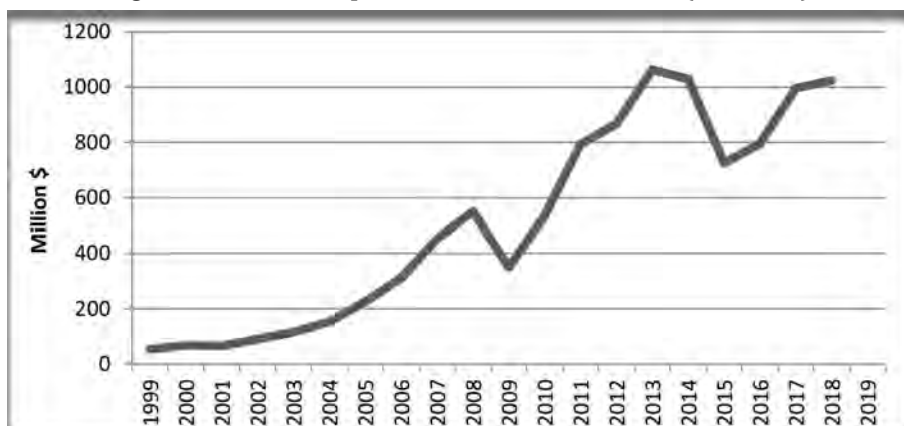
Key features of trade between Serbia and the Russian Federation

Russia has been one of Serbia's principal trade partners for several years. Their successful trade dates back to the time of the former FRY but has become increasingly important in recent years. The Russian Federation is the first Serbian partner on the import side and the fifth on the export side. Serbia's principal imports included oil, natural gas, aluminum, copper wire, and ferrous and non-ferrous metal products. Due to large energy imports, Serbia has a constant trade deficit.

Serbia's exports to Russia have been constantly and rapidly increasing since 2003 and especially since 2010 (Figure 1). If we compare this trend with previous data on Serbia's inclusion in the EAI processes, it can be noticed that the increase in exports did not occur after the signing of the agreement with Russia, but a sharp jump was recorded after the agreement with Belarus and Kazakhstan (Figure 1). It seems that participation in the Eurasian integration processes, at least in the case of Serbia, has a much greater positive impact on economic relations with Russia than bilateral agreements with this country.

From \$50-60 million during the 1990s and early 2000s, Serbia's merchandise exports to the Russian Federation in 2013 reached almost \$1,100 million. Since then, there has been a sharp but short-lived decline on two occasions, and in the period 2017-2019, Serbian exports to Russia again reached \$1 billion (Figure 1). The cooperation agreement with the EAEU from December 2019 should encourage new export growth.

Figure 1. Serbia's exports to Russia 2004-2019 (million \$)



Source: Author according to UN Comtrade – <https://comtrade.un.org/data>

Serbia's exports to Russia are dominated by textile and agricultural goods, medicines, paper, and pneumatic tires. The following table shows Serbia's exports by the most important product groups to Russia and total exports by groups for 2019. Product group classification according to the Harmonized System (HS) of the United Nation Conference of Trade and Development (UNCTAD) was used.

Table 1. Serbian export of selected commodity group

Commodity group UNCTAD classification	Export to Russia (mil. \$)	Total exports (mil. \$)	Share (%)
Dairy produce; eggs; honey	35.22	108.05	32.60
Fruit and nuts	173.25	610.20	28.39
Pharmaceutical products	72.49	290.17	24.98
Apparel and clothing accessories	101.66	461.84	22.01
Vegetables	22.26	129.38	17.21
Pneumatic tires	76.65	742.76	10.32

Source: Author according to UN Comtrade

Exports of dairy products, eggs, and honey to Russia make up more than a third of the total Serbian exports of these products, fruit exports about 29% of total exports, pharmaceutical products about 25% of total Serbian exports.

Assessing the Impact of the International Integration Processes on Russia's commodity imports

Russia's commodity import factors – model variables

The gravity model of trade is one of the most common approaches in modern econometrics, and it will be used as the basic quantitative method of this research. The dependent variable in the gravity model is most often exports, while the key independent variables are usually the size of the economies in the trade relationship and the distance between them. The most common are dummy variables such as common language, former colonial status, and the like. This research includes the basic elements of 'gravitational' attraction, but it is set up significantly different.

The model determines the factors of Russian imports from certain countries so that the dependent variable is Russian imports (expressed in millions of \$, according to the UN Comtrade). The first independent variable is the size of the market from which Russia imports goods, expressed by their nominal GDP in a million \$, according to the World Bank (World Bank indicators, 2020). Data on trade and GDP are expressed in nominal terms following Baldwin, Taglioni (2006), who suggested that deflating nominal GDP and trade by a price index is a mistake because the gravity equation is obtained from the expenditure, and not demand, functions and therefore it requires nominal data. Another independent variable is the distance between Moscow and the capitals of the partner countries.

To analyze the effects of regionalism, investigators typically add dummy variables for participation in regional arrangements (Eichengreen, Irwin, 1998; Frankel and Wei 1993). Three dummy variables related to international arrangements are included in this model.

Those are:

- Eurasian economic integrations which imply the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) and its previous forms, whose influence is at the center of research,
- The BRICS community, as an acronym for member countries: Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa,
- The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), in 2001 the Republic of Kazakhstan, the People's Republic of China, Kyrgyzstan, the Republic of Tajikistan, and the Republic of Uzbekistan, India and Pakistan in 2017.

The variable related to the Eurasian integration processes is referred to as EAI because the analysis does not refer only to the EAEU, which is only the latest form or stage of these processes but to a whole series of previous integration phases. The first form of integration after the collapse of the USSR was the CIS, which involved free trade between all members of the former state, but in many cases, this rule did not work. Some countries have irrevocably separated from Russia not only politically but also economically. The first organization the already formed and independent states joined was The Eurasian Economic Community (EAEC or EurAsEC), which was founded in 2000 and lasted until 2014 when it grew into the Eurasian Economic Union. It was a regional organization between Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. Uzbekistan joined the EurAsEC in 2006 but suspended its membership in 2008 (EurAsEC official website). After that Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Armenia, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova and Tajikistan signed the Free Trade Agreement of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS FTA) on 18 October 2011. The Customs Union (2010-2014) included the same countries. In 2014 Moldova signed the Association Agreement with the European Union and the establishment of the Deep and Comprehensive FTA. That is why Russia has introduced import duties and import bans on some Moldovan products. In 2014 Uzbekistan joined the CIS FTA. The EAEU included the former CIS FTA members. Then Armenia joined in 2015, and in the same year, an EAEU trade agreement was concluded with Vietnam. In 2016 Ukraine and the European Union started applying a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement. Russia signed a decree suspending its CIS FTA with respect to Ukraine from 1 January 2016, and other member countries impose customs checks on goods entering the EEU from Ukraine. In 2018, new free trade agreements will be reached with China and Iran, then with Serbia and

Singapore in 2019, and in 2020 Indonesia will join. The effects of the agreement after 2018 cannot be measured because the latest data on Russian imports are available for this year, with the participation of Serbia already included in EAI since 2011, i.e., since the entry into force of the free trade agreement with the Eurasian Customs Union.

These details are listed because dummy variables change in individual countries depending on participation in international integrations with Russia.

Model specifications

In this research, the single-country gravity model will be applied to the imports of the Russian Federation. It is used to calculate the impact of selected factors (GDP, distance and participation of partner countries in international integration processes with Russia) on commodity imports of Russia. The research covers the period 2000-2018. The extended gravity equation takes the form as follows:

$$\ln Imp_{rjt} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \ln GDP_{jt} + \beta_2 \ln D_{rj} + \beta_3 EAI_{jt} + \beta_4 BRICS_{jt} + \beta_5 SCO_{jt} + e_{ij} \quad (1)$$

The subscripts r stands for Russia, j for the trade partner of Russia and t for the time period, respectively. Imp_{rjt} denotes the imports of Russia from country j in year t , GDP_{jt} is GDP of a partner country in the year t , D_{rj} is the distance between Moscow and a capital city of a partner country, and EAI_{jt} , $BRICS_{jt}$ and SCO_{jt} are dummy variables for partner country j participation in given international integrations in the year t , and e_{ij} is a random error term. Dependent and independent variables except dummy variables are in logarithmic form.

The first variant of the model includes all 15 countries involved in three international integrations with Russia. The sample includes 285 observations. Independent dummy variables are given a value of 1 in the year following the accession of individual states to international organizations of which Russia is a member. Upon abandonment of these arrangements, such as the cases of Uzbekistan, Ukraine and Moldova in the EAEU, the value of the variable for the following year is 0. For example, Ukraine has dummy variable 1 in the period 2011-2016, Moldova in the period 2012-2015, in accordance with stated participation in EAI.

The second variant includes 24 countries exporting to Russia. This includes the 20 countries with the largest volume of exports to Russia and all countries from the first model. Several countries are in both groups, such as China, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Ukraine, India, and Vietnam. The economies of Germany, the United States, France, Italy, the UK, Japan, South Korea, Turkey, Poland, etc., are added. The sample includes 456 observations.

Results and discussion

The results of testing the gravity model are two model variants, referring to two different samples of Russia's import partners.

Table 2. Results

<i>Variables</i>	(1)		(2)	
	<i>Coefficients</i>	<i>Standard Error</i>	<i>Coefficients</i>	<i>Standard Error</i>
<i>Intercept</i>	7.21***	0.75	0.88	0.75
<i>ln GDP</i>	0.81***	0.04	0.91***	0.05
<i>ln D</i>	-1.42***	0.09	-0.51***	0.10
<i>EAI</i>	0.80***	0.15	0.84***	0.20
<i>BRICS</i>	0.55**	0.22	-1.23***	0.25
<i>SCO</i>	0.42***	0.14	-0.31*	0.18
<i>Regression Statistics</i>				
Multiple R	0.85		0.72	
R Square	0.72		0.52	
Adjusted R Square	0.72		0.51	
Standard Error	0.98		1.27	
F	145.40		95.69	
Significance F	0.00		0.00	
Observations	285		456	

Notes: ***, ** and * represent significance at 1, 5 and 10 percent, respectively.

Source: Author's calculation

The variable related to the size of trading partners, as usual, has a positive impact on Russia's merchandise imports, while geographical distance has an expected negative impact.

Both models show the correctness of the initial assumption of the research, which is a significant positive impact of Eurasian integration – variable EAI on Russia's imports from partner countries. In the first variant of the model, which includes all partner countries in different integrations, the EAI coefficient has a significantly higher value than BRICS and the SCO, 0.8 versus 0.55 and 0.42.

In the second variant of the model, which includes all of Russia's major trading partners, membership in the BRICS and the SCO shows a negative impact. Eichengreen and Irwin (1998) analyzed the situation in many research with dummy variables of regional integrations when the coefficient for the other and each subsequent regional integration variable is negative. This is not an unusual result of such research, 'indicating when only one member of the pair participates in a particular preferential arrangement is taken as evidence of trade diversion vis-a-vis the rest of the world' (1998, p. 34).

In addition, in comparison (sample) with large exporters to Russia, such as the EU countries, the importance of these two integrations is not pronounced. Involvement in the Eurasian integration processes, however, even in this combination shows a significant positive impact, more precisely even greater than in the first variant, with a coefficient of 0.84.

All variables are statistically significant with a *p-value* lower than 0.05 and 0.01. The coefficient of determination (R^2) in the first model has a significant value of 0.73, which indicates that the included variables explain as much as 73% of Russian imports. In the second model, which includes all major Russian import partners, R^2 is only 0.51, which is a reflection of the diversity of economies included in the analysis and does not explain Russian exports sufficiently. The significance of this model is that it also shows a significant positive impact of Eurasian integration, despite the fact that the group includes more dominant countries in terms of import volume that are not in any integration arrangements with Russia.

Potential Commodity Exports of Serbia to the Russian Federation

The projected Serbia's export to Russia will be marked with Imp_{rs} . It will be calculated using data of the GDP of Serbia in 2019 (GDP_s) and \ln distance between Belgrade and Moscow.

$$\ln Imp_{rs} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \ln GDP_s + \beta_2 \ln D_{rs} + \beta_3 EAI_{st} + \beta_4 BRICS_t + \beta_5 SCO_t + e_i \quad (2)$$

The coefficients obtained in the first variant of model have been applied to Serbia's exports to the Russian Federation. Variables $BRICS$ and SCO are omitted, so that the projected export of Serbia to Russia takes the following form:

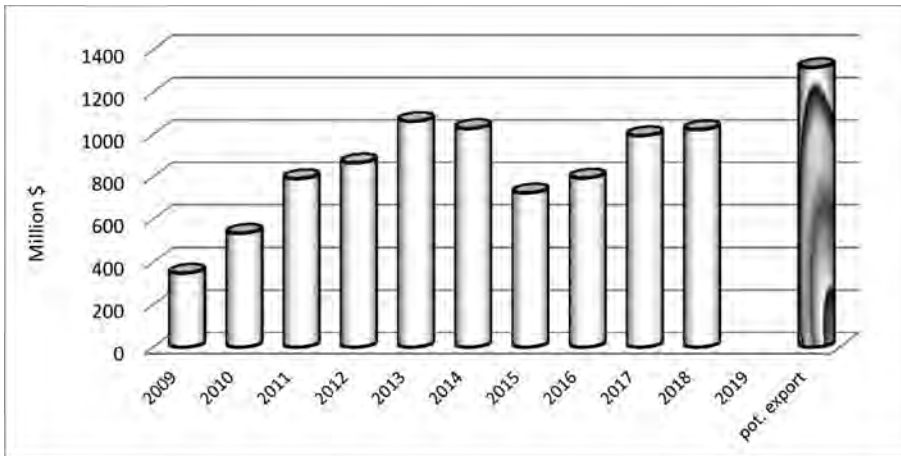
$$\ln Imp_{rs} = 7.21 + 0.81 \ln GDP_s - 1.42 \ln D + 0.80 EAI + 0.98 \quad (3)$$

that is:

$$\ln Imp_{rs} = 7.21 + 0.81 * 3.94 - 1.41 * 1.44 + 0.80 * 1 + 0.98 \quad (4)$$

$\ln Imp_{rs}$ is 7.21 which is 29% higher projected (potential) exports in 2020 than $\ln Imp_{rs}$ 6.93 in 2018, the last year for which data are available. Shown in real value (exp), potential exports are about \$ 1317 million (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Real and Potential Serbian commodity export to Russia



Source: Author's calculation

Conclusions

The main purpose of this paper was to examine the potential increase of Serbian export to the Russian Federation, as a consequence of more intensive involvement in the Eurasian integration processes. The assumption is that the benefits of regional Eurasian integration outweigh the benefits of the formal legal aspects of the agreement, as Russia opens up a part of its vast market to partner countries, not because an economic need for goods from these less developed economies, but to strengthen alliances and strengthen influence. The impact of Eurasian integration on the volume of Russian imports from partner countries is thus greater than its involvement in other economic integrations. It is, therefore, a non-economic factor and the informal impact of the EAI accession on exports to Russia.

By using the gravity model of international trade, which was applied to two different samples of trading partners, the coefficients of the selected variables that influence Russian imports of goods most were determined. According to the results, imports intensify with a higher level of income of Russian trading partners, and greater distance from the trading partner weakens imports, which is common. What is most important for this research is that the coefficients of both resulting models showed a significant positive impact of Eurasian integration on Russia's import. The membership in these integration processes has a far greater positive impact than inclusion in other integrations. This strong impact does not weaken even compared to large exporters to Russia, such as the EU countries.

According to the created model, the obtained coefficients were applied to Serbian exports to Russia. This procedure has shown that deeper involvement in Eurasian integration enables an increase in Serbian exports to Russia by a third compared to current exports.

This is not the result of the aforementioned new provisions of the agreement with the EAEU. A duty-free export permit for several additional products will further increase Serbian exports, which is not included in this study. In this research, only the informal effect of more intensive involvement in Russian regional spheres of influence was singled out and analyzed. These expected positive effects are not the result of amendments to the agreement, but of the additional opening of a large Russian market to partner countries for the sake of strengthening alliances and influence in these countries.

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POLITICAL, ECONOMIC, AND CULTURAL COOPERATION BETWEEN THE REPUBLIC OF BELARUS AND THE WESTERN BALKAN THROUGH THE LENS OF RELATIONS WITH SERBIA

Asja Pentegova¹

Abstract: The multi-vector foreign policy of the Belarusian state provides opportunities for collaboration and platforms for dialogue and cooperation with all countries of the Western Balkans. Serbia is the most promising Balkan country for Belarus in terms of communication and cooperation. Serbia is in many ways similar to Belarus in its creative attempts to manoeuvre between the centres of power to maximize the protection of its national interests.

Belarusian-Serbian relations have been and are stable. They show relatively high dynamics of economic contacts and a developed legal framework. Both Belarus and Serbia implement economic policies based on developing trade relations as well as on supporting the establishment of joint ventures and promoting investment cooperation.

Belarus and Serbia are roughly equal regional actors. Among the key areas of cooperation, the crucial role of joint emergency prevention and response efforts and, in particular, joint crisis management exercises should be highlighted. The Belarusian and Serbian military, jointly with their Russian counterparts, have been organising the Slavic Brotherhood Military Exercises since 2016.

Cooperation between Belarus and Serbia also includes interaction in the spiritual and cultural sphere. Sharing common spiritual and cultural values is one of the leading factors in the formation of close relations between the two countries. To enhance cooperation in all sectors, Belarus and Serbia should consider the inclusion of tourism in the promising areas of bilateral

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relations. The development of relations between Serbia and Belarus contributes not only to the preservation of spiritual and cultural ties but also to the unity of all Slavic peoples.

Keywords: Belarus, Serbia, bilateral relations, foreign policy, economic contacts, culture cooperation, fraternal support.

Political, economic, and cultural cooperation between the Republic of Belarus and the Western Balkans through the lens of relations with Serbia

The multi-vector foreign policy of the Belarusian state provides opportunities for collaboration and platforms for dialogue and cooperation with all countries of the Western Balkans.

The relations between Belarus and Serbia have a long history, and its high point must be the political decision of the President of Belarus to support Serbia and visit Belgrade during the NATO bombing of the Serbian capital in April 1999. This instilled hope and confidence in the Yugoslav population. Belarus is perceived in Serbia as a symbol of virtue. It was not able to counter the NATO forces, but its “fraternal support” was much appreciated.

Based on the classification developed by Mark Khrustalev, a prominent Russian professor (MGIMO University of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation), three key vectors shaping the political and psychological aspects of relations between countries can be distinguished in the most general terms.²

“Friend-Enemy Vector”: is characterised by the highest degree of tension in the relationship as opposed to “fraternal relations” considered as the ultimate degree of friendliness. For example, the rivalry mode relations developed during the Cold War between Russia and the United States.

“Dependence-Independence” Vector: is based on the “balance of forces” between countries, or rather, on the obvious superiority of one international actor over another, where the second actor is explicitly dependent, both politically and economically, on the leading state. For example, the relations

² Khrustalev. M.A. (2008). Analysis of International Situations and Political Expertise. Moscow, Regional Library of International Relations.

within Belarus–Russia Union State, as well as within the EAEU, where Russia is a clear leader.

“Trust-Distrust” Vector: it emerges as a consequence of the conventionality of the policy as well as its moral and ethical changes in compliance with treaties, agreements, conventions, and agreements reached.

It is obvious that the relations between Belarus and Serbia belong to this vector, in which there is no obvious superiority of any of the two actors. The countries are in equal bilateral economic and political relations that meet the needs and interests of both countries and do not have obvious pressure on the political course of the other country. It should be noted that the more favourable the political and psychological climate, the fewer obstacles there will be for interaction between countries in all spheres - politics, economy, culture, etc.

The political contacts between the countries have noticeably intensified in recent years: Tomislav Nikolić visited Minsk at the beginning and the end of his presidential term; Aleksandar Vučić, President of Serbia, visited the 2nd European Games held in Minsk in June 2019; Alexander Lukashenko paid an official visit to Belgrade in December 2019.

Implementing a consistent approach, Minsk has proved to be an important political partner of Belgrade. The “Kosovo issue” is a special case in relations between the two countries. Belarus’ position with regard to the unilateral declaration of independence of Kosovo is clear: on all international fora, Minsk supports the territorial integrity of Serbia.

Belarusian-Serbian relations have been and are stable. They show relatively high dynamics of economic contacts and a developed legal framework.

The existing legal framework of Belarusian-Serbian relations can be formally divided into four main categories:

- Cooperation agreements;
- Foreign relations (documents);
- Trade and economic relations (documents);
- Scientific, cultural, and humanitarian cooperation (documents).

In June 2015, during the official visit to Minsk of Maja Gojković, Chair of the Serbian Parliament, the Memorandum on Cooperation between the National Assembly of the Republic of Belarus and the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia was signed.

The interregional contacts between Belarus and Serbia are supported by cooperation agreements signed by a number of Belarusian and Serbian cities.

In 2016, Minsk hosted Belgrade Days, and in 2017, Minsk days held in Belgrade were aimed at promoting the cultures of the two peoples as well as trade and economic contacts and tourism.

Serbia is the most promising Balkan country for Belarus in terms of communication and cooperation. The history of Belarus-Serbia relations does not contain any encumbrances, except for Belgrade's solidarity with European sanctions. Serbia is in many ways similar to Belarus in its creative attempts to manoeuvre between the centres of power to maximize the protection of its national interests.

A gradual increase in trade between Belarus and Serbia was made possible by the bilateral free trade agreement (2009), which abolishes import customs duties and fees save in respect of a special commodity group, which is an exception to free trade as specified in the 2011 bilateral protocol.

The trade turnover proved particularly dynamic in the first few years after the signing of the FTA agreement, while it has stagnated in the last five years.

In 2009, the trade turnover between Belarus and Serbia amounted to USD 53.5 million. One year later, it totalled USD 116.5 million (a more than twofold increase). In 2011 it was USD 145.4 million and in 2012 nearly USD 150 million.³

At the same time, the Belarus-Serbia cooperation roadmap for 2017-2018 set a goal to increase trade turnover by USD 500 million. However, the mutual trade turnover which totalled USD 240 million at the best of times, in 2018 amounted to USD 148 million, falling by 38.2% compared to 2017 (the rate of decline in Belarusian exports was 40.9% – up to USD 84.5 million).

In particular, one of the obstacles for the economic cooperation between Belarus and Serbia is the geographic distance (absence of common borders), which increases supply chain and transportation costs and, consequently, the cost of inter-country trade.

In addition, it is important to understand despite the positive personal attitude of the President Vučić to Belarus, the cooperation with Minsk is

³ Belarus-Serbia: prospects for cooperation (2016, November 11), retrieved from http://www.mintorg.gov.by/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1720&Itemid=30. Accessed 25 July 2020.

viewed in the broader context of cooperation with the Russian Federation and the post-Soviet countries.

The signing of the FTA agreement between Serbia and the EAEU in October 2019 indicates the potential for an increase in mutual trade. The Serbian society sees the Eurasian Economic Union as a project to establish a new supranational pole of power destined to become a link between Europe and the Asia-Pacific region, and which has a deep geopolitical basis for uniting Central Eurasia.

The implementation of this Agreement is also important for strengthening the positions of the EAEU member states, in particular, Belarus, in the markets of the Western Balkans.

Both Belarus and Serbia implement economic policies based on developing trade relations as well as on the support of emerging joint ventures and investment cooperation.

Joint production on the Serbian territory is attractive to Belarus because the existing Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA) establishes a free trade regime between the member states. Taking into account the level of Belarus-Serbia trade and investment cooperation, there is a potential for Belarus to enter foreign markets of the Balkan countries. Since the signing of the Additional Protocol in 2011, the CEFTA countries have abolished all customs duties on imports, equivalent measures, and all import duties of a fiscal nature in mutual trade.

The CEFTA countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Moldova, and Montenegro) are the second-largest trade partner of Serbia, ensuring an annual surplus of about USD 2 million and a 15% share in the country's total trade.

Serbia has a law on foreign investment that guarantees the same legal status for domestic and foreign investors, i.e., freedom of investment, national security, legal security, and the ability to transfer profits abroad. These guarantees for Belarusian investors create a good investment climate.

Serbia's interest in such projects is motivated by the fact that over the previous two decades, during the transition to a free-market economy, Serbia has almost lost its primary manufacturing sector. Given the need for reindustrialisation, foreign direct investment is an important tool for reviving the economy, improving its competitive qualities, facilitating access to international trade markets, and improving the balance of payments.

It is to be understood, however, that since the European vector of Serbia's development is considered a priority, the trade and economic cooperation between Serbia and Belarus, as well as between Serbia and other EAEU countries, is limited to areas that either do not raise concerns with the European Union or are largely determined by the EU.

Belarus and Serbia are roughly equal regional actors. Neither of the two countries dominates in trade and economic cooperation, unlike, for example, Russia-Belarus relations.

Among the key areas of cooperation the crucial role of joint emergency prevention and response efforts, and, in particular, joint crisis management exercises should be highlighted. The Belarusian and Serbian military, jointly with their Russian counterparts, have been organising the Slavic Brotherhood Military Exercises since 2016. These exercises have become the sequel of successful cooperation between the Russian airborne troops and the special brigade of the Serbian army, which started with "SREM-2014" held on the territory of the "Nikinca" training ground in Vojvodina and was aimed at training anti-terrorist special units.⁴ According to the Minister of Defence Alexander Vulin, the Republic of Serbia attaches great importance to military and technical cooperation, which certainly sets out the vector for the development of future relations between the countries.

It is obvious that military and technical cooperation between Serbia and Belarus is developing, but it is not strategically oriented. Regrettably, Serbia's cooperation with NATO and the United States in the framework of the Partnership for Peace, Status of forces Agreement (SOFA), and Individual partnership action plan (IPAP) is incomparably more intense, although Serbia claims military neutrality.

After Montenegro signed the accession treaty to join NATO, the parity of Alliance forces in the Balkans has strengthened due to the overall expansion of its member states. The Agreement signed in September 2015 between the Government of the Republic of Serbia and the NATO Support and Procurement Organization (NSPO) on cooperation in the field of logistics support gained public attention only after its ratification by the President of Serbia in February 2016. It commits Belgrade to grant the NSPO

⁴ Serbia summed up the results of the joint military exercises SREM 2014 (2014, November 15), retrieved from https://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12000000@egNews. Accessed 15 July 2020.

personnel freedom of movement in the country (article 10, paragraph 2), access to public and private facilities (article 11, paragraph 1), diplomatic immunity under the Vienna Convention (article 10, paragraph 1), and to exempt the property of the Alliance and its representatives from customs duties and taxes (article 10, paragraphs 4 and 5).⁵

Serbia is surrounded by NATO and EU member states. Even though the official policy aimed at European integration has been undisputed for years and perceived positively by both public institutions and people, the situation regarding the prospect of NATO membership is exactly the opposite: Serbia has no desire to become a member of NATO, it intends to maintain its independence. The state supports and equips its army. In particular, since 2013 the Serbian Parliament has the observer status at the CSTO Parliamentary Assembly - a kind of counterweight to NATO.

Cooperation between the defence industry enterprises of Belarus and Serbia has developed consistently. For example, in 2018, Belarus handed over 4 MiG-29 aircraft to Serbia as part of military and technical assistance. In early 2021, Belarus will repair and upgrade them.

The prompt response to a request for humanitarian aid during a natural disaster demonstrates that partnership relations still prevail over pragmatism in decision-making. As an example, the response to the flood in Serbia in 2014 should be mentioned. International rescue teams from Belarus and 11 other countries arrived in Serbia on short notice.

Humanitarian cooperation suffers from political controversy to a lesser degree. Since early 2020, the fight against the coronavirus pandemic has clearly shown and proved the strength of bilateral relations between small and medium-sized countries in times of crisis and an adverse epidemiological situation, when, regardless of their economic power they help each other. Political elites find ways to cooperate and help friendly nations when it comes to rescuing people in danger. The Belarusian flight crew transported humanitarian aid from China for the Serbian population. Subsequently, the Serbian Government sent two planes with medical supplies as humanitarian aid to Belarus.

⁵ How Serbia balances between NATO and Russia (2016, April 19), <https://expert.ru/2016/04/19/assimetrichnaya-nejtralnost-kak-serbiya-balansiruet-mezhdu-nato-i-rossiej/>. Accessed 11 July 2020.

Thus, along with the economy and politics, humanitarian and cultural cooperation provides positive examples of relations between Belarus and Serbia.

Bilateral cooperation in the field of culture is developing based on the intergovernmental agreement on cooperation and the interdepartmental cooperation programme signed in 2012.

Cultural cooperation based on a common ideological and symbolic space and a common historical memory resists the falsification of history and is an essential element of close relations between countries.

Cooperation between Belarus and Serbia also includes interaction in the spiritual and cultural sphere. The Orthodox Church plays an important role in both Belarusian and Serbian society, and it can be safely said that Orthodox values serve as a unifying framework for Belarus and Serbia. Civilizational identity can be considered as one of the factors uniting two peoples. Sharing common spiritual and cultural values is one of the leading factors in the formation of close relations between the two countries.

The development of spiritual and cultural ties between Serbia and Belarus helps the “Christian world” to balance the influence of cultural “ultra-liberalism”, which can overnight involve the Muslim peoples of the region into the Middle East extremism.

According to Konstantin Kosachev, only those who are able to use all available resources (language, education, tourism, national cuisine, cinema, brands) make significant progress in international fora.⁶

In 2017, the Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Belarus and the Government of the Republic of Serbia on cooperation in the field of tourism was signed.⁷

To enhance cooperation in all sectors, Belarus and Serbia should consider the inclusion of tourism in the promising areas of bilateral relations. The growing importance of tourism is an essential component of

⁶ Kosachev, K.I. (2012). Conversation with Konstantin Kosachev: Russia maintains its authority in the world [Audio], retrieved from http://rus.ruvr.ru/radio_broadcast/65446337/86815347.html. Accessed 01 July 2020.

⁷ Embassy of the Republic of Belarus in the Republic of Serbia: cultural cooperation (2018, December 1), http://serbia.mfa.gov.by/ru/bilateral_relations/cultural/eea1260d7e5b1a69.html. Accessed 21 June 2020.

the attractive image of “fraternal partnership”. The promotion of historical and cultural heritage sites, as well as spiritual shrines of the Orthodox world (for example, integrated into combined tour itineraries), can ensure an increase in tourist flows between the two countries. The Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Belarus and the Federal Government of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia on the abolition of visas (2009) applies in the relations between Belarus and Serbia. The current visa-free 30-day regime helps attract tourists, ensuring the unhindered movement of persons. In the era of globalisation, “territory brands” have become fundamental trademarks of the tourism industry.⁸ Both Serbian and Belarusian lands are notable for their national cuisines and hospitality, and also for agritourism, which remains an undervalued resource.

Academic cooperation is essential for both countries. A number of Serbian faculties are accredited in European countries, while Belarus has a well-developed scientific capacity: state universities offer great opportunities and ensure a high standard of knowledge. This is one of the reasons why it is important to cooperate in the scientific and educational spheres, although competitive programmes should be developed.

The universities of the two countries should support student and academic exchange projects based both on bilateral agreements and international education programmes. It should be understood and taken into consideration that the prospects for such cooperation are often limited due to the lack of interest among young people who prefer renowned European universities. The development of competitive programmes providing for certain advantages and greatest incentives possible as well as scholarships to students would attract promising young people to projects that are less visible compared to Western ones.

The development of relations between Serbia and Belarus contributes not only to the preservation of spiritual and cultural ties but also to the unity of all Slavic peoples. Fraternal relations are an important part of the partnership, but they are merely a foundation for the strengthening of political and economic ties, which must first and foremost be based on mutually beneficial agreements that should be tailored to each country’s

⁸ Cherevichko, T.V. (2014). Tourism as a tool of public diplomacy. Journal “Izvestiya of Saratov University. New Series. Series: History. International Relations”, (14), pp. 93-95.

and the Western Balkan region's specific conditions and take into account certain unresolved territorial issues.

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THE IMPACT OF THE ISSUE OF KOSOVO AND METOHİJA ON SERBIAN – ALBANIAN RELATIONS

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Abstract: The article considers the current state of Serbian – Albanian relations by 2020. It gives an overview of the importance of Albania's position on the issue of Kosovo and Metohija for the deepening of bilateral relations as well as the Serbian strategy in the region, analyses the main contradictions in Belgrade – Tirana relations, and identifies the features of Serbian diplomacy towards Albania. The chronological scope of the study is limited to 2008–2020, which is due to the emphasis on the analysis of the current disagreements between the two states in connection with the recent developments in Kosovo and Metohija. The article also deals with the changing situation in the Western Balkans in the context of the full incorporation of all countries into the European and Euro-Atlantic integration institutions. This article examines the internal and external factors of a certain degree of Serbian – Albanian relations, the positions and actions of those who support and those who oppose the cooperation of the two countries not only at the bilateral but also at the regional level.

Keywords: Serbia, Albania, issue of Kosovo and Metohija, Western Balkans, bilateral relations, EU enlargement, stabilisation and association process.

Serbian – Albanian relations were affected by Albania's 2008 recognition of 'Kosovo' independence. Albania supported the 1999 NATO intervention against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the policy of expanding the number of countries extending diplomatic recognition to 'Kosovo'.

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Serbia protects its sovereignty and territorial integrity and has launched the process of revocation and suspension of recognitions of the unilaterally declared independence of 'Kosovo'. Currently, Serbia's EU accession is conditioned with the rule of law and economic reforms, as well as the normalization of relations with Pristina via the EU-facilitated dialogue. The finding of a comprehensive, viable political solution to the issue of Kosovo and Metohija is a top national priority of Serbian policy, with obvious significance for Serbian – Albanian relations and peace and stability in the wider region. Serbian First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Ivica Dačić stated that the project to create an independent state of 'Kosovo' was a big mistake made by a part of the international community, as well as that the states could not be created by unilateral decisions (Dačić, 2020).

'Kosovo' declaration of independence on 17 February 2008 met a divided international response. Some 23 EU Member States recognised 'Kosovo' as an independent state. The five non-recognising states are Spain, Cyprus, Greece, Romania, and Slovakia. Serbia is trying, on the one hand, to preserve its territorial integrity and sovereignty violated by the independence of 'Kosovo' and, on the other, to develop the concept of a multi-vector foreign policy and multiple strategic partnerships.

The bilateral Serbian – Albanian political dialogue has almost stopped. Since 2014 the government of Prime Minister Aleksandar Vučić has tried to improve relations with its neighbours, particularly with Albania. The first visit of Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama to Serbia in November 2014 was deemed historical. At the press conference of the two leaders, Rama declared that the countries "have two entirely different positions on Kosovo, but the reality is one and unchangeable" (Rama, 2014). Belgrade and Tirana were trying to overcome the dominant differences between the two countries concerning the status of Kosovo and Metohija, to strengthen economic cooperation and further improve the status of minority communities. When it comes to relations with neighbours, Tirana often emphasizes the position of Albanians in North Macedonia, southern Serbia and Montenegro and repeatedly requires the copying of legal guarantees for the status of Serbs in 'Kosovo' for the Albanian municipalities of Preševo, Bujanovac, and Medveđa (the Preševo Valley). The two Prime Ministers have intensified meetings to overcome barriers between the two countries and made efforts to boost cooperation.

Serbia is active in its relations with Albania, fully respecting the principle of non-interference in internal affairs. The two countries' governments have expressed the political will to settle pending issues and further promote bilateral relations in general and of the evident need to enhance cooperation in the framework of the European integration process in particular.

A series of statements by Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama, the "head" of the self-proclaimed independent 'Kosovo' Hashim Thaci, and the "head" of the south Serbian municipality of the Presevo Valley (mainly populated by Albanians) Jonuz Musliu, regarding the redrawing of borders in the Balkans (to implement the Greater Albania project), raised particular concern in Serbia. However, any projection for a *de jure* unification prior to full accession of Albania and 'Kosovo' in the European Union is not realistic because of constitutional obstacles and opposition of international actors, but also because of the resistance of the mainstream political leaders in Albania and 'Kosovo', which may see any potential unification as a threat to their personal power (Kalemaj, 2014, p. 37).

The European Union (primarily Germany) and indeed the United States, perceive the improvement of relations between Belgrade and Pristina as a potential solution to the numerous latent tensions in the Western Balkans (Đukanović, Simić, Zivojinović, 2013, p. 108).

Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić, participating in the leadership panel of the 15th Bled Strategic Forum, pointed out that the political status of Kosovo and Metohija will be discussed under the auspices of the EU, and economic issues with the United States (Vučić, 2020). President Trump suggested a formula 'to do economics first and let the politics follow the economics' (Trump, 2020).

On 3-4 September Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić and 'Kosovo Prime Minister' Avdullah Hoti met at the White House for talks on economic relations and committed to the economic normalization. President Trump announced a historic commitment (Trump, 2020). By focusing on job creation and economic growth, Belgrade and Pristina were able to reach a real breakthrough on economic cooperation across a broad range of issues such as the opening of border crossings, the US investment in both 'Kosovo' and Serbia, and deals between 'Kosovo' and Serbia on recognizing each other's diplomas and licenses. One part of the agreement was the freezing on the recognition and de-recognition campaigns during 2021. President Vučić pointed out that the normalization of economic relations between

Belgrade and Pristina was a huge step forward. However, for Serbia, it is very important to have a unified economic zone, the entire Western Balkans (Vučić, 2020).

Meanwhile, Serbia has committed to opening a commercial office in Jerusalem this month and to move its embassy to Jerusalem by July. Pristina and Israel have agreed on the normalization of ties and the establishment of diplomatic relations.

On 7th September, on the occasion of the continuation of the EU Facilitated Dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina, President Aleksandar Vučić and Prime Minister Avdullah Hoti confirmed to the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the European Commission, Josep Borrell that they attach the highest priority to EU integration and to continuing the work on the EU-facilitated Belgrade-Pristina dialogue, which is a key element of their respective EU paths. They also committed to redoubling their efforts to ensure further EU alignment in accordance with their respective obligations (Vučić, Hoti, 2020).

Miroslav Lajčák, the EU's special representative for Belgrade-Prishtina dialogue said:

They confirmed that they attach the highest priority to the EU integration and to continuing the work on the EU-facilitated Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue.

We spoke about economic cooperation and missing and displaced persons – the topics which were opened in our last high-level meeting. And I am happy to announce that we made full progress on the discussions.

We also discussed for the first time, as part of the negotiations of a legally binding comprehensive agreement, arrangements for non-majority communities and also the settlement of mutual financial claims and property. This was the first exchange that allowed us to define the next steps in our discussions.

(Lajčák, 2020).

Russia insists on the resolution of the Kosovo issue exclusively based on the agreements that will have to be subsequently endorsed by the UN Security Council and will accept any solution that will be agreed upon by Belgrade and Pristina.

Currently, both international and local pressure is growing on Belgrade and Pristina to define their relations through a comprehensive agreement

on the normalization, with a view to achieving a visible and sustainable improvement of mutual relations. Although Serbian and 'Kosovo' representatives confirm, in principle, their commitment to the full normalization of relations, they have differing and often conflicting views of this ultimate goal. Belgrade and Pristina often have different views of the time-frame needed for this agreement to be reached. EU membership is a common goal for both Belgrade and Pristina. Establishing good relations and resolving open disputes are absolute prerequisites for this goal to be achieved.

At the turn of the XX and XXI centuries, the Balkan region was included in the sphere of influence of only the one external force – the collective West. The West's influence in the region is currently almost unchallenged, which explains the ongoing homogenization of the Balkans due to its gradual integration into the EU and NATO and the adoption of common standards of foreign and domestic political behaviour. The USA and the EU act as an arbiter in disputes between the Balkans states, quite often contradicting public sentiment in the region and states' interests in foreign policy and economy. Thus, the concessions of Belgrade and Pristina in the process of the EU-initiated dialogue were widely rejected by both Serbs and Kosovo Albanians. The Brussels Agreement (April 2013) was reached only after a demand to overcome differences in two weeks (Кириллов, Путинцев, 2020, с. 60-61).

One of the priorities in the foreign policy of Serbia and Albania is regional cooperation which is a cornerstone of the EU's policy framework for the Western Balkans – the stabilisation and association process (SAP). The countries and the EU consider enhanced regional cooperation to be a key factor for establishing political stability, security, and economic prosperity.

The first impetus for institutionalizing regional cooperation was given by the end of the Cold War. In the context of the easing of international tensions, development of the Helsinki process, and the approval of a cooperative model of relations between the states of two opposite social systems, the Central European Initiative (CEI) was established in 1989. The appeal to common interests has underscored most regional cooperation schemes since the 1995 Dayton peace (Bechev, 2004, p. 5). The EU and the USA created and developed a number of regional groupings as stabilization mechanisms. They subsequently became an instrument of the Central and

Southeastern European countries' adaptation to development conditions in the European Union and NATO.

In the framework of the EU integration process, Serbia and Albania pay special attention to the development of regional cooperation, particularly through regional initiatives: the South East European Cooperation Process (SEECP), the CEI, the Adriatic and Ionian Initiative (AII), the Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA 2006), the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC), the Berlin process (BP) and the Western Balkans Fund (WBF). The areas of security, trade, energy and transport are among those where regional cooperation is the most substantial. The leaders of Serbia and Albania urged regional cooperation to establish a common market for local and foreign investors. Prime Minister Rama said that 'our markets are too small, separated from each other in a world that from the competition viewpoint is becoming tougher' (Rama, 2016). In 2019 Serbia, Albania and North Macedonia signed the declaration of intent to establish the free movement of people, goods, services and capital between the three countries (the so-called "mini-Schengen" regional cooperation initiative).

Meanwhile, the development of regional cooperation is hindered by the lack of developed infrastructure and communications, the lack of funding for multilateral projects and initiatives, the low degree of economic complementarity between states, and the legacy of ethno-political conflicts.

Economic relations between Albania and Serbia have improved in recent years. There is a free trade agreement that provides significant trade preferences for bilateral trade between Serbia and Albania (Kosovo and Metohija is a separate customs territory, as defined by UNSCR 1244). They are members of the Revised Central European Free Trade Agreement signed in 2006 (CEFTA 2006). However, the dynamics and structure of trade between the two economies are low and unbalanced.

In the 2000s, trade flows between the two countries had an increase because of the application of trade preferences contained in free trade agreements (Bjelić, Dragutinović Mitrović, 2016, p. 5). In the 2010s, trade flows were consistent. Serbia had a trade surplus of 110 million Euros in 2019. The exports from Serbia to Albania during 2019 amounted to 158 million Euros, while imports were 48 million Euros. Albania's balance of trade with Serbia has been negative over the years. The commodity groups making the biggest bulk of Albania's imports from Serbia are "minerals, fuels and electricity" (the main commodity is electricity) and "food, tobacco and

beverages” (the main commodity is grains). Serbia is currently Albania’s sixth-largest trading partner, while Albania is not even in Serbia’s top twenty partners for trade exchanges.

The trade in services between Serbia and Albania started to rise steadily in 2010. It was around 16 million Euros in 2018. Serbia foreign investment in Albania is at a mere 40 million Euros, with potential for investment in construction, energy, and transport tourism, which is emerging as one of Albania’s most promising sectors.

In 2016 Tirana-based joint Albania-Serbia Chamber of Commerce was launched and expected to give a boost to trade exchanges and investment between the two countries. Irrespective of political differences, Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić and Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama called on the business communities to invest in the two countries. Some 100 Serbian SMEs operate in Albania, mainly in construction, industry, tourism and services, while the number of Albanian companies in Serbia is estimated lower. The states launched the direct Belgrade-Tirana flights by Air Serbia carrier and the extension of the Albania-Kosovo highway to Nis.

Bilateral resistance factors of the low level of trade are beyond the trade regime conditions and dependent on infrastructural quality, product structure of exports, and political factors (Bjelić, Dragutinović Mitrović, 2016, p. 12). There needs to be trust between Belgrade and Tirana to take cooperation and collaboration to the next level. The economy is serving as a meeting point for Serbia and Albania and should be seen as the cooperation that will spill over to other areas (Balla, Ejduš, Llubani, 2013, p. 59).

Cultural diplomacy and its accessories play an important role in increasing Serbia’s influence in the region. Cultural cooperation between Serbia and Albania is expected to strengthen bilateral relations and contribute to the common goal of EU integration. In 2017, the Serbian and Albanian Ministers of Culture signed the cultural cooperation agreement. Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO) was established to increase cooperation in education, culture, youth and sport.

Civil society organisations are also playing a key role in the improvement of Serbian – Albanian relations. The Albanian Institute for International Studies and the European Movement Serbia have established a joint Centre for Albania-Serbia relations to boost relations between the two countries and overcome stereotypes. According to the results of the 2014 survey taken

by the Albanian Institute for International Relations (AIIS), Albanians consider the 'historical hostility between the two nations' as one of the key obstacles in developing bilateral relations (Cela, 2015, p. 10). Civil society contacts are at an advanced stage.

Serbia's relationship with Albania experiences occasional tensions, ranging from improvement to a deterioration. Serbian-Albanian ties were strained when Tirana recognized 'Kosovo' independence in 2008 and became one of Pristina's strongest external supporters. Although some of the goals of Serbia and Albania are complementary, others contradict each other. The probability of overcoming Serbian – Albanian disagreements about the issue of Kosovo and Metohija, while maintaining the positions taken by both sides today, remains low. The statements by Albanian Prime Ministers Sali Berisha and Edi Rama and the "head" of the self-proclaimed independent 'Kosovo' Hashim Thaci on their readiness to join forces in a single Greater Albania state do not contribute to the development of Serbian – Albanian relations and finding a compromise solution for the issue of Kosovo and Metohija. At times disputed issues seem to dominate relations and bring them back to the past.

However, as long as the countries share the same foreign political goal of EU membership, the process of European integration in itself is a stabilizing and developmental tool of political, cultural, economic, and tourism bilateral cooperation. The EU and NATO enlargement in the Balkans has eliminated (promptly or proactively) the existing and re-emerging conflicts between the countries of the region and has artificially overshadowed outstanding issues. In the context, relations between Serbia and Albania require more goodwill and permanent efforts of the political elites in order to actually eliminate obstacles and build relations on mutually beneficial foundations.

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RUSSIAN – SERBIAN COOPERATION IN THE SECTOR OF OIL AND GAS: PAST, PRESENT, AND POSSIBLE FUTURE

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Abstract: The paper provides a brief history of the Russian-Serbian cooperation in the oil and gas sector, starting with the conclusion of clearing agreements during the 1950s. Special attention is given to key events such as the construction of refineries in Novi Sad and Pancevo in 1968, and the commissioning of the gas and oil transport pipelines through which oil and gas directly arrived from the then USSR to the former Yugoslavia and Serbia from 1979 onward. An overview of jointly signed agreements and cooperation plans concluded during the difficult times of the “Yugoslav crisis” is presented, when both countries had joint plans such as the construction of the Serbia-Bulgaria gas pipeline. Emphasis is placed on the turning point in 2008 when the so-called “Energy agreement” was signed, giving Russian companies the majority ownership of NIS and the underground gas storage Banatski Dvor.

The situation in the oil and gas sector in the world is especially analysed, and trends that will have repercussions on the position of this sector in Serbia.

A concise analysis of the state of the gas, and especially the oil sector in Serbia, is given. After the failure of the “South Stream” gas pipeline project and the expected completion of the “Turkish or Balkan Stream” gas pipeline, greater development opportunities are expected in the oil than in the gas sector. The gas sector is particularly burdened by the provisions of the Third Energy Package that Serbia has implemented in its legislation and by relatively small market potential.

Considering that after the completion of the second developmental phase of the Pancevo Refinery, NIS and Serbia will have one of the most modern

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refineries in Europe connected to the petrochemical complex, it was concluded that further development efforts should focus on increasing oil and gas production and derivatives trading. These goals include development projects in Serbia, but also in the region, the Mediterranean and beyond, i.e., those that expand the area of operation because that is the only way to reach the necessary resources and markets of sufficient size.

To that end, the Russian and Serbian sides need joint, creative strategic solutions and an “out of the box” thinking. The advantages of Serbia’s geographical position, old interstate ties and the status of an associate member of the EU, as well as the relations of the Russian Federation with certain countries, should be used to open new, cost-effective perspectives. For this purpose, several suggestions and brief descriptions of possible strategies are given. At the same time, a review of the possible geopolitical implications of such solutions is given.

Keywords: oil, gas, history, strategy, development plans, Russia, Serbia.

A Brief historical review of the development of the oil and gas sector in Serbia and agreements with the Russian Federation

Most historical data on Russian-Serbian relations in the oil and gas sector could be found on the website of PE Srbijagas (Srbijagas, 2020), the website of the Oil Industry of Serbia (NIS) (NIS a.d., 2020), and the website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia (Ministarstvo Spoljnih poslova Republike Srbije, 2020), but sometimes in a form too dull and incomprehensible for the average reader. Therefore, the necessary clarifications are given below, while the additions and interpretations are the contribution of the author as a direct witness to certain events.

Based on the existing Shell’s, Standard Oil’s and other assets, a state-owned trading company for the trade of oil and oil derivatives was formed in 1945 (red and yellow colour in the Jugopetrol’s brand were a reflection of the past). By nationalizing and purchasing already existing petroleum storages and building new ones, a network of storages was created. This was the basis for the future distribution network that has developed together with the road network and the increase in the number of motor vehicles. After the Second World War, oil was processed in refineries in

Rijeka and Bosanski Brod. It was imported mostly from Romania, and then from the USSR.

The forerunner of today's company NIS was the Company for Oil Exploration and Production based in Zrenjanin, founded in 1949 by the decision of the Government of the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia. The oil exploration and production company Naftagas was founded in 1953 in accordance with the decision of the Government of the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia (FPRY) and the management was transferred to Novi Sad. In the early 1950s, the first gas stations were opened in this area (Wikipedia, 2020). As an oil company, Jugopetrol covered the territories of Serbia, Macedonia, and Montenegro from then until the mid-1970s, and Jugopetrol Kotor and Makpetrol later separated from it.

In 1951, the construction of a gas and oil pipeline transport system began. The section of the gas and oil transport pipeline Mokrin-Kikinda-Elemir-Velika Greda-Pancevo was completed in 1963. The production of oil and gas from Serbian fields was constantly growing and met up to 40% of domestic needs in oil and even 100% in gas when production was at its peak.

"Oil refineries in Pancevo and Novi Sad started operating in 1968 (Wikipedia, 2020)." The technology of the USSR was used in atmospheric and vacuum distillation plants (the Institute of Nizhny Novgorod was their creator, and since then the twinning of the cities of Nizhny Novgorod and Novi Sad has originated). The technology used and the configuration of the refineries has conditioned that the highest yield of derivatives can be achieved from URALS (REB) Russian oil and Iraqi KIRKUK oil. This also shows the strategic commitment of the former SFRY to the USSR and the non-aligned countries. Only since the construction of the oil pipeline, the possibility has been created to use different sources of supply to avoid dependence on one supplier. In addition to these types of oil, high-quality Libyan oil, Iraqi BASRA, and smaller quantities of Syrian, Kazakh, and other oils were imported.

The Yugoslav oil pipeline, which via Omišalj-Rijeka stretched one branch through Sisak, Bosanski Brod to Novi Sad and Pancevo, and with the other branch towards Lendava and the Hungarian border, was put into operation in 1979. This oil pipeline could supply Hungary, and even Czechoslovakia, and was conceived as a geopolitical lever for the eventual

reduction of the USSR's influence on Hungary and Czechoslovakia. The pipeline operated in two modes, the first was pumping oil from Russia from the direction of Slovakia and Hungary to Yugoslavia and the second was pumping from the terminal in Omišalj to Yugoslav refineries and Hungary. The Russian private oil company Yukos in the 1990s and early 2000s wanted to use the possibility of exporting Russian oil via the port of Rijeka in this direction, but the idea has never been materialized.

Since the 1950s, clearing has been used in trade with the USSR. The low value of the dollar settlement had a stimulating effect on the export of Yugoslav goods. From the USSR to Yugoslavia, oil was imported according to the clearing settlement. This was a stimulus for all Yugoslav republics because this encouraged their own exports, and they could get oil, or real value, for that. This has led to the construction of oil refineries in almost all Yugoslav republics with capacities far greater than necessary.

In 1979, the transport system of the Horgos-Batajnica gas pipeline (the "pillar" or the core part of the gas transport system of Serbia) was put into operation. This gas pipeline was built in cooperation with the USSR and Hungary. In the same year, the branch of the gas pipeline to Bosnia and Herzegovina was completed and put into operation. From then until today, only Russian gas has been imported and used in Serbia. It should be borne in mind that the production of natural gas in Serbia reached as much as 2.2 billion cubic meters, which is practically equal to today's consumption of this energy source. The abundance of gas conditioned the construction of an industry that uses gas as raw material, thus the Ammonia plant, Nitric Acid plant and CAN Pancevo (Azotara Pančevo) and the Methanol-Vinegar Combine Kikinda (Metanolsko-sirćetni kombinat Kikinda) were founded.

The construction of the transport gas pipeline in central Serbia began in 1980, and the construction of the distribution system in 1987.

The Oil industry of Serbia, which included the oil refineries Pancevo and Novi Sad, Jugopetrol and Naftagas promet, Naftagas, Energogas, Novi Sad gas, the Oil refinery Belgrade, FAM Krusevac and NIS Engineering, was founded in 1991 as a state company for exploration, production, refining and trading of oil and oil derivatives and natural gas. The special law that was passed for that purpose wanted to protect the crucial energy activity at the dawn of the Yugoslav wars (Croatia did the same with INA).

During the Yugoslav wars, Russia continuously supplied gas to Serbia, including through humanitarian arrangements.

In 1995, with a special "Agreement between the Federal Government of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the Government of the Russian Federation on Cooperation in the Construction of a Gas Pipeline in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia" (Official Gazette of the FRY, 1996), the Yugorozgas company was established, and the construction of the branch Pojate-Nis transport system started. The agreement provided for the construction of an interconnection (gas pipeline) with Bulgaria. On the same occasion, the "Agreement between the Federal Government of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the Government of the Russian Federation on Natural Gas Deliveries from the Russian Federation to the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia" was signed (Official Gazette of the FRY, 1996).

The Protocol between the Federal Government of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the Government of the Russian Federation on oil deliveries from the Russian Federation to the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Official Gazette of the FRY, 1996) was signed in 1996.

The privatization of NIS by Russian oil companies, especially the PSJC Lukoil, has been negotiated almost continuously since the 1990s. Documents of various weight and content were signed, but there were no concrete results.

In 2005, works began on the underground gas storage Banatski Dvor. Sometime around this time, a joint technological solution of the Novi Sad Refinery and the Russian Academy of Sciences for the production of synthetic oil was created and installed in Nizhnekamsk, through the joint venture RANIS.

In 2005, the company NIS received the status of a joint-stock company, and PE Transnafta, PE Srbijagas, the Oil Refinery Belgrade and FAM Krusevac separate from it.

Problems related to Serbian debts for energy sources from the 1990s and Russian ones related to clearing trade were mostly resolved by the "Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Serbia and the Government of the Russian Federation on regulating the obligations of the former USSR on settlements related to trade between the former USSR and of the former SFRY "(Official Gazette, 2009) and the "Protocol between the Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Serbia, the Ministry of

Mining and Energy of the Republic of Serbia and the Ministry of Finance of the Russian Federation, the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade of the Russian Federation on harmonization of the list of goods and services delivered for the purpose of settling the debts of the Russian Federation to the Republic of Serbia” from 24 July 2007. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2007)

Certainly, the most important agreement ever signed between the two countries is the “Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Serbia and the Government of the Russian Federation on cooperation in the oil and gas industry”, signed in 2008 (Government of the Republic of Serbia, 2008). The agreement included the privatization of NIS, the construction of the Banatski Dvor gas storage facility, and the construction of a gas pipeline with a capacity of not less than 10 billion cubic meters per year through the territory of Serbia. This agreement will lead to substantial changes in the oil and gas sector in Serbia.

In 2008, the Russian company Gazprom Neft became the majority shareholder of NIS in accordance with the “Purchase Agreement”, with 51% of shares purchased for EUR 400 million and EUR 550 million of investment obligations, primarily in the Pancevo oil refinery and for solving environmental problems.

In 2009, a Basic Agreement on Cooperation on the “South Stream” project on the territory of Serbia was signed with the Russian company GAZPROM, and a joint Serbian-Russian company “South Stream Serbia” was established with the headquarters in Zug, Switzerland.

The agreement on the establishment of a joint venture for the Banatski Dvor underground gas storage (PSG B. Dvor) between PE “Srbijagas” and the company “GAZPROM GERMANIA” based in Novi Sad and the completion of the first phase of construction of PSG B. Dvor was signed in 2010.

In 2011 the underground gas storage in Banatski Dvor was officially put into operation.

In 2012, Serbia signed agreements on the construction of the South Stream gas pipeline and passed an appropriate law that should facilitate the construction of this strategic infrastructure facility as much as possible. The same year, representatives of the governments of Serbia and Russia signed the Agreement on Natural Gas Supply from Russia in 2012-2021, as

a basis for signing a long-term gas supply agreement between “Gazprom” and PE “Srbijagas” (Government of the Republic of Serbia, 2013).

In 2012, the construction of the mild hydrocracking plant (MHC/DHT) was completed at the Pancevo Oil Refinery, which marked the completion of the first phase of the refinery modernization and the fulfilment of investment obligations by Gazprom Neft. In the same year, NIS began to expand in the region: in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, and Romania.

A Memorandum of Understanding in the field of energy efficiency, energy-saving and renewable energy sources between the Ministry of Mining and Energy of the Republic of Serbia and the Russian Energy Efficiency Agency of the Ministry of Energy of the Russian Federation was signed in 2014 (Ministry of Mining and Energy, 2014).

Works on the deep processing plant with delayed coking technology began in 2017 at the Pancevo Refinery with the aim to put the plant into operation in 2020. The same year, a contract on the construction of the thermal power plant – heating plant Pancevo was signed between the companies “TE-TO Pančevo” and the Chinese company “Shanghai Electric Group”, and the corporate Development Strategy of NIS until 2025 was adopted.

In 2018, the construction of the “Turkish Stream” gas pipeline began, whose pipes were laid before the end of 2019, and the construction of the compressor station began in 2020. The pipeline is not yet connected to the gas pipeline systems of Bulgaria and Hungary at the time of writing this paper.

Besides, it should not be forgotten that the Russian Federation is one of Serbia’s strategic partners and that the “Declaration on Strategic Partnership” was signed in 2013 in Sochi (Government of the Republic of Serbia, 2013). To this should be added a free trade agreement.

All interstate cooperation is coordinated permanently, based on the “Agreement between the Federal Government of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the Government of the Russian Federation on the Establishment of the Intergovernmental Yugoslav-Russian Committee for Trade, Economic and Scientific-Technical Cooperation” of 1995. This Committee meets every year.

The situation in the oil and gas sector in the world and possible tendencies

According to the latest official data for 2018, or from the period before the pandemic KOVID-19 (British Petroleum, 2019), oil consumption in the world has increased, but slower than its production. According to the same source, natural gas consumption is growing strongly, supported by wide demand and increasing gas availability, with the help of constant expansion of liquefied natural gas (LNG).

Forecasts said that natural gas would take precedence over oil in the 2020s as the most important energy source in the 2020s (DNV, 2019).

The result of the “oil market crisis” that occurred during the KOVID-19 pandemic was that three key players in the oil market stood out, namely Russia, Saudi Arabia and the United States, which are responsible for over a third of world oil supplies.

In the first four months of 2020, there was a drastic drop in global car sales - by about one third compared to the same period in 2019. Electric cars - a key element of the transition to cleaner energy, also sold less. However, despite the crisis, their sales could reach a record share in the total car market this year.

The peak of oil demand can be reached in the next decade or by 2040, i.e., the longer the pandemic lasts, the later. It is clear that it is impossible to rely entirely on one or a few sources of primary energy for energy security and decarbonisation, which will have to be achieved through an optimal energy mix, which is, in principle, an issue for each country. Advances in energy efficiency, new technologies and increasingly stringent environmental regulations will limit further growth in oil and gas consumption.

Demand for gasoline and diesel will grow more slowly as a result of changing consumer habits, the adoption of electric vehicles, an increase in the efficiency of internal combustion engines, but also increased mixing of biofuels. There are serious attempts to reduce the share of petroleum products in aviation and shipping. Countries with the highest fuel consumption have switched to the Euro 5 standard. Safety and environmental standards in the oil and gas sector will become increasingly demanding. The public will ask more and more questions

and there will be fewer company secrets in this area. Without public support, it will be increasingly difficult for oil and gas companies to do business.

The International Research Group for the Conservation of Clean Air and Water in Europe (CONCAVE) shows that 21 refineries in Europe have been closed since 2009. The need for refinery capacity is projected to fall by about 25% after 2030. Those refineries that are more complex with the most efficient processes and that are integrated with petrochemicals have a higher chance of surviving (such is the Pancevo Refinery).

Oil and gas companies are already doing a lot in the field of decarbonisation. For example, they install wind generators on oil platforms, build solar power plants, cogeneration plants, introduce new energy, and petrochemical solutions. They want to achieve the so-called “zero carbon footprint”, i.e., to conserve carbon dioxide in proportion to the amount they produce.

There will be a consolidation of buyers on the market in order to reduce the price of raw materials by increasing the volume of purchases. Companies from African countries have been doing that for years. In general, the market will soon turn completely into a customer market because the production of hydrocarbons will be higher than the demand.

Present and future of the oil and gas sector in Serbia in the light of interstate cooperation between Serbia and Russia

The situation in the oil and gas sector in Serbia

The oil market in Serbia is the so-called “an oligopoly with a dominant player.” This practically means that, on the one hand, we have NIS with oil and gas production, refinery, storages and pump network (dominant player), and on the other hand, we have many smaller or larger traders with relatively limited storage capacities and 2/3 of pumps. That is why every story about oil in Serbia is mostly a story about NIS. The story of gas in Serbia, similar to the previous one, is the story of Srbijagas, which is the only one that has a transport system, storage, and distribution of gas. All the others (about 36 of them) are only gas distributors, except for

Yugorozgas, which has a transport system from Pojate, through Nis to Leskovac and distribution in Nis and Leskovac.

In general, fuel consumption in Serbia increased by 5.1% in 2019 compared to 2018, especially the consumption of diesel. This is a consequence of the redirection of European traffic to the newly built corridors 10 and partly 11, and economic growth. Gas consumption in Serbia has been growing at a rate of 2-3% per year in recent years.

In the last five years, about half a million used vehicles have been imported to Serbia. If this trend continues, the pollution we can expect in the coming years could take more human lives than the coronavirus Covid-19.

The first contracts for granting subsidies to citizens for the purchase of electric and hybrid vehicles were scheduled for signing in the middle of this year. The charging infrastructure is still modest, although the efforts are made to improve it.

The above-mentioned is confirmed by the fact that, despite the global trend of switching to electric vehicles, their mass arrival in Serbia cannot be expected soon. The situation is similar in the region. This is good news for the oilmen but not for citizens who care about the environment, clean air, and the reduction in the number of illnesses and deaths related to them.

The good news is that due to the state programs of marking and quality control, fuel smuggling has been seriously reduced, and the quality is at the prescribed level, which also affects the reduction of pollution. The state has started a program of creating obligatory oil reserves, which is improving its energy security every day.

According to the report to its investors, NIS extracted 859,000 tons of oil and 389 million cubic meters of gas from the Serbian fields in 2019 or 3% less than in 2018. In 2019, 3,373,000 tons were processed or 12% less than in the previous year (justified by the overhaul of the refinery). Sales were 3,702,000t or only 1% less than in 2018. EBITDA fell by 17% and profit by 34%. The financial result is modest, bearing in mind that the ore rent is at the level of only 7% (NIS a.d., 2019).

These results are not encouraging at all if it is known that the demand for fuel, especially diesel, has increased in Serbia, i.e., NIS has lost more because the market environment was favourable. What is further striking is that the production of oil and gas has dropped almost to the level from

before 2009, i.e., before the privatization. The results of the fracking of the existing wells were obviously short-lived, and the fate of further exploitation of Serbian oil is now in question. Reducing domestic gas production is not in favour of Serbia's energy security. The refinery operates at 70% capacity, which is below the level that provides economies of scale. A somewhat bright spot is the turnover, which at least does not lose much market share, and has expanded its activities to the region so that the company owns a network of gas stations in Serbia (323) in Romania (18), BiH (37) and Bulgaria (35). The situation after the coronavirus Covid-19 can only get worse.

The positive moments are that the Deep Processing and Gas Power Plant projects are coming to an end. Upon their completion, NIS will own the most modern refinery in the region and maximally valorize the gas it produces. The good news also comes from Bosnia and Herzegovina, where NIS is conducting exploration work, and from Romania, where the experimental production at 4 wells has been launched.

Regarding oil as an energy source and the oil market, Serbia must have a double goal. The first is to promote electric vehicles and renewable energy sources to reduce pollution, improve energy security and promote the use of lithium, which could be a new national treasure if it turns out that the development of batteries for electric vehicles will go in the direction of using this metal. Given that the state owns about 29% of NIS shares, its second goal must be the development and support of this company because without its support NIS will experience hard times in the transition period.

The first goal can be achieved through creative regulation through which, for example, all pumps will be obliged to upgrade the charger for electric vehicles in the next ten years (like in Germany) and to provide various financial incentives to car buyers but also manufacturers of electric cars and batteries if they are produced in Serbia.

To achieve the second goal, the state and NIS must develop a joint strategy and use all the opportunities available to them. The fact that fossil fuels will dominate the region for at least another twenty years and that many regional refineries are closed should be used as an advantage. Given that no further technological and commercial justification can be found for continuous investment in oil refining, it is obvious that the focus must be on oil exploration and production and derivatives trading.

The state, on its part, can help the oil economy by increasing the purchase of now cheaper oil derivatives, through a system of commodity and required reserves, which would stimulate demand. In that way, it can help agriculture and other economic branches by lending these derivatives to farmers and economic organizations with the return obligation, etc.

The biggest event in the gas part of the sector will certainly be the commissioning of the “Turkish or Balkan Stream” gas pipeline. This way, cheaper gas could arrive in Serbia, but also its energy security, which is completely dependent on one gas entrance to the country, could be significantly improved. Due to the obligations on the way to joining the EU and those from the Law on Energy passed in 2014, PE Srbijagas will have to be divided by activities, into transport, distribution, and storage part. Serbia needs to build interconnections with Bulgaria and probably Romania, according to commitments already made. The storage part of the company should not worry about its fate, especially if the intentions to expand the existing gas storage and fulfil the legal obligations on the formation of “mandatory gas reserves” are realized. The transport part will probably remain in state ownership, but it will have a problem if small quantities of gas are transported through “old” gas pipelines and new interconnections because most of it will go through the “Turkish or Balkan Stream” gas pipeline. The only parts that will be relatively liquid are trade and distribution, but we should also keep in mind that the market is not large or has great development potential if we exclude the construction of gas power plants.

In the gas sphere, the possibilities for Russian-Serbian cooperation after the construction of the “Turkish or Balkan Stream” gas pipeline practically remain only in the sphere of privatization of gas distribution and construction of the gas pipeline from Leskovac to Vranje and further to the Macedonian border by Yugorozgas. Further construction of gas power plants is possible, but first, Serbia has to adopt a new energy strategy that should define the optimal mix of primary energy sources.

Due to the above-mentioned, in the following text, more attention will be paid to NIS as an oil and gas company that has a much larger “room for manoeuvre” for development.

Comments on the current NIS strategy

NIS has an elaborated strategy that covers all activities of the company (NIS a.d., 2017).

It is considered that the ideal ratio between production, refining and sales in vertically integrated oil companies, such as NIS, is 1: 1: 1, i.e., the exact amount of oil produced is being refined and the same amount is sold through its own sales channels. The NIS strategy envisages a ratio of 1/3 or ¼: 1:1, which indicates a potentially smaller opportunity to operate stably and with maximum effects on the value chain.

The strategy in oil and gas production is primarily focused on reducing or maintaining the same level of production in Serbia, which, according to the latest reports, will apparently not be realized. There is talk of abandoning the concession in Angola, while certain effects are expected from the concessions in Romania. The company owns and procures drilling equipment that can operate in the EU. In the past, there was always a surplus of so-called service capacities, including oil drilling facilities, as evidenced by the still ongoing engagement of services in Turkmenistan.

In order to reduce the negative effects of the reduction of oil and gas production, the emphasis in the strategy is placed on refining and trade (downstream). Thus, the growth of processing is predicted from about 3.5 million tons per year to 4.2 - 4.4 million tons per year. This means that the company must increase its sales outside the Serbian market because the consumption of the Serbian market is small and won't necessarily grow quickly.

Upon the completion of the Deep Processing project, the Pancevo Refinery will produce almost exclusively petroleum products with high added value, i.e., diesel, gasoline and kerosene, as well as coke, which is currently imported. The refinery is planned to supply with predominantly domestic Serbian oil, REB (Russia), and Kirkuk (Iraq).

The company currently places its products on the markets of Macedonia, Bulgaria, Romania and Bosnia and Herzegovina and to a lesser extent on some others (200-500,000t per year). It owns the storage only in Bulgaria.

There are no indications in the strategy of a larger expansion of the sales network in the recent period, which does not fit with the goal of increasing processing in the refinery.

In energetics, the company participates in wind farm projects and the construction of a 170MW gas power plant in Pancevo. For this last project, the question is whether there is enough gas from Serbian sources or gas will be imported.

Among other projects, the company showed interest in the construction of the Pancevo (Serbia) - Timisoara (Romania) product pipeline, the construction of an oil refinery in Novi Sad, investment in Petrohemija Pancevo, exploitation of oil shale in Aleksinac, and the purchase of one of the larger gas station chains in the region. Cooperation with major international chains in the region was also discussed.

The most important potentials that NIS has, but are not included in the strategy, are:

- More gas deposits, which could be converted into gas storage facilities with a capacity of about 5 billion cubic meters. Given that BiH, Macedonia and Greece cannot build gas storage facilities, as well as the passage of the "Turkish Stream" gas pipeline through Serbia, this possibility can be commercially effective. It should be kept in mind that the European Union has approved the money for the construction of the Itebej gas storage, which was never used.
- Large existing storage capacities for storage of oil and derivatives, but also great potential for their upgrading for the purpose of storing Serbian obligatory reserves of oil derivatives (it is considered that around 100,000 cubic meters more of storage space is needed), as well as for derivatives trading in the Danube basin. For the latter, the existing NIS location in Novi Sad is ideal.
- Bunkering of LNG on the Danube in accordance with the LNG Master Plan for Rhine-Main-Danube from 2015, which identifies opportunities for supplying Europe with LNG via the Black Sea and the Danube. On this route, traffic of LNG tankers of 1000-3000t is possible (with some maintenance works on the lower course of the Danube). These are ships that can sail both on the Black Sea and on the Danube, which means that they could be supplied with LNG somewhere on the east coast of the Black Sea.

In order for NIS to maximize the effects of existing capacities and those planned to be built within the current strategy, at the international level it would be desirable:

- Obtaining new concessions in the Balkan region, but also beyond, preferably in the Mediterranean region (because there are logistical supply opportunities from there). Both oil and gas concessions are of interest.
- Reduction of oil import costs that can be achieved by gaining access to the Druzhba oil pipeline through Slovakia, Hungary and Croatia or by building a section of the oil pipeline from Pitesti (Romania) to Pancevo (Serbia) to enable the direct supply of oil from the Black Sea. Both Lukoil and Gazprom Neft have expressed interest in building this 170 km long pipeline, which would connect Serbia with the Black Sea. In addition to cheaper transport, the geopolitical aspect is also important because Serbia would not be tied exclusively to the oil pipeline that passes through Croatia.
- Increasing the export of oil derivatives to the region and beyond imposes the need for an urgent solution of logistical problems through the construction of pipelines to Romania and possibly at least to Nis in order to create logistical opportunities for exports to Romania, Bulgaria, Macedonia, and so-called Kosovo. It is also necessary to build storage for derivatives in Romania and BiH. In this way, NIS would reduce transport costs to the level to be the most competitive in these markets.
- Of the larger gas station chains in the region, the only remaining large chain that is not integrated into larger international systems is Makpetrol, Skopje, Macedonia.
- The larger international chains operating in the region are Oiltanking (Germany), Shell and OMW (Austria), so cooperation should be based on this knowledge (MOL and Hellenic are less influential players in the market).
- The existence of a concession in Africa, services in Turkmenistan, and the need for more exports do not exclude activities on other continents.
- The operation of the Russian company Zarubezhneft (Bosanski Brod) and partly Lukoil in the same markets on which NIS focuses, imposes the need for a partnership rather than a competitive relationship. This

especially refers to the possible creation of a joint venture with Zarubezhneft, which would create the largest oil company in the region and enable the integrated operation of refineries. Geopolitics is certainly on the side of this solution because the joint company could be dominant in Serbia, Kosovo and Metohija, BiH, Slavonia, Montenegro, and Macedonia.

Possible access to joint development plans

“Three regions” Access

NIS can potentially realize its activities at the international level in “three regions”:

- The regional - Balkan/Danube
- The Mediterranean - Middle Eastern
- African

The Balkan/Danube region includes activities on the possible acquisition of Makpetrol, construction of the Serbia-Romania product pipeline (Pancevo-Timisoara), product pipeline to Nis, regulation of supply through the Druzhba oil pipeline, purchase or construction of derivatives storages in neighboring countries, expansion of NIS gas station network, cooperation with regionally present international companies, acquisition of new concessions, integration with Zarubezhneft’s assets and cooperation with other Russian companies present in the region, participation in infrastructure and other projects, etc. To resolve open issues in these projects, it may be better to use the status of NIS as a Serbian company that already largely operates in accordance with EU regulations. There is also an unresolved problem in the region, such as the ownership of the JANAF (Croatia-Serbia) oil pipeline, for which possible solutions from a geopolitical and security point of view should also be considered. The production of oil from oil shale near Aleksinac must be actualized to compensate for the negative effects of the decline in domestic oil production.

The Mediterranean-Middle Eastern region is interesting for two reasons. The first is to obtain new oil and gas concessions for NIS to raise the share of “own” oil and gas in the strategic mix. Synergy with the parent

company Gazprom (Gazprom EP International B.V.) and involvement in its projects is one of the possibilities.² Of particular interest are projects in Algeria (Gazprom, 2019), (Gazprom, 2019) and Libya (Gazprom, 2019) due to the existence of already signed contracts and concessions. NIS probably has a surplus of service resources, and light oil from these countries is very suitable, having in mind the configuration of the Pancevo Refinery and the logistical possibilities through the JANAF (Rijeka-Pančevo) oil pipeline. Serbia, as well as Russia, has traditionally excellent relations with these countries.

The war in Syria is coming to an end and it is a question of the near future when the exploration, production, and export of oil and gas will start again. Gazprom already has certain favourable positions in Syria (OilPrice, 2020) because it signed an agreement, according to which it is responsible for the further development of Syria's energetics and energy infrastructure. NIS has the advantage of a surplus of its service potentials here, as well as a possible buyer of Syrian oil due to the proximity and logistical advantage of supply through ports in the Mediterranean.

The second reason is that more gas pipelines such as the TAP/TANAP and EAST MED will cross the Balkans in the near future (Reuters, 2019). Through these gas pipelines, gas from Azerbaijan, Israel, Cyprus and Egypt, and in the future may be from Iran and Syria, will reach European consumers. Serbia will be connected to these gas pipelines via the Greece-Bulgaria and Bulgaria-Serbia interconnections. NIS is a company that, through SWAP or directly, could be a user of these new infrastructures, a buyer and distributor of Gazprom gas produced or obtained by SWAP in these regions.

The third, African region, can be included in the consideration in order to better effectuate the NIS concession in Angola through, for example, participation in the reconstruction of the only refinery in Zambia, and its supply with oil or semi-finished products. Relations between Zambia and Serbia are more than cordial, and any initiative, assistance and investment are accepted without "political" prejudices. This situation can be related in a broader context to Tanzania, for whose oil/gas resources Gazprom has shown interest (Gazprom International, 2019). It should be noted that Tanzania (the port of Dar es Salaam) and the refinery in Zambia are connected by a pipeline, which is why logical thinking is imposed on the possible use of more effects and the realization of higher-level synergies.

The above-mentioned are just some of the ideas and possibilities that should be considered.

“Judo grip” approach

NIS, as a company registered in Serbia, a country that is an associate member of the EU, should use its position to insist on the implementation of the “Third Energy Package”. This currently applies to the supply of oil through the JANAF and the Druzhba.

If gas production starts at Gazprom’s concessions in Algeria or Libya, gas can currently be delivered to other markets only through the pipeline that connects Algeria and Libya with Spain and Italy. NIS, as a company registered in an associated EU member state, which is both a buyer (e.g., for the needs of the gas power plant in Pancevo) and a registered gas trader, no one will be able to deny access to the “pipe”, which is not certain for Gazprom or its 100 % subsidiaries.

This advantage NIS can also use with the TAP/TANAP gas pipeline for possible gas supply from Gazprom’s Iranian concessions or the EAST MED gas pipeline for possible gas supply from Syria.

Similar logic is applied to the previously planned gas pipeline from Libya to Italy, which Gazprom was supposed to implement in cooperation with the Italian ENI (New York Times, 2008).

Practically, a “judo grip”³ means the use of EU rules for the possible realization of the goals of NIS and Gazprom, whereas the both companies represent the indispensable factors.

Concluding remarks

Cooperation in the oil and gas sector between Russia and Serbia will begin with the conclusion of clearing agreements during the 1950s. It intensified with the construction of refineries in Novi Sad and Pancevo, and especially intensified in 1979 after the commissioning of the transport gas and oil pipelines through which oil and gas directly arrived from the then USSR to the former Yugoslavia and Serbia. During the 1990s, Russia continuously supplied gas to Serbia, and most of the time, oil through interstate and humanitarian arrangements.

Even in those difficult times, both countries have joint plans, such as the construction of the Serbia-Bulgaria gas pipeline.

The turning point happened in 2008 when the so-called “Energy agreement” was signed. According to this agreement, Russian companies became the owners of NIS and the underground gas storage Banatski Dvor. After the failure of the “South Stream” gas pipeline project, the completion of the “Turkish or Balkan Stream” gas pipeline is expected, which should put Serbia on the gas map of Europe.

Given that after the completion of the second phase of development of the Pancevo Refinery, NIS and Serbia will have one of the most modern refineries in Europe, related to the petrochemical complex, further development efforts should focus on increasing oil and gas production and derivatives trading. These goals include development projects in Serbia, but also in the region, the Mediterranean and beyond, i.e., those that expand the area of operation because only in this way can the necessary resources and markets of sufficient size be reached.

To that end, the Russian and Serbian sides need joint, creative strategic solutions and an “out of the box” thinking. The advantages of Serbia’s geographical position, old interstate ties and the status of an associate member of the EU, as well as the relations of the Russian Federation with certain countries, should be used in order to open new, cost-effective perspectives.

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RUSSIA AND THE SERBS (SERBIA) FROM THE EASTERN QUESTION TO CONTEMPORARY RELATIONS

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Abstract: Tsarist Russia defined its policy towards the Balkans, including Serbian territories, mostly within the framework of the Eastern Question. The fall and collapse of the Ottoman Empire after 1683, until the end of the First World War, meant the liberation and unification of the conquered Christian, mostly Orthodox peoples of the Balkan Peninsula and, at the same time, increased the influence of Russia, the Habsburg Monarchy and some other European powers. Russia's advantage within the Eastern Question was its cultural closeness with the Orthodox, especially Slavic peoples of the Balkans, and the joint centuries-long cooperation in the fight against the Ottoman Empire, which helped the liberation and unification of the Serbian and Yugoslav peoples. In the epoch of the existence of the USSR, that role became more complicated during the twentieth century because of the ideological issues, world wars, and then the relations between the superpowers and the two opposing blocs. After the disappearance of the USSR and the SFR Yugoslavia, modern Russia has renewed its cooperation and influence in the Balkans on new foundations. In the foreground is the energy policy of Russia, then the economics, but also the cultural and historical closeness. The gradual process of transforming the world order towards multipolarism and the military neutrality of Serbia (both BiH and the Republic of Srpska) also represent a connecting factor. Serbia's foreign policy concept of cooperation with several world centers of power (EU, Russia, USA, and China) also affects

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The paper was created within the project "Serbia and Challenges in International Relations in 2020", which is financed by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia, and implemented by the Institute of International Politics and Economics in 2020.

the deepening of cooperation with Russia. An important issue is Russia's support for Serbian interests regarding the problem of Kosovo and Metohija and the position of the Republic of Srpska.

Keywords: Eastern Question, Russian Federation, Serbia, Kosovo and Metohija, historical and cultural closeness, energy policy.

The eastern question and Russian-Serbian relations

Russia's attitude towards the Balkans, including the Serbian territories, developed gradually in the modern era, after the period when the Russian territories were freeing themselves from Mongol-Tatar pressure. While the Russian territories slowly emancipated and freed themselves from Mongol-Tatar domination in the century after the Battle of Kulikovo, the Serbian territories were under the Ottoman occupation. The symbolic wedding of the Byzantine princess from the royal family Palaiologus (Sofia) with the Grand Duke Ivan III gave Moscow a symbolic legacy of being the "Third Rome" and the heir of the Roman Empire. Also, the cultural closeness with the Byzantine heritage gave an additional patronizing relationship and closeness to Russia as an empire in relation to the Orthodox Christian peoples of the Balkans. The Serbs as Orthodox Slavs certainly had a special significance here. The territorial and state unification of the Russian territories during the following period was especially helped by the breaking up of the Golden Horde into several independent and semi-independent khanates. Thus, Ivan the Terrible occupied the Kazan (1552) and Astrakhan Khanate (1556) and placed the entire waterway of the Volga in the internal composition of the Russian state. This was followed by the conquest of the Urals and Western Siberia, and during the 17th century of Eastern Siberia, and expanding to the Pacific. When eastern Ukraine and Kiev united with Russia in 1654, a more serious rapprochement with the Balkans began.

In that direction, the geopolitical preconditions for Russia's rapprochement with the Balkans and the Serbian territories were created for several reasons. First, the tsarist Russia of the Romanovs was constituted as the leading Eurasian power, which covered a colossal space, approximately from the Baltic and the Black Sea (but still without direct access to these seas) to the Pacific in the east. However, this colossal, the most spacious empire in the world, did not have direct access to the Baltic and the Black Sea even then. Moreover, it aspired to unobstructed access to

free and warm seas (like the Mediterranean). On the other hand, the enslaved Orthodox Christian, and especially the Slavic peoples of the Ottoman Empire in the Balkans and also in Asia Minor (Armenians and Greeks), saw their liberation in the resolution of the Eastern Question and through Russia's help. (Петрович, 2013, стр. 119-132, 120).

The Eastern Question represented a period of more than two centuries in which this hub was resolved. The defeat of Turkey near Vienna and the beginning of the unstoppable process of its withdrawal from Europe and the Balkans at the end of the 17th century (starting from 1683 with the Peace of Karlovac as a temporary determinant on that road) coincided with the coming to power of Peter the Great. From his epoch, direct addressing and connecting began, and therefore the cooperation with the Serbian factor in the Balkans in favor of further resolving the Eastern Question. The common interest of Russia and the Serbs was obvious, i.e., the liberation of the oppressed Christian-Orthodox peoples of the Balkans (including the Serbs) and the expulsion of the Ottoman occupier from these areas. Figuratively, during the entire period of the Eastern Question, the sublimation of this aspiration was the transformation of the Hagia Sophia in Constantinople into an Orthodox Christian cathedral again. The Serbs cooperated in resolving the Eastern Question with other Christian powers, primarily with the Habsburg Monarchy, the Venetian Republic, etc., but Russia increasingly won their trust due to Slavism, Orthodoxy, and the long history of joint struggle against the Ottoman Empire. When Eastern Ukraine and Kiev joined Russia under Ataman Khmelnytsky in 1654, it started to approach the Balkans. In the period of Peter the Great, Russia had a colossal continental mass of Eurasia, from the Baltic Sea and the Sea of Azov to the Pacific. Therefore, its aspiration to extend to the coastal seas and, at the same time, to become an important factor in resolving the Eastern Question was an interconnected process. Thus, the aspiration of Orthodox Christians to free themselves through the Eastern Question from the Ottoman Empire and the interests of Russia coincided (Успенски, 2013); Поповић, 2003; Нарочницкого, 2003).

On the one hand, Russia's interest was to reach the warm seas with new territorial expansions, but also to support the creation and expansion of the newly created Orthodox peoples' (and often Slavic) states in the Balkans and the Middle East, which Russia considered as akin and cultural-civilizational close states. During the 18th century, Russia became more and more geographically "closer" to the Balkans because it took control of the north and east Black Sea

coasts as a result of a series of victories in the wars with the Ottoman Empire, and on the other hand, by the expansions at the expense of Poland.

The attractiveness of Russia compared to other Christian powers in resolving the Eastern Question was significantly bigger, especially for the Serbs, which was shown by the fact that in the 18th century, on several occasions, there were migrations from the area under the Habsburg monarchy to the eastern Ukrainian steppes and other areas of then southern Russia (Рудјакoв, 1995). The cooperation between the Serbian Orthodox Church and Russia and the Russian Orthodox Church has been especially intense since the Middle Ages. In that direction, the historian Dejan Tanić speaks about the phase of the spiritual-ideological aspect which lasted until the end of the 16th century, then the political-diplomatic phase which lasted until the beginning of the 18th century, and the cultural-educational phase which lasted until Vuk's reforms (Танић, 2013, стр. 7-9).

From the final decades of the 18th century, therefore, Russia's influence in the Balkans and the Serbian territories increased due to the occupation of the entire Black Sea north coast, the conquest of Bessarabia, and reaching of the Danube's estuary at the beginning of the 19th century. On the other hand, after the peace in Iasi in 1791, the Belgrade Pashaluk returned to the Ottoman Empire after the occupation of the Habsburg monarchy, but now it has gained certain autonomy. During the First Serbian Uprising, Russia and insurgent Serbia were allies and Russian troops came to Serbia in a joint victorious fight against the Ottoman Empire. When Napoleon left for Russia in 1812, Alexander I was forced to sign the Peace Treaty of Bucharest with Turkey. However, in point eight, Serbia was guaranteed broad autonomy. It was an important international treaty, which helped Milos Obrenovic not to re-enter the armed conflict with the Ottoman Porte after 1815. Using the achievements of the Vienna Congress and the fact that Russia was one of the leading victors over Napoleon (the Great Alliance) enabled Milos a great influence on the organization of Europe. After that, the Principality of Serbia, although it remained out of the war conflict with the Ottoman Empire, gained several expansions and confirmation of its growing independence.² Russia's victory in the war with Turkey and the Treaty of Edirne brought

² Although neutral in that war, with Milos's diplomacy, Serbia achieved that the Bosnian viziers and the Skadar pashas did not arrive in time to help the sultan in key battles with the Russian army.

Milos's Serbia the Hatisheriff from 1830, confirming the previous great autonomy to the level of internal independence, and with Hatisheriff from 1833, Serbia gained the expansion by six nahiyes.

The importance of Tsarist Russia in international relations in the new age period, and Russian-Serbian relations

In modern history, Russia has practically continuously increased its significance and influence, including during the epoch of the Eastern Question. Territorial expansion in Eurasia, an increase of the number of inhabitants, military and economic power, participation in various victorious coalitions in European affairs, made Russia a great power. During the 18th and the beginning of the 19th century, it geographically approached the Balkans, occupying the entire northern and eastern shores of the Black Sea, and finally the Danube estuary. That process was not absolutely straightforward. This was the case after the defeat in the Crimean War, where the Paris Peace Agreement of 1856 was not particularly exemplary towards Russian interests, but it was still a step back from the previous positions. Half a century after that, the defeat in the war with Japan in the Far East and the beginning of the internal revolution were also an obvious step back. At the internal level, modernization, the liberation of serfs, the process of urbanization and development, which had its backlogs and contradictions that will remain evident until the Great War, continued. Taken as a whole, with some setbacks, Russia in the entire modern history and the process of resolving the Eastern Question was advancing and developing until the Great War of 1914. That Great War, especially the October Revolution, represented a watershed, and a completely new position of Soviet Russia (USSR) in relation to the previous epoch.

The characteristics of Russian-Serbian relations during the Eastern Question, until the beginning of the First Serbian Uprising, were as follows: 1) a constant deepening of ties, as a consequence of the coincidence of interests in the direction of the fight against the Ottoman Empire, and cultural and national kinship; 2) Russia's constant territorial approach to the Balkans and the Serbian territories, especially during the second half of the 18th century. However, in the physical sense, there was no contact between the Russian Army and the Serbian people in the Balkans, except

for the assistance provided to Montenegro by the navy and in other ways. There was also the migration of the Serbs to south Russia, primarily today's area of eastern Ukraine. Within the attitude of the Western powers towards the Serbian issue, the attitude they had towards Russia was also important. Great Britain (and later such a course was largely accepted by the United States during the twentieth century) saw Russia as the most important planetary adversary within its geopolitical interests. Great Britain viewed the Serbian factor mostly negatively since it was close to Russia. In principle, France took a far more favorable attitude towards both Russia and the Serbian issue. Germany had a changing attitude towards Russia until the conclusion of the Franco-Russian alliance in 1891. Before German unification, the most important German states also had a changing attitude towards Russia. However, after Bismarck came down from power, Germany tightened its policy towards Russia. This coincided with the worsening of the policy of the Habsburg monarchy towards the Serbs and the binding of Vienna to the policy of Berlin.

The characteristics of Russian-Serbian relations from the First Serbian Uprising until the end of the First World War were as follows: 1) more direct cooperation, the Russian army physically present in the First Serbian Uprising, and then through volunteers in the Serbian-Turkish wars of 1876 and 1877-78; 2) in the later war (1877-78), the Russian army fought against Turkey in the Balkans (in present-day Bulgaria). The situation was similar in the First World War. During the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, Russia's relations with Serbia and Montenegro deepened in the military, political, spiritual, cultural, and economic domains. This did not apply evenly to all periods, so there was a cooling of relations during the reign of the King of Milan when official Belgrade pursued an Austrophile policy. Montenegro relied on Russia practically all the time of its existence in the modern period, although, at the same time, it established relations and cooperation with some other powers. Since the formation of the Franco-Russian alliance in the early 1990s, Montenegro has been oriented in that direction (besides, it maintained friendly relations with Italy, and even with Austro-Hungary), and Serbia was definitely tied in that direction after the May coup in 1903. Russia finally entered the Great War precisely on the issue of the Austro-Hungarian attack on Serbia. Of course, the motives for the great European conflict were more complex and embedded in the long-term contradictions between the two opposing military-political blocs of the

Entente and the Central Powers. Russia's entry into conflict with the Central Powers over Serbia (Austria-Hungary wanted its local war with Serbia with the support of Germany) while the Russian army and economy were not yet ready for a major conflict, recovering from the internal revolution and war with Japan 1904-1905, represented great help to the Serbs and the significant support in the just ended era of resolving the Eastern Question. The victories of Serbia and Montenegro in the Balkan wars marked the end of the era of the Eastern Question for the Serbs, but a great conflict was imposed on them by the Central Powers in 1914.

Russian-Serbian relations after 1918

It was the paradox that, after the October Revolution, Russia, which was one of the pillars of the Entente and made great sacrifices until the beginning of 1918 for its final success, after the victory of the Bolsheviks, became a country opposed to the victorious Versailles system for ideological reasons. In that direction, both Serbian and Yugoslav unification remained without Russia's support in the Versailles Peace Treaty. This was one of the important reasons why a great Serbian united state could not be formed in Versailles. This issue was not supported by Western powers, but also from France. Instead, a Yugoslav state was created. In the interwar period, the relations of Soviet Russia with the Versailles system in Europe were even hostile in the first phase (and thus with the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, they were far from the previous centuries-old Serbian-Russian friendly cooperation). The turning point was the arrival of the Nazis to power, the entry of the USSR into the League of Nations and the Franco-Soviet Pact, which had only a partial result in the existing balance of power in Europe (Петровић, 2019, стр. 115-118). The USSR was in a kind of isolation during a significant part of the interwar period in relation to the Versailles system in Europe. All this was reflected in the Soviet-Yugoslav relations. Due to ideological differences, blood ties of the Karadjordjevic dynasty with the executed Romanov dynasty, but also due to the opposition that the Bolshevik regime in Moscow had to the Versailles system and Yugoslavia as its link, the differences between the authorities in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and the USSR were very pronounced. Even in the period after the entry of the USSR into the League of Nations and Moscow's rapprochement with Paris

and Prague, these relations slowly warmed up, which was largely a consequence of the concept of Prince Pavle and Milan Stojadinović. Over time, there came to the warming and rapprochement, while official relations were not established until June 1940, but then started to deepen.³

The Second World War additionally brought together the Russian and Serbian peoples, who were fighting on the same side. After the war, although both countries were socialist, there were differences. The USSR was a world superpower and the leader of the Eastern Bloc. It regained the territories it partially lost after the foreign intervention and the civil war on the western outskirts of the country. Moreover, it possessed nuclear weapons and a permanent seat on the Security Council with the right of veto.

During the twentieth century, the Serbian and Russian people, that is, the states in which they lived (USSR and Yugoslavia), had specific and unequal relations in the complex ideological and then the Cold War opposites of Europe and the world. The Kingdom of Yugoslavia was even among the last states in the interwar period to establish diplomatic relations with the USSR, and relations between Tito's Yugoslavia and the USSR were changeable, although close in principle.

After the disintegration of the complex states in which they were in 1992, Russia and Serbia (FRY) came out of that process evidently severely mutilated (to this the mostly unfounded accusations that they had the role of hegemon in the USSR and the SFRY should be added), leaving outside their borders significant parts of their own people. After the difficult 1990s, which were hard for both countries, it seemed that, in the past two decades, mutual relations had been rising constantly and with even greater predispositions for future development.

With the fall of the Berlin Wall and the disappearance of the USSR, a (temporary) monopolar world order emerged with the dominance of the USA and NATO. Within that emerging monopolar world order, the Yugoslav crisis developed, which ended during the 1990s to the detriment of the Serbian factor. During that period, although after several decades spent in a complex state, independent states emerged. The Serbs (the Federal Republic

³ More details in Dragan Petrović's books: Краљевина Срба, Хрвата и Словенаца и Совјетска Русија (СССР), Краљевина Југославија и СССР 1929-1935, Краљевина Југославија – СССР 1935-1941 (Петровић, 2018; Петровић, 2019; Петровић, 2017).

of Yugoslavia) and Russia could not develop adequate cooperation in such circumstances. Russia was not in a position to help resolve the Yugoslav crisis equally and fairly.

Russian-Serbian relations after 2000

However, since Vladimir Putin came to power, Russia has gradually and significantly strengthened. In these last two decades, relations between Serbia (FRY until 2006, i.e., Serbia and Montenegro) and the Republic of Srpska, and Russia were good and multidimensional. During this period, Russian-Serbian relations were developing on the basis of traditional closeness, but also in the context of geopolitical and state interests of both sides. Regarding the issue of Kosovo and Metohija, Russia supported Serbia. Russia is interested in preserving the territorial integrity of Serbia for several reasons. It is a principled position on the immutability of borders by unilateral pressures. Secondly, in this epoch of aggressive policy of the USA and NATO, first of all, the status quo in international relations suits Russia better. Next, the Serbian factor is close and traditionally friendly, and stable Serbia is in Russia's interest. Moreover, the precedents in the former Yugoslavia could serve as a laboratory and a precedent in a number of other neuralgic points, including the post-Soviet space where Russia has first-rate strategic interests. Through its support to Serbia on the issue of Kosovo and Metohija, Russia has an additional factor of influence in the Balkans, which confirms its status of great power.

Serbian political scientist Dragan Simeunović points out that "Vladimir Putin's rise as a statesman and international successes as the President of Russia, the renewal of the Russian state and military power, and his determination to question the fate of Serbia, has made visible Russia's popularity in the eyes of Serbs again, and the myth of the fraternal and protective position of Russia has gained new strength" (Симеуновић, 2018, стр. 318). The re-strengthening of Russia in the era of Vladimir Putin strengthened the traditional faith of the Serbian population in Russia.

Political scientist Leonas Tolvaishis believes that after the withdrawal of its peacekeeping contingent from the UN forces in Kosovo and Metohija in 2003, Russia primarily concentrated the concept of "soft power" on the Serbian territories. It is a range of cooperation in the field of politics, defense,

economy, and cultural identity. In the field of politics, it is primarily Russia's support for the territorial integrity of Serbia regarding Kosovo and Metohija. It is important for Russia that in 2007 Serbia declared military neutrality as a state concept. It is also important that Serbia became an observer in the CSTO. In 2017, Serbia bought military equipment from Russia, primarily six MiG-29 aircraft, thirty T-72 tanks, armored personnel carriers, and other (Толвайшисю, 2019, стр. 99-102).

In economic terms, during the last two decades, in parallel with the economic and social rise of Russia, its economic cooperation with the Balkans, including the Serbian territories, has intensified. At the beginning of the second decade of the 21st century, the foreign trade cooperation between Serbia and the Russian Federation was around 3 billion euros⁴, and in the following years, it will experience smaller fluctuations. The coverage of Serbian exports to Russia in relation to imports increased from about one-seventh of the total bilateral exchange in 2008 to one-third in 2018. If we look at the bilateral trade exchange between the two countries in recent years, we can see that from 2013 to 2018, this balance was quite stable, i.e., that the coverage of imports by exports was about 40 to 60%. Exports were approximately one billion dollars and imports about two billion dollars (Привредна комора Србије, 2019).

Russia is generally in the fourth place of Serbia's foreign trade partners, behind Germany, Italy, and China. The structure of Serbian exports is dominated by food products, clothing, pneumatic products, etc. In the structure of imports, energy, oil and gas are in the first place, accounting for over 60% (Петровић и Јокић, 2015, стр. 104-110). It is clear that such a high structure of energy imports, called an inelastic type of product in economic science (for which it is difficult to find a substitute), conditions the negative bilateral foreign trade balance of the two countries to the detriment of Serbia. Therefore, it is no wonder that Russia has had a positive foreign trade balance with the world for years, often twice as much

⁴ The record in the foreign trade of the two countries was achieved back in 2008 when it amounted to \$4 billion. For example, in 2019, \$3.6 billion was reached. However, compared to 2008, Serbian exports in the foreign trade of the two countries are extremely advanced, so in 2008 it amounted to only \$500 million (one-eighth of the total bilateral exchange that year), and in 2019 as much as \$1 billion (close to 30% of bilateral trade) (Политика, 2013).

nominally as imports because the dependence on imports of its energy sources is high (Привредна комора Србије, 2019).

There are as many as 895 active business entities on the territory of Serbia, whose majority owners are legal entities from the Russian Federation.

In the institutional sense of economic cooperation, the Free Trade Agreement signed in 2001 is important. It is one of the few that Russia has signed with some country, and it provides ample opportunities for successful bilateral cooperation. For almost two decades, this agreement has only been partially used in relation to the possibilities and the perspective of increasing cooperation. The Agreement of February 28, 2008, signed after the session of the expert working group of the Government of the Republic of Serbia and the Government of Moscow determined the basic directions for strengthening trade and economic cooperation. (Петровић, 2018, стр. 401-402). On the issue of military cooperation, the status of military neutrality of Serbia positively affects the maintenance of military cooperation with Russia as well. In 2014, Vladimir Putin attended the military parade of the Serbian Army in Belgrade, which was held for the first time in three decades (Восток, 2019).

Since 2014, Serbia has been regularly participating in the Slavic Brotherhood Military Exercise together with Russia and Belarus. During 2019, Serbia held four military exercises with Russia (Center for Euro-Atlantic Studies, 2019). In recent years, Serbia has stepped up its arms purchases from Russia, and since 2013, Serbia has been granted observer status within the Collective Security Treaty Organization (Организация Договора о коллективной безопасности, 2020).⁵

For Serbia (and the Republic of Srpska), the integration processes and international organizations in which the Russian Federation is located are an additional factor in relations with Russia. It is the whole spectrum, starting from the post-Soviet space, where the Eurasian Union dominates in the economic sense, then the Commonwealth of Independent States, and finally, in the security sense, the Organization for Collective Security and Cooperation. Then follows the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the

⁵ Within its observer status, Serbia monitors the activities of the CSTO continuously, thus, among other things, the National Assembly of Serbia has been an observer of the work of the CSTO Parliamentary Assembly for years.

BRICS, which have a wider (Eurasian, i.e., the world) significance. Serbia has the status of an observer within the SCO. Serbia is a status-neutral state in military terms, so cooperation with the CSTO (where it is an observer), and in the future with the SCO, may suit it to strengthen its neutral status. When it comes to the Eurasian Union, first of all, the CIS and especially the BRICS, Serbia can strengthen its economic cooperation. For example, the BRICS Development Bank also provides loans to third countries without conditioning the application of the economic concept or even political issues.

If we consider the importance of Serbia in the official strategic documents of the Russian Federation in the last twenty years, we can notice the following. The 2000 document, as the first strategic concept since President Vladimir Putin came to power, cites the Russian Federation's interest in the survival of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, and the issue of Kosovo and Metohija" as the most important in the Balkans". Russia's direct interest was linked to the survival and the territorial integrity of the FRY because the alternative was the possibility of a "general Balkan conflict". The next strategic document of the Russian Federation from 2008 does not mention Serbia at all. The 2013 strategic document states the importance of the Balkans in Russia's transport and energy policy and provides a general guideline for supporting the territorial integrity of the Balkan states, including Serbia. It is similar in the 2016 document. Russian political scientists Bokerija and Pejic, on the other hand, point out that although in the official documents the strategy towards Serbia is not particularly elaborated and even mentioned in some of them, the importance of the Balkans and Russian-Serbian relations is evident. In the light of the transport of Russian energy, the fact that Serbia territorial integrity is endangered on the issue of Kosovo and Metohija, this insistence on territorial integrity is of special importance. The high frequency of mutual meetings at the top in recent years is pointed out. The record was in 2017 when as many as six such meetings were organized. In 2013, the Declaration on Strategic Partnership was signed between Serbia and Russia, where, in addition to economic cooperation, the possibility of military cooperation was also mentioned. The issue of Kosovo and Metohija, i.e., the territorial integrity of Serbia, was mentioned as one of the important factors of the Russian side in mutual summits, but also in the statements of the Russian side. After the introduction of sanctions regarding the Ukrainian crisis by a number of Western countries, Serbia did not participate in it (Бокерия и Пеич, 2018. стр. 93-96).

For official Russia, the issue of Kosovo and Metohija is primarily a question of the territorial status and integrity of Serbia. Therefore, Russia refers to Resolution 1244, which considers Kosovo and Metohija as an integral part of the FR Yugoslavia, i.e., Serbia. Some Russian political scientists, such as Sergei Vyacheslavovich Moshkin, believe that after the annexation of Crimea to Russia and the separation of Abkhazia and South Ossetia from Georgia, as well as some other controversial situations in the post-Soviet space, the territorial integrity is not considered so decisively final category in international relations. (Вјачеславович, 2018, стр. 164). An Austrian expert on international law Benedikt Harzl thinks similarly. He assumes that if Kosovo were alienated from Serbia under any explanation, then a similar status issue would be raised for the post-Soviet space and, for example, the issues of Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and others (Гарцль, 2018, стр. 105).

Perspectives of Russian-Serbian cooperation

The modern world is in the process of growing from a monopolar, where it was after the “fall of the Berlin Wall” towards a multipolar one. In addition to the United States, other world powers, primarily China, Russia, and even India, Germany, France, Britain, Japan, and Brazil, have a significant influence in the multipolar world order. The collapse of the neoliberal economic and social concept in recent years has hit the United States and the Anglo-Saxon world the hardest. The planetary process of the easy transition of the center of the world economy from the North Atlantic to the Pacific region is also underway (with an emphasis on China, but also other countries and areas of the Far East and the west coast of Anglo-America). In the new circumstances, the BRICS countries, in particular, will stand out as “continent countries” with large territories, large populations, and natural resources. In that direction, the Russian Federation gained additional importance. Its energy sources and other strategic resources (metal and non-metal ores, clean drinking water, forests, arable land) will gain in importance. When it comes to oil and gas, for example, the neighboring macro-regions (China, EU countries, Japan, India, etc.) are increasingly deficient in these resources, and Russia will be able to export in respectable quantities in the coming decades. It is clear from all this that Serbia’s strategic interest is to maintain and

expand the closest possible cooperation with Russia, with which it shares ethnic and cultural closeness and historical alliance.

In the strategic sense, this cooperation consists of political and security ties because the Russian Federation represents an important pole of influence in international relations, including the Balkan Peninsula. This especially refers to the issue of Kosovo and Metohija and Russia's support for Serbia. Russia is also acting positively on the issue of the position of the Republic of Srpska and the respect for the Dayton Accords, as one of the signatories of this international peace agreement which regulates peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Integrations in the post-Soviet space and international organizations in which Russia participates (SCO, CSTO, BRICS, Eurasian Union, CIS) are also important for the interests of Serbia, which has opted for a neutral position in terms of security. In the economic sense, regardless of the proclaimed policy towards the EU, Serbia is interested in economic cooperation with Russia and integrations in which it has an important role. After all, Serbia has a special status in trade cooperation with Russia, and, among other things, the status of an observer in relation to the CSTO. Russia supports the change of Djukanovic's regime and concept in Montenegro, which was achieved in the parliamentary elections on August 30, 2020. These changes are in the Serbian interest for several reasons, primarily in improving the strategic relations between Serbia and Montenegro. Cooperation in the field of culture, tourism, transport also offers great potential.

In the economic domain, Serbia is directed to import primarily Russian energy. On the other hand, in the structure of exports, special potential represents the food products and cooperation with Russia in joint production and the agreed placement for Russian areas of deficient agricultural products and the introduction of high technologies (Буквич, Пайович, Петрович, 2016).

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IMAGES AND PERCEPTIONS

RUSSIAN INFORMATION PRESENCE AT THE BALKANS: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS

Evgeny N. Pashentsev¹

Abstract: The article seeks to explore the role and the channels of Russia's information presence in the Balkans. Focusing first of all on the activity of the Russian media in the region, it also describes the activity of Russian public diplomacy institutions, foundations, public organizations, scientific associations, etc., which have developed a collaboration with civil society institutions of the Balkan countries in the interest of bilateral and multilateral cooperation.

When implementing strategic communication, the main attribution is the "synchronization of words" (information support of the state course) and "deeds" (long-term public policy) and how they will be perceived by target audiences. Thus, the very actions of the Russian state and its various representatives (both officials and a wide range of non-state actors), undertaken both in Russia and the Balkans, constantly project certain meanings into the minds of the audience. The most significant will be projections of real cases that objectively benefit both Russia and the Balkan countries themselves, for example, the creation of high-tech jobs and assistance in crisis situations.

Not only are new crises dangerous for Russia, but it is important for Russia not to lose the opportunities to strengthen relations with the Balkan countries and with all other countries that do not want to see Europe and the Balkans as only a chessboard of the great powers, or even worse the possible battlefield of a WW3.

Keywords: information presence, the Balkans, Russia, public diplomacy, strategic communication.

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RUSSIAN INFORMATION PRESENCE IN THE BALKANS

Russia's information presence in the Balkans and its impact on relations with the Balkan countries and the overall situation in the region is understandable and of undoubted importance, not only in the context of the historical past, but above all in the present and future, whether it is in the economy, politics, culture, or security. Against the background of increasing international tension, compounded by mutual accusations of global and regional actors in the crisis associated with the coronavirus pandemic, the relevance of the topic of the article only increases.

There is an evident lack of research not only on the topic of the article but also on related topics (for example, on "the role of Russia's information influence in the Balkans") (Skovorodnikov, 2017, p. 184). The current article cites publications on strategic communication (General Staff of the Slovenian Armed Forces, 2019; Holtzhausen & Zeffass, 2015; Pashentsev, 2012; 2014a, 2014b, 2018, 2020; Paul, 2011), public diplomacy (Seidov, 2017; Tsvetkova, 2017; Velikaya, 2019), and soft power (Borisova, 2015; Neymark, 2018; Nye, 2013). Expert assessments of the situation were received, as well as analytical materials and publications from a researcher at the National University of Political Science and Public Administration in Bucharest (Romania), Dr. Marius Vacarelu, and a researcher at the Institute of Political Science in Belgrade (Serbia), Dr. Maria Đoric.

The main volume of open sources directly related to the topic is represented by publications of analytical centers and researchers mainly from the European Union (Anderson, 2019; Eisentraut and de Leon, 2018; Janda and Víchová, 2019; Secrieru, 2019; Svárovský, Gurney, & Kröger, 2019; Szpala, 2014; Víchová, 2019), which means that the information space of Europe, including the Balkan countries, is dominated by one-sided biased assessments of the Russian information presence (Stronski & Himes, 2019, p. 10). This is reflected in the tone of Russia's representation in the media, not only in the Balkans but also in neighboring countries, including states that are only partially located on the peninsula (Burduja, 2018; Recorder, 2018; Voicu, 2018). Works on the topic of Russia's presence in Serbia (but primarily on the economic presence, contacts of Russian and Serbian political parties, and in some cases on the work of Russian media) are available in Serbian (see, for example, Antidot, 2018; Đurković, 2012; Đurović, 2019).

The author expresses his gratitude for the analytical materials and publications received from Dr. Marius Vacarelu, the researcher from the National School of Political Science and Public Administration in Bucharest (Romania), and Dr. Marija Đorić, the research associate of the Institute for Political Studies in Belgrade (Serbia).

The research question. The article seeks to explore the role and the channels of the Russian information presence in the Balkans. Focusing first of all on the activity of the Russian media in the region, it also describes the activity of Russian public diplomacy institutions, foundations, public organizations, scientific associations, etc., which have developed a collaboration with civil society institutions of the Balkan countries in the interest of bilateral and multilateral cooperation.

The type of study. Qualitative research that collects and works with non-numerical data and seeks to understand better the role of the Russian information presence in the Balkans and its functioning, including the current crucial period of struggle with COVID-19.

THE MAJOR FINDINGS

RUSSIAN INFORMATION PRESENCE IN THE BALKANS: MAIN DIRECTIONS AND THEIR CURRENT STATE

The Russian information presence in the Balkans is evident not only by the media but also by various actors who create information channels, from top officials of the state to a wide range of non-state actors. The channels of Russia's information presence in the Balkans include both the Russian media and the media of the Balkan countries themselves. Working with the local media is often difficult due to their frequent ownership by owners from the EU and the United States. But as we will see later, Russian news agencies are able to publish their materials in major media in the region. These channels can also be other mass media, such as social networks, as well as online services such as Booking.com. These are channels where reviews of Russia's actions in the international arena or Russian realities cannot be controlled by the Russian government.

All theoretical research about public diplomacy is worth little if there are no real working institutions. Among the dozens of NGOs that shape the image of Russia in the Balkans, the undisputed leaders are *Rossotrudnichestvo*, the

Russkiy Mir Foundation, and the Alexander Gorchakov Public Diplomacy Fund (GF) (Mladenovich & Ponomareva, 2016).

Rossotrudnichestvo is represented in the Balkan region in Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Slovenia, by Russian centers of science and culture and representatives of Russian embassies (*Rosstrudnichestvo*, 2020).

Russkiy Mir has been operating in Serbia for quite a long time: it has offices in Belgrade, Novi Sad, and NIS; it also has offices in the Republic of Srpska (Banja Luka) and is expanding its activities to some other countries in the region (Russia Noah's Ark, 2019).

Since 2013, the GF has been implementing the scientific and educational program "The Balkan Dialogue" in the form of an annual international conference for young professionals in the fields of international relations, politics, economics, and history of the Balkan region, as well as for representatives of public organizations, local and regional self-government bodies and state structures, and journalists. Over the years, representatives from Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Macedonia, Moldova, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, the Republic of Srpska, Russia, Ukraine, and Montenegro have participated in the conference (Ponomareva, 2017). Unfortunately, the program receives only modest coverage in the Russian media, on the website of the GF (Balkan Dialogue [Russian and English versions], 2020), where there are no conference outcome documents, but there are full texts of at least the most significant of the Russian–Balkan dialogue papers. (While for public diplomacy the texts are available both in Russian and in foreign languages, for true open access English-language versions are needed.) As we will see later, reports and documents of foundations and "think tanks" that have a negative attitude toward Russia are almost always available in English, the most widely used language of international communication in Europe.

Among the Russian media in the Balkans, and in particular, in Serbia, RT, Sputnik, and Voice of Russia are the leaders in audience coverage (www.glasrusije.rs). The largest Serbian daily newspaper *Politika* and the monthly *Geopolitika* contain the additions *Ruska Reč* and *Rusija i Srbija* published by *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* as part of Russia Beyond the Headlines Project (Szpala, 2014). Information received from the Sputnik Agency is transmitted by numerous local media outlets in Serbia, as well as by the *Blic*, *Kurir*, *Informer*, *Večernje novosti* and *B92* portals. In addition, according to

2018 data, about 40 Serbian Internet portals periodically broadcast Russia's point of view on important political topics (Kosovo and Metohija, Syria, and Eastern Ukraine) (Đurović, 2019).

Certain areas of implementation of the Russian information presence related to contacts through political parties and public organizations, as well as sports and religious diplomacy, which make a significant contribution to Russia's information presence in the Balkans but have limited scope for the purposes of this publication, are not analyzed in the current article.

Russia's information presence in the Balkans is one of the factors (but not the decisive one) for Russia's popularity in the Balkans, although the attitude toward it varies greatly from country to country. Serbia and Montenegro are countries where Russia's popularity is at a high level. Russia is more popular in Montenegro than in the US and the EU (Víchová, 2019, p. 29). An opinion poll conducted in July 2018 in Serbia showed that 21% of respondents considered Russia the main source of financial assistance, compared to 24% who pointed to the EU, and 17% to China (Bechev, 2019, p. 16). Under these conditions, the prospects for Russia's information presence may be rather favorable.

PROBLEMS OF THE RUSSIAN INFORMATION PRESENCE IN THE BALKANS

Russian state and non-state actors have to present their point of view and establish cooperation in the Balkans in the context of ongoing information warfare. This involves not only the media but also research institutes, in one way or another, connected with the governments of Western countries.

The publication of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace is an example of a typical report on Russia's international activities: "Within Europe, the Balkans appear particularly vulnerable to fake or manipulated news narratives . . . due to lagging education systems and poor political literacy. Russian news agencies also take advantage of cash-strapped Balkan news sources by providing content to local outlets for free or at extremely low cost" (Stronski & Himes, 2019, p. 8). The Carnegie Foundation is formally a non-governmental organization, but its employees include a number of former US government officials. The foundation's president is

former Deputy Secretary of State William Burns (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2020).

The Organized Crime Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP), founded in 2007 in Sarajevo by American journalist Drew Sullivan, who accused Russia of interfering in the internal affairs of North Macedonia, openly reports that it receives support in the form of grants from the US Agency for International Development (USAID) and the US State Department (OCCRP, 2020).

An actual example of the development of anti-Russian programs is the *Kremlin Watch Strategy for Countering Hostile Russian Interference* (Janda & Víchová, 2019), published by the European Values Center for Security Policy in December 2019. The strategy proposes 20 measures that, according to the center's staff, the EU should take against Russia. The authors of the strategy proposed to increase funding for the EU's Eastern Strategic Communications Task Force (East StratCom Task Force) at the European External Action Service, transferring large funds to the sphere of psychological warfare (the goals which in a situation of aggravation of international relations can serve as strategic communication goals).

Noteworthy are the center's proposals to conduct regular surveys and in-depth sociological research to assess the extent of Russian influence (Janda & Víchová, 2019, p. 9), bring EU sanctions to full compliance with US sanctions, counter not only the work of Russian nonprofit organizations but also the speeches of representatives of the Russian academic community (Janda & Víchová, 2019, p. 14), and change the relationship with employees of Russian state media—for example, reconsidering their role as legitimate journalists, prohibiting them from participating in press conferences, and not giving interviews to them (Janda & Víchová, 2019, p. 14).

The Konrad Adenauer Foundation (KAF) recommends that the EU implement public diplomacy in the region in two main areas: active counteraction to Russian propaganda and “smarter outreach to Western Balkan nations” (Eisentraut & de Leon, 2018, p. 5). The foundation points out the need to translate EU strategic communication materials not only into English, Russian, and German but also into the languages of the Balkan countries, in addition to creating a mobile application that can be downloaded in various languages of the Western Balkans, and to sponsor the monitoring of social networks through the European Commission to track Russian propaganda (Eisentraut & de Leon, 2018, p. 5).

Some recommendations of the KAF may mean direct intervention in the internal affairs of the Balkan states. Thus, the KAF recommends that the EU “increase their pressure on regional leaders” who “misrepresent the EU’s role in their countries” by “overstating Russia’s assistance to their country”: “EU institutions and member states should credibly *threaten* [italicization mine] to reduce or withdraw certain types of assistance should their activities not be adequately communicated” (Eisentraut & de Leon, 2018, p. 8). At the same time, there are no promises to increase aid to those countries committed to the idea of European integration. Thus, a country that has essentially rejected Russia’s aid may experience a deep crisis. We can already see this in the example of the ban on the export of medical products from the EU to the Balkan countries (PolitNavigator, 2020), despite their requests for assistance in the fight against the coronavirus.

Despite all the bias of such publications, it should be noted that they cover the problem in a comprehensive manner. Thus, the publications of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, the NATO StratCom Center of Excellence, and the European Values Center for Security Policy consider Russia’s influence in the Balkans in various aspects—from the influence of Russia’s economic presence in the life of the region to the cooperation of the Russian and Balkan media. Thus, Russia’s actions are considered as operating at the strategic communication level. Accordingly, complex countermeasures are also proposed.

In our view, it is advisable to take into account the effectiveness of such analytical reports and articles in the development of Russian publications in order to critically (not manipulatively) prove to the Balkan audience the systemic influence of the EU, the US, and NATO in the region in selfish interests that infringe on the interests of the Balkan countries, but where and since such interests are actually present and such infringement takes place. A dubious publication about the Bolshoi Theater (Nemtsova, 2017) should not be answered in the same way. In a game of tabloids, it is unlikely that Russia will win strategically, even if some members of the public prefer the beautiful fairy tales of the Russian tabloids. Of course, when describing actions against the Russian media and their Balkan partners, it is necessary to refer to traditional European values, first of all, to the concept of freedom of speech.

High-quality Russian analytical products published with open access, including in foreign languages, require the development of scientific schools, providing research institutes and centers with funds not only for conducting

the research itself but also for high-quality translation and editing in foreign languages. If an article is accepted in a highly rated international journal (and ideally such Russian journals are in great need), it is necessary to publish the article in an open-access format. Presenting scientific arguments that go beyond journalistic polemics is especially important against the background of periodic accusations of aggressive coverage by the Russian media regarding the situation in the Balkans (Antidot, 2018).

Despite the importance of cooperation between Russia and the Balkan countries in the energy sector, it is worth thinking about what high-tech industries, in which Russia is an innovator, can be developed in the Balkans. In this regard, we can agree with the Russian Ambassador to Serbia Alexander Botan-Kharchenko, that the opportunities of Russia and Serbia in the field of economic cooperation are not fully realized (Borisov, 2019). New knowledge and jobs in innovative industries themselves create the need to learn the language of the country that is leading in the field of innovation.

RUSSIAN INFORMATION PRESENCE IN THE BALKANS THROUGH THE PRISM OF STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION

Tools for increasing the information presence can include interaction with not only the media or the means of public diplomacy but also with the means of strategic communication. Most generally, strategic communication is the state's projection of certain vital and long-term values, interests, and goals into the conscience of domestic and foreign audiences. It is effectuated by means of adequate synchronization of multifaceted activities in all domains of social life, commonly with professional communication support. It is clear that such synchronization takes place in Russia nowadays (reflecting the dynamics of the unique national symbiosis of the old and the new, of the local and the adopted aspects of administration forms and methods of influencing public consciousness).

In order to usher in a qualitatively new level of development, it is vital for Russia to raise the efficiency of management in all domains of society. The increase in Russia's capacity for utilizing strategic communication might become one of the most efficient tools for developing new systems of this sort. It will decrease the burden on administrative and financial

administration organs, have a real impact on the speed of economic growth, and reinforce Russia's international position (including in the Balkans) as well as its state security. It is worth noting that we are not talking about replacing physical action with communication manipulation mechanisms - Russia needs real progress, not its propagandistic imitation.

Without strategic deeds, there is only a set of long-term communication goals on principal issues, but whether such deeds are adequate or truthful is an open question. Without relevant state deeds, the communication is very often nothing more than vague propaganda, even if it is strategic in intent. For example, First Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union Nikita Khrushchev, speaking on October 31, 1961, at the Twenty-Second Congress of the party with a report on the project of the third program of the CPSU, said, "the current generation of Soviet people will live under communism." The document, which was adopted by the delegates of the Congress, also indicated the deadline for the completion of the "unfolded construction of communism"—20 years (Obeschania.ru, 2019). Of course, the Soviet people were a bit disappointed by the results of non-existent progress long before 1980. Later, false propaganda of the party elite was one of the reasons for the collapse of the USSR. However, it is not only good ideas that are deformed by wrong decisions. Sometimes, for example, synchronization of the wrong words, images, and deeds has led to global disaster. *Efficient deeds* (first the decisive and rather easy successes on the fronts of the Second World War, plus robbery of Untermenschen all over Europe) made the majority of Germans firmly believe in the genius of Hitler (with the help of very efficient Nazi propaganda). The result is well known: more than 50 million victims of German aggression. *Effective synchronization* of deeds, words, and images almost led to fascist world domination.

Thus, strategic communication has to be not only an efficient synchronization of deeds, words, and images but has to include an *ethical and social dimension* too. In a failed state you can find no state strategy and no state strategic communication. But there is no vacuum in the current world. Instead of national strategic communication, there *always* appears strategic communication of other states and/or non-state transnational groups, such as in current Libya, for example. Through a rise of progressive social forces coming to power, strategic communication may appear once again, or the state will be split forever like the USSR—or taken over by

reactionary forces with their own interests and agenda-setting and relevant strategic communication. In failed states like Libya, such dilemmas are more or less evident. In still viable, more developed countries—yet in the group experiencing protracted crises—such processes are more difficult to detect. They are, however, no less real.

First, strategic communication is not only communication by itself but also communication through state deeds.

Second, it is incorrect to consider strategic communication primarily as a military tool; it is a strategic public administration tool (with a military dimension as well, of course).

Third, it is necessary to confront not only a wrong strategic communication in itself but also a state-run machine—if it supports itself utilizing a wrong means of development. This often involves the use of reactionary social groups. A reactionary state can follow on a weak strategic communication, and it is not bad at all for progressive forces. In the case where a reactionary, especially aggressive state follows efficient strategic communication, it may be extremely dangerous for the whole world if we are speaking about a rather powerful state or international union of states.

Fourth, progressive forces cannot underestimate the role of efficient strategic communication as a tool for progressive change. A progressive strategy without efficient means, based on advanced technologies, is objectively doomed to death.

When implementing strategic communication, the main attribution is the “synchronization of words” (information support of the state course) and “deeds” (long-term public policy) and how they will be perceived by target audiences. Thus, the very actions of the Russian state and its various representatives (both officials and a wide range of non-state actors), undertaken both in Russia and the Balkans, constantly project certain meanings into the minds of the audience. The most significant will be projections of real cases that objectively benefit both Russia and the Balkan countries themselves, for example, the creation of high-tech jobs and assistance in crisis situations. One of the most recent good examples of this is sending military planes carrying military physicians and medical equipment to Serbia to help it fight the coronavirus outbreak.

Real assistance can be the first step toward developing a full-fledged strategic communication of Russia that goes beyond the activities of fuel and

energy companies in the region. Even now, Russia's assistance to European countries encourages a more appropriate attitude of the EU, not least to its own members. For example, after the Russian assistance to Italy was noted as a positive example for other countries by NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg (Dzhabrailov, 2020), President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen apologized to Italians for the lack of solidarity on the part of Europe in the fight against the coronavirus crisis (Balmer, 2020) and promised significant assistance in fighting its economic consequences.

CONCLUSION

Tensions in the international arena, including in the Balkan region, will not ease in the near future. Moreover, the opponents of Russia's rapprochement with the countries of the Balkans may become even more active, which will significantly hinder Russia's information presence in the region.

New crises in the Balkans are dangerous not only for the Balkan countries themselves but also for international security in general. It is important for Russia to strengthen its relations with the Balkan countries on a long-term basis. In the implementation of strategic communication of Russia, academic research in the languages of target audiences should be used as a means of scientific diplomacy. Comprehensive research on the Balkan region is necessary, but this is impossible without an established school of Balkan studies that is well funded at the state level.

It is advisable to establish continuous monitoring of the media of the Balkan countries, for which we can recommend using the media databases available from specialized business structures, such as Medialogy (Medialogia). It is desirable to develop communication strategies to respond to possible media campaigns designed to upset relations between Russia and the countries of the Balkan Peninsula. Cooperation in this area between researchers from Russia and the Balkans and other countries can have a positive effect because it is not about pulling the Balkans from one military bloc to another, but about turning them into a zone of international stability, and preventing them from becoming a springboard for direct aggression against Russia, which is in the interest of lasting peace in Europe.

Contacts with non-governmental organizations, among whose publications one can find works containing different views on political

processes, can become an additional channel for both scientific and broader public diplomacy. In addition, in order to ensure mutually beneficial cooperation between Russia and the Balkan countries in high-tech areas, it would be advisable to find out how many students from the Balkans study in Russian universities and in what specialties. If there are many such students in the field of advanced technologies, it would be useful to organize competitions for the best student projects, possibly with subsequent internships in Russia and subsequent employment (first of all in the home country of a particular student, which can be done in cooperation with interested employers from the Balkan region). This would significantly increase Russia's reputation as a high-tech country in the Balkans. But such mutually beneficial results cannot be achieved without a progressive model of development of Russia and the Balkans based on a socially oriented economy, real democracy, and rapid implementation of the fruits of scientific and technological progress in the interests of the broader population strata.

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INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION EXPANSION IN THE BALKANS AS AN IMPLEMENT OF GEOPOLITICAL INFLUENCE

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Abstract: Modern information and communication expansion is one of the instruments of geopolitical influence, which is used along with military and economic expansion to achieve dominance in a specific target region. The author, based on a systematic approach, attempts to explore the current state of the information and communication space of the Balkans.

The article considers the issue of information and communication expansion of Western countries in the Balkan political arena, with clearly defined goals pursued by the US and the EU, which do not always coincide. In recent years they have even come into a certain contradiction, especially since dissatisfaction with the European Union is ripening in the Balkans due to the EU's new approach in the form of "privileged partnership". It is shown that, on the one hand, the process of external acquisition by foreign actors of key mass media, Internet providers and mobile communications of the Balkan states is currently underway (ideally they are interested in establishing full control over the media and mobile communication systems of the Balkans). On the other hand, the thesis in the Western mass media that Russia systematically affects it, for which information campaigns allegedly have long been a habitual affair, blows onto the media space of the Balkan countries. Accordingly, the media very clearly follow the EU and NATO orders, that is, they work out the financing, demonizing Russia.

The author believes that the United States and the EU see their main task in the formation and education of a new generation of young analysts and experts who could defend the positions of Western countries and leading international organizations, explain to the population their advantages, and give favorable forecasts for them. Various structures, information and

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analytical centers, academies and institutes specially created for this purpose, as well as other Western foundations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), were called upon to unite such experts, to form a pool from them. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) as actors of information expansion today have a significant impact on the formation of the public and civil environment in the Balkan space. At the same time, the activities of many local and international non-governmental organizations, essentially financed by Western structures, often constitute interference in the domestic and foreign policy of the state and can be a threat to national and regional security. Based on the research materials of a number of scientists from Serbia and Bulgaria, the author emphasizes that in the current conditions, we can expect a further deepening of the split in the European Union itself on the main Balkan problems, as well as an increase in the attention of the capitals of the Balkan's countries to alternative integration projects, including with the participation of Russia, China, and other world powers. On the other hand, it can be said that the post-truth propagated by the Western media mainstream, nevertheless, cannot compete with reality. Therefore, the best way of information interaction and cooperation is not aggressive propaganda but joint practical activities in the humanitarian sphere and other areas of mutual interest to all parties.

Keywords: EU, Balkan, information expansion, mass-media, Russia, non-governmental organizations, geopolitical influence.

Preface. Modern information and communication expansion is an instrument of geopolitical influence that is used along with military and economic expansion to achieve dominance in the target region. Therefore, speaking about the information and communication expansion of the West in the Balkans during the post-Soviet period, it is necessary to clearly define its goals pursued by the US and the EU, which do not always coincide and lately have even come into some sort of conflict with each other. At the first stage, the collapse of the USSR and the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact, the main goal of Western propaganda was “decommunization” of the Balkan countries, which had been previously within the Soviet Union’s sphere of influence, in order to destroy the existing “pro-Soviet” political landscape (destruction of some states and creation of others on their ruins). And the West was at one in thinking of the necessity to implement this plan, which was demonstrated by the “humanitarian” NATO bombings of Yugoslavia (it should be noted that one of the priority targets of these bombings were

radio and television centres)². And when the NATO military bloc bombed the Radio Television of Serbia (RTS) in 1999, its arguments were clearly built on the simple fact that television inevitably spreads propaganda on behalf of its owner. Therefore, since its owner was a hostile state, and propaganda is an integral part of any war, NATO considered television to be a weapon in this war and, therefore, a legitimate target for attack. The tendencies and goals of Western propaganda after 1989 were perceived by most of the public in the Balkan countries as a “new interpretation of history.” In fact, NATO did not collapse (unlike the Warsaw Pact), and the Western propaganda did not change its practices, except for its wording, which became an anti-Russian instead of anti-Soviet. The evident absence of an ideological basis in this propaganda shows that the Cold War is not ideological warfare, but rather a war for resources and against the Slavs as a cultural community. Later on, from the beginning of the 2000s, the information policy of the West in respect of the Balkans was still uniform – the main emphasis was made on the introduction of Western standards in modern media in the Balkan countries, on the creation of new national sources of information under the control of Western entities. These new Balkan mass media were supposed to counteract the “Russian information expansion”, which increasingly frightened Western elites since the EU countries and then the United States began to lose their positions on the international stage. As the crisis of the West-centric world order escalated, which was accelerated by Donald Trump’s rise to power, the contradictions between its pillars – the United States and the EU – began to grow, including in the Balkan region. Besides, currently, one can expect in the Balkans a deeper split within the European Union itself, in particular, between Paris and Berlin, as well as a shift in emphasis towards alternative integration processes in the Balkan countries, including those involving Russia, China and several other world powers. That is why this fact has been reflected today in the tasks that the EU leadership and the US leader are charging with their information policymakers. And the current situation around the

²On April 23, 1999, NATO missiles destroyed the Radio Television of Serbia (RTS) building, taking the lives of sixteen employees. On May 3, 1999, on world press freedom day, NATO will level another TV Studio in Yugoslavia, Radio-TV Novi Sad.

informational influence and the general strategy of the Western nations aim to spur the maximum isolation of the Balkan and Eastern European countries from Russia, in order to hinder Russian integration and cultural influence since the role of the Russian language, Russian media landscape and Russian culture is still quite essential. All this predetermined the information expansion of the West in the region, which was put into practice under the slogan “transition from dictatorship to democracy” and gave rise to a whole series of ‘colour revolutions’ in the post-Soviet space or attempts to make them. Therefore, the West pays close attention to the formation of a beneficial information-communication and information-analytic landscape in the Balkans. Based on this, the United States and the EU see their main task in the formation and upbringing of a new generation of analysts and experts who could defend the positions of Western countries and leading international organizations, enlighten the public about their advantages, and make forecasts beneficial for them. Various entities were called upon to unite such experts to form a certain pool of them – different think tanks, academies and institutes specially created for these purposes, as well as other Western funds and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). However, the existence of NGOs sponsored by the West is not enough to achieve strategic goals, to build a certain ground for regional humanitarian and other kinds of intervention. To effectively manage this process, it is necessary to raise a local pro-Western “intellectual elite” since the opinions and judgements of local media personalities always inspire more confidence among the population than the speeches of foreign guests, and secondly, the activities of Western emissaries remain rather difficult in some countries due to the specifics and characteristics of their political construction.

INFORMATION STRATEGY PURSUED BY THE EU IN THE BALKANS

In September 2017, Jean-Claude Juncker delivered the report “On the State of the Union” and elaborated on a “new word” of Brussels as part of the certain propaganda campaign, which supposedly opened the doors of the EU to the states of the region. Later on, on February 6, 2018, the

European Commission adopted the strategy “A credible outlook for enlargement of the EU and closer cooperation with the Western Balkans”. However, let us take a closer look at the advantages the European Union is really offering to its potential and even “officially” recognized candidates (Albania, Macedonia, Serbia, Montenegro), and what it expects from them in return. Earlier at the meeting of the European Council (2003) in Thessaloniki, a paradigm was proposed concerning a special European path for the countries of the Western Balkans which are in fact already surrounded by the EU countries and admit to sharing a common history and common European destiny. Moreover, in 2017 Jean-Claude Juncker said that stability and security in the EU could only be ensured by the accession of the Western Balkans countries. And reorientation of the Balkan countries towards the standards and practices of the European Union was a reliable fact for the remaining representatives of the EU institutions. In fact, since the early 2000s, the European Union has taken specific steps to integrate the economies and socio-political regimes of these states into its sphere of influence. This boosted the rapid growth of trade turnover (80% increase in comparison to 2016, and over the last five years, the EU has invested more than 10 billion euro in the Balkan countries) and led to various kinds of humanitarian cooperation. The European Union desired to give the impression that Brussels opened the doors to countries of the region willing to join the EU. But after careful consideration of the whole process in general, we can conclude that the European Union pursues a completely different main goal. First, the EU wishes to strengthen the existing instruments of control and influence on the domestic and foreign policy of the Balkan countries. Secondly, the EU would like to prevent the strengthening of positions held by EU’s serious rivals in the Balkans, such as Russia, China, Turkey, and the Arab countries. Thirdly, the EU strives to strengthen collapsed credibility and improve the image of the EU in a geopolitically important region. Therefore, the European External Action Service (EEAS) created in April 2015 a special task force for strategic communications (East StratCom Task Force) to counteract especially the Russian influence in the informational sphere. And in October 2017, the governments of several European countries demanded Federica Mogherini that the EEAS significantly expands its activities in the fight

against Russian propaganda, especially in Southern Europe and the Western Balkans. Moreover, the promised accession of the applicant countries to the European Union is today seen as a matter of an uncertain future, which in reality depends on a large number of subjective variables, due to which it is impossible to predict the timing for potential accession. Therefore, the countries most-longing for EU membership have found and even successfully tried a number of ways to spur the process of European integration. These include, among other things, overtures to the EU's rivals, and threats of destabilization, and nationalistic narrative contradicting all the European standards, and even demonstrative unwillingness to observe the recommendations of Brussels. All this, of course, provoked the emergence of a new strategy of the European Union, but no one can guarantee that the new campaign will be effective and able to provide more reliable control over the region from Brussels. Speaking about its enlargement, the European Union tries to demonstrate its willingness to implement and disseminate its ideology and governance model. In addition, this enlargement, according to European planners, is expected to push the US to perceive the EU as a more equal partner. In any case, the new European strategy is likely to help the European Union gain some time (Kandel, 2018, p. 18).

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION STRATEGY OF THE USA IN THE BALKANS

Washington's information strategy in the Balkans is determined by a certain concern about the prospects for the US presence in this region and reflects worries about the negative deformation of the perception of America as a world leader and guarantor of European security. Since the 1990s, the Balkans have become an important region in the structure of US foreign policy interests due to their position in terms of geopolitics, transportation, and logistics. On the other hand, it was exactly the place where the United States was able to demonstrate its leadership and strength on the international stage³. Today, it is much more difficult to

³ Serbia became the target of this demonstration at least twice – in 1995 and 1999.

apply methods similar to those used twenty years ago: the world has changed, the attitude towards such actions within the United States has changed, and, most importantly, the willingness of the American elites to go in for them has also changed. The present environment does not require the degree of presence and display of force that the United States used in the 1990s. Nevertheless, the desire for domination, which still exists in the minds of many Washington residents, forces the US administration to maintain its already acquired positions, while considering two main threats: in geopolitics and cyber security. In this context, Russia is viewed by the American powers that be and Trump's Administration as the most active and serious player in the "soft power" informational landscape and the main "contributor" hindering the integration of the Balkan countries into the Euro-Atlantic structures. Moreover, the greatest concern is caused by the military-technical cooperation between Russia and Serbia. The US Agency for International Development (USAID) has recently developed a concept to counterforce the malignant influence of the Kremlin, condensed down to three pages. The concept identifies four main areas on which, according to USAID, it is necessary to focus in the fight against Russia in Europe. One area relates to interaction with independent media and countering manipulation of information. The main proposals for this area relate, first of all, to the freedom of the media and are aimed at increasing the ability of the media to deliver reliable information. Secondly, they relate to the training in media literacy and the formation of public demand and demand for high-quality journalism as well as ensuring freedom of the press⁴ (Wiśniewski, 2016). In this sense, the most illustrative was the latest campaign against Russian interference in Montenegro. Recently (for about 8 years), the Western mass media have been actively promoting the thesis that Russia, for which information campaigns have long become a habit, is systematically influencing the media space of the Balkan countries. "The Kremlin's strategy is to form the image of Russia as a great power and powerful ally among the population of these states"

⁴ Despite the fact that Western countries are trying to monitor all manifestations of "Russian propaganda", they have almost lost sight of Moscow's "Balkan campaign", which showed that the West still has a lot to learn.

as stated in reporting contributed by the Washington Post (Wiśniewski, 2016). The contributors emphasize that the propaganda campaign of the Russian Federation is mainly focused on the Orthodox communities in the Balkans and the Serbs. The key instruments of the information policy of Russia in the region are RT and Sputnik Srbija TV channels, which in every possible way popularise the special relations between Russia and the Slavs. In testimony of these theses, the Washington Post puts forward the assertion that RT and Sputnik regularly refer to the common Slavic history and culture, emphasizing the important role of Russia in the fate of the Balkan countries. These agencies also actively use anti-Western narrative, referring to those events and ideas that find a wide response, especially among the Serbs, for example, the NATO bombing (1999). At the same time, the Western countries are shown in the Russian media as culturally alien to the Serbs and unable to understand the so-called "Slavic exclusivity". Russia is trying not only to build a dialogue with the Balkan countries but also to pull them away from the West, the Washington Post notes. According to polls, many Serbian citizens would like to see their country as an ally of Russia, not European states, as emphasized by the contributor of the article in the Washington Post (Wiśniewski, 2016). Therefore, the key statement in the mainstream of Western media is that the United States and the EU should pay the most attention to the Balkan information policy of the Russian Federation and analyse the experience of its implementation. Until now, Western leaders have failed to develop a convincing concept of the unity of the Balkan states and Europe. As a result, public support for the European Union in these countries began to decline.

CONTROL OF THE INFORMATION SPACE IN THE BALKANS

Currently, the process of external acquisition of the media of the Balkan states is actively underway. The American private investment fund Kohlberg Kravis Roberts (KKR) has been successfully operating in this region for several years. Its leadership includes a four-star General David Petraeus, who was a director of the CIA in September 2011 – November 2012. Under the leadership of Petraeus, a real media empire

was created in the Balkan region. Prior to leaving military service, Petraeus commanded a multinational force in Iraq (February 2007 - September 2008) and was the commander of US and NATO forces in Afghanistan (July 2010 – July 2011). At the end of 2016, Donald Trump considered Petraeus's candidacy for the post of head of American diplomacy, but he chose to stay in KKR, already as a partner. General Petraeus is also a member of the US Council on Foreign Relations and a regular member of the Bilderberg Club meetings (Houzelot, 2018). L'Observatoire des Journalists⁵ presented a detailed investigation into the activities of General David Petraeus. The publication states: "Moving into the business world, the former civil servant immediately showed his worth, expanding the already impressive portfolio of KKR. At that time, back in 2013, the fund channelled its first direct investments in Eastern and Central Europe to purchase the United Group media company (SBB/Telemach). The transaction volume was not disclosed, but it was estimated to exceed EUR 1 bn." The United Group brought together the largest cable and satellite TV operators and key Internet service providers in the former Yugoslavia, covering nearly two million users. Among them were:

- SBB (Serbia Broadband) – Serbia's largest cable TV operator and Internet service provider with 700,000 users;
- Total TV – Serbia's leading satellite TV network covering all six countries of the former Yugoslavia;
- NetTV Plus – the main operator of IPTV;
- Telemach – leading cable TV operator and Internet service provider in Slovenia and Bosnia and Herzegovina (BH);
- United Media – TV channels Sport klub, Cinemania, Ultra, Mini Ultra, Lov i ribolov (hunting and fishing);
- CASMedia – the largest advertising agency on cable and satellite television.

In 2014, the KKR Foundation significantly strengthened its influence in the region. Through the United Group was acquired a controlling stake

⁵ The French Investigative Association of Journalists belonging to the right-wing of the French media. Created in 2012.

in Montenegro's cable television operator BBM and Grand Production, a giant of the entertainment industry in turbo-folk. Then KKR became a co-owner of Blic.rs (Serbia's most popular information website), having bought 49% of the digital division from Ringier, a Swiss media group. In addition, the foundation launched its own regional television network N1 TV with studios in Belgrade, Sarajevo, and Zagreb, becoming an exclusive partner of CNN. "Through this controversial campaign, the United Group has united TV content production with its distribution," as reported by L'Observatoire des Journalistes (Houzelot, 2018). Subsequently, KKR acquired the Slovenian Tušmobil (2015). This was, perhaps, the first case when a cable TV operator acquired a mobile network operator. In 2017, the fund received the Central European Media Enterprises (CME) business in Croatia and Slovenia, including TV Nova, the most popular channel among the Croats. The evening news program of this channel was the highest-rated program in the country, as well as POR-TV, whose 24ur program is, in fact, the main news program in Slovenia. Simultaneously, the United Group continued to expand its sphere of influence by accessing the landline and mobile telephony market and acquiring its rivals, including BHB Cable TV (Bosnia and Herzegovina), M-kabl (Montenegro), and Ikom (Serbia). The Serbian Media Ownership and Control Report provides specific examples of the lack of transparency in the Serbian media and names the true owners of newspapers, magazines, radio stations, and TV channels. (The Journalists' Association of Serbia, 2015). According to this report, the owners of a major part of the most influential media in Serbia are registered abroad – in Cyprus, Holland, the Cayman Islands, Luxembourg, Germany, Switzerland, etc.

INTERNET CONTROL

In 2010, the US Army Central Command (CENTCOM), led by General D. Petraeus, announced a competition for so-called virtual management software that allows 50 real users to control and manage 500 virtual users, "without the threat of being detected by a trained enemy" (Fielding, Cobain, 2011). The massive control of the world-wide-web by the Anglo-American intelligence services revealed by Edward Snowden

was at its peak precisely at the time when D. Petraeus headed the CIA. These are projects such as PRISM (Program for Robotics, Intelligent Sensing and Mechatronics), which provides direct access to the servers of such Internet giants as Google, Facebook, Apple, Microsoft, etc., or MUSCULAR (DS-200B)⁶ and Tempora⁷, directly penetrating fiber-optic cables. The Serbian study “Invisible Infrastructures: Data Flow” (Share Lab, 2015) clearly shows that a significant portion of Internet traffic today passes through providers owned by David Petraeus and his SBB network. Ultimately, it became clear that KKR controls a significant number of Internet companies, including GoDaddy (hosting), Optiv (cybersecurity), First Data (emoney), and Internet service providers of the United Group. Thus, all national traffic in Serbia is now controlled by KKR. One of the owners of KKR, General David Petraeus, plans to continue buying up key media and mobile operators in the Balkans, as he and his partners are most interested in establishing complete control over the Balkan media and mobile communication systems.

NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS AS THE MAIN ACTORS OF WESTERN INFORMATION EXPANSION IN THE REGION

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs), as actors of information expansion today, have a significant impact on the formation of the social and civil environment in the post-Soviet space. At the same time, the activities of many local and international non-governmental organizations cause deep concern and pose a threat to national and regional security. The main source of funding for such organizations is the United States, Great Britain, and other NATO countries. Funding is provided either directly or through private foundations associated with

⁶ A special computer-tracking program used by the UK Government Communications Center (GCHQ) and the US National Security Agency (NSA).

⁷ A secret computer-tracking program was created in 2011 and used by the UK Government Communications Center (GCHQ) in conjunction with the US National Security Agency.

the governments and secret services of these countries. Statistics showed that from 2011 to 2014, non-governmental organizations in Macedonia (USA) invested more than \$16 million, not to mention the funding from USAID (United States Agency for International Development). These funds were distributed among ninety-six NGOs. Nearly \$ 2.2 million has been channelled from the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), and the Soros Foundation has allocated \$12.9 million. Another 938,790 USD was transferred from the accounts of several other organizations. The office of the Soros Foundation, the Open Society-Macedonia Foundation, invested in 2016 alone more than \$5.3 million in the non-governmental sector of Macedonia, and in just 20 years of the branch's operation, Soros has invested more than \$100 million in the Macedonian "democracy" (Zotiev, 2017).

In fact, the activities of many NGOs funded by Western entities often represent interference in the domestic and foreign policy of a specific state. For example, in Bulgaria, during the 2017 presidential elections, some Bulgarian non-governmental organizations sponsored by the Soros Foundation campaigned in the media and called for mass riots if the "wrong candidate" (Rumen Radev) wins. And America for Bulgaria Foundation ("Америка за България") paid Bulgarian national television and the private Bulgarian television station BTV \$30,600 and \$26,500, respectively, in order to put a „correct spin“ during the coverage of the electoral struggle between Clinton and Trump, that is to the benefit of Clinton (Pshenichnikov, 2017). The Soros Foundation has so closely supervised various NGOs in the Balkans and Eastern Europe and sponsored local media to gain control over the media space that the activities of the Soros Open Society Foundation were almost simultaneously opposed in several countries of Eastern Europe and the Balkans. Soros and his foundation are no longer welcomed in Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovenia, Romania, Macedonia, and Hungary (Rambler News, 2017).

CONCLUSION

In this situation, one can expect a deepening of a further split in the European Union itself concerning the main Balkan problems, in

particular, the Paris-Berlin dispute as well as increasing attention to alternative integration projects in the Balkan capitals, including those involving Russia, China, and other world powers. The creation of a Western, primarily American, the infrastructure of information impact in the Balkans is a natural process, which can only be countered by creating our own infrastructure, all the more so because S.V. Lavrov noted that the Russian side is interested in participating in the information space of the Balkan region (Lavrov, 2018). Unfortunately, Russia's think tanks carry out their work in these regions only sporadically, and not enough experts and entities are engaged in this process in contrast to the United States and the European Union. And there they are much more in demand by the state. It is necessary to establish systematic work of expert centres of various profiles, which would constantly keep track of the situation in the regions. In April 2019, the Bulgarian capital hosted the Balkan Dialogue Forum, one of the most successful and popular scientific and educational programs of the Alexander Gorchakov Public Diplomacy Support Fund. The Balkan Dialogue – 2019 started with a roundtable discussion “Mass Media as a Tool of Public Opinion Development and Public Worldview Change in the Balkans”. During the discussion, the host of the programs “Deconstruction” and “12+3” on the Bulgarian National Radio Peter Volgin lamented that most of the Russia related content released in the media was openly negative: an authoritarian president, a desire for world domination, and other similar patterns. And this is an indisputable fact. At the same time, we should keep in mind that the Western media have recently been losing their reputation as an example of honest and professional journalism. Everything that was previously proclaimed in the West as a “standard” in the work of the media, namely pluralism of opinions, the so-called “second opinion”, work with facts, rejection of censorship, is now almost completely lost. The information realm of the West is now predominated not only by intolerance to other opinions and someone else's position, but also direct restrictions on the activities of competing media. The same applies to what is happening on the world's social networks such as Facebook and Twitter. The consequence is the loss of public confidence in journalists. According to the data coming from various sources, one could conclude that the

situation is only getting worse⁸. During the above-mentioned forum in Bulgaria, the chairman of the Union of Journalists of Bulgaria, Snezhana Todorova, noted in her speech that the country faces serious problems in terms of freedom of speech. The media very strictly adhere to the instructions of the EU and NATO, working off their funding, demonizing Russia. And almost nothing is written about Russia's success in one area or another, about what ordinary people are concerned about. On the other hand, the volume of Euro-Atlantic publications has grown 16 times over the past four years. Nevertheless, S. Todorova shared the data of sociological research, showing that about 75% of Bulgarians consider Russia a friendly country. This suggests that the post-truth being propagated by the Western media mainstream, after all, cannot compete with reality. Therefore, the best way to exert influence by information is not conducting aggressive propaganda, but taking practical joint efforts in the humanitarian sphere and other areas of mutual interest of the parties involved.

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⁸ For example, in Russia, 82% of respondents agree with the opinion, deliberately sharply pointed in the question, that criticism of Vladimir Putin's actions and the situation in Russia in foreign media is an attempt to destroy and destroy our country.

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FRAMING RUSSO-SERBIAN COOPERATION AS A “HYBRID THREAT”: A NATO/EU STRATEGIC NARRATIVE

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Abstract: The strengthening of the strategic partnership between Serbia and Russia has come at a time when policymakers and analysts in NATO and EU countries have become increasingly critical at the reluctance of Belgrade to play by the “Western book”. Serbia is refusing to legitimize both the unilateral secession by Kosovo Albanian leaders and the redefinition of the Dayton Accords aimed at further reducing the autonomy of the Republic of Srpska (Republika Srpska) in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Furthermore, it continues to reject NATO membership and anti-Russian EU sanctions and declarations. As a result, fingers are pointed at Kremlin’s “malign influence” over Serbia and the Serbs in the Western Balkans in general, including in the fields of politics, economy, communication, energy, and defence. This influence extends into a synergy between Serbian and Russian interests and resources. Thus, it is not just Russian activities, but the whole array of Russo-Serbian cooperation that is considered a “hybrid threat”.

The paper analyses which strategic frames use think tanks from the EU/NATO countries to portray the evolving state of Russo-Serbian cooperation. The results point to elements of a strategic narrative painting Serbian-Russian cooperation as a “hybrid threat” through the consistent use of a threat frame in relation to key areas of political, security, informational, economic, religious, and non-governmental cooperation. The strategic narrative is, in turn, an integral part of strategic communication aimed at promoting the interests of the EU and NATO in the region.

Keywords: Serbian-Russian relations, EU, NATO, the Balkans, hybrid threats, strategic communication, strategic narrative, strategic framing.

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Russo-Serbian cooperation in a “hybrid” limelight

The strengthening of the strategic partnership between Serbia and Russia over the last decade has come at a time when policymakers and analysts in NATO and EU countries have become increasingly critical at the reluctance of Belgrade to play solely by the “Western book”. Serbia rejected continuous attempts to legalize the 2008 unilateral secession by Kosovo Albanian leaders and the redefinition of the 1995 Dayton Accords, aimed at further reducing the autonomy of the Republic of Srpska in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Belgrade continues to refuse NATO membership and anti-Russian EU sanctions and declarations. Furthermore, it has actively pursued military cooperation with Moscow and the construction of the new Balkan Stream gas pipeline, while signing a free trade agreement with the Eurasian Economic Area. As a result, Western fingers are pointed at Kremlin’s “malign influence” over Serbia and the Serbs in the Western Balkans in general, particularly in the fields of politics, economy, communication, energy, and defence. The Serbian-Russian partnership is increasingly seen as a synergistic “hybrid threat” to Western interests, in particular the enlargement of NATO and the EU in the region.

Such portrayal is part of the “war of narratives” between various major geopolitical players in the Western Balkans, each aiming to extend their influence and vying for local allegiance and support. This battle of influence is being fought in the context of the EU’s internal weakness and indecisiveness to chart a firm enlargement process, the confusing U.S. combination of isolationist disengagement and occasional problem-solving “pop-ups” in the region, China’s increasingly visible Balkan-wide web infrastructure and investment strategy, and Russia’s attempt to curb continuous attacks at its centuries-long role of powerful relevance in the Balkans. In such a context, it is understandable that various players wish to legitimize their status and leverage through political, military, economic, or cultural might – and project it through strategic communication.

This paper seeks to analyse which strategic frames use think tanks from the EU/NATO countries to portray the evolving state of Serbian-Russian relations. Strategic frame analysis will be used to identify these frames, which are expected to form a strategic narrative that defines the Serbian-Russian partnership as a “hybrid threat” to stability, security and enlargement of the EU and NATO in the Western Balkans. The strategic

narrative is, in turn, an integral part of strategic communication aimed at promoting the interests of the EU and NATO in the region.

Strategic communication, framing and narratives

Strategic communication, a concept of organized persuasion, represents a “system of coordinated communication activities implemented by organizations in order to advance their missions, by allowing for the understanding of target groups, finding channels and methods of communication with the public, developing and implementing ideas and attitudes which, through these channels and methods, promote a certain type of behavior or opinion” (Mitić, 2016: 9). States and organizations of various kinds are using strategic communication in order to achieve legitimacy, given that legitimacy is based on perception and interpretation – not on actions but perceptions of these actions. To achieve legitimacy through strategic communication, organizations need trust, social capital and networks to project their discourse, narrative, and power (Mitić and Atlagić, 2017). They do so through framing processes, which are “critical to the two fundamental aims of strategic political communication” – campaigning and governing (Kioussis and Strömbäck, 2015: 391).

In order to remain persuasive, strategic communication must adapt its strategic framing. Frames are a key component of strategic communication messaging, as they are an integral part of media reports and can impact the interpretation and perception of the public. Framing refers to “selection and salience” in order “to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation” (Entman, 1993: 52). Strategic framing is thus an act in which communicators “use message frames to create salience for certain elements of a topic by including and focusing attention on them while excluding other aspects” (Hallahan, 2008: 4856). It is a rational rhetorical strategy used by politicians to “angle” arguments presented to the general public (Leimbiger and Lammert, 2016) as frames have the capacity to provoke different reactions of the public depending on the element of reality they are accentuating or hiding. A successful framing requires adaptive frames, which are nonetheless in line with the strategy and information end-state. However, selectively punctuating some elements and hiding others points

to the importance of strategic action in framing and to the potential conflict that might arise among different actors promoting their frames (Fiss and Zajac, 2006: 1174).

Yet frames cannot be fully understood without narratives, just as narratives cannot function without frames. In the process of strategic communication, organizations thus use frames and discourse to shape strategic narratives – “a means for political actors to construct a shared meaning of the past, present, and future of international relations in order to shape the opinions and behavior of actors at home and overseas”. (Miskimmon, O’Loughlin and Rosselle, 2013: 248). These narratives are a “tool for political actors to extend their influence, manage expectations and change the discursive environment in which they operate” (Miskimmon et al: 3). Strategic narratives, however, also face limitations: from the formation of the strategic narrative to its projection and reception. This is particularly true in international environments, in which great powers must face not only a complex international environment but also a complex media ecology as well as frequent or even permanent contestation by other actors.

“Hybrid threat” – a useful buzzword in the Balkans?

Although “hybrid threat” as a form, concept and term has been present in political, security and academic discourse years before – and has been developing since the mid-2000s mainly in the U.S. defence sector strategic documents amid the “colour revolutions” in Russia’s neighbourhood and during the “Arab spring” – its prominence and (geo) political (mis) use has become viral after the 2014 Crimean referendum and the conflict in the Donbas. From then on, Western fingers were pointed mainly at Russia as the main suspect of “hybrid threat” to a number of countries, primarily in Europe. Thus, a 2018 report by the German Marshall Fund Alliance for Security Democracy argued that Russia had used disinformation campaigns, financial influence and cyberattacks in at least 27 countries, most of them NATO and/or EU members (Treverton, 2018). It has thus come as no surprise that both of these institutions have adopted several strategic documents and mechanisms aimed at fighting “hybrid threats”, arguing however that despite international cooperation, protection of country structures and institutions remains primarily a national task.

For NATO, hybrid threats are “used to blur the lines between war and peace, and attempt to sow doubt in the minds of target populations” (NATO, 2019). The EU considers that their aim is to “achieve specific political objectives” and that they “target critical vulnerabilities and seek to create confusion to hinder swift and effective decision-making” (European External Action Service, 2018). The prominence of the concept has led to the foundation of the Helsinki-based European Center for Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats. This institution, supported by the EU and NATO member countries, argues hybrid threats are “coordinated and synchronised action, that deliberately targets democratic states’ and institutions systemic vulnerabilities” – which are created by “historical memory, legislation, old practices, geostrategic factors, strong polarisation of society, technological disadvantages or ideological differences” – with the aim to “influence different forms of decision making at the local (regional), state, or institutional level to favour and/or gain the agent’s strategic goals while undermining and/or hurting the target” (The European Center of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats, 2017).

According to the Helsinki Center, this means exploiting the thresholds of detection and attribution as well as the different interfaces (war-peace, internal-external, local-state, national-international, friend-enemy). They can include “influencing information; logistical weaknesses like energy supply pipelines; economic and trade-related blackmail; undermining international institutions by rendering rules ineffective; terrorism or increasing insecurity” (The European Center of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats, Hybrid Threats s, 2017). NATO argues that they “combine military and non-military as well as covert and overt means, including disinformation, cyberattacks, economic pressure, deployment of irregular armed groups and use of regular forces” (NATO, 2019). The EU insists that these activities are “coordinated by state or non-state actors”, “multidimensional, combining coercive and subversive measures” and can range from “cyberattacks on critical information systems, through the disruption of critical services such as energy supplies or financial services, to the undermining of public trust in government institutions or the deepening of social divisions” (European External Action Service, 2018)

Fighting the hybrid threat through resilience-building has thus become a prominent feature of EU/NATO political and security mechanisms. The Western Balkans – as a focal point of NATO/EU enlargement – were

designated as potential primary targets of alleged Russian hybrid activities. Indeed, as a European Parliament report underlines, “hybridity is a buzzword in the field of international relations and security. However, it has been introduced in NATO and EU member states’ doctrinal corpus to depict new threats and challenges. The EU uses the concept to deal with the difficulties created by the local influence of non-EU powers (Russia, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia) in the enlargement process of the Western Balkans countries” (European Parliament Policy Department for External Relations, 2018). Arguing for this perspective, various transatlantic organizations, think tanks, and officials have most prominently pointed to the examples of what they considered as Russian meddling in the 2016 parliamentary elections in Montenegro – which included an alleged involvement in a coup d’état – and the interference in now North Macedonia over the Prespa Agreement between Skopje and Athens. As a result, NATO sent to Montenegro its first-ever mission to fight hybrid threats (Lekic, 2019), while dozens of Western researchers have been monitoring and analysing “Russian hybrid threats” in the Western Balkans.

The Helsinki Center has compiled what it considers a series of Russian hybrid methods, including pressure through economic leverage and organization of protests. One of the central roles belongs to the use of cyber tools and information operations, propaganda, strategic leaks and fake news, and their spread through domestic media, as well as amplification through social media. The “toolkit” also involves the funding of organizations and political parties, the use of oligarchs, paramilitary organizations, and the Orthodox Church (Treverton, 2018).

A narrative about the Russian hybrid threat has been carefully crafted and sustained through governmental and non-governmental sources.

Given the level of strategic cooperation between Moscow and Belgrade on a variety of political and economic issues, we will seek to analyse how this cooperation is being framed and whether a strategic narrative is being constructed with regards to Russian-Serbian cooperation being viewed as a hybrid threat from the perspective of the EU/NATO and the transatlantic think tank community.

Our hypothesis is that, in order to present a strategic narrative of Serbian-Russian cooperation as a hybrid threat, Western think tanks will use a consistent threat frame in relation to key areas of political, security, informational, energy, NGO, and religious cooperation.

Methodology

We will use strategic frame analysis in 20 research papers and reports by Western think tanks focused on Russian influence activities in the Balkans (see the list in references). We will analyse frames referring to Russian and Serbian cooperation in papers which have been published since 2018, after the adoption of a series of “hybrid threat” documents and mechanisms by the EU/NATO.

A selection of frames will be particularly looked at. These frames have been chosen based on preliminary analysis of the relevant research papers. They will include Russian-Serbian cooperation in the field of politics, security, the economy, religion, non-governmental, and information fields. We will perform a strategic frame analysis at the level of themes. Only themes related to cooperation between Russian and Serbian actors will be analysed (state, NGO, Church, media).

The results could point to a possible building of a strategic narrative regarding Russian-Serbian cooperation as a hybrid threat.

Results

Political sphere

In the political sphere, the main theme for Russian-Serbian cooperation has predominantly been focused on the issue of Kosovo and Metohija. The unresolved status of Kosovo and Metohija is seen as the primary source of instability not only in the territory concerned but also in the wider region. Russian-Serbian diplomatic cooperation in the international arena – which is strengthened by the Russian veto power in the United Nations Security Council – is seen as mutually beneficial for the two countries, but detrimental to Albanian aspirations and long-term Western interests of legalizing Kosovo’s 2008 unilateral secession, as well as in fully integrating the entire region in Western political and security arrangements. Furthermore, Russian-Serbian cooperation is seen as sustaining ethnic tensions within Kosovo and Metohija through the support of the Kosovo Serbs. (*“Russia is Serbia’s most powerful backer against Kosovo’s*

independence. It is an alignment of interests that both countries benefit from" – Chrzova et al., 2019).

The second main theme of political cooperation is related to the Republic of Srpska. The Serb entity in Bosnia and Herzegovina is often perceived and sometimes labelled as a "Russian proxy". Moscow is perceived as the main international backer of the Republic of Srpska – from the Peace Implementation Council to the UN Security Council. Russian-Serbian cooperation is perceived as a source of political and ethnic tension, as well as a threat to the territorial integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina, but also its functionality, NATO and EU integration. (*"President Putin has fostered close ties with the Republika Sprska leader, Milorad Dodik, whose ultimate goal is secession from Bosnia and Herzegovina."* – Smith and Juola, 2020)

The third theme is related to the field of the general counterbalancing of EU and NATO interests in the Western Balkans as Russian support to Serbian interests over Kosovo and Metohija, the Republic of Srpska, Montenegro and military neutrality is seen as detrimental, particularly to NATO expansion – which is in line with Moscow's objectives. This includes cooperation over North Macedonia and the general promotion of the idea of a "Greater Serbia". (*"Russia positions itself as a great, relevant power in the Balkans; whereas Serbia uses its relationship with Russia to leverage the EU, threatening the Union to forge closer ties with Russia and consequently aid the expansion of Russian influence in the region"*. – Chrzova et al., 2019)

Security

In the security field, most of the themes are related to the Russian-Serbian Humanitarian Center in Niš, as well as to general defence cooperation. The center in Niš is particularly singled out as a threat. Doubts are shed over its officially stated purpose of serving humanitarian and disaster relief operations in the region. Rather, it is either suspected or directly labelled of being a potential "spy center" for NATO activities in Kosovo and Metohija, as well as in the wider region. It is also suspected of being a training center for "paramilitary" groups. (*"It claims to be a centre to coordinate assistance missions, but Western governments generally regard it as an intelligence hub. The US State Department has expressed the fear that it will become "some kind of a special centre for espionage or other nefarious activities"* – Galeotti, 2018)

The legitimacy of general defence cooperation – ranging from the delivery of MIG 29s, T-72s, and Pantsir anti-aircraft artillery systems – is generally not put into question. Yet, several analyses point to the fact that such cooperation increases nervousness and tension in the region, particularly among Kosovo Albanians. (*“Kosovo has legitimate concerns that Russia represents a serious security threat, as it could militarise the Serbian army”* – Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 2018).

Concerns over security cooperation also include Russian’s provision of equipment to the police of the Republic of Srpska, (*“Moscow’s security assistance to the Republika Srpska is growing, although it formally contradicts the spirit of the Dayton Accords, which prohibit an independent Bosnian Serb military”* – Stronski and Himes, 2019) but also suspected cooperation between Russian and Serbian intelligence services during the 2017 “storming” of the parliament in Skopje (*“The intelligence activity sought to push North Macedonia away from the Euro-Atlantic path and especially membership in NATO came through two avenues: Serbian journalists, MPs, and intelligence officers’ efforts to manipulate the country’s policy for Serbia; and the subterfuge of the Embassy of the Russian Federation”* – European Values Center for Security Policy, 2020).

Economy

In the economic field, the primary threat from Russian-Serbian cooperation is the energy sector. Serbia is considered as an important energy hub since the 2008 acquisition of the NIS refinery by Gazpromneft and a key actor in the construction of the Gazprom-led Turkish/Balkan gas pipeline. Of primary concern here is the intensification of dependency on Russian gas for the entire region – with accompanying implications for gas route diversification – and the economic downturn for Ukraine. (*“Russia intends to strengthen its influence in the region by setting up the Turkish Stream pipeline”* – Kuczyinski, 2019), while *“Belgrade is a strategic transit point in Russia’s plans to extend its TurkStream pipeline to deliver gas across southern Europe.”* – Metodieva, 2019).

Other issues of concern include the prospects of enlarging the Eurasian Economic Area in the region following Serbia’s membership, as well as the impact in Bosnia and Herzegovina of the Russian financial support to the Republic of Srpska. (*“The Kremlin is attempting to expand the Russia-led*

Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) in the Balkans. Serbia and the EEU signed a free trade agreement (FTA) on October 25. – Bugayova and Yanchuk, 2019).

Religion

In the religious sphere, the main focus is on the cooperation between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Serbian Orthodox Church on various issues in the region. Furthermore, the Serbian Orthodox Church is often portrayed as a “conduit” of Russian interests, particularly as it has firm positions on the issues of Kosovo and Metohija, Montenegro, the Republic of Srpska and NATO membership. Think tanks put a particular focus on this cooperation in Montenegro, accentuating the role the Serb Orthodox Church and its leaders have had over various political issues – from the issue of a referendum on independence to the recognition of Kosovo’s secession or NATO membership. This is, in turn, seen as divisive for the society in Montenegro, and thus an opportunity for Moscow’s disruption. (*“One of the key channels of Russian presence and influence in Montenegro is precisely the Serbian Orthodox Church and its leaders, who strive to influence domestic politics by supporting pro-Russian political parties and anti-EU and NATO voices”* – Chrzova et al., 2019).

Non-governmental sector

In the non-governmental sector, the main focus has been on portraying cooperation between Russian and Serbian organizations as a security threat. The most prominent case is the alleged 2016 “coup” attempt in Montenegro (*“The alarm of the international community about the revitalization of Russia’s influence in the Western Balkans was strengthened by the attempted coup in Montenegro by pro-Russian Serb nationalists during the fall 2016 parliamentary elections, which allegedly was supported by ‘organs of the Russian state’* – European Parliament Policy Department for External Relations, 2018), but it also includes various “paramilitary” threats from organizations such as “Srbska čast”, “Night Wolves” or the “Cossacks” – which are portrayed as active in various Serb-populated areas, but also close to the authorities in the Republic of Srpska (*“Russian influence runs strong in Republika Srpska too. There, the boundary between civil society and the entity’s increasingly militarised law enforcement services is fuzzy”* – Betchev, 2019). Active Russian organizations in Serbia are portrayed as purveyors

of strong anti-NATO sentiment. Beyond the security field, Russian-Serbian cooperation in the NGO sector is also considered as producing a conservative, Eurosceptic narrative.

Information sphere

Russian-Serbian cooperation in the informational sector is generally presented as a disinformation hub for the entire Western Balkans region, namely for all areas where Serbian is spoken or understood. Sputnik Serbia is considered as the main and most powerful Russian-sponsored media outlet in this hub. Yet, the Serbian media – including pro-governmental news agencies, TV, newspapers and tabloids, as well as a variety of online outlets – are seen as a partner in the hub. Thus, Sputnik and the Serbian media – in Serbia, the Republic of Srpska and Montenegro – serve interchangeable as either sources or amplifiers of narratives that are considered detrimental to EU and NATO interests. (*“A recent study by ‘Zasto Ne’ tracked how political disinformation is spread in BiH. A network of 29 media outlets was identified, 15 of which are in Serbia, and 14 of which are in BiH (of which 12 are in Republika Srpska). Often, Sputnik Srbija appears in this hub as one of the main “connectors” between media outlets in Serbia and BiH” – Doncheva, 2020).*

Main themes, actors and threats – summary table

The following table summarizes the main themes and actors of Russian-Serbian cooperation, as well as the threat frames resulting from this cooperation, as identified in the reports which were analysed.

THEME	ACTORS	THREAT
Opposition to Kosovo's statehood	Governments of the Russian Federation and the Republic of Serbia, NGO and media	Destabilization of "independent Kosovo". Instability in the region. Interethnic tensions. Prevention of NATO and EU enlargement.
Support to the Republic of Srpska	Governments of the Russian Federation and the Republic of Srpska, NGO and media	Destabilization of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Interethnic tensions. Prevention of NATO and EU enlargement.
Influence of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Montenegro	Serbian Orthodox Church and the Russian Orthodox Church	Opposition to NATO activities and Kosovo's "statehood". Support to stronger links with Serbia and Russia. Interethnic tensions.
Defence and disaster relief cooperation	Governments of the Russian Federation, the Republic of Serbia, the Republic of Srpska	Militarization of the region. Spying activities. Paramilitary training ground.
NGO cooperation	Russian and Serbian NGOs	Paramilitary activities. Interethnic tension. Violent and illicit interference in regional affairs. Promotion of anti-Western discourse.
Energy cooperation	Governments of the Russian Federation, the Republic of Serbia, the Republic of Srpska	Strengthened monopoly and regional dependence on Russian gas supply. Threat to diversification.
Informational activity	Sputnik, Serbian media in Serbia, the Republic of Srpska, Montenegro	Formation of disinformation hubs. Narrative proxies carrying messages which amplify interethnic tensions and anti-Western discourse.

Conclusion

In analysing 20 think tanks reports from the EU/NATO countries, we have not come across a single positive statement regarding Russo-Serbian cooperation. Such cooperation is exclusively perceived and portrayed in a negative light. While the narrative on the “Russian malign interference” has been present for some time, we now also have a strong narrative of Russo-Serbian cooperation as a “hybrid threat”.

This analysis does not intend to address the veracity or the motivations of the think tank reports which were randomly used. Yet, it is necessary to state that these reports complement each other, amplify the concerns (based on facts or not), and – to use a term from a German Marshall Fund report – serve as “narrative proxies” in portraying Russo-Serbian cooperation as a “hybrid threat”.

The employed strategic frames paint Russo-Serbian cooperation as firmly negative in nature and consequences. Such portrayal is present in all the spheres which were analysed. In the political sphere, cooperation is detrimental to regional security, inter-ethnic relations, conflict resolution, and full integration into Western structures. In the security sphere, cooperation is perceived as conducive to militarization, espionage, and mistrust. In the economic sphere, it leads to energy monopolies and prevents diversification. In the religious sphere, it hurts inter-ethnic coexistence and promotes anti-Western agendas. In the non-governmental sector, it leads to illicit, violent actions that sow inter-ethnic discord. In the information sector, Russo-Serbian cooperation is disinformative and propagandistic, contaminating the entire regional media eco-system.

The following chart identifies key strategic elements of portraying Russian-Serbian cooperation as a “hybrid threat”:



In accordance with our hypothesis, a combination of such frames points to the building of a strategic narrative regarding Russo-Serbian cooperation as a “hybrid threat”. While this analysis is limited to think tanks, given that many of these reports are based on statements by policymakers or media reports, our assumption is that the framing and the narrative in the state and media sector in NATO/EU countries largely coincide with our findings. The consequence of such presentations – no matter their level of coordination – points to the presence of a strategic communication campaign aimed at presenting Russo-Serbian cooperation as negative – indeed, a “hybrid threat”. Policy implications of such strategic communication portrayal include the development of a number of “anti-hybrid” or resilience activities in all of the concerned fields. It remains,

however, unclear how such strategic communication and policy could benefit long-term conflict-resolution and stabilization of the Balkans. The same is true for other world regions, where a “cooperative hybrid threat” model could be or already is applied to discredit cooperation between Russia and its partners.

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DYNAMIC REGIONAL POLITICAL CONCEPTS AND THE EUROPEAN INTEGRATION PROCESS

Miloš Petrović¹

Abstract: This paper aims to explore the evolution of different political constructs in the context of several EU enlargement rounds. The research has shown that the deepening of the EU integration processes has resulted in different political conceptualizations of European regions. Whereas the political notion 'Central and Eastern Europe' included countries that were part of the enlargement rounds between 2004-2007, a new political concept – the 'Western Balkans' – largely grouped the countries lagging behind in the EU integration process. However, that political concept is temporary since once a country joins the EU, it is no longer politically regarded as a 'Western Balkan' nation, as seen on the example of Croatia. The author hypothesizes that the concept 'Western Balkans', which overlaps with the EU enlargement agenda, will become outdated as a political bureaucratic term at a distant point when the entire region joins the Union. At that point, the region will be subjected to fundamentally different normative, political, economic and other contexts, which will affect how the citizens, institutions and states act, how they perceive their country, and how the international community understands and treats them in regional terms. The future abandoning of the 'Western Balkan' political concept is analyzed through the social constructivist approach.

Keywords: Western Balkans, Central and Eastern Europe, integration, EU, political constructs.

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The paper presents findings of a study developed as a part of the research project "Serbia and challenges in international relations in 2020", financed by the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia, and conducted by Institute of International Politics and Economics, Belgrade.

CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE: DISTANCING FROM THE “SOCIALIST PAST”

Following the revolutionary ‘Annus mirabilis’ of 1989 and the abandonment of the socialist system, the *rapprochement* process between the former Warsaw Treaty Organization countries and the European Communities commenced (Jović-Lazić, 2015, pp. 156-157). As part of their ‘return to Europe’, the entire east-central region started to distance from the ‘Eastern European’ socialist-era legacy. ‘Central and Eastern Europe’ (CEE) became a dominant geopolitical regional designation in the context of European integration (Schimmelfennig, Sedelmeier, 2005, p. 2).

Whereas the Carpathian, Baltic and western Black Sea countries had initiated their European Union (EU) accession processes as part of the new Central and Eastern Europe concept, on the other hand, the EU has conceived an additional political designation: the ‘Western Balkans’ (Zöpel, 2018, pp. 2-3; Đukanović, Minić, 2015, p. 11). Throughout the Cold war, the term Balkans was largely geographical, its countries belonging to different strategic realities (Greece to the European Communities, Bulgaria to the Warsaw Pact, the SFRY to the Non-aligned movement, Albania – self-isolated). However, following 1989, countries like Bulgaria, previously perceived as Eastern European, in geopolitical terms became more associated with the wider notion of CEE. Although geographically placed in the ‘eastern Balkan’ area, Bulgaria or Romania were never politically grouped under such designation by the EU. They were instead included in the EU enlargement agenda, which treated CEE as a large cluster, consisting out of the former ‘Warsaw Pact’ countries. There was simply no conceptual need to set a few ‘eastern Balkan’ states apart from other EU candidates or distinguish them in a more specific way. The entire CEE area has joined the Union between 2004-2007 (Rapacki, Prochniak, 2009, p. 3).²

Whereas the fall of the Iron Curtain enabled countries like Bulgaria to be increasingly less associated with the term ‘Balkans’, that notion maintained politically relevant in western areas of the Peninsula, which was

² In their report for the EC, R. Rapacki and M. Prochniak classify the following ten states as CEE: Bulgaria, Romania, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia.

included in the EU enlargement policy only later.³ The region which would later become known as the 'Western Balkans' (WB) has been *de facto* excluded from the wider integrative processes in CEE, above all due to its political unreadiness or unfitness to enter the integrative processes in the early 1990s. The countries which lagged behind CEE in the EU integration processes included Albania and most of the former Yugoslavia. Unlike the CEE countries that joined the EU between 2004–2007, the WB countries were subjected to the Stabilization and Association Process, which included provisions directed towards encouraging the post-conflict recovery and development of good neighborly relations among the previous contenders (Džankić, Keil, 2019, p. 181). Since the accession process of the WB developed somewhat differently comparing to the CEE enlargement rounds, the EU opted to design and treat it as a separate regional political concept.

These countries' EU accession perspective was recognized at the 'EU-Western Balkans Thessaloniki Summit' in 2003, which formally marked the beginning of their long transformation process.⁴ As of 2020, the only group member which successfully joined the EU was Croatia in 2013 and therefore ceased to be treated as part of the 'Western Balkans' political concept. As Theresia Töglhofer noted on that subject: *'...Croatia itself now has the right to participate in decision-making in all policy areas, including the EU's enlargement policy towards the accession candidates in the Western Balkans, whose ranks it so recently left'* (Töglhofer, 2013, p. 5).

While the EU ceased to perceive and treat Croatia as a WB country, the country's changed geopolitical, economic, and other position has also distanced it from that region. That represents an illustrative example of how the geopolitics and integrative processes also affect the external perception and regional 'affiliation' of the country. Likewise, the Croatian distancing from the WB political concept also resembles the preceding candidates' distancing from the Eastern European political image (Todorova, 2006, pp. 276–277).⁵

³ The Council of the European Union. (2003). Thessaloniki European Council 19 and 20 June 2003 Presidency Conclusions 11638/03, 1 October (Council of the European Union, Brussels).

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ In 1994, the State Department officially abolished the designation "Eastern Europe" in favour of the CEE concept. See: Maria Todorova, *Imaginarni Balkan*, XX vek, Beograd, 2006, pp. 276–277.

Having in mind the aforementioned, several hypotheses can be tested. The 'Western Balkans' is a temporary political notion, almost equivalent to the current enlargement agenda. As such, it will progressively lose its conceptual, political and other purposes once the candidates join the EU. Hypothetically, the current 'leading candidates', Serbia and Montenegro, may accede to the EU already during the third decade of the 21st century, following the conclusion of prolonged accession negotiations. Following their EU accession, the 'Western Balkans' would be reduced down to a couple of 'enclaved' countries, which will further weaken the connectivity and functionality of that political domain. The Europeanization process will encourage further transformations which, in an optimistic scenario, would reshape the entire southeast European region and result in its EU membership within several decades.

However, as each new country joins, the new political, economic, institutional, and social context would distance it from the WB region to which it previously 'belonged'. That will further diminish the scope, the functioning and the political and other meaningfulness of the political concept of the Western Balkans that would become outdated by the time all candidates achieve EU membership. Once that happens, these countries would have the opportunity to deepen cooperation with other member states within regional concepts that are not limited to the western area of the Peninsula. That includes possibilities for further regional cooperation not only within CEE but also with other regions, which would be facilitated by the shared EU political, economic, and social space.

THE 'WESTERN BALKANS' AS A POLITICAL CONSTRUCT – A THEORETICAL APPROACH

Since the early 2000s, the EU has chosen to distinguish and treat the 'Western Balkans' differently from the politically more advanced 'CEE' region. Apart from the delayed onset of the European integration process, compared to their CEE neighbors, the WB was also faced with specific difficulties related to its post-conflict heritage, weaker democratic and economic performances, political challenges, etc. (Vachudova, 2019, p. 78).

Although the former Yugoslavia did not put a large emphasis on its Balkan background during the Cold war, the majority of its successor states

and Albania were still 'identified' as such by various international actors during the 1990s (Todorova, 2006, p. 130). Their entanglement in a series of ethnic and political conflicts, economic mismanagement and other negative aspects have 'reactivated' the stereotypical political notion of the Balkans as a troubled place and Europe's 'powder keg' (Zöpel, 2018, p. 2). Since the early 20th century, the term 'Balkans' has had an unfavorable reputation due to the above-mentioned analogies with conflicts, ethnic distrust, and complex historical circumstances. The derivative term 'Balkanization' has been used pejoratively, designating the processes of uncontrolled and hostile fragmentation into smaller units (Todorova, 2006, pp. 98–99). Notwithstanding that the Balkans would remain a physical-geographical term, and having in mind the traditionally unfavorable perceptions, it is unsurprising that the EU designated its regional approach as the 'Western Balkans'. In strategic terms, the EU no longer considers members like Croatia or Bulgaria to be part of the region anymore. Although geography has not changed, the political, economic and strategic circumstances did construct another reality.

According to the social constructivist approach, how things are named or 'labelled' influences the articulation of one's identity. The social constructivist reality is not fixed but ever-evolving, and so are its dominant terms and meanings (Theys, 2017, pp. 36–37). Notions are always connected with the values, beliefs, or more generally, the ideational context (Ibid). Institutions and the political actors may conduct separate activities, but they are intertwined and jointly shape the constructivist reality. In that context, the constructs such as 'CEE' or 'WB' are not purely bureaucratic terms, but also political inventions of various actors (EU), which attribute meanings to these concepts. Likewise, subjects subjected to those meanings are expected to act according to the construct. However, once these notions become outdated, other constructs may assume dominance.

For example, the 'Warsaw Pact' nations used to/be associated with the Soviet-style policies, socialist legacy, and Eastern-European image. Since their inclusion in the European integration process, they have been collectively regarded as the Central and Eastern Europe countries (Weise, Bachtler, Downes, McMaster, Toepel, 2001, p. 15). Over the past decade, the notion of 'CEE' has become associated with consolidated democracies that have successfully transformed their systems and satisfied the conditions to join the EU since the 2000s (Stephens, 2019). Today these countries'

political, economic and other identities are largely influenced and shaped by the 'European' ideational factor, stemming from their EU membership.

On the other hand, the WB is a post-conflict region, subjected to the Europeanization process in the institutional, economic and political sphere (Džankić, Keil, 2019, p. 3). Having in mind the unfavorable reputation attached to the term 'Balkans', the WB notion also depicts the region as the one that is 'under construction', oriented towards (eventual) EU membership. Once the entire 'construction' process is completed and the country becomes an EU member, it ceases to be subjected to the 'Western Balkan' approach, as seen in Croatia. Therefore, it could be expected that once the leading candidates (e.g., Serbia, Montenegro) join the EU, they would begin to be perceived as part of the successfully reformed CEE. Their geopolitical position will politically 'evolve' to the EU status. However, the 'Western Balkans' would be additionally reduced to the remainder of the 'unintegrated' Southeast (Jovic, 2012, pp. 177–178).

One of the main working assumptions in this paper is that the 'Western Balkans' might vanish as a political concept once the entire current enlargement group enters the EU. Such assumptions could be backed by the preceding examples of Croatia or Bulgaria, which have been largely placed out of the Balkan-related policies. Likewise, Serbia, similarly as Croatia or Bulgaria, would one day begin to be perceived as a successfully reformed and integrated CEE country. By virtue of continuous and deep integration processes in the EU space, the country would be drawn towards forging closer ties with other member states as its new closest partners. Regional initiatives, such as the Craiova Group (which currently assembles Greece, Bulgaria, Romania and Serbia) may become important stepping stones towards the further deepening of cooperation.

The language can have a pivotal role in designing or altering social reality (Theys, 2017, p. 38). According to Wittgenstein and Winch, the role of the language is not only to (passively) reflect social reality, but also to take part in constructing that reality (Đorđević, 2016, p. 34). How we perceive or name things or act upon those considerations affects our relations. This also applies to the political actors. The EU perceives, designates and treats the region under the 'Western Balkan' approach. The term is political and bureaucratic, setting the scope for specific EU policies (Theys, 2017, p. 38). It is also structural, since it designs areas for institutional and political cooperation between the two sides (Ibid). The WB, apart from Turkey, is

currently the sole focus of the EU enlargement policy. The enlargement policy, in constructivist terms, can be viewed as a process during which an external country, through the accession process and associate status, gradually acquires norms, values and customs of the EU. In the early 2000s, the Western Balkan countries were officially removed from the 'external relations' and included into the 'enlargement' policy, which aims to fully integrate the region.⁶ The successful and complete adoption of the EU model would ultimately result in the WB countries' EU accession. The WB would then formally blend into the EU area and its supranational political concept in various domains (Petrović, Radaković, 2013).

The constructivists also argue that the normative framework turns into reality once it gets accepted by the group through several distinct stages, such as the norm emergence, norm acceptance and the norm internalization (Theys, 2017, pp. 38–39; Tsvetkova, 2010, pp. 57–58). That is precisely how the EU enlargement process has been unfolding. The candidates are initially required to design and adopt legislation and shape the institutional framework according to the EU matrix in a way which would be conducive for successful and sustainable implementation. Further on, the emphasis is on the acceptance, on the enforcement of the norms, standards and values, and on removing or adjusting challenging domains which hinder comprehensively successful enforcement. The third and final stage applies to the internalization, whereby individuals and institutions have integrated the imported EU norms and values into their behavior and functioning. At that point the country becomes sufficiently 'Europeanized' and prepared to assume EU membership obligations. The accession is viewed as a value-based contract between the candidate and the EU that share organizational principles and norms (Tamvaki, 2008, p. 62). The member states and their populations are integrated into one common political and economic system and are closely drawn together, as they function according to the same legislation, standards and values. Likewise, belonging to such a space also provides an additional confirmation of their country's 'Europeanness' (Tsvetkova, 2010, p. 59). On the other hand, the 'outdated' Eastern European

⁶ The Council of the European Union. (2006). Brussels European Council 14/15 December 2006 Presidency Conclusions 16879/1/06, 12 February 2007 (Council of the European Union, Brussels).

or Western Balkan constructs would remain tied to the preceding stages of political history.

According to the constructivist theory, social norms not only influence behavior and activities, but also shape how institutions work and how the identity is perceived (Aydin-Yilmaz, 2014, p. 65). Collective understanding of one's role and identity takes part in shaping the actor's considerations and activities. Citizens from the WB region will eventually become EU citizens, and their individual and national self-identification will be influenced by that fact. Once a country accedes to the EU and obtains access to a variety of freedoms, rights and obligations that will constitute a major change comparing to the current status. By doing so, the Western-Balkan 'transitory' regional identity would gradually dissolve as each new country enters the EU.

Although the EU context largely influences and shapes social reality, it does not exclude some additional, sub-regional level of political identification. The formerly WB countries may someday decide to additionally deepen regional ties within the EU; how they name that cooperation will also influence how they perceive themselves or how they wanted to be perceived externally. Perhaps an entirely new phrasing should be used to reflect their changed status at that point. If we presume that the 'Western Balkans' is a temporary designation, applicable during the enlargement process, it would perhaps be useful to reflect a bit on how we wish to be perceived in the future or how we think we would perceive ourselves.

The Balkans is gradually losing its purpose as a political designation. Currently, it is narrowed down to the western area of the Peninsula, from which Croatia has seceded by entering the EU, diminishing its geographic scope even further. As part of its 'departure', Croatia (as other acceding members before) also withdrew from the CEFTA (Central European Free Trade Agreement). The CEFTA simulates many aspects of the EU market and is limited primarily to the 'Western-Balkans', so it would also lose its purpose once the enlargement process completes (Petrović, 2019a, p. 67). Notwithstanding the distance of the membership perspective, the regional countries will no longer be politically associated with the WB nor economically with the CEFTA. In other words, the political status of the WB and its economic area (exemplified by the CEFTA) are largely *transitory* and will cease to be in political use once the region, at some distant point, enters the EU.

The European narrative becomes growingly important as the integration process progresses and constructs how the region will be referred to. In line with the constructivist logic that there could be multiple identity layers, the EU membership does not preclude the existence of regional identities (Arežina, 2013, p. 91). Even the 'Europeanization' itself is a constructivist term; literally speaking, the entire WB is indeed geographically European. However, although they originated and expanded from Western Europe, the European Communities have always perceived themselves as the core of the continent and its identity. Their governing liberal norms and values – the four freedoms, the protection of minorities, the rule of law, independent judiciary – were 'exported' into CEE and the WB as part of their integration processes with the EU (Panebianco, 2006, p. 139). The EU has not only expanded its territory but also its system of beliefs, meanings, and its sole *credo* towards the eastern part of the continent (Vukčević, 2013, p. 48). As of 2020, the 27 member states jointly decide on political, economic and many other aspects of reality in the Union, and the process of EU enlargement, despite deficiencies and stagnation, is formally incomplete without the 'Western Balkans'.

Whereas the 'Western Balkans' represents a current conceptual designation for still-unintegrated southeastern Europe, as the enlargement agenda gradually completes, the countries would likely be faced with the necessity to cooperate with EU partners more closely through different frameworks. Unlike the WB designation – which was unsolicited by the region but rather bureaucratically imposed by the EU – the Southeastern European countries may opt to actively take part in constructing their new political identity within the Union. That would provide an opportunity for the constructivist logic, whereby the identities are representations of actor's understandings who they are, point out to their interests, and how they mean to address them (Theys, 2017, p. 37). Politically speaking, the countries could 'evolve' from the WB associate membership to some new status, which would be more compatible with its obtained EU membership. The V4 is an example of an additional layer of political identity which has almost become politically synonymous with the Central European region. That initiative has been very beneficial as a supportive network for deepening the political, economic, cultural, and other processes as part of the wider European integration efforts. Likewise, it was also in accordance with the broader aim of reestablishing a distinctive regional Central

European concept as a counterbalance to the abandoned socialist legacy and the outdated 'Eastern-European' image (Labov, 2019, p. 63).

From the social-constructivist perspective, names are symbolically powerful and may reflect how we perceive our position and how the world perceives us. If the 'Western Balkan' notion indeed loses its political purpose once the enlargement agenda is realized, the author finds it relevant to consider the changed political perceptions which might reflect the new position and our adjusted understanding of who we have become. The new political concept which could illustrate an ideational shift from the post-conflict WB towards a CEE/EU 'status' may be connected with participation in some other regional partnerships. Once the region, mostly or in its entirety, joins the EU, there might be new proposals for reconnecting the southeastern European area. In constructivist terms, it might be relevant to consider several naming proposals that might be suitable for an initiative that would cover the southeastern European states and reflect distancing from the externally named, growingly outdated bureaucratic notion known as the 'Western Balkans'.

EU MEMBERSHIP – A POLITICAL IDENTITY CHANGER

Deepening cooperation within older or newly established regional initiatives may mark a shift away from the 'Western Balkans' as a political concept, especially once Serbia becomes the EU member. At that point, the political paradigm shift will materialize in a twofold manner. Firstly, the EU will cease treating Serbia within the WB approach and instead will act in accordance with all membership-related norms and privileges. The application of the conditionality principle will change, and the country would participate in the decision-making and shaping of policies along with other member states. Secondly, the position of the country will fundamentally change, both internally and externally. Externally, it will be treated as a member of the world's most prosperous market and political area, instead of belonging to the enlargement group – the 'Western Balkans'. Internally, the EU norms, regulations, standards and benefits will integrate the country fully into the Union and largely reshape the political, economic, and social context. The new 'sense of belonging' will even be symbolically represented by means of an EU passport. On the other hand, the political

concept of the 'Western Balkans' will no longer be applicable in its original form. This may lead to the consideration of the new regional initiatives, which could reflect the newly acquired, upgraded strategic position of the country, and (perhaps also) its changed self-perception.

In constructivist terms, the EU is a non-traditional international actor, which defines its own modes of functioning, and its legislative, political and other activities provide valuable insight into its self-identification and the perception of its international role (Vukčević, 2010, p. 204). Its institutions, member states and citizens accept and adhere to the EU norms, standards, and values. The deepening and widening of the European integration have contributed to the 'Europeanization' of its member states and the acceptance of an additional, supranational level of identity in a variety of domains (Ibid, p. 205). These processes encourage constant approximation between countries that shape the 'European project' and contribute to the sense of common belonging (Aydin-Yilmaz, 2014, p. 56).

This feeling of belonging to a common area is visible in many domains. The EU single market operates as an internal market, with the free mobility of people, goods, services, and the capital. These four freedoms constitute the governing ideas and the very backbone of the entire EU integration process. Freedom to work across the Union, guaranteed by the Treaties, consists one of the most enjoyed benefits of EU citizenship (EP, 2020).⁷ Likewise, since 1979, the EU citizens vote for their representatives in the European Parliament (Cracknell, Morgan, 1999, p. 7). Through the ordinary legislative procedure, along with the Council of the European Union, the Parliament adopts legislation that subjects the entire EU territory to the same norms. These norms are applied in each member state and encourage further 'Europeanization' processes in each country. Although sovereign prerogatives are still very strong, especially in high political domains, the member states are expected to comply with the decisions of supranational institutions in many areas and to apply the *acquis*, which facilitates further bonding between the states, institutions, and individuals within the EU territory.

The continuation of the EU accession process in the following decades provides room for the emergence of the new regional initiatives, or the

⁷ Legal basis: Article 3(2) of the Treaty on European Union (TEU); Articles 4(2)(a), 20, 26 and 45-48 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU).

expansion of the already existing ones. Hypothetically, the existing platforms for political cooperation, such as the Visegrád Group (consisting of Czechia, Slovakia, Hungary and Poland) may include new countries. However, this political alliance was established as a coordination platform in the context of the integration processes and did not expand geographically since its establishment 25 years ago (Đukanović, Minić, 2015, p. 25). Whereas the V4 might never expand, it might offer space for eventual privileged cooperation with other countries/regional initiatives.

However, the Craiova Group (CG), in which Serbia already takes part alongside Bulgaria, Greece and Romania – may gain additional prominence as an internal EU regional cooperation platform once Serbia enters the Union. The CG, which currently focuses on expanding possibilities for cooperation in the domains of infrastructure, energy and EU integration, largely resembles the V4 initiative. At this development phase, it focuses largely on interconnectivity and aims to upgrade the underdeveloped domains of cooperation and overcome the economic and other disparities (Bochev, 2018). The CG is currently asymmetrical with Serbia as the sole non-EU member, but it could eventually evolve into another inter-EU regional framework. The CG members are not only neighbors but also close economic and political partners that share common historical and cultural traits. Initiatives such as the CG may become one of the pivotal regional cooperation platforms for Serbia, not only as it currently benefits its EU membership ambitions, but also because once the country joins, it will already have a developed framework of cooperation – a close and ‘friendly’ domain – for further projects.

Likewise, there could be opportunities to establish a new regional cooperation model. Such a platform may also reflect the changed context and the new understanding of the country’s changed political reality and identity. In some distant future, once the entire WB area accedes to the EU, the possibilities for reestablishing mutual cooperation may be realized in a different political, economic and social context.

From the contemporary practice, it may be drawn that the ‘baptizing’ of the regional initiatives is often tied to some geographical and historical scope, which may reflect the common feeling of belonging or assert certain identity, such as Central-European within the V4 initiative (Jagodzinski, 2006). The V4 was named after a medieval alliance between the leaders of the above-mentioned nations, forged in the Visegrád castle. However, in the

WB area, domains such as history or culture constitute a challenging 'least common denominator', having in mind largely fragmented and diverging historical interpretations. Therefore, some neutral geographical designation may be more appealing and be broad enough to bridge the differences and accommodate different perceptions. These may be named after mountain ranges (Dinaric Alps, Haemus Mons), or by the rivers (e.g., Sava/Drina...), depending on the geographical scope. Naming after toponyms, given the history and the diverging perceptions in the region, may prove to be less controversial, divisive or neutral comparing to, for example, bearing the name of some regional historical personality or event which could be interpreted in diverging ways in different countries. For example, the archaic Hellenic term for the Peninsula – *Haemus* could still apply, partially or fully, to the Balkans (Todorova, 2006, p. 79). Although outdated, selecting such a name for some political regional platform would represent a symbolic tribute to the Hellenic culture and political thought, which is native to the region. It would also be helpful in "constructing" or reshaping a new regional political idea, following the disestablishment of the WB political concept.

The author would also suggest exploring neologisms such as the *Dinaric Group*. The Dinaric Alps stretch across the region in the northwest-southeast direction. That is a neutral term which, like the Balkan designation, depicts a mountainous nature of the region. Unlike the Balkans, the term is not burdened by the negative prejudice, political or ideological stances and propaganda, which often depict it as a region inclined towards violence, conflicts, ethnic distrust, fragmentation, nationalism, backwardness, transcultural clashes, etc. The term 'Dinaric Group' is neutral, unhindered by historical, political and social inputs, and as such might be useful for depicting their development from the 'Western Balkan' status to some upgraded form of cooperation, which would reflect the context of their EU membership prospects.

Similarly to the V4 or the CG, and unlike the WB concept, such platforms may be initiated 'from below', by the regional governments. Apart from supporting European integration efforts, their value is in fostering sustainable and deeper cooperation. The V4 was established to coordinate regional integration efforts, which was perceived favorably for their EU membership prospects. (Paroubek, 2006, p. 14). These countries perceived themselves as Central European, whose political identity is related to and interested in adopting the 'Western' system and norms. These perceptions

are in accordance with the constructivist view that countries striving towards a certain identity should adhere to the norms that form that identity (Theys, 2017, p.38). The establishment of a regional platform was perceived as a supportive instrument in acquiring ideas, norms, models, and other aspects which build the EU political identity. Following the EU accession, the V4 successfully continued its political and social mission in Central Europe (Paroubek, 2006, p.14). For the V4 countries, the EU membership provided an additional incentive for deepening regional cooperation, as it resulted in access to the single market, set of fundamental freedoms, rights, obligations and benefits which further removed formal barriers in forging even closer regional ties.

Concluding remarks

Many years ago, the 'Western Balkans' entered the process of European integration. Although Serbia and Montenegro are commonly perceived as the upcoming two member states, the EU accession process is stringent and prolonged, as these candidates struggle to meet demanding requirements in fundamental areas of the rule of law, the independence of the judiciary and high political domains (Petrović, 2019b, p. 31). Although these candidates might not meet the ambitious deadlines set by the Credible enlargement strategy in 2018, their EU membership remains a proclaimed strategic goal and should be expected, perhaps already by the end of the decade (Petrović, 2019a, pp. 72-73).

On the one hand, it might be somewhat optimistic to already project the future of the WB concept once the 'leading candidates' become fully 'Europeanized' and join the EU. However, it appears likely that in such a case, by the virtue of their new geopolitical, economic and other position and the new *modus operandi*, these countries would be encouraged to proceed with the integration processes with the remainder of the EU. The future EU territory in Montenegro and Serbia would reduce the 'Western Balkans' and divide it into two parts, marginalizing it even further as a political and economic concept. The functioning of the CEFTA within such 'enclaves', intersected by the EU territory, would be additionally challenged. The 'Western Balkan' area would thus become additionally fragmented (or ironically speaking, 'Balkanized') while countries like Serbia would integrate

further with EU partners, which would progressively distance it from the WB concept.

Taking part in regional initiatives may also reflect how these countries perceive themselves or want to be perceived, especially once the EU membership is obtained. At that point, the political identity will be affected both internally and externally. The shared EU political, economic and social space will stimulate the deepening of ties and facilitate new modes of regional cooperation. Initiatives such as the Craiova Group may become one of the pivotal regional cooperation platforms for the Republic of Serbia, not only as a platform for advancing its EU membership prospects but also as a domain for closer regional cooperation with (other) EU members. The importance of such networks should not be underestimated, especially during the post-EU accession period, when the country might need new regional partnerships.

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**EURASIA:
SECURITY, INTEGRATIONS
AND GEOPOLITICS**

NEW SERBIAN INTEGRATION CHALLENGE: RUSSIAN AND/OR CHINESE EURASIANISM

Milomir Stepic¹

Abstract: The political, economic, and security supranational organizations of the West are in an obvious crisis and downward trajectory, although still very powerful. From the point of view of Serbian national interests, it is risky for the proclaimed and practical integration orientation to remain “on the path without an alternative” following that direction. In the new conditions of multi-polarization of the world, this orientation has to be less dogmatic and follow the rapid changes not only in the hierarchy of “big players” but also their interests in the Balkans. Primarily, this refers to the increasingly influential Russia and China, which have different, though not incompatible concepts of Eurasianism. Their common strategic goal is to push the USA domination from the “largest landmass on the planet”. In that context, it is geopolitically logical that Russia and China perceive the future position of the Balkans and the role of the Serbian factor completely differently from the personifications of the West – the EU and NATO. This does not mean that Russian and Chinese interests are in the lasting agreement, and their rivalry on the “chains of the world” (*Catena Mundi*) is not possible if/once they push away the still leading world power to the other side of the Atlantic. The long-term future of the “Serbian pebble” will depend on the ability to fit adequately into that future complicated integrative “geopolitical mosaic”.

Keywords: geopolitics, integrations, rivalry, alliance, Serbian factor, Russia, China.

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Transfer of global power and Serbian integration dogma

Serbia's commitment to integration has never been tested in a referendum. Ending the phase of political-territorial functioning, first in the monarchist and then Titoist Yugoslav supranational state after its violent disintegration, the Serbian corps was immediately imposed with involvement into the integrational creations of the West as its only option – primarily in the EU, and in a specific way in NATO. Such an orientation has been almost implicit since the post-Cold War European East was in the process of disintegration, geopolitical regression and economic collapse, and the triumphalist West was at the peak of power and in the momentum of spatial expansion, which included the post-Yugoslav part of the Balkans. Consequently, the postmodern, neoliberal understanding of *integration* at that time, 'implies less the merging of parts into a whole and the increase of internal cohesion, but mostly the notion acquires the geopolitical connotation of territorial expansion. Integration has become a seemingly more benign variant and a "politically correct" substitute for traditional actions of (un) armed aggression, (in) direct occupation, (neo) colonialism, and (neo) imperial domination' (Стренић, 2014a, p.154).

In the meantime, the world has fundamentally changed and is increasingly gaining completely new contours in all its forms. They mostly stem from the epochal translation of geopolitical and geoeconomic power from the Atlantic regions of America and Europe to the Indo-Pacific region and the Heartland of Eurasia, i.e., from the USA and the EU to China, Russia, India, the Far East "tigers". Without any doubt, the so-called unipolar moment has irrevocably passed, and the absolute American hegemony in the last decade of the 20th and the first decade of the 21st century gave way to relative unipolarism (Stepić, 2017, p. 23). According to the cumulative indicator resulting from numerous factors of "tangible" and "intangible power", the USA is still the leading actor in world affairs, but its power is increasingly crumbling. The USA is no longer an unattainable hyperpower as it seemed at the turn of the millennium (for example, at the time of the aggression on the FRY in 1999), and the distance in relation to its runners-up, especially China, is rapidly decreasing. Before our eyes, a true multipolarism is emerging in all its complexity and various manifestations, which tends to grow into a somewhat balanced neo-bipolarism. In this 'new cold

war' (Пандуревић, 2018), which can be more precisely and essentially called the 'continuity of the cold war' (Трифковић, 2017), the USA can gradually become a weaker side if it fails to try to confront Eurasian giants.

The former imposition of USA narcissistic self-knowledge about the so-called necessary nation and its own Messianic role on the whole world now exists less and less even on the internal plane of "reality facing". The systemic fragility of the Empire's core is indicated by the disorganization and conflict that are growing every day and in different forms. They are less and less an exception and incident, and more and more a permanent condition that grows into a chronic social pathology. This was somewhat witnessed in the explosion of riots and anarchy caused by deep contradictions, whose immediate cause was the death of a controversial African-American due to police torture. Another morbid indicator was the pandemic of the COVID 19 virus, which officially infected over 5.5 million people in the United States by mid-August 2020 and claimed more than 172,000 lives, (<https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/country/us/>), i.e., 22.5% of the total death toll in the world, with the egoistic reaction of a large number of USA federal states. Thus, there were sarcastic proposals in the public that the global leader should be given a new name instead of the United States of America – *Divided States of America* (Над, 2020, p. 53). Therefore, the number of countries considering the USA for an example of reputation and reason for voluntary compliance to Westernization, as an American variant of globalization, is increasingly decreasing. Also, the instruments of Pax Americana – primarily NATO as a military-security integration, and the EU as an economic-political Atlantic integration, have slowly ceased to be reasons for such belief.

Despite the obvious declinism of the West, the official Serbian integration orientation masochistically stays directly on *the European path*, and indirectly on *the North Atlantic ship*. Such a (geo) politics is even more absurd given the recent experience – NATO under the leadership of the USA acted biasedly anti-Serbian during the break-up of the SFRY, actively participating in air strikes on the Republic of Serbian Krajina and the Republic of Srpska 1994-1995, carrying out open aggression against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (mostly Serbia) in 1999, while, at the same time, the EU favored Serbian rivals and directly applied harsh economic sanctions, used political pressure and waged a real propaganda war against the Serbian people and state. Besides, both NATO and the EU – mostly

coordinatedly and sometimes each in their own way – are still directly helping the secessionist ambitions of the Albanian national minority and trying by all means to separate the Kosovo-Metohija part of Serbia. All this was not a sufficient reason to reduce the country's economic and trade dependence on the West, slowly, gradually and with minimal negative consequences over a relatively long period of 2-3 decades, and thus at least partially blunt its "blackmailing capacity" which several generations of Serbian nomenclatures have used as an alibi. For several years now, the conditions for foreign policy reorientation have been improving because the alternative appears in the East.

The world, Europe, the Balkans: less Atlanticism, more Eurasianism

For the entire half of the millennium – from Columbus and the so-called Great geographical discoveries until the second decade of the 21st century – the world was shaped on the foundations of thalassocratic, Atlanticism supremacy. Current turbulent events and processes testify to fundamental, epochal, historically important changes and the end of the primacy of the westernized part of the world. Analogous to the indicators of the beginnings of the decline of earlier empires, there are undeniable indicators of the downward trajectory of the current outgoing global Empire:

- the increasingly visible slippage of American society into decadence, the transformation of identity, indifference towards the state and the loss of national "passion";
- the weakening of internal cohesion and harmony, which was unquestionable during the rise and peak, despite the national, religious, racial and other heterogeneity of the USA;
- an unbearable level of the external overstrain that results in America's inability to realize its self-proclaimed "vital national interest" in every corner of the Planet;
- problems of retaining influence in the strategically most important regions, especially in Europe as a 'stepping stone for progressive expansion' and 'America's most important geopolitical bridgehead' on the Eurasian mega-mainland (Bžežinski, 2001, p. 57);

- increasing disloyalty of the most important (post) modern vassals, where an indicative example is the traditionally tellurocratic, centrally positioned and economically strongest European country Germany, to which the USA seeks to prevent energy security (Nord Stream 2) even with the threat of economic sanctions;
- the inability to prevent the “uniting of barbarians” – primarily the strongest, China and Russia – and to resist their joint anti-American (anti-Western) action;
- increasing difficulties in keeping client-countries in its sphere of interest and preventing them from being gravitationally drawn into the orbit of rival forces.

The former unipolar advance of Atlanticism in all directions has been largely stopped and forced to “burrow”, and on some “fronts” to be on the defensive. This is unmistakably recognized by the current state and functioning of its two instruments in Europe – NATO and the EU. After two strong waves of the post-Cold War expansion to four countries in 1999 and seven countries in 2004, NATO was strategically stopped on the western borders of the former Soviet republics of Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova, with minimal, almost no chance of continuing the campaign. Over the next decade and a half, it has succeeded to successively include only four other small Balkan countries, which are, however, only of lower importance – Croatia and Albania in 2009, Montenegro in 2017 and North Macedonia in 2020 – largely due to the creation, instrumentalizing and forcing of their anti-Serb role.² Precisely for these reasons, it can hardly be expected that it will legally and legitimately include Serbia and BiH (due to the resistance of the Republic of Srpska) and thus *finish the unfinished business in the Balkans*. At the same time, the US’s ties as “commander-in-chief” with “subordinates” are increasingly problematic, and the mutual relations of the allies are often antagonistic to the point of mutual conflict. Aren’t these two

² In the then FYR Macedonia, there was even a referendum held with the question: “*Are you for the EU and NATO membership, with the acceptance of a name compromise between the Republic of Macedonia and the republic of Greece?*”, which failed due to a massive boycott (only 37% voted). That means that it wasn’t only the state’s name change that was rejected, but also its ascension into the euroatlantic organizations. In spite of the people’s obvious opposition shown, the country was incorporated into the NATO!

examples, each in its own way, indicative “litmus tests” of the crisis of Atlanticism – one, the refusal of members to finance the Alliance with the “prescribed percentage” of GDP and the other, the constant tension on the so-called Southern wing between two important members Greece and Turkey – which this time (at the end of July 2020) was on the brink of war near the island of Megisti (Kastellorizo)?

And when the USA and NATO are weak, according to the principle of geopolitical “connected vessels”, the EU is also weak. From the point of view of the West, this seems apocalyptic because it indicates a “crack in the monolith”. The president of France, one of the key members of both organizations, warned about this in an interview given to a prominent *Economist* on October 21, 2019 (published on November 7, 2019) – on the exact year when NATO marked the 70th anniversary. Stating that ‘what we are currently experiencing is NATO’s brain death’, which is why the EU is on the ‘edge of a precipice’, and that it is high time to ‘wake up’ because otherwise ‘it will no longer be in control of our destiny’ (Macron, 2019), he did give a diagnosis and possible consequences of the latent dysfunctionality of Western integrations but did not take into account the initial, essential, so-called construction error. The genuine causes of the crises are more adequately pointed out by the act of leaving of the one EU’s so-called old member, with great demographic, territorial, military, political, and economic “specific weight” – Brexit. The fact that this will not be an exception in the European wing of the Atlanticist camp, but a hard-to-stop trend of disunity, has long been manifested by the different approaches of the individual or groups of members on the occasion of almost every crisis, such as the long-standing issue of immigrants. Even the existential threat of the COVID 19 pandemic did not contribute to the “closing of ranks”, an increase of solidarity and joint struggle. On the contrary! It started literally by snatching the necessary medical equipment and leaving Italy and Spain to themselves and came to a barely reached compromise in the EU between the “leading two” (Germany and France), the “thrifty four/five” (Austria, Denmark, the Netherlands, Sweden, joined by Finland) and the “prodigals” (other members) on the adoption of the EU draft budget for 2021-2027. Although it has been proposed that as much as €750 billion should be earmarked for post-pandemic economic recovery, the enigma remains whether the amount will be adopted by the European Parliament by the end of 2020 and how it will be achieved – most likely by even higher borrowing

and additional taxation (€390 billion non-refundable and 360 billion in low-interest loans) (European Council, 2020, p. 3).

Opposite the Empire of countries and organizations under the USA leadership, which is obviously in a far advanced process of the relative weakening, there is an increasingly strong Eurasian “community of giants”. China and Russia are convincingly in the lead among them, striving to achieve the widest and most diverse alliances. Global confrontation is fierce and is taking place in all fields, with the exception of direct armed conflict for now, but also involving brutal hybrid and network warfare. It is not just a mere struggle to take over the world throne, but a change in the global geopolitical paradigm and a completely new concept of (super) power. More precisely, it is not just a question of transforming the thalassocratic Atlanticist unipolar “new world order” into the tellurocratic Eurasian multi-polar “even newer world order”. For the world, the establishment of a “new bipolarism” is forthcoming, based on the integral power of the so-called full spectrum. On its two sides, there will be “integration clusters” based on different, selective, and flexible principles and factors – geographical, civilizational, communication, military security, political, economic. The actual clash of the “big players” has already been projected on the “Balkan subcontinent” as one of the crucial geopolitical regions, primarily on its fragmented post-Yugoslav part. The Balkan “indicators of new bipolarism” are Kosovo and Metohija, based on which the whole world allied either as a pro-Atlanticist or anti-Atlanticist (Степић, 2018, p. 42). It is the Balkans, which in the post-Cold War period was structured in accordance with Western, Atlanticist postulates, that will be the subject of interest and fundamental rearrangement in accordance with Eurasian principles. The place of the previous regional “subcontractors of geopolitical works” in the name of Washington, London, Berlin, Vienna, logically should be taken by the exponents of Beijing and Moscow as the coming forces. The continuous destabilization of the Balkans for three decades, caused by the Atlanticist engagement in the violent disintegration of the SFRY, and whose best evidence is the inconsistent borders of the new states, can only be completed by their adequate redefinition in Eurasian direction. In the conditions of increasingly offensive Eurasianism, whose geopolitical and geoeconomic Balkan vectors are (also) projected through Serbian countries, the persistent Serbian pro-Western orientation is obviously becoming a counterproductive dogma that requires re-examination.

Geopolitical duality of Eurasianism and the Serbian position

Atlanticism is a multidimensional concept of the world order, but in the geopolitical sense it is unambiguous:

- it is theoretically designed and practically implemented monistically – by *one*, the inviolable superpower of the West, the USA;
- The USA based it on a *single*, thalassocratic geopolitical principle, drawing from it the total, global power;
- it was implemented by controlling Eurasia through its *one*, peripheral macro-entity – Rimland;
- the ultimate goal was the establishment and duration of a globalist *unipolar* order, i.e., of a world under USA “constant leadership” (Pax Americana).

On the other hand, Eurasianism is pluralistic in all dimensions, and also geopolitical:

- in the current historical “cross-section”, it is personified by *two* powers – Russia and China – with a realistic perspective that, at a lower, macro-regional level, *more* of them will join them;
- initially, it was founded tellurocratically, but in modern variants, it also develops on *other* principles, i.e., more and more as an integral conception;
- it creates the future world order as *multi-polar* (polycentric), with the possibility to eventually move to a balanced hierarchical model of *neo-bipolarism*;
- joining to the integration is not based on coercion, unanimity and unification, but on voluntariness, symbiosis of interests and multidimensional *pluralism* – ideological-political, economic, cultural-civilizational;
- Anti-Atlanticism and the expulsion of the USA from Eurasia are key factors on which the cohesion of as *many* Asian, African, Latin American and even European countries as possible is based;
- delicate relations and conflicting historical heritage within heterogeneous Eurasia seeks to overcome with as little conflict as possible and in a *multilateral* way, especially by trying to coexist with

the expanding Islamic world, and by constructively controlling potentially destructive EU-Russia and India-China rivalries.

Although the Russian and Chinese Eurasian concepts have great similarities, a common “red thread”, and for now they are largely complementary, they differ in nature. This is recognizable based on two phenomena that personify them – the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The Russian thinker Leonid Savin understood this difference: ‘...The Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) is really an *integration* project, and the Chinese BRI is not. China is interested in *connection*, not integration’ (Савин, 2019, p. 49). Russian *neo-Eurasianism* represents the Eurasian idea of “white” emigrant intellectual circles from the 1920s/30s, adapted to modern conditions. It identifies Russia as a multidimensional, and especially cultural-geographical predetermined center of a gathering of other great partners on the largest mainland on the Planet (Выковий, 2013, p. 108). It also has an emphasized spatial dimension in the sphere of neoclassical geopolitics. It implies the territorialization of global political relations, and the phased division of the world into several meridians elongated pan-zones and several large spaces in their composition, all in accordance with the initial postulates of continentalism and multi-polarism.

The realization of the neo-Eurasian (re) composition of the world is predicted through the ‘axis of friendship’ (Дугин, 2009, p. 113), i.e., the geopolitical vectors directed towards several key countries and regions – the three *basic* (two plus one) towards Germany and Japan/China, and the Islamic world, and several *auxiliary* to Indochina, South Asia, the Middle East and even some areas outside Eurasia such as the Caribbean (Степий, 2013, pp. 107-108). In the early neo-Eurasian variants, the vector towards the Balkans was omitted, although it is a region of first-class importance for achieving the world power and “taking over” Europe from Atlanticist hands (Степий, 2014b, pp. 120-127). Undoubtedly the most suitable starting point for the Balkan “axis of friendship” is the Serbian lands, which is respected in some revised views (Дугин, 2004, p. 200), and therefore the Serbian factor (Belgrade) is assigned an important geopolitical role of one of the four centers of phased neo-Eurasian integration. (Панарин, 2012).

The intensive modern development and expansion of China have long been challenged by geopolitics. China insisted on cooperation in the framework of the economy, finance, trade, communications, new

technologies, and other “benign” aspects of connection, so as not to provoke resistance from other forces. However, in the Chinese so-called *charm offensive* can be clearly recognized the specific features of Eurasianism and postmodern geopolitics. Moreover, ‘China is striving to become the first power in history to build an integral geopolitical code and power – both telurocratic and thalassocratic at the same time’ (Зарић, 2013, p. 200). China embarked on a major campaign many years before she announced in 2013 first the idea of a (land) *Silk Road Economic Belt*, and then the *21st Century Maritime Silk Road*. Thus, the networking of the Afro-Eurasian mainland and the broad coastal zone started to be globally recognized by the abbreviation OBOR (One Belt One Road), and then the BRI (Belt and Road Initiative). For the vectors of Chinese Eurasianism and their westward penetration, the Central Asian “five” are of key mediating importance. It now successfully corresponds to the earlier American formula C5+1 with the counter-formula C+C5 (China plus Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkmenistan). It also uses the CPEC formula (China-Pakistan Economic Corridor) for land access to the Indian Ocean basin, from where it can “keep an eye” on the strategically important Strait of Hormuz and establish “threads” that connect it with oil giants Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates.

At the same time, China continues multiplying its Eurasian connections by initiating the *Arctic Silk Road* (activating the Northern Sea Route together with Russia), the *Digital Silk Road* (for cross-border e-commerce), and the *Medical Silk Road* (for medical assistance due to COVID-19). For countries whose poverty will accelerate sharply in the post-pandemic period, borrowing from China is becoming the only way out, which China already “charges” by dragging them into its orbit by privileged business positions, gaining territorial concessions, and positioning at strategic points. China is largely accused by its competitors for using ‘debt-trap diplomacy’ (Engdahl, 2020). All this confirms that the comprehensive *Silk (geopolitical) concept* (Stepić, Zarić, 2016, p. 452) will be difficult to stop by USA sanctions, a real economic and propaganda war, and the increasingly ambitious attempts to form an anti-Chinese coalition in the world level. The full realization of the Silk (geopolitical) concept – as well as the success of Russian neo-Eurasianism – depends on the penetration into Europe, in which the Balkans is crucial. It is an integral part of the China+17 initiative, which has the characteristics of the Baltic-Aegean intermarium “vertical”, geopolitically

similar to the buffer Sanitary cordon from a century earlier. But, for the sake of certain success, China will also need an intermarium “horizontal” – the Black Sea-Adriatic one – with a point of intersection in Belgrade (Stepić, Zarić, 2016, pp. 460-461). Therefore, China is focusing on the Serbian factor, which qualifies as a key regional mediator because of its central geographical position and anti-Atlanticist geopolitical orientation.

Instead of conclusion: Serbian benefits from Russian and/or Chinese Eurasianism

It is not excluded that the complementarity of two modern Eurasianisms – Russian and Chinese – will last only until the ousting of a great common rival, and after that, it will grow into direct rivalry, competition for influence, and even confrontation in Eurasia and the world as a whole. On the contrary, it is possible to continue their peaceful coexistence with the “smallest common denominator” of geopolitical, geoeconomic and other interests, and with some form of division of areas of activity and zones of responsibility. The multidimensional heterogeneity of Eurasia is a suitable environment for the emergence and development of still relatively autonomous, limited, partial variants of Eurasianism of macroregional and transregional ranges, which will difficult fit into the previous two main streams. These can be Indian *subcontinentalism* in South Asia and the Indian Ocean basin, Turkish *neo-Ottomanism* and *pan-Turkism* in parts of the Balkans, Central and Western Asia, Iranian Islamist (mostly Shiite) *fundamentalism* in the Gulf, Southwest and also Central Asia, Indonesian Indo-Pacific *Trans-oceanism* in Southeast Asia, Saudi expansionist *Wahhabism*, and even *pan-Arabism* in the Middle East, German *Mitteleuropeanism* extended from Central to Eastern and especially to Southeastern Europe, and so on.

In the Balkans, through NATO and the EU, Atlanticism is still dominant, but its “offer” is less and less attractive. On the other hand, Eurasianism is more and more present on the Balkan “subcontinent”, and it is especially attractive from the point of view of Serbian national interests. Preserving Serbia’s sovereignty in the face of direct Atlanticist attacks aiming to separate its Kosovo-Metohija part is only an obvious indicator. Much more important are the essential reasons for Serbia’s closeness to Eurasianism,

primarily Russian neo-Eurasianism, which are geographical, historical, ethnical, cultural-civilizational, geopolitical, geoeconomic and others. Therefore, the Serbian factor can become a key guarantor of the 'neo-Eurasian Balkan sub-order' (Степић, 2017b, p. 25), as evidenced by the so-called strategic partnership between Russia and Serbia. It is reflected in the procurement of Russian weapons for the Serbian Army, the pipeline route of the former South and now Turkish Stream, the sale of NIS to Gazpromneft, Russian investments in Serbian roads, and especially the Free Trade Agreement between Serbia and the EAEU. This agreement was not signed with any other European country, and it opens the possibility of Serbian exports to a market of almost 200 million people (the Russian government approved ratification on July 26, 2020).

Due to its position as a central, transit, hub and non-Atlanticist country, Serbia is the most suitable mediator for China's Eurasian BRI-influence in the Balkans. For now, geoeconomics is a "visible part of the spectrum" of the rapid growth of Chinese influence, as evidenced by credit arrangements, investment in Serbia's infrastructure, buying of strategic companies (the ironworks in Smederevo, RTB Bor, etc.), investment in new technologies and reindustrialization, but also increasingly significant deliveries of modern Chinese weapons. The Republic of Srpska is intensively involved in similar flows (e.g., the Russian purchase of the refinery in Brod, the Chinese construction of TPP Stanari, etc.). In the current situation, Chinese and Russian Eurasianism competitors in the Balkans, but it might not remain their (long-lasting) relationship. If (When?) these two expanding powers conduct de-Atlantization of the Balkans, the question is whether they will start fighting each other for supremacy? Will the Serbian choice follow at some point no longer the West or the East, but Russian or Chinese Eurasianism? Will Russia and China continue to support the independence of the states – even small Balkan ones – for which they are currently advocating, or will they keep and even more sharply implement the concept of limiting and usurping parts of their sovereignty? Can they, one and/or the other, realize their interests to the maximum if they inherit the current Atlanticist geopolitical configuration of the Balkans, or will they overcome its dysfunction by recomposing the borders, primarily the post-Yugoslav ones?

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MILITARY AND POLITICAL SECURITY PROBLEMS. COMMON THREATS AND CHALLENGES IN THE OSCE REGION

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Abstract: The article asserts that the persistent alarming trend towards a further increase of the conflict potential in relations between the West and Russia is reflected on the security situation in Europe.

The Alliance has been pursuing a course towards the militarization of Europe for the fifth year, running under the pretext of countering the contrived Russian threat. This course is accompanied by exerting massive informational pressure on Russia.

The COVID-19 pandemic triggered purely selfish approaches to ensuring security and added to the general instability.

The idea of a Wider Europe without dividing lines and bloc confrontation actually turned out to be unrealized. It will be difficult to expect any breakthroughs in relations and the creation of foundations to ensure European security as long as the course for the aggressive military containment of Russia continues.

A substantive and productive dialogue is required to overcome mutual fears and increase the level of trust. The re-establishment of professional contacts, including those at the military level, is needed in order to avoid misunderstanding of each other's intentions and prevent the descent into an uncontrolled escalation of tensions.

Keywords: strategic stability, arms race, arms control, antiballistic missile defense, escalation of tensions, security architecture, transparency and confidence-building measures, structured dialogue.

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Background analysis

The security situation on the European continent is developing unfavorably. The tension is growing. Moreover, new lines of contradictions and exacerbations appear.

We all know that European security was largely identical to global security for many years. The stability and predictability of the entire system of international relations built on the basis of the UN Charter and the basic principles of international law depended on the state of affairs in Europe.

Nowadays, one of the European security problems is connected with the fact that Europe and the Euro-Atlantic area are generally losing their key system-forming role. New centers of power and influence are emerging, the Asia-Pacific region – is a convincing example. The habitual old center of power is compelled to carry out an ever-intensifying competition for a place in the sun and for the privilege to shape the international security landscape based on its preferences, and the world order based on its own patterns.²

COVID – 19 has also said its piece. The pandemic not only affected the health of Europeans but also exposed serious systemic gaps in the health care system and painfully hit the entire social sphere.

Politically and strategically, the pandemic was a serious sustainability test and a test of the effectiveness of the mutual support system within the framework of such multilateral structures as the EU and NATO and not only them. It triggered purely selfish approaches to ensuring security and worked rather for disconnection than for interaction.

All this could not but affect the state of security affairs on the European continent, including in the military and political dimensions.³

² Huntington S.P. The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order. – New York, N.Y.: Simon and Shuster, 1996. – 367 P.; Подберёзкин А.И. Значение Локальных Человеческих Цивилизаций (ЛЧЦ) как субъектов формирования международной обстановки (МО) в мире // ЦВПИ. 13 февраля 2020 [Electronic resource]. – URL: www.eurasian-defence.ru

[Podberyozkin A.I. Znachenie LCHC kak subjektov formirovaniya MO v mire // CVPI. 13 fevralya 2020. – URL: www.eurasian-defence.ru]

³ Клаузевиц К. фон. О войне. Избранное. М.: АСТ. 2019. – 318 с.

[Klauzevic K. fon. O vojne. Izbrannoe. M.: AST. 2019. – 318 s.]

Currently, we continue to face a persistent alarming trend towards a further increase of the conflict potential in relations between the West and Russia. Under pressure from Washington, which is pursuing its geopolitical course despite the growing contradictions within the American elites, NATO countries are increasingly getting involved in an aggressive anti-Russian stand.

At the same time, following a certain pause associated with the above-mentioned COVID crisis, the western elites continue to pursue a course of unilateral economic sanctions, trade and financial wars, extraterritorial application of national legislation, blackmail and even, threats to use force. This course is accompanied by exerting massive informational pressure on Russia and attaching propaganda labels “revisionist” and “aggressor” to it – new know-hows at the information age.⁴

In our opinion, an extremely destructive process of ideologizing the geopolitical confrontation is underway. It is complemented by dehumanizing the opponent – in this case, Russia – and imparting the immanently inherent properties to it, supposedly not organically coinciding with the basic European values.⁵ Moreover, after the active phase of the pandemic, this process does not fade, but only begins to intensify.

It seems that these actions reflect the ongoing attempts of the Western elites to impose their understanding of the world order and establish a monopoly on the implementation of globalization not as a balanced and inclusive process, but as a project in the interests of the elites. In practice, this only leads to a sharp exacerbation of contradictions, to new faults and lines of confrontation.⁶

The matter is not limited only to measures of political, economic, and psychological pressure. NATO is currently focused on countering the contrived Russian threat. With this pretext, the Alliance has been pursuing a course towards the militarization of Europe for the fifth year running.

⁴ Castells M. The rise of the network society: The information age: economy, society, and culture. – John Wiley & Sons, 2011. – T.1.

⁵ Tomes R. Releaning Countersurgency Warfare / US Army War College, 2004.; Overextending and Unbalancing Russia. RAND. 2019.

⁶ Nye J.S. The future of power. – Public Affairs, 2011. – 320 P.; Modern Political Warfare. Current Practices and Possible Responses. RAND. Cal., 2018. – P.8

Military contingents appear where they have never been before on a continuous rotational basis. NATO is focusing on fighting “the threat from the East”. Along the Russian borders, military infrastructure is being deployed and modernized and large-scale exercises are being conducted.

Thus, over 50 thousand soldiers practiced offensive and defensive actions in low temperatures during the Trident Juncture exercises in 2019. Logistic and infrastructural capabilities of the European countries are being rebuilt in order to transfer significant forces and resources to the Russian borders, including the transfer of American military contingents from overseas. From the expert point of view, this is a very remarkable sign of real military preparations. Thus the focus is being made on military predominance.⁷

The scale and intensity of the exercises increased and their provocative focus strengthened. The Bloc’s geopolitical expansion continues in the Balkans. The once militarily stable regions of Northern Europe, the Baltic states and the Black Sea, have been turned into “frontline zones” in the short term. The development of the US ABM systems and NATO ABM systems continues.⁸

It will be difficult to expect any breakthroughs in relations and the creation of foundations to ensure European security as long as the course for the aggressive military containment of Russia continues. Besides, a real material basis for military and strategic capabilities is being created, the

⁷ The National Defense Strategy of the United States of America, 2018. [Electronic resource]. The Department of Defense official website. – URL: <https://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf>

⁸ NATO missile defense. FAS Special Report 1. September, 2011. [Electronic resource]. – URL: https://fas.org/pubs/_docs/2011%20Missile%20Defense%20Report.pdf. Frank A. Rose. Growing global Cooperation on Ballistic Missile Defense. Remarks as prepared for delivery in Berlin, Germany. September 10, 2012. [Electronic resource]. The U.S. Department of State website. – URL: <http://www.state.gov/t/avc/rlss/197547.htm>

Frank A. Rose. Implementation of the European Phased Adaptive Approach. Remarks at Polish National Defense University Warsaw, Poland. April 18, 2013. [Electronic resource]. The U.S. Department of State website. – URL: <http://www.state.gov/t/avc/rls/2013/207679.htm>

infrastructure of which has come very close to the Russian borders. Measures to modernize the US tactical nuclear potential on the continent and to give it the characteristics of a “battlefield weapon” are becoming a reality; the practice of the “joint use” of nuclear weapons (nuclear sharing) also continues, which is a direct violation of the NPT.

All this is complemented by an unprecedented increase in NATO military budgets up to \$1 trillion.⁹

Speaking about the alleged non-orientation of NATO against Russia, one should note the sharply increased activity of the Alliance on the “eastern flank”. As specific examples, it is appropriate to cite the activities of the Alliance in the Baltic and Black Sea regions, and the Arctic zone. The intensity and scale of military exercises, involving carriers of nuclear weapons, including strategic ones, are increasing. The total number of the armed forces of the Alliance countries is currently more than 3 million people. Military measures are accompanied by instruments of “hybrid” influence – pressure in the economic sphere, anti-Russian propaganda and expulsion of diplomats. Thus, the basis for long-term psychological and power pressure on Russia is being created.¹⁰

The crisis potential is also growing in other parts of the world. The results of NATO military operations in Europe (Yugoslavia) and beyond its borders (Afghanistan, Libya) include numerous civilian casualties, destruction of infrastructure, significant economic damage, actual disintegration of states, and violation of the fundamental principles of international law. Apparently, the Alliance is solving the problem of “projecting stability” outside its area of responsibility in this way.

⁹ National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2019 / Congress. [Electronic resource]. – URL: <http://www.congress.gov>115/crpt/hrpt676/CRPT-115hrtp676.pdf>

¹⁰ Overextending and Unbalancing Russia. RAND. 2019. Modern Political Warfare. Current Practices and Possible Responses. – Cal., RAND. 2018. –P.8

Попов И.М., Хамзатов М.М. Война будущего. Концептуальные основы и практические выводы. Очерки стратегической мысли. 3-е изд., испр.М.: Кучково поле, 2019. – 832 с.

[Popov I.M., Hamzatov M.M. Vojna budushego. Konceptual'nye osnovy I prakticheskie vyvody. Ocherki strategicheskoy mysli. 3-e izd., ispr. M.: Kuchkovo pole. 2019. – 832 s.]

This course is strengthened by ongoing “humanitarian and peacekeeping operations”, which affirms the Alliance’s move beyond its geographical responsibility. That hardly contributes to the harmonization of international relations.¹¹

Visible military preparations are accompanied by practical steps in the new areas of confrontation, such as space.¹²

All this demonstrates how far the Western elites are ready to go in order to maintain a monopoly on global strategic decisions and on shaping the political, financial, economic, and value-based world landscape.

Despite the emerging centrifugal tendencies in NATO and statements about the “death of the organization’s brain”, the Alliance is actively looking for a new mission in new conditions.

At the same time, Washington continues its consistent course to increase the individual defense spending of allies, keeping in mind the sale of its military products.¹³

Simultaneously, the institutions of interaction were thrown into crisis, the Russia-NATO Council was frozen, and the arms control architecture is being consistently undermined. One gets the impression that NATO is looking for meanings of its existence. Now, when the Alliance celebrated the 70th anniversary of the organization’s founding not so long ago, it becomes more obvious that we are dealing with a vestige of the Cold War, which NATO is trying to reanimate and to which it is trying to give new “expanded” functions.

In this context, NATO’s strategic course to replace international law with “NATO legitimacy”, “rules of international behavior” and the imposition of the globalizing Alliance’s role based on these rules could be evaluated as a long-term challenge.¹⁴

¹¹ Operations and Missions past and present. – URL: https://www.nato.int/ehpsh/natohqtopics_52060

¹² Trump reauthorizes U.S. Space Command / Spaceflight Now // – URL: <http://www.Spaceflightnow.com>

¹³ Remarks by President Trump at Signing Ceremony for s.1790, National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2020 // The White House, December 20, 2019.

¹⁴ The globalizing role of NATO has been confirmed by the Active Engagement. Modern Defense strategic concept adopted in November 2010. [Electronic resource]. – URL: https://www.nato.int/cps/ru/natohq/official_texts_68580.htm

Thus, the idea of a Wider Europe without dividing lines and bloc confrontation actually turned out to be unrealized. The commitments enshrined at the highest level in the fundamental documents of the OSCE and the Russia-NATO Council not to strengthen their security at the expense of the security of others were ignored.¹⁵

On the contrary, in reality, we are dealing with the gradual expansion of NATO, and the deployment of global anti-missile defense elements in the interests of the US on a continent located a thousand miles away from them. Talks about the fact that this structure is not directed at Russia arouse doubts among professionals, to put it mildly.¹⁶

The fact that the Europeans actually allowed themselves to be drawn into the process of deliberately increasing the level of confrontation with Russia, accompanied by significant costs from the imposed sanctions-related activities, has become a reality.¹⁷

The consequence of such a short-sighted policy is the agreement system erosion in the field of arms control and limitation. A clear example is the INF Treaty that ceased to exist in August 2019, the disruption of which the US stubbornly pursued. The course of events shows that the Americans had been preparing a decision to withdraw from the INF Treaty for a long time – they needed only a pretext. The termination of the Treaty is a blow to strategic stability and European security architecture. It is acknowledged by most European politicians. Attempts to shift the responsibility onto Russia look like manipulation of European public opinion and justification of Washington's own preparations in this area.

Speaking about the INF Treaty, another fact is surprising – how easily Washington managed to convince the Europeans to give up their security on the basis of such a lightweight and unconvincing pattern.

¹⁵ Данилевский Н.Я. Россия и Европа. М.: Академический Проект, 2015. – 602с. [Danilevskij N.YA. Rossiya I Evropa. M.: Akademicheskij Proekt, 2015. – 602 s.]

¹⁶ Frank A Rose. Implementation of the European Phased Adaptive Approach. Remarks at Polish National Defense University Warsaw, Poland. April 18, 2013. [Electronic resource]. The U.S. Department of State website – Mode of access [http:// www.state.gov/t/avc/rls/2013/207679.htm](http://www.state.gov/t/avc/rls/2013/207679.htm)

¹⁷ Measuring Geopolitical Risk Caldara, Dario and Matteo Iacoviello [Electronic resource]. – URL: <https://doi.org/10.17016/IDDP.2018.1222>

At the same time, efforts continue to shift responsibility for the collapse of the INF Treaty onto Russia. This case is as senseless as it is unsightly. It is obvious that this is the choice of the American side, which has rejected the practical measures proposed to it for transparency and trust, as well as for removing the accumulated concerns regarding the Treaty.

Essential measures should include Russia's commitment not to deploy the INF in Europe and other regions until American missiles appear there. Unfortunately, neither Washington nor its NATO allies have responded to this commitment in a concrete manner – the sweeping accusations continue.

As for another cornerstone of security - the situation with the extension of the 2010 START Treaty remains uncertain. The timid signals accompanying the Russian-American discussion of strategic stability issues in Vienna could only give hope for progress in this area.

Thus, we face a situation of growing uncertainty in international relations, in which the strategic stability system is increasingly showing a high degree of deterioration.¹⁸

It seems that Russia and the need to contain it both in the military and political sense and in the value-based dimension will remain the main factors justifying the very existence of the Alliance in modern conditions. In this context, it should be expected that these principles will be reflected in the forthcoming new strategic concept of NATO. The core of NATO's anticipated future strategic concept will likely be its orientation against Russia.¹⁹

The Western countries' consolidation in the face of an imaginary common threat from Russia is only one of the factors providing new meanings of the Alliance. Ideological considerations are among other unifying goals: an alliance of "democracies" against "authoritarian regimes" that refuse to accept rules to establish a new world order. In addition, one should take into account the highly pragmatic geopolitical intentions of

¹⁸ Koblentz G.D. Strategic Stability in the Second Nuclear Age / Council on Foreign Relations. Special Report № 71. November 2014

¹⁹ Штоль В.В. Россия и Запад: несостоявшийся альянс, или Противостояние как неизбежность. СПб.: Алетейя. 2019. – 434 с.

[SHtol' V.V. Rossiya i Zapad nesostoyavshijsya al'yans, ili Protivostoyanie kak neizbezhnost'. SPb.: Aleteiya. 2019. – 434 s.]

NATO and the pursuit to secure by force the right to access energy resources. All this is evident in the increased activity in the Arctic region.

It is very appropriate in this regard to quote the words of NATO Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen, which he said on September 16, 2014, that “only NATO is the provider of that political legitimacy and military power that no country or coalition can provide”.²⁰

These claims indicate the Alliance’s course towards a “monopoly” of legitimacy, which, among other things, is a challenge to the central role of the UN and its Security Council in resolving international problems.

The fact that NATO countries have the powerful collective military capacity – i.e., possibilities, confrontational rhetoric – i.e., intentions and concrete actions – i.e., practical deeds towards Russia does not allow to trust statements about the defensive nature of the Alliance.

New areas of confrontation are also emerging

Analysis of the key doctrinal and policy documents of the US, and recently NATO, on this topic, shows that the leadership of the country and the Alliance is increasingly considering space as a zone of growing vital interests, as well as a factor and condition for ensuring national security and military predominance in possible armed conflicts.

As for the US policy documents, the Pentagon issued a directive on space policy in October 2012.

The document declares that any interference with the activities of American space systems, including ground infrastructure, is considered a “violation of the rights” of the US and will require “reciprocal actions.” The document is also indicative because it essentially lays down the parameters for the creation of a “space NATO”, within the framework of which an attack in space or an attack on “space” objects of one of the Alliance member states on Earth will be considered as an attack on all of them.²¹

²⁰ Speech by NATO Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen at Carnegie Europe. A force for Freedom. September 16. 2014. [Electronic resource]. – URL: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_113063.htm?selectedLocale=en

²¹ Directive of the United States Department of Defense on Space Policy №3100.10, October 18, 2012 Space Directive [Electronic source] // Defense Technical

Currently, we are witnessing the active phase of this project's implementation. The Alliance's space policy was preliminarily approved at the meeting of NATO defense ministers in June 2019.²²

NATO allies are practically joining the space military race. Attention was drawn to the speech of the French Defence Minister Florence Parly, who presented the national military space doctrine in July 2019. This is the first document of this nature, and it will undoubtedly affect the situation in space.

The doctrine also implies the adoption of a special program called "space management". France's space defense strategy aims to build capacity to conduct military operations in space using space-based means by 2030.

Taking this into account, one cannot but come to a logical conclusion that the plans of France and NATO, in general, have the ultimate goal of deploying strike weapons in space. And this despite the fact that Russia and France are actively interacting in "peaceful" space in the field of creating delivery vehicles and operating satellite systems, as well as developing space science.²³

At the same time, the very search for diplomatic measures is essentially rejected. Forceful actions become the dominant factor in resolving such issues. Russian initiatives to prevent space from becoming a battlefield are in fact ignored by the US and its NATO allies.

The substantive negotiating work of the Conference on Disarmament (CD) in Geneva has been suspended for more than twenty years. Against this

Information Centre [official website]. – URL: <http://www.dtic.mil/whs/directives/corres/pdf/310010p.pdf>; 2011 National Security Space Strategy (NSSS) [Electronic source] // Defense Technical Information Centre [official website]. – URL: <http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a536546.pdf>

²² НАТО утвердила концепцию альянса по сдерживанию в космосе / ТАСС. [Electronic resource]. – URL: <https://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/6600988>
NATO utverdila koncepciju alijansa po sderzhivaniju v kosmose / TASS. – [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/6600988>

²³ Как Франция собирается милитаризировать свою космическую доктрину / Le Monde. [Electronic resource]. – URL: <https://inosmi.ru/politic/20190726/245529943.html>

Kak Franzija sobiraetsja militarizirivat` svoju kosmicheskuju doctrinu
Le Monde. – URL: <https://inosmi.ru/politic/20190726/245529943.html>

*backdrop, Russia's proposal to adopt a mandate for launching negotiations concerning a Treaty on the Prevention of the Placement of Weapons in Outer Space, the Threat or Use of Force against Outer Space Objects (PPWT), which provides for a ban on the placement of weapons of any kind in outer space and on any use of force against space objects, the initial draft of which was submitted jointly with China within the CD back in 2008, and the amended version – in 2014, remains unfulfilled.*²⁴

We do hope that the joint efforts of the planned Working Group on space strategies and concepts of Russian and French experts could result in better mutual understanding in this strategic sphere.

Peacekeeping as a tool of influence

Special attention should be given to the forceful expansion of NATO's influence using a tool for peacekeeping. NATO has developed its own model of peacekeeping. Since 2008, NATO has begun to conduct its own peacekeeping operations without much regard for the UN, going beyond its zone of responsibility, which in fact can be qualified as geopolitical expansion under the pretext of peacekeeping using the mechanism of civil-military cooperation as a tool for "democratic" changes.²⁵

One has the right to ask oneself a question whether the policy goal of the Alliance, limited in its membership to 30 member countries, is to replace the UN. In any case, in peacekeeping, for example, we are already witnessing such a trend. Attempts to replace international law with "NATO legitimacy" are one of the reasons for the current European security crisis.

What is happening in the Alliance itself?

As for the Alliance itself, including the Washington-Euro-NATO course, it becomes clearer that NATO remains an unexpectedly demanded mechanism

²⁴ See Draft – Treaty on the Prevention of the Placement of Weapons in Outer Space, the Threat or Use of Force against Outer Space Objects [Electronic source] // United [Official website]. – URL: <http://www.un.org/ru/document/ods.asp?m=CD/1985>

²⁵ Phillips W.R. Civil-Military Cooperation: Vital to Peace implementation in Bosnia // NATO Review. 1998. Vol.48. №1. P.22-25

if we consider the situation from the angle of attempts to discipline the allies and consolidate American dominance over them on a new level and in new conditions. This is especially important in the context of COVID19 – the factor which has “worked” for disconnecting rather than unifying.

Paradoxically, this course is accompanied by fierce financial and economic competition between the US and Europe. Europe is increasingly questioning whether to sacrifice its competitiveness for American military backup. This trend is supported by centrifugal tendencies associated with both the “Trump factor” and the US readiness for “situation coalitions” with non-Alliance members and, in general, with the declining readiness of the “old Europeans” to sacrifice their economic and financial competitiveness for the sake of American security guarantees.

This was particularly evident in relations between Washington and Berlin, especially around the issue of the construction of the Nord Stream-2 gas pipeline.

It seems that the “COVID crisis” only contributed to further exacerbation of these contradictions. In these conditions, in addition to the Baltic states, Poland, which is positioned to play a role of the main “cementing” link of the Alliance in its opposition to Russia, is increasingly advancing to the number of countries expressing a high interest in NATO guarantees, primarily from the US.

It also seems that Brussels and Washington do not see the future of the Alliance in the same way. Simultaneously, Europe realizes that it is compelled to increase its contribution to European security, as NATO understands it. A greater contribution, however, does not at all mean a fair distribution of responsibility, whereby Europe could actually rather than declaratively be an equal partner for the US.

It appears that the “capitalization” of the US assets in NATO under the present turmoil conditions in the US themselves may have a backfire effect on the Alliance itself, whose fundamental value is being tested by the policy of individual state interests.

Despite the emerging centrifugal tendencies in NATO and statements about the “death of the organization’s brain”, the Alliance is actively looking for new meanings, a new mission in new conditions, and creating a working group to develop a new strategy. At the same time, Washington continues

its consistent course to increase the individual defense spending of allies, keeping in mind the sale of its own military products.

Meanwhile, the EU, being a strong economic player, manifests itself fairly passively when it comes to the issues of international security and strategic stability. In fact, the EU reacts weakly to Washington's deliberate undermining of the system of international treaties in the field of arms control and allows itself to be drawn into the sweeping demonization of Russia and in the course to intensify the confrontational line towards Moscow.

It is quite indicative that, despite the numerous conversations about the creation of a "European army", the prospects for the activities of such a structure as PESCO are still hard to see.²⁶

Nevertheless, no doubt that NATO will be able to "digest" the tendency towards "Euroseparatism" and will remain to exist as an Alliance. The potential problem, though, could come from a predicted even greater level of geopolitical aggressiveness of the Alliance - the "differentiated product" intended to become a condition for the survival of this structure.

Missed opportunities

Thus, we should note the chance, missed in the 90s, to build a truly democratic system of European security based on equality and taking into account the interests of all states on the continent. Instead, the Alliance, which virtually lost the reason for its existence with the end of the Cold War, has embarked on a course of expansion. As a result, the *dividing lines in Europe that existed in the Cold War bloc confrontation era were not erased but only moved further to the East.*

It is becoming increasingly clear that one of the goals of the Alliance's expansion was the desire to isolate Russia and create a "cordon sanitaire"

²⁶ Журкин В.В. Европейская армия: Поражения и победы. Общая политика безопасности Европейского Союза. М.: Международные отношения, 2012.

Jurkin V.V. Evropejskaja armija: Porazhenija i Pobedi. Obshsaja politika bezopasnosti Evropejskogo Sojuza. M.: Mejdunarodnije ontnoshenija, 2012.

around it. But, it is also more clear that it is impossible to address the common security issues without working jointly with Russia.

Meanwhile, a really alarming situation has now emerged, in contrast to the repeated periods of “cold spells” and “thaws” in relations with NATO - periods after the events in Yugoslavia in 1999 and after the armed venture of Saakashvili’s regime in South Ossetia in 2008, on the one hand, and after the signing of the Pratica di Mare Declaration on a new quality of cooperation in 2002 and after the NRC Lisbon summit, on the other.

This time the European countries are in fact participating in an aggressive anti-Russian policy, accompanied by a sharp increase in military presence near the borders of Russia and allied Belarus. That could only lead to the risks of unintentional incidents and an escalation of military and political tensions.

The crisis in Ukraine, which was triggered by the unconstitutional coup in 2014 and, more recently, around the elections in Belarus, as well as the fictitious “Russian threats” associated with them, are used today as an excuse for the militarization of Europe pursued at the expense of European taxpayers.

It is also fundamentally important to realize that the course to undermine the international legal order was taken by the West *long before* the Ukrainian crisis.

Long before the abovementioned events, NATO did not support any of the Russian initiatives to form a united and indivisible security space in Europe. The most tangible blow to strategic stability was delivered *long before* the Ukrainian and Georgian events – back in 2002 when the US unilaterally withdrew from the ABM Treaty.

The missed opportunity to sign the Charter for a New Europe back in 1990 is deliberately silenced. For many years, Russia was led to believe that the accession of Central and Eastern Europe countries to NATO would improve relations with Moscow and create a belt of states friendly to Russia. In fact, all this turned out to be a myth.

On the contrary, the core of the security policy of the Alliance states is now the thesis about the need for their special protection from Russia. The West apparently forgot that it was Russia that made a decisive contribution to the elimination of the Cold War material legacy. After all, it was Russia that carried out the demilitarization of Eastern Europe by withdrawing

troops out of there and making a specific contribution to strengthening European security.

Moreover, NATO expansion at the last stage occurs not due to the free choice of states, but due to their forceful involvement in the Alliance. This was the case with Montenegro, where they did not take into account the overwhelming opinion of its population, and North Macedonia, where the national referendum results were ignored. Thus, the main criterion for admitting new members is not their allegedly comprehensive compliance with NATO standards and requirements, but, above all, considerations of political expediency and geopolitical and strategic long-term calculations.

The threat of the escalation of tension hangs over Europe itself. The rise of aggressive radical nationalism and neo-Nazism and uncontrolled migration are overlaid with the lingering Cold War legacy.

Thus, contrary to the goals declared in the OSCE documents, *the European security space remains fragmented*.

At the same time, the bloc countries turned out to be not fully ready to cooperate equally with Russia in the areas of common interests and to build a genuinely inclusive European security architecture without dividing lines.

NATO is deliberately avoiding continuing constructive dialogue and systematic work on military issues. There are only occasional meetings and contacts, which does not provide an opportunity for de-escalation and defuse and for reducing military and political tensions in Europe.

It is obvious that the absence of civil and military cooperation with Russia (programs to combat terrorism and WMD proliferation do not in fact work) is a purely politically motivated decision. The only channel remained is the dialogue between military leaders, which really could be of help in the present circumstances aimed at reducing the risk of a military confrontation, but which is vividly not enough.

In general, it should be noted that it turned out to be more painful for the Western elites than expected to realize and admit that after a period of catastrophic disintegration processes in the territory of the USSR, nowadays the world has a serious player in the face of Russia.

And this player happens to have its own opinions and interests, which, if ignored, could only lead to instability and lack of balance. The legitimate

nature of the strategic interests of Russia is acknowledged by competent western experts.²⁷

It seems reasonable to continue strengthening the Western elites' awareness of this reality through political and diplomatic dialogue and expert meetings.

General suggestions

Given the limited potential of Russian influence on the state of affairs in NATO itself and the absence, in contrast to the 70s and 80s of the 20th century, of a significant anti-war protest political movement in Europe, it is important to develop a bilateral dialogue with Alliance individual participants.²⁸

The focus should be on the heavy demand for regular contacts between military experts in order to reduce the military threat and prevent unpredictable incidents.

Despite the presence of objective difficulties, the European space, often called the OSCE space, can still be a platform for an equal and non-politicized dialogue on the most pressing security issues.

De-escalation of military tensions, countering transnational threats, and conflict resolution are called upon to become the central areas of such a dialogue.

Taking into account the existing difficulties, it is appropriate to focus on the remaining structures of pan-European interaction, in particular, on the Vienna Document 2011 – without attempts to unreasonably modernize it – and on the Open Skies Treaty (OST), which, in our opinion, has not lost the main elements of its viability, despite the blow struck in the form of Washington's decision to withdraw from the Treaty.

As for the “structured dialogue” on security challenges, launched at the OSCE Ministerial Council in Hamburg in 2016, it has not brought the expected result yet. The Russia-NATO Council could have its say here. The

²⁷ Clinton Rich. Strategic Report // RAND, Cal., 2017.

²⁸ Public support for peace building. September 2017/ Sociology June –July 2017. [Electronic resource]. – URL: www.revalgeldesigns.co.uk

focus of attention could be a substantive expert dialogue on the military and political aspects of security with the involvement of the military. Possible topics include a discussion of ways to prevent incidents and dangerous military activities, as well as to reduce military activity along the Russia-NATO line of contact, and practical de-escalation measures.

Such a pragmatic approach could lead to the recovery of the dialogue and its activation and contribute to finding ways to restore confidence and reduce the confrontation level in Europe. However, such a dialogue is possible only based on equality and mutual consideration of interests.

At the same time, it is important not to politicize it and not to turn it into an additional mechanism of unilateral pressure on Russia and unfounded accusations against it.²⁹

It is difficult to say now whether such a dialogue will be able to turn into negotiations on a wide range of political and military issues, not to mention the real aspects of arms control.

In Europe, there are enough important and demanded topics directly related to the aspects of tight security. Among them are terrorism, organized crime, drugs, cybercrimes, and so on. All this needs a joint coordinated response.³⁰

We do not have to search for ready-made interaction structures. These are, on the one hand, the specialized structures of the OSCE. On the other hand, the CSTO, whose member countries have considerable experience in responding to such threats, have repeatedly expressed their readiness for interaction.

The CSTO partnership institute tends to build its capacity, including through the involvement of Chinese colleagues and the SCO's capabilities, in particular, open integration projects.

²⁹ Daniel R Coats Director of National Intelligence/ Worldwid Threat Assessment of the US Intelligence Community. Febr. 13, 2018. – P. 15. [Electronic resource]. – URL: https://www.aredmed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Coats_03-06-18.pdf; Russian Military Power. – Defense Intelligence Agency, 2017. P.1-VII, +86.

³⁰ Th.Freat, L.Kulesa, D.Raynova. Russia and NATO: How to overcome deterrence instability? / Euro-ATLANTIC Security Report/EuropeanLeadership Network, 2018. April. –P.2

It seems that the idea of a Greater Eurasian space is quite applicable to the security sphere and not only to joint economic and humanitarian projects. It is also quite compatible with the idea of building a continent-wide architecture of equal and indivisible security. It is important, at the same time, to rely on the decisions of the OSCE summit in Astana in 2010 on the establishment in Europe, in the OSCE area, of a free, democratic, common and indivisible community, which can be created if there is the proper political will.

For Russia, and ultimately for Europe as a whole, long-term security projects can be effective. In this context, it is worthwhile, in our opinion, to think about returning to the idea of a European Security Treaty, the Russian draft of which has been practically rejected upfront by Western partners in its own time.

Specific areas of interaction

The course towards the “forceful” containment of Russia objectively works to slow down the *2011 OSCE Vienna Document on confidence and security measures*. What kind of in-depth practical measures of transparency and trust, that is, measures to update the VD 2011, can we talk about in the atmosphere of deliberately increased confrontation, which, apparently, is considered as one of the instruments of the “policy to coerce” towards Russia? Not to mention the policy of sanctions and the lack of military cooperation.³¹

It seems that, under the current conditions, we can only talk about the fulfillment of existing obligations under the VD.

Meanwhile, this direction objectively has a significant potential to improve the military and political situation, which is difficult to realize without clarifying the fate of the Conventional Arms Control Regime in Europe (CACE). After all, we all understand that the CFE Treaty mechanism has long become a relic, and its adapted version did not find real support from NATO countries and never entered into force.

³¹ Gompert D., Binnendijk H. *Power to Coerce* // RAND Cal., 2016. P.5-10

As for the *fate of the CACE regime*, the development of new approaches to it is possible on the condition that the principles of equal and indivisible security, as well as a balance of rights and obligations, be observed.

At the same time, a joint discussion with the OSCE partners is highly desirable in order to find starting points for a possible transition to a practical conversation on the CACE new image. In this context, the question arose about finding an adequate platform to build a dialogue on such a basis. It seems that, given the objective prevailing circumstances, it will be very difficult to use the formal settings at the present. One would think about the possibilities provided by the “second” track, or better yet, by a “one-and-a-half” track. The very possibility to launch such a dialogue within the OSCE could be viewed as a positive dynamic.

The “structured dialogue” launched by the decision of the OSCE Ministerial Council in Hamburg (2016) deserves special consideration

This process made it possible to successfully start a frank and focused discussion of truly pressing issues: the perception of challenges and threats in the OSCE area, military doctrines, trends in the guise of armed forces and military exercises as well as and the risks arising from these trends, challenges to the rule of law in the field of European security and prospects for military contacts and cooperation.

Despite deep disagreements over the reasons for the current situation and the threat assessments, the dialogue participants have repeatedly spoken out in favor of overcoming negative trends and reducing the confrontation level, including by developing measures to prevent incidents, exercising mutual restraint and transparency, re-establishing military contacts, improving the implementation of existing agreements and developing new agreements on arms control as well as by building confidence and security.

In addition, despite the parties’ disagreements over the figures and facts characterizing the current military and political situation, the benefits of a joint analysis of relevant trends in order to create a generally accepted factual basis for further discussions were recognized.

However, it has proven difficult to develop commonly understood and recognized methodological aspects of such an analysis. The disagreements in approaches to ensuring security were too deep. First of all, these are fundamental differences in approaches to the goals, objectives, and coverage of the dialogue.

So, when adopting the relevant declaration of the Ministerial Council in Hamburg in 2016, many Europeans proceeded from the assumption that a change in the US leadership would allow to fairly quickly start rebuilding relations with Russia and, consequently, improving the situation (including military and political) in Europe. Accordingly, they also hoped to move away from general discussion to discuss specific agreements, in particular, on arms control, within a year.

When it became clear that it is here to stay, the “structured dialogue”, however, began to increasingly bog down in attempts to politicize the discussions and return them from consideration of specific military and political issues to fruitless debates about “violations of the fundamental OSCE principles”. Nevertheless, it should be admitted that the Americans have repeatedly stated during the discussions that they basically do not object to the Russian thesis that the “structured dialogue” at the current stage should be first aimed at de-escalating tensions.

However, not all representatives of Western countries agree with this thesis. Some of them continue, out of a long-standing habit, to talk about the intrinsic value of “transparency” and about the Vienna Document’s modernization. Others are not at all ready to limit the “structured dialogue” to talking only about the military aspects of security.

At the same time, the “old Europeans” would like to revive the conversation specifically on arms control and confidence-building measures and to look into options for de-escalating military and political tensions in the OSCE area.

Thus, there is no unity on a number of fundamental issues under the dialogue, even among Western countries.

It seems that progress in this direction is possible only with the active involvement of military experts and, what is most important, with the political will of all the participating states, which is not clearly visible yet.

The Chief of the General Staff of the Russian Federation, General of the Army, V.V. Gerasimov has been deliberately focusing on the importance of

the elaboration of specific measures aimed at de-escalating military tensions along the contiguity line of NATO and the RF. Concrete suggestions were transmitted to the NATO leadership in 2019.³²

It is certainly encouraging that most of the dialogue participants do not want to lose a potential channel of informal communication, primarily between the military, and the atmosphere at the site of the “structured dialogue” is calmer than at the weekly meetings of the OSCE Permanent Council and the FSC.

Thus, we have a right to draw a general conclusion: the Germans’ plans to gradually narrow the “corridor” of discussions in that area to military and political security aspects (consistent with the well-known Steinmeier’s initiative) have not worked yet.

However, it is highly revealing that nobody hastens to “bury” the initiative, also because no other “strategic” project has been developed to replace it.

Thus, the guidelines for the “structured dialogue” generally remain rather blurred, especially considering the attempts of a number of countries to channel the discussions towards criticism of Russia and attacks on it for “undermining the European order”. The future of this dialogue remains to be questionable.

Forum for Security Cooperation (FSC)

Speaking of the FSC, it should be emphasized that the situation in Ukraine and the ongoing crisis in Russia-West relations had a determining influence on its activities. Fundamental differences in approaches to the

³² The Chief of the General Staff of the Russian Federation, General of the Army V.V. Gerasimov has been deliberately focusing on the importance of the elaboration of specific measures aimed at de-escalating military tensions along the contiguity line of NATO and RF. Concrete suggestions were transmitted to the NATO leadership in 2019. See: Герасимов В.В. Роль и место контроля над вооружениями в системе обеспечения безопасности Российской Федерации. Московская Конференция по Европейской Безопасности // Под ред. А.И. Антонова 23-24 мая 2013 г. [Gerasimov V.V. Rol' I mesto kontrolja nad vooruzhenijami v sisteme obespechenija bezopasnosti RF / pod redakzii A.I. Antonova 23-24 maja 2013].

Russian Military Power: – Defense Intelligence Agency, 2017. P.1-VII, +86.

military and political situation assessment and the advancement prospects in key areas of the forum's activities were acutely revealed during the preparation and conduct of the OSCE Ministerial Council. It is getting harder to coordinate the final documents, even on seemingly "neutral" issues.

In this context, the results of Russia's chairmanship of the FSC (April–August 2017) look very illustrative. It appears that the course taken on focusing attention on topics uniting all OSCE participating States has paid off. As it is known, the best practices accumulated by Russia were submitted (preventing incidents on and above the high seas, countering the diversion of small arms and light weapons into illegal circulation, disposing ammunition, and creating an effective export control system). The speeches of the representatives of regional organizations involved in ensuring security – the speeches of the SCO Secretary-General (for the first time in the OSCE history) and the CSTO Deputy Secretary-General – aroused considerable interest.

Participants indicated that this, to a certain extent, contributed to the improvement of the atmosphere at the FSC and the intensification of the OSCE's cooperation with Russia and indicated organizations. Russia's chairmanship was well appreciated by other participating states.

It seems that the strict adherence to the VD - 2011 and other agreements, the de-escalation of the situation and the restoration of military contacts should remain among the important topics in the FSC activities and the "structured dialogue".

Open Skies Treaty (OST)

The situation around the OST is developing very ambiguously.

Most of the open skies missions were conducted in a spirit of mutual understanding and cooperation. The Open Skies Consultative Commission (OSCC) was engaged (in early 2017 – under Russia's chairmanship) to ensure the strict implementation of treaty provisions. The Small Format Group (Russia, the US, Canada, Germany, Poland, Italy, Sweden) searched for a mutually acceptable "package" solution to the problems of the Treaty implementation.

However, in line with the general escalation of tensions in relations with Russia, the US began to tighten its approaches, accusing Russia of violating the Treaty, primarily in connection with the introduction of the maximum flying range over the Kaliningrad region (500 km). The work in the “small format” was virtually curtailed by the US. In the fall of 2017, Washington took unilateral steps, which were announced to be aimed at returning Russia within the Treaty framework. These actions (canceling sleepovers at two airfields, changing the maximum flying range, redistributing open skies airfields, and refueling airfields and their functions) were frankly aimed at creating maximum inconvenience for Russian open skies missions conducted over the US.

In response, the Russian side was obliged to cancel sleepovers at three Russian airfields when carrying out flights with the participation of the US, as well as to terminate a number of bilateral technical agreements and unilateral measures that were used as a demonstration of good faith and previously facilitated the conduct of American missions over Russia.

It became clear that the spiral of measures and countermeasures would continue to unwind, with relevant consequences for the Treaty. Further developments confirmed these fears. An extremely destabilizing blow to the OST was delivered by the US withdrawal from the Treaty.

At the same time, there are indications (including the plans of a number of states to develop open skies aircraft and digital observation equipment) that many OST participants, primarily Western Europeans, would not want to lose the Treaty. Thus, two opposite trends in the development of the situation around the OST have emerged to date – confrontational and constructive.

It is very indicative that the prominent American politicians and experts give a high degree of significance for the Treaty: “Unilateral U.S. withdrawal from Open Skies would undermine American allies and friends” - that is the assessment of the situation with the OST by G. Shultz, W.J. Perry and S. Nunn in their memo sent to the US Administration and published in WSJ.³³

From a political point of view, it is the OST, together with the Vienna Document 2011 on confidence and security-building measures that

³³ Open Skies Help keep the Peace with Russia by George P. Shultz, William J. Perry and Sam Nunn, WSJ oct.20 2019. [Electronic resource]. URL: [https:// www. wsj. com](https://www.wsj.com)

represent a tool that, to some extent, ensures transparency and, accordingly, helps to stabilize the situation. We hope that common sense would prevail, and this important CBM will remain to be intact.

Important addition

On June 2, 2020, a very important and, in a sense, the unique document appeared in Russia. It can be described as a military-diplomatic memorandum in the field of nuclear deterrence. We are talking about the “Principles of the state policy of the Russian Federation in the field of nuclear deterrence”.³⁴

The document, among other things, is apparently directly related to the issues under discussion, since, for the first time in modern Russian history, it clearly formulates conditions and threats, in the presence of which Russia can and must use its nuclear missile potential.

These include the deployment of ballistic missiles, hypersonic weapons and the ABM systems by the countries that consider Russia as a possible adversary. In addition, the build-up by the likely adversary of general-purpose forces on the borders of Russia and its allies, as well as the creation and deployment of missile defence assets and strike systems in space were identified as threats that could force Russia to use nuclear weapons in certain conditions.

These conditions for a nuclear strike by Russia are clearly formulated. This is the launch of ballistic missiles on the territory of Russia and its allies, a WMD attack against Russia, the impact on critical state or military facilities, as well as the aggression against Russia using conventional weapons with a threat to the existence of the Russian Federation as a state. In this context, the document is a follow-up of the existing military doctrine.³⁵

³⁴ Указ Президента РФ от 02.06. 2020 № 355 « О основах государственной политики РФ в области ядерного сдерживания». – URL: <https://www.kremlin.ru>
Ukaz Prezidenta PF ot 02.06.2020 № 355 «Ob osnovah gosudarstvennoj politiki v oblasti jdnogo sderzhivaniya». [Electronic resource]. – URL: <https://www.kremlin.ru>

³⁵ Военная доктрина Российской Федерации (утв. Президентом РФ 25 декабря 2014 года. № Пр-2976). [Electronic resource]. – URL: <https://base.garant.ru/70830556/>

As paradoxical as it may sound, let us allow to assert that the document in terms of its essence, focus and clarity objectively works as a confidence-building measure, and not only among de jure and de facto nuclear states. It could as well be generally applied to the security issues in the Euro-Atlantic area.

It distinctly recognizes that nuclear weapons are a last resort and are viewed solely as a deterrent. Besides, the conditions and procedures for making a decision on Russia's use of its nuclear potential are clearly formulated, and any country can correlate its military policy with the way how Russia will react to it.

At the same time, the document warns those who are deploying or preparing to deploy systems threatening the Russian nuclear deterrent forces on their territory that their actions will not be simply ignored.

Simultaneously, the document removes all speculations and concerns regarding Russia and its "aggressiveness" and debunks various nuclear strategies that were falsely attributed to Russia, such as, for example, "escalate to de-escalate" and others.

The reaction to this document of Russia's strategic opponents, the US, is very interesting. Thus, former US Deputy Secretary of State Frank A. Rose, well-known in the circles of arms control negotiators, and already cited in this thesis, asserts: "If Putin says that they will use nuclear weapons in exceptional circumstances, then it is much better than previous statements about the use of nuclear weapons against US allies because they participate in legitimate defense cooperation..."

As conclusions

It is becoming increasingly clear that the world is entering a phase of high international tension. The combination of the financial, economic, social, energy and oil crisis – and in various regions, the military and political crisis as well – with the coronavirus pandemic can lead to a sharp deterioration in relations between key world players. Contradictions are

[Voennaya doktrina Rossijskoj Federacii (utv.Prezidentom RF 25 dekabrya 2014 g. № Pr-2976). – URL: <https://base.ga.garant.ru/70830556/>]

growing. They are exacerbated by the contradictions between the globalist-minded Western elites and those segments of them that are focused on national development.

Tensions are also growing in Europe. All this requires maximum mutual restraint and work to find adequate political and diplomatic steps aimed at strengthening confidence and strategic stability.

Obviously, the European direction remains central for Russian foreign policy, including because of the negative historical experience. It was Europe that posed the main threat to Russia's security and sometimes to its existence.

The current state of affairs in the field of European security is unlikely to satisfy all of us Europeans. It is necessary to develop new forms. A substantive and productive dialogue is required to overcome mutual fears and increase the level of trust. The re-establishment of professional contacts, including at the military level, is needed in order to avoid misunderstanding of each other's intentions and prevent the descent into an uncontrolled escalation of tension. As an urgent measure, it would be important to ensure the reduction of military activity along the Russia-NATO line of contact.

A reliable and long-term solution to the problems is possible in the modern world only on the sound basis of international law through cooperation between countries and their consolidation in the interests of solving common problems.

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RUSSIA, THE EU, AND CHINA: FOREIGN POLICY INITIATIVES IN CENTRAL, EASTERN AND SOUTH-EASTERN EUROPE (CESEE)

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Abstract: In the late 20th century the countries of Central, Eastern and Southeastern Europe (CESEE) faced a deep crisis, which had economic, political, and ideological aspects. The crisis of socialist ideas, the dissolution of the Eastern bloc structures, and the breakup of the Soviet Union have changed the whole European system of international relations.

In the last decade of the 20th century and the first decade of the new century, the CESEE countries were busy reforming. The search for new, more effective ways of political and economic development under the conditions of a single option resulted in the adoption of liberal democracy and the market economy as development models. This predetermined the pro-western foreign policy priorities of the CESEE states. By the early 2000s, part of them joined NATO and the EU. Other states continued to carry out reforms in close coordination with these organizations.

Russia managed to 'come back' to CESEE only in the mid-2000s. By that time, it had redefined its foreign policy interests, which had been largely influenced by the Balkan crisis and NATO enlargement, and had been on the way to complete the economic recovery.

The early 2010s were marked by the emergence of China as another major international actor in CESEE.

Research question: what are the consequences of China's emergence in the eastern part of Europe for the European system of international relations, which already includes the EU and Russia as major players?

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Hypothesis: a growing competition between the EU and China in CESEE is highly likely. Competition between the EU and Russia will continue, mostly because of the diverging values and approaches to the desired setup of international relations. Russia may avoid competition with China due to the specific features of its foreign policy in the region. The CESEE states can win from the presence of the three actors.

The following issues will be covered:

Which states Russia, the EU and China regard as CESEE;

Features of Russian, EU and Chinese foreign policies in CESEE (their interests, available foreign policy resources, and practices of foreign policy implementation);

The new geopolitical situation in CESEE, created by the presence of the three major foreign policy actors.

The research will be based on the analysis of Russian, EU (enlargement and Eastern Partnership) and Chinese ("Belt and Road Initiative", "17+1") foreign policy initiatives in CESEE.

Proceeding from these sources, the author will conclude on:

The specific situation in CESEE, where three players are interested in intensifying their relations with regional states;

Common and divergent features of Russian, EU and Chinese foreign policies;

The importance of the CESEE states for Russia, the EU and China.

For many years, the countries of Central, Eastern and Southeastern Europe (CESEE) have been at the centre of interest of the leading powers of the world. Their location – close to the developed countries of Western Europe, Russia, and the Middle East – has been the key to their importance for the world. During the Cold war, attention to the region was driven mostly by strategic security issues. After the dissolution of the Socialist bloc, it was regional security and economic matters that made the centres of power keep their eyes on it.

Apart from geographic adjacency, the CESEE countries do not have much in common. What can be named as a recent common historic ground is the choice of further development strategy they had to make after the end of the Cold war and the wish to reach the level of socioeconomic development performed by Western Europe. The reforms of the early 1990s marked a symbolic breakaway from the decades of socialist development. However, both starting positions for transformations and their results varied. More than 15 years after joining

the EU, the average GDP per capita indicators in the “new” EU member states are well below that of Western Europe.

Differences in terms of political, economic, and social development have made it clear that one needs a more differentiated approach to elaborate an appropriate foreign policy towards these states. At the very least, three groups can be distinguished in the area. The first one includes those that managed to finalize the pro-western reforms in the 1990s and joined the EU and NATO. As their full members, the states of this group carry out national policies in line with the strategic approaches of these organizations. The other two groups include the post-Soviet and Balkan states. Unlike the Central European countries, these states had a vast intra-regional agenda that was holding them back in their economic development. Also, in the early 1990s, there was no unanimous wish to join Western European structures and no clear invitation from the EU and NATO to join. For over 30 years, the post-Soviet and Balkan states have been less successful in carrying out domestic reforms and still strive to apply a tested and working model. External resources are needed to improve the economic situation and the well-being of people.

In the new world, after the financial and economic crisis of 2008-2011, there was a wider choice of external resources and foreign initiatives offered not only by the EU and NATO. The changed external conditions, dissatisfaction with the economic situation, and, for some non-EU states in CESEE, the traditions of multilateral foreign policies made them eager to see whether there are possible partners not only to the west but also to the east of their borders. The EU vector remains very strong and, practically, unchallenged in their foreign policies, but it is supplemented by a thorough consideration of what is offered by other players, like China and Russia. Unable and unwilling to stick to just one foreign policy direction, they have been trying to combine the opportunities that the external actors were offering. For that reason, their foreign policies are often described as multipolar.

Until the end of the first decade of the 2000s, the EU, the US and Russia were among the ‘non-regional’ international actors visibly present in CESEE. For the EU, which has been on the rise since its establishment in the early 1990s, these countries became the main area for the implementation of regional, enlargement, and common foreign and security policies. With the backup offered by the US and NATO in means of ideological, economic and military partnership, the EU was effective in

establishing permanent frameworks of relations with the countries of the region. For some of them, close ties with the EU resulted in EU membership.

For Russia, a proactive foreign policy was an internationally visible sign of its economic recovery. Its reappearance in CESEE in the mid-2000s was characterized by the attempts to establish a new type of economic relations with its former socialist partners. Active policy in the region was important to ensure that the system of international relations continues to work based on international law principles.

In the second decade of the 21st century, China became one more foreign policy actor, which was highly interested in the CESEE states. For China, the CESEE states became important as the key link between China and the leading European states. Once again in history, the strategic geographic location made these states important for a number of external actors.

The US seemed to be the first to raise the alarm about the growing international presence of China. It was seen as jeopardizing the US influence and “challenging the American power”.² The National Security Strategy named China (along with Russia) “revisionist powers” and accused them of “shaping a world antithetical to US values and interests”.³ According to the US 2017 assessments, China was “reasserting its influence regionally and globally”.⁴ To counter such tendencies seen as negative in the US, it started to oppose Chinese international initiatives and took a number of protectionist measures, which turned into a trade war between the two countries.

Unlike the US, the EU at first was less alarmist in its assessments of Chinese foreign policy. In the second decade of the 2000s, Brussels had a hard time overcoming the consequences of the world financial and economic crisis and was facing a number of other regional challenges. One was the 2014-2016 migration crisis when the EU was flooded with refugees, mostly from the Middle East and Northern Africa. Still not fully recovered from the economic and debt crisis, the EU faced the

² The US National Security Strategy, 2017. P.2.

³ The US National Security Strategy, 2017. P. 25.

⁴ The US National Security Strategy, 2017. P. 27.

deterioration of domestic security, which accompanied the migration crisis. Another regional challenge came from a neighbouring Ukraine. The international consequences of the Ukrainian crisis, which started in 2014, led to the disruption of normal and regular political relations with Russia and the fall of bilateral trade by over 40%. Under these circumstances, the EU was reluctant to follow the foreign policy of its closest ally and partner in starting both trade and geopolitical competition with its second-largest trade partner, China. However, Chinese activity in CESEE and its growing economic presence in the “old” EU member states, like Greece and Germany, had triggered the EU response. With some reservations, “the West” showed its common approach to the international challenges coming from Asia.

Thus, complicated relations between the US, the EU, Russia and China in the 2010s were projected to CESEE. The new competitive and multilateral structure of international relations was responsible for very certain assessments and strategies of the major foreign policy actors in CESEE. On this playground, regarded as a sphere of western interests, the US felt necessary to compete with China and prevent it from challenging the US international leadership, while the EU expressed its intention to preserve the strategic partnership with the US and keep its grip on CESEE. Chinese activity in the region is seen in the West as part of a global master plan to challenge the weakened western-oriented world order and set off the competition. In this respect, Russia, which had problematic relations with the US and the EU since the beginning of the Ukrainian crisis, and did not show any renewed activity in CESEE that could bring about more tensions and seemed here a minor irritant for the West. Nevertheless, here it was regarded as a Chinese partner in creating a network of alternative global governance and financial institutions.

EU foreign policy initiatives

The European Union can only partly be considered an external actor for CESEE. The most proactive and high-performance period of its foreign policy here fell in the 1990s and early 2000s, in the run-up to its largest eastern enlargement. In 2004 and 2007, a large part of these states bordering the EU became the EU members. In 2003, at the Thessaloniki Summit, the Western Balkans were promised to become the EU members.

The same year saw the start of the European Neighbourhood Policy. That was the time when the EU, as a pole of attraction was at its high, and other major foreign policy actors considered in this paper, like Russia and China, were not offering any alternative initiatives that could be presumably beneficial for CESEE.

From 2007 on, the EU distinguishes between new member states, EU candidates, potential candidates, and neighbourhood partners. By the early 2010s, the EU organized its foreign policy towards the rest of the non-EU CESEE states via Enlargement and Neighbourhood Policies, which have a lot in common except for the EU membership result. However, noteworthy is that candidates, potential candidates and partners in the neighbourhood also include states outside CESEE (Turkey, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia). To be more precise in addressing the states of the region, the EU most frequently uses a geographic term the “Western Balkans”, which has been repeatedly named as the next in line of states to join the EU.

Under the conditions of competitiveness with China in the second decade of the 2000s, the EU continues to carry out enlargement policy in the Western Balkans. According to the EU Global Strategy, the EU is interested in the Western Balkans (and Turkey) as necessary partners to tackle ‘the challenges of migration, energy security, terrorism, and organized crime’.⁵ The ‘strategic challenge’ for the enlargement agenda is to promote ‘political reform, the rule of law, economic convergence and good neighbourly relations in the Western Balkans’ (and Turkey). Therefore, in its policies towards the region, the EU is guided by the interests of its own security and economic development. Not least important is the ability to attract and transform the states bordering the EU, seen as a proof of its international soft power influence. The challenges identified by the EU are to be fought by means of promoting “common values”, strengthening the capabilities of states, good governance, and tighter cooperation with the EU. Such priorities are expected to bring peace and prosperity to the region.

The EU ‘domestic’ difficulties – like debt crises in a number of member states, Brexit, migration and terrorism have affected the EU Western

⁵ Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe. A Global Strategy for the European Union’s Foreign And Security Policy. June 2016, p. 24.

Balkans and neighbourhood policies. The concept of resilience has become central to both. The term is positioned as a unique EU foreign policy instrument meant to give the answers to practically any challenges. However, the word implies that the responsibility for fighting the threats and challenges is transferred from the EU to the partner states. They are supposed to become 'resilient' with the support of the EU, which 'enjoys a unique influence' in the Western Balkans and is seen as a development model in the neighbourhood. The 2018 EU Commission Strategy⁶ renewed the membership perspective. However, it called on the states to pay more attention, not only to the traditional reform process but to the irregular migration issues.

Therefore, the EU policy in the region is fully in line with its foreign policy practices. Common values, trade, and integration helped Europe to overcome post-war difficulties. Enlargement strategy with the ideas of "common values", good governance and EU law adoption is based on the experience of bringing Central European states into the EU. The attractiveness served as an additional stimulus for reform when it was needed. It opened new markets to the producers of goods from the EU member states. It demonstrated the superiority of the Western European market economy model and symbolized the increase of EU influence.

The EU applies foreign policy resources at its disposal and trusts the methods that have been checked. However, a number of trends affect existing resources negatively. The economic resources – trade and investment – were hit by the financial and economic crisis. Brexit and the coronavirus downturn may be responsible for the further shortage of available trade and financial resources. The conditionality principle, which proved its effectiveness in stimulating change, continues to serve the EU foreign policy. However, it only works when the EU is attractive to its partners, and the countries believe that the EU-sealed domestic reforms will bring positive change. In this respect, migration, Brexit and the coronavirus response work against the EU and affects both its finances and attractiveness.

Moreover, since 2014, there is also an example of a failed implementation of the EU-recommended reforms reducing the EU's

⁶ A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans, Strasbourg, 6.2.2018, COM (2018) 65 final.

appeal. Ukraine did not succeed despite the huge financial support in the last 6 years after the coup of 2014. So far, the pro-EU information resources have covered these negative sides, but the EU's turn to the "resilience" principle can be seen as a sign that it seeks some "safety measures" that would free them of responsibility in case the reforms fail.

Chinese foreign policy initiatives

China revitalized its foreign policy with the election of a new leader, Xi Jinping, who took steps to ensure China's global presence. That was a serious deviation from the foreign policy principles formulated by Deng Xiaoping and reiterated by his successors. The principles provided for "hiding the capacities and biding the time" as well as "maintaining a low profile and never claiming leadership". However, such "staying in the shadow" of the world politics now contradicted the economic and political weight gained by China in 20 years, which became especially evident during the global 2008-2011 financial and economic crisis.

Xi Jinping initiated China's more targeted and visible international participation. Its foreign policy was aimed at reforming the global governance system, setting up globalization that would be "more inclusive and mutually beneficial", and "closer multilateral and multilevel cooperation promoting common development".⁷ Therefore, China's interests are primarily of political and economic character, i.e., strengthening its role in the international arena and the world trade.

To achieve these interests China started by being proactive on multilateral forums. In 2012-2014, it was BRICS that presented some of the China-proposed foreign policy initiatives. In 2014 the forum gave way to the establishment of a New Development Bank with an initial authorized capital of US \$100 and US \$100 billion BRICS Pool of Conventional Currency Reserves (with the largest share offered by China, US \$41 billion). From the very beginning, both financial structures were aimed at supporting infrastructure and sustainable development projects.

⁷ Wang Yi, State Councilor and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Speech at the inauguration ceremony of the Xi Jinping Thought on Diplomacy Studies Centre / July 20, 2020. https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1799305.shtml

Later, China kept the same focus on infrastructural networks when it turned to presenting initiatives on its own.

The global outreach of China's foreign policy was responsible for its interest in Central and Eastern Europe. Its initiatives in the region include the "17+1" (initially, the "16+1") and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The BRI came into being in 2013 as an umbrella initiative for the two projects – the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road. The BRI has a global set of countries it addresses (in Asia, Eurasia, Europe, and Africa), and proceeds from a set of priorities which include policy coordination, infrastructure connectivity, unimpeded trade, financial integration, and connecting people.⁸ The huge geographic scope made infrastructure projects key to the implementation of this initiative. Two of the proposed routes have Europe as their endpoints – the New Eurasian Landbridge Economic Corridor and the China – Central Asia – Western Asia Economic Corridor. The BRI-involved countries in CESEE are Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, and Poland. Thus, the list comprises three post-Soviet Eastern European states, three Baltic post-Soviet EU member states, and just one Central European country, located on the BRI routes.

Although "17+1" was established before the BRI, it supplements the Belt and Road. Interestingly, the Chinese offer makes no significant distinctions between the EU members and the non-members, putting the stress on the common interest, which unites them – to renew the outdated infrastructure and to increase bilateral trade. Hence, among the participants initially were 11 EU members, 5 Balkan non-EU states. Greece was the last one to join the "17+1" in March 2019. The implementation of the initiative, however, added another issue to China's strategic dialogue with the EU. Like the BRI, the "17+1" contains humanitarian cooperation aspects, which means increased intercultural links, student and academic exchanges, and the Chinese language courses.⁹ Since their inception, the activities were supported by a US \$10 billion credit line by Chinese financial institutions.

⁸ Belt and Road Initiative // <https://www.beltroad-initiative.com/belt-and-road/>

⁹ China's Twelve Measures for Promoting Friendly Cooperation with Central and Eastern European Countries, 26.01.2015. http://www.china-ceec.org/eng/zdogjhz_1/t1410595.htm

China's foreign policy in its post-2012 version is aiming to apply the financial resources that China can now distribute abroad. The projects in CESEE are primarily economic, although, to some extent, they serve the interest of China's new global positioning. All projects are well supported by the Chinese state and China-based international financial institutions – the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), The Export and Import Bank of China, the National Development Bank, the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China, the Construction Bank of China, etc. In CESEE, like elsewhere, it proceeds from the principles of “common good” generally meaning “common economic good” and economic prosperity of the people and “the progress of humanity”.¹⁰ Unlike the EU, it does not seek to spread its values or, in the Chinese case, “socialism with Chinese characteristics”,¹¹ but is proud of its experience of effectively tackling the economic and financial crises and is ready to share the experience of long-lasting sustainable economic growth.¹² Infrastructure as a priority for both CESEE projects demonstrates that China's interest is to have a smooth transport corridor and an entrance to the EU internal market.

Russian foreign policy in CESEE

In Russia, the region to the west of its borders and up to Germany and Austria in the west is more often described as “Central and Eastern

¹⁰ Wang Yi, State Councilor and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Speech at the inauguration ceremony of the Xi Jinping Thought on Diplomacy Studies Centre / July 20, 2020. https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1799305.shtml

¹¹ Wang Yi, State Councilor and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Speech at the inauguration ceremony of the Xi Jinping Thought on Diplomacy Studies Centre / July 20, 2020. https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1799305.shtml,

Wei Liu Combining Marxism and China's practices for the development of a socialist political economy with Chinese characteristics // China Political Economy Vol. 1 No. 1, 2018 pp. 30-44.

¹² Wang Yi, State Councilor and Minister of Foreign Affairs of The People's Republic of China, Speech At the French Institute of International Relations, Paris, 30 August 2020. “Upholding the Trend of Peace and Development of Our World with Unity, Cooperation, Openness and Inclusiveness”. 31.08.2020. https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjlb_663304/zjzg_663340/xos_664404/xwlb_664406/t1810696.shtml

Europe”, “Eastern Europe” (both terms used for Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary), “Southeastern Europe” (“Balkan states”) and the “post-Soviet states” and the “Baltic states”.¹³ However, the term “CESEE” can still be found in some papers as a tribute to the Soviet designation of a region. With regard to the changes that these countries have gone through after the end of the Cold war and the differences between them, geographic and regional names are also in circulation. In most cases, except for the Baltic, the post-Soviet states, which are not part of the EU, are not meant among CESEE states.

In the 1990s, Russia was out of CESEE. With the dissolution of the Soviet Union, there was no understanding of what Russian foreign policy should look like and what foreign policy interests should lay at its core. Furthermore, the country fell short of resources to conduct a proactive policy abroad. In the foreign policy documents, the states of CESEE were excluded from the foreign policy priorities, even though they were still close to the Russian borders. Russian foreign policy was aimed at building up relations with the US and western European countries, which could secure Russia’s international recognition and its “inclusion” into the developed western “world”. Metaphorically, it looked like Russia was communicating with the EU and with western European states “over the heads” of the CESEE states.

At a political level, there were a number of issues, hindering the establishment of active and friendly relations with the states of the region. On the one hand, ideologically, Russia was no longer posing a development model. On the other, the pro-western governments, which came to power after the communist governments were overthrown in 1989, turned their full attention to the west. Also, with some countries (Poland, Hungary, Czech Republic, the Baltic states), there were some historical issues that were highly important for the political forces in power and made Russia an unwanted partner. For the Balkan states, such ideological and historic issues in relations with Russia were not the case, but this group was entangled in intra-regional ethnic and confessional conflicts. Under these conditions, Russia could only offer its mediating services and not a full-fledged cooperation initiative.

¹³ Центральная и Юго-Восточная Европа. Конец XX – начало XXI вв. Аспекты общественно-политического развития. Историко-политологический справочник. М.; СПб.: Нестор-История, 2015. 480 с. (с. 8)

Russia's comeback to the international arena with a proactive foreign policy took place only after it had managed to overcome the economic downturn of the 1990s. In 2006 the first signs of this new policy became evident. A new understanding of foreign policy interests came to a couple of years earlier. Interestingly, it was the events in the Balkans that have led to a profound transformation of Russian foreign policy. The 1999 NATO aggression against Yugoslavia was the moment of clarity when Russia came to understand that its interests abroad do not coincide with the interests of western states. NATO eastward expansion, which followed, strengthened Russia's new perception of its role in the world.

The current Foreign policy concept of Russia, which was adopted in 2016, does not mention any of the CESEE states or this region as a whole. This is a change from the previous Russian Foreign policy concept of 2013. The 2013 document contained a passage on the Balkan region in South-East Europe, which had an important strategic location and was a key infrastructure and transit hub for Russian oil and gas supply to Europe.¹⁴

In the 2016 Concept, Russian policy towards the CESEE states is included in a broader abstract dealing with Russia's policy in fostering economic integration in Eurasia and possible interlinkages and harmonization between Eurasian, European, and Asian integration.¹⁵ Also, some of the passages dealing with the transit of goods and resources, including energy resources, can be applied to the CESEE states like the ones lying on the transit routes and being responsible for a secure supply of goods.

Despite the vague official description of policies towards CESEE and lack of multilateral regional initiatives, some of these is carried out by Russian state companies. Thus, Gazprom, Rosatom and Russian Railway are among the companies with infrastructure projects in the CESEE and ensure the Russian presence there. The Turkish Stream so far has been the biggest project with most CESEE countries involved and interested in gas supply. Some of the projects include people-to-people contacts meant to support intercultural links.¹⁶

¹⁴ Foreign policy concept of Russia, 12.02.2013.

¹⁵ Foreign policy concept of Russia, 30.11.2016.

¹⁶ See: International projects of the Russian Railway.
<https://rzdint.ru/activity/project.php?page=RS>

Like in cases of foreign policies of the EU and China, Russian foreign policy proceeds from the interests it has in the region and from the foreign policy resources at its disposal. It checks whether it is possible to strengthen Eurasian and European integration linkages and to improve regional transit capabilities. Also, it is working on the bilateral level to support cultural and humanitarian cooperation, keep links between Slavic peoples, preserve religious and historic ties, and more specifically, the common perception of the Second World War history. Like China, Russia promotes the idea of cooperation and development for the common economic good. Lack of multilateral foreign policy initiatives with sets of cooperation offers can be explained by the low importance of CESEE as a region for the build-up of the Russian international role. In the absence of financial resources and trade volumes compared to that of the EU or China, Russia offers multilaterally specific infrastructure projects, which are, nevertheless, important due to the importance of energy resources and infrastructure in general.

Since the beginning of the 2010s, there have been a number of initiatives in CESEE by several global actors. The EU, China and Russia became aware of each other's presence and, in the overall context of the structure of international relations, started to regard each other as competitors. Meanwhile, a closer look at the policies of the three actors demonstrates that some differences can prevent the situation from turning into the race and a "zero-sum game".

First, The EU is the only actor vitally interested in preserving its influence in the region. It is also the actor that has already disbursed most of the financial and consultative resources.

Second, only China and the EU have comparable trade and financial resources to compete with each other.

Third, the interests of the three actors in the region vary. For the EU, essential are the interests of security (including "soft security" issues like irregular migration, organized crime), the access to the markets of its adjacent states, the demonstration of its ability to facilitate political and economic reform in other countries, and to spread "European values". In

the EU case, infrastructure projects are serving the aim of better trade and a more attractive EU image.

For China, it is important to create infrastructural conditions for growing trade volumes and to ensure access to the EU internal market. The CESEE states are only a small part of the global BRI initiative and cannot ensure the success of the whole project. Security issues are not among the top priorities.

For Russia, policy towards CESEE is important to create favourable conditions for its energy and goods transportation to the EU markets. Also, this is the only region in the world with Slavic and, partly, the Christian Orthodox population with which it still seeks to keep traditional ties. Unlike the EU and China, Russia lacks full-fledged multilateral initiatives for CESEE. Its foreign policy focus is on the post-Soviet states, which, in the Russian view, belong to the post-Soviet region, although they are geographically in Eastern Europe.

Finally, available foreign policy instruments demonstrate that competition is possible only between the EU and China. Russia can get involved in the competition not because of its policy in the region, but because of the ongoing shift in international relations and its positions on other key issues of international relations.

AMERICAN GEOPOLITICS IN CONTEMPORARY EURASIA: WHAT MUST BE DONE AND CAN GLOBAL LEADERSHIP BE PRESERVED?

Dušan Proroković¹

Abstract: The research question that is being answered is: *Can the United States retain its position as a global leader?* Or: What does the United States need to do to get back to its position before 2008? The theoretical framework in which the answer is sought is classical geopolitics. More specifically, the dualistic concept of the constant clash of the Tellurocratic and Thalassocratic forces, the Continental and the Maritime powers. Therefore, the scenarios that predict what the United States has to do are directly derived from geopolitical logic. The specific methods used in this research are analysis, synthesis, abstraction, induction, and deduction. The research aims to examine the potential activities the United States can take to maintain global leadership. In this context, the research objective is related to scientific description and prediction.

Keywords: American geopolitics, Thalassocracy, global leadership, China, Russia, Japan, Europe, Islam.

Introduction

Make America Great Again! It was a slogan in 2016 Donald Trump's presidential campaign. And after that, Trump continued to use it. Actually,

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The paper presents findings of a study developed as a part of the research project "Serbia and challenges in international relations in 2020", financed by the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia, and conducted by Institute of International Politics and Economics, Belgrade.

this slogan is just a derivative of Ronald Reagan's 1980 election campaign: *Let's make America great again*. Even then, in the early eighties, the United States was facing big challenges. Reagan succeeded. (Hayward, 2009, pp. 403–558) America has become great again. The greatest! Victory in the Cold War left the United States (the US) as the only superpower in world politics. The new world order was unipolar. Can Trump make America great again? Can America return to the positions it held before 2008? In 2011, "the Pentagon's new strategic guidance" was named: Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for the 21st Century Defense. (Hammes, 2012, p. 1)

This paper presents one scenario: what America needs to do "to become great again". Namely, what to do to return to previous positions. The theoretical framework is classical geopolitics. More specifically, the dualistic concept of the constant clash of the Tellurocratic and Thalassocratic forces, the Continental and the Maritime powers. (Proroković, 2018a, pp. 31–44) Of course, the United States is the largest thalassocratic force, maritime power seen in world history so far. The fact that Trump returned to Reagan's slogan shows us that the US position is in jeopardy. Or more precisely, that US global leadership is being jeopardized.

Geopolitical problems and security threats for the United States

The question is: Can America keep global leadership? American global domination is over, and leadership is seriously endangered. (Zakaria, 2008, pp. 49–128; Ferguson, Zakaria, 2017) Numerous factors show that we are witnessing the creation of the multi-polar world. In this new multi-polar structure, the United States could be the most powerful military and one of the most powerful economic poles in the world. (Proroković, 2018b) But current trends in international politics suggest that this may not be enough for the United States to sustain a possible "new global leadership".

New (macro) regional geopolitical players appear in different parts of the world, who, in order to realize their interests, are ready to push out the American interests. Of course, the US is more or less present in all parts of the world and capable to defend its interests "to some extent". Compared to the current situation and especially to the US position in international

relations during Bill Clinton's second term and the first term of George W. Bush, it would mean significant erosion.

There are three major "internal problems" that the United States is facing in international politics. The first one is an unstoppable process of the decline of American economic power on a global scale. (Lachmann, 2011, pp. 44–49) While in the period immediately after World War II, the US economy accounted for almost half of the global economy, today's this comes down to a quarter. The current economic crisis only further undermines the US position. The second problem is the fact that the image of the United States in the world has changed in the last two decades. The seductiveness of "the American values" is gone. According to Zbigniew Brzezinski, globalization has also made the global awakening that is distinctly anti-American. (Brzezinski, 2012) After the scandal with *Wikileaks* and information discovered by Edward Snowden, American talks about the struggle for democracy, reforms, and human rights have lost credibility. This makes it harder for the US to rely on "soft power". The third problem is the decline of military domination. American rivals are increasing their military expenses, and they are constantly developing new weapons. However, it is important to underline that the weakening of the US in this area is the least evident since the United States continues to spend on defense as all other countries in the world together. Despite all, the military force remains an instrument on which the US can rely on in realizing its foreign political goals.

In order to keep global domination, the United States needs to work on achieving economic consolidation, keeping technological supremacy, and modernization of the existing (development of new) kind of weapons. This requires a change in current trends. And this change is impossible without stopping rivals in different parts of the world. Increasing aggressiveness in foreign politics and daring performances of new (macro) regional powers present an "external problem" for the US. Therefore, the battle that the US will lead in the next decades will primarily be geopolitical!!

What are the most important "foreign problems" for the United States: 1) China's continuous economic growth (economic empowerment has caused and increased allocations for military purposes) and its geo-economic positioning in East Africa, Southeast Asia, the eastern part of Central Asia, and partly in the Middle East and Western Eurasia (Eastern Europe); 2) institutional and economic consolidation and military

strengthening of Russia (including the modernization of all types of weapons and equipment); 3) desire of long-standing partners, the leading West European countries and Japan, to play a more independent role and on certain issues even to go against the American interests; 4) struggle for leadership in the (so-called) Muslim world; 5) reduction of regional powers technological delay in comparison to the US; 6) strengthening of anti-Americanism in different parts of the world, especially between Muslims.

How to keep global leadership: Priorities in American geopolitics

Therefore, the following priorities are imposed on the United States: containment of China; exhaustion of Russia; controlling of the EU and Japan; directing Islam. Successful resolution of these “external problems” would be a “half-way” to solving the “internal problems”. These priorities are interconnected in a great deal. Exhaustion of Russia could open room for directing China towards the Russian Far East territories and for the redirection of the West European NATO members towards the Russian sphere of interests in the east part of Eurasia. The weakening of the Russian position is, on the one hand, suitable for the US, but on the other hand, it would also strengthen the position of China and the EU, which is not in the American interest. China’s rapid decline would arouse geopolitical expansionism in Japan, and due to that Japan would eventually become a US rival in the Pacific. The direction of Islam could produce a great inter-civilizational conflict that could contribute to the containment of China, exhaustion of Russia and control of the EU, but it could also turn out into a large intra-civilizational conflict that will, even more, complicate the situation in the Middle East. This is why it is hard to define what should be the order of the realization of these priorities. Maybe some of them could be realized simultaneously, but they should certainly be well-coordinated for a long period. How could the aforementioned priorities be realized?

Containment of China

The containment of China would mean bringing down its current (three decades old) economic growth and successful control of future economic trends. US military resources in the Pacific seem to be insufficient for the

containment of China's geo-economic influence, and reliance on the coastal-insular "geostrategic arc" South Korea–Japan–Taiwan–Philippines could have only a limited effect. (Hammes, 2012, pp. 3-7) These resources can help to stop China's exit to the World Sea, but this does not mean the desired containment. The containment of China will only be successful if the following three measures are realized: 1) creation of an effective continental geostrategic arc at the southwestern border of China. In this context, it would be significant for the US to encourage the India-China rivalry, but also to work on bringing Myanmar and Vietnam to its sphere of interests; 2) prevention of China's strategic linkage with Russia; 3) disabling further strengthening of China-Pakistan relations. Immediate steps to achieve these three measures would probably be the following: 1) obstruction of the BRICS work in order not to allow the improvement of Sino-Indian relations and the Sino-Russian strategic connection through this multilateral configuration; 2) constant disruption of Sino-Russian cooperation always and on every place, creating a public opinion that the Sino-Russian conflict is inevitable in the future (China needs resources and the Russian Far East territories are sparsely populated!); 3) working on attaining a more significant influence on Kazakhstan. Kazakhstan is one of two Russia's strategic partners in the post-Soviet space (next to Belarus). This fact alone is a reason enough for the US to have the interest to influence political processes in this country. But Kazakhstan could also be used as a tool for long-term disturbance of Sino-Russian relations. In this regard, the United States could encourage China to seek its link with continental Europe through the old "Silk Road" which leads through Kazakhstan (one route of the Belt and Road Initiative); 4) ensuring adequate investments that could significantly improve the economic and social situation in Myanmar and Vietnam (thanks to low production costs, they are currently more attractive than China, so there is also an economic justification for this step!), then signing an agreement on military cooperation with these two countries; 5) putting a constant pressure on ASEAN to ensure anti-Chinese posture; 6) establishing a notable presence in Malaysia and Indonesia to ensure limited and directed strengthening of the radical Islamist groups in these countries. South Asian radical Islam can be directed against the Chinese interests in this region, and to this end opening of the "Uyghur issue" can be used, as well as maintenance of latent conflict in Xinjiang (Xinjiang's Palestinization). With this approach, all

Muslim nations in this part of the world (or the majority of Muslim countries in the world) could turn to the extreme anti-China position; 7) the gradual opening of a conflict between South Asian Muslims and China and the Palestinization of Xinjiang would create a favorable environment for long-term disturbance of Sino-Pakistani relations. Thus, China would be completely directed towards Kazakhstan as the only western neighbor on which one can significantly rely, adversely affecting its relations with Russia; 8) continuation of more significant military cooperation with India and helping India to expand its influence as far as possible to the east (to the border with China). At the same time, China would be trying to calm Indian-Pakistani hostilities and create an acceptable framework for cooperation between the two countries.

Exhaustion of Russia

In the last decade and a half under Vladimir Putin, Russia has undergone an extraordinary journey from the country on the verge of collapse to the pivot of Eurasian integration. The Eurasian Union, which has the ambition to grow from an economic into a political integration and expand territorially, is cause for concerns in the United States. The Eurasian Union has the capacity to become one of the most significant regional integrations in the world. (Golam, Monowar, 2018, pp. 163–172) However, it is visible that the Russian economy is facing a number of structural problems and that it is over-reliant on revenues from the sale of energy. (Eder et al., 2017, pp. 2–4) By creating a Eurasian Union, Russia is trying to change this and accelerate its own economic development, to modernize its technology, and to develop innovative capacity. At the same time, because of Russia's nuclear and other military capabilities (which are rapidly developing), the US must be cautious in its approach towards Russia. Notably, the US is trying to use the media campaign as well as some Russian NGOs and political organizations to destabilize the internal political structure (power pyramid) in Russia. The effects of these efforts are small due to the decreasing influence of instruments of soft power in the political process. The internal destabilization of Russia is possible only through the dramatic disruption of existing social relations, and this can be done only through the deterioration of the economic situation. This can be achieved in two ways: 1) by direct impact on Russian budget revenue (revenue from the sale of energy) that can be realized if the US gets under its direct control sources

of natural gas in Central Asia (notably this applies to sources in Iran, the second-biggest reserves of natural gas in the world). This would help reduce the dependence of some consumers from Russian gas. This can also be done by preventing the construction of new pipelines from Russia to end-users, primarily towards the EU; 2) directing Russia towards a different allocation of budgetary resources. This can be accomplished by opening a number of security issues that would lead Russia into a new “armament race” forcing it to assign a greater amount of resources to the military budget. In addition to these measures, the Muslim factor (about 8.5-10% of the total population of Russia, concentrated on the sensitive geostrategic points) and directed campaigns to strengthen nationalism can be used for the internal destabilization of Russia.

On the one hand, the strengthening of Russian nationalism would produce a growing intolerance toward non-Russian nations, thereby causing conflicts (about 17.5% of the Russian population is non-Slavic). On the other hand, the strengthening of nationalism among non-Russian nations would create a tendency towards independence and secession (although separatism, except in isolated cases, is not noticeable, it should be noted that there are 22 republics in the constitutional system of the Russian Federation, including the Republic of Crimea).

This would mean the depletion of Russia. As a result, the country would have growing economic problems, which would cause social tensions and quickly produce ethnic and religious intolerance. Thus, Russia would be thrown from the tracks, and possibly even its existing borders would be questioned. How can this aim be accomplished? The goal could spread out a “geopolitical anaconda” around Russia’s body, just as Alfred Mahan suggested a long time ago. (Mahan, 1890) Only now, in order to achieve the effective depletion, the “content” of this geopolitical surrounding would have to be different in different parts of the world.

Looking from the US position, what needs to be done in order to achieve this plan is the following: 1) all Eastern European countries should join NATO. Once Eastern Europe is completely under the “NATO umbrella”, it will provide full control of the Russian western border and open up space for endangering its southern border. The problems with NATO expansion have emerged in the post-Yugoslav space (the key American problem in this region is Serbia!) and in the case of Ukraine. Belarus is a similar case, but due to close ties that this country has with Russia (The Union State), NATO

cannot expect some greater success here (the maximum, in this case, could be the continual undermining of the Russia-Belarus Union through destabilization of Belarus). Regarding the area of the former Yugoslavia, the US has the dominant influence in this region, but it is also facing some problems that could escalate in the future and introduce the Balkans into a new crisis. One of the problems for the US presents the fact that until now the membership in the wealthy EU was used as a means of attracting the Eastern European countries to NATO. Now the EU is in the crisis with no end in sight. Lack of trust in the EU is noticeable in all East European countries. Special attention will be paid to the "Christian-Orthodox" countries in this part of the world, given that they are more or less leaning towards Russia. (Adamsky, 2019) Orthodox countries within the framework of NATO and the EU will have to be directed to have extreme forms of anti-Russian activities. In this context, one should observe the installation of the American (anti) missile installations in Bulgaria and Romania; 2) prevent the construction of new pipelines to transport Russian energy through the East European countries to Western Europe. This would reduce the dependence of the European countries on Russian energy, cut the flow of funds into the Russian budget, disable the strengthening of the Russian influence in the transit countries and lessen the risk of creation of the Berlin-Moscow strategic axis; 3) prevent the "return of Russia" to the South Caucasus. The path to the internal destabilization of Russia leads through the Caucasus, and that is why the US needs to keep Georgia and Azerbaijan in its orbit and to try to get Armenia in this group as well. Armenia is the only Caucasian member of the CSTO military alliance, and this threatens the US interests. In order to push out the Russian influence from the Caucasus, the US can use the resources of Turkey. As in the case of the Eastern European countries, the United States could accelerate the admission of Georgia and Azerbaijan in NATO; 4) one of the most effective ways to exhaust Russia is the destabilization of Iran (either by "producing" new revolution or by the military intervention of the US and/or Israel, which would destroy Iranian nuclear installations). The ultimate American target in Iran is taking control over sources of gas and control over the strategically important Strait of Hormuz, but any destabilization of this country weakens Russia's position. Destabilizing Iran would weaken the position of Shias in the region of the Middle East, where Russia was always able to find solid allies. Also, the weakening of Iran would lead to the

strengthening of Saudi presence in the Central Asian region, which coincides with the US interests. This creates conditions for a more aggressive approach towards the steppe Muslims who so far have demonstrated a high degree of loyalty to Russia (unlike some Caucasian Muslims who in certain historical periods were easily motivated to go into the war against Russia); 5) organize a special program for Kazakhstan, which can be used either as a tool for the outbreak of the Russo-Chinese disagreements or as a “malignant tumor” in the Russian geopolitical stomach. The geographical position of Kazakhstan is such that its transfer to the US track would lead to the collapse of the idea of the Eurasian Union as any kind of integration. (Starr et al., 2014, pp. 16 - 31) To achieve this, the US needs to influence the political and military structures in Kazakhstan; 6) after withdrawal from Afghanistan, to direct Tajiks against Pashtuns. Production of chaos in Afghanistan could lead to the “export of violence” to the north, threatening the Russian interests in Tajikistan; 7) bind Uzbekistan to the US as much as possible, through agreements on military and economic cooperation. Due to a number of open issues in bilateral Kazakh-Uzbek relations, the US reliance on Uzbekistan would threaten the possibility of transferring Kazakhstan to the new tracks. However, due to the participation of Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan in the Eurasian integrations and their membership in the CSTO military alliance, this is the only possible measure at this time; 8) strengthen the American presence in Mongolia; 9) organize a long and wide anti-Chinese campaign in Russia itself. The Russian public and its political representatives have to be convinced that the main enemy is populous China.

Controlling of the EU and Japan

After the victory in the Cold War, the efforts of former US allies to become independent geopolitical players are all the more noticeable. The US alliance with the EU countries in the West, which was also manifested through economic cooperation, but primarily through NATO and with Japan in the East, was asymmetrical, with a clear definition of who stands where. The United States was superior, and allies followed its foreign policy priorities. The reason for this was the existence of one common enemy. (Tanaka, 2011, pp. 50 – 56) The collapse of the bipolar world meant the disappearance of the common enemy, and at the same time, the beginning of the growing differences between the US and the European countries and

Japan. Regarding the European countries, the particular problem for the United States presents frequent disagreements with Germany, although in France one can also often hear that it is necessary to reduce dependence on the US. In the case of Germany, the threat to the US interests is seen in the possibility of the creation of a strategic partnership between Germany and Russia. These two countries are already connected with the strategic pipeline "Nord Stream" and are continuously showing a willingness to deepen bilateral cooperation. While there is NATO, the United States will be in principle able to control the European countries. However, the EU is making significant efforts to form its own military forces, and on the other hand, the European members are showing clear disagreement with certain US moves. (Cooper, 2003) Because of that, the United States could not use NATO military structure for certain interventions. As for Japan, the practice shows that it is unacceptable for the global economic superpower to stay long with modest military capacities. In the bottom line, it would be useful for the US to use everything, including the military capabilities of Japan against the growing influence of China.

A new approach of the United States in the Pacific is unlikely to mean the permanent maintenance of the military weak Japan, but rather allowing the military strengthening of Japan with the obligation of harmonization of geopolitical priorities of two countries. In this context, the measures that the US will take to control more effectively the EU and Japan can be: 1) not allowing the EU to become an independent geopolitical player. Therefore, it is necessary to obstruct all attempts of the EU towards federalization and the creation of common institutions with greater executive and judicial powers; 2) tighter binding of East European and South European members to the United States to maintain a critical mass within the EU that will protect the American interests; 3) encourage the rapid expansion of the EU to all Eastern European countries (including Ukraine and Belarus), regardless of the increasing Euro-skepticism and fatigue from the previous expansion. American interest is to keep the EU constantly "politically tired". On the one hand, this would set the "homework" for the EU structures, and it would be at least a decade before they would end this process. At this time any thinking about federalization would have to be postponed. On the other hand, this would open a space for the expansion of NATO to the whole of Europe (except Belarus, but an offer for the EU membership would be given to this country to achieve its internal destabilization and disruption

of its relations with Russia); 4) latent expansion of anti-German atmosphere in all European countries where this is possible; 5) continuation of strong overall cooperation with Poland and its connection with the three Baltic States (Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia) to prevent the creation of a German-Russian geopolitical corridor; 6) coordination of positions with France in all matters of vital interest to this country (the Maghreb, the Eastern Mediterranean, etc.), and in return, insisting on its participation in the control of Germany; 7) opening the question of the South Kuril Islands and working on gradual “stirring up” of the Japanese-Russian crisis; 8) giving a more important role to Japan in controlling the crisis with North Korea. This measure can be implemented in the coordinated action with South Korea, given that the official Seoul would not look favorably on this arrangement. However, for the US, it is more important that such a measure would further damage Sino-Japanese relations and prevent (already highly unlikely) an alliance between the two powers; 9) promotion of Japan as an important political factor in the Pacific. In this regard, the United States will have to insist that Japan and India become permanent members of the UN Security Council (which would mean a partial change of the previous stand on this question). With this act, the ball would be thrown into the Chinese (and partly Russian) yard, because due to the projected deterioration of Japan-China relations, China would probably be against this proposal.

Directing Islam

A phenomenon called “the struggle for leadership in the Muslim world” should demonstrate all the problems and differences within the Islamic bloc. Samuel Huntington marked the Muslim world as Islamic civilization. (Huntington, 1997) There are compelling reasons why Huntington did that, but at the same time, it can be said that a single Islamic civilization does not exist (the question is whether it will ever be formed). The differences between the leading Muslim countries are vast, almost insurmountable. These differences are manifested in relation to the dogmatic questions and regarding compliance with the Sharia norms, as well as in relation to the influence of Islam in daily life and the geopolitical setting and the choice of key allies. Because of this, the relationship of the United States with these countries varies. While the Gulf states are strategic allies (especially Saudi Arabia), Iran presents one of the biggest foreign policy challenges, and

Turkey is on “its way”. The other thing is that pan-Islamic radical groups are getting increasingly influential within the Muslim world (their interpretation of Islam has little to do with the original principles of the religion). Although these groups present a threat to the security of the United States at this moment, due to their extremely anti-American and anti-Western stance, they could in the future serve as a useful tool to enhance the US influence in many regions. For the United States, it is important to keep control over the situation in the Middle East and that their allies in the region remain stable. But, at the same time, their interest is to destabilize the biggest rivals in Eurasia, and for that radical Islam can be used. Therefore, on the one hand, it is necessary to strengthen the position of Turkey (as a NATO member) and Saudi Arabia (but in a way in which their strengthening would not jeopardize the interests of Israel) and to fully link Pakistan to the United States. On the other hand, the goal is to attempt the radicalization of Muslim nations in Central and Southeast Asia. Thus, the American strategic allies would be positioned as leading countries in the Muslim world. However, at the same time, “civilization conflicts” would be opened alongside the entire southern rim of Russia border and partially at the southwestern and northwestern border of China. The specific steps that can be taken to achieve these goals are: 1) constant coordination of activities between Turkey and Saudi Arabia, first to limit the influence of Iran, and then to provoke its internal destabilization through armed rebellion. The conflict in Syria should also be seen in this context; 2) not allowing any internal destabilization of Turkey and Saudi Arabia. This would mean allowing Turkey to use all available means to solve the Kurdish issue and letting the ruling Saudi family use all means to prevent tribal rebellions in this country; 3) allowing Turkey and the Gulf states to expand their spheres of influence in the areas they are interested in (but so that it does not threaten the US strategic interests): the Caucasus-Caspian region, the Balkan peninsula, Crimea, northeastern Africa (including a possible strengthening of the Saudi economic presence in Egypt) and the Maghreb; 4) political and economic isolation, or if possible, destabilization of all potential Russian and Chinese partners in the Muslim world (of particular importance is the continuation of isolation of Palestine, maintaining the current situation in Iraq and further destabilization of Syria; other candidates for this list are already mentioned in the previous sections of the work); 5) channeling the discontent of Islamic nations

towards the nearest, neighboring civilizations, thereby spreading the impact of radical Islamic groups in the region of Central and South Asia; 6) concentrating on Malaysia and Indonesia as potential allies in containing China; 7) achieving the highest possible degree of influence among the representatives of the Pakistani military, political and economic elite; 8) in this regard and to strengthen the oversight of all operations, it is important to realize the significant military presence in the Indian Ocean (naval forces and maintaining Diego Garcia base) and to keep control over the East African coast (Kenya and Somalia in the internationally recognized borders); 9) supporting the fight against terrorism of radical Islamic groups in the European countries and India.

Conclusion: Global leadership as a historical category

The described measures and actions that must be taken to preserve global leadership are imposed by simple geopolitical logic. Does America have the strength to make such an approach? A comparison with the Reagan era is somewhat unfounded. At the time, however, the US was in a much better position. Yes, there was the USSR as a challenger, but the US was the “engine of the global economy”, the “bastion of democracy” and the “protector of human rights”. Being with America, supporting America, copying America, was not only useful but also to some extent prestigious. This showed solidarity with the oppressed, courage in the fight against autocracy. What has left of it today? The room for maneuver for expanding US soft power is so narrow that Donald Trump’s position on the world stage is more comparable to that of the Soviet Union in the early 1980s than to Ronald Reagan’s. Also, the US is clashing with several challengers at the same time (and these different challengers are different in character and intensity), a phenomenon that they did not encounter after World War II. There are also the classic challengers - Russia (in the contemporary geopolitical context in American eyes Russia is the successor of the powerful Soviet Union) and China, but also yesterday’s allies – the Western European states and Japan - with whom relations must be redefined (neither European powers nor Japan cannot agree to a “junior partner” position in relation to the US). In the Cold War bipolar framework, this was simply not

the case. As a result, the US is forced to rely more on regional allies, which will increase the cost of its geopolitical projects (allies need political support and economic support). Viewed from the “current angle”, it is also evident that the United States has a problem with keeping Turkey in the “American” sphere of interest. The signing of energy agreements and agreements on the transfer of military equipment between Russia and Turkey indicates that Ankara is pursuing an independent foreign policy without coordination with NATO. This makes impossible the whole plan to “Directing Islam”. Under this plan (described in Chapter 4 of the article), Turkey is a key partner for its implementation.

Basically, the situation that official Washington is facing is quite new. It is incomparable to the Reagan era. The slogan *Make America great again* may serve to win elections, but at the same time, viewed from the perspective of geopolitics, it is a difficult task in world politics. The US is leading the complex geopolitical fights, which will in the long-run denote its position in international relations, but more importantly, it will denote the structure of the world political system.

To carry out the activities noted and described in order to determine the position of a global leader means to conduct a patient, organized, and coordinated policy. And have hope that the challengers will not recognize these activities as a threat to their own safety. The chances of such a thing are minimal. Therefore, the final statement is that one cannot expect (or in a milder variant that it is difficult to expect in the near future) the return of America to the positions it held before 2008. US global leadership is not only threatened, but it is also most likely a historical category.

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CIP - Каталогизација у публикацији
Народна библиотека Србије, Београд

327(497:11:470)"18/20"(082)
327::911.3(4-12)"19/20"(082)
330.34(497.11)"19/20"(082)

RUSSIA and Serbia in the Contemporary World : bilateral relations, challenges and opportunities / [editors in Chief] Bogdan Stojanović, Elena Georgievna Ponomareva. - Belgrade : Institute of International Politics and Economics, 2020 (Novi Sad : Mala knjiga +). - 259 str. : ilustr. ; 24 cm

Tiraž 150. - Str. 9: Предисловие к изданию Белградского института международной политики и экономики "Russia and Serbia in Contemporary World" / Alexander Botsan-Kharchenko. - Str. 11-13: Foreword / Branislav Đorđević. - Napomene i bibliografske reference uz tekst. - Bibliografija uz radove.

ISBN 978-86-7067-278-9

а) Међународни односи -- Србија -- 19в-21в -- Зборници б)
Међународни односи -- Русија -- 19в-21в -- Зборници в)
Геополитика -- 20в-21в -- Југоисточна Европа -- Зборници г)
Србија -- Економска политика -- 20в-21в -- Зборници

COBISS.SR-ID 24482313



ISBN 978-86-7067-278-9