MAPPING OF RUSSIAN INFLUENCE IN SERBIA

DURING

2013 AND 2014

Collection of Analyses

by The Center of Euro-Atlantic Studies
Russification
Published in New Eastern Europe Magazine, October 2014

Putin's Orchestra
Published in The New Century Magazine, No. 7, May 2014

#Putinization
Published in The New Century Magazine, No. 6, February 2014

Sad Stream
Published in The New Century Magazine, No. 5, August-September 2013
The Russification of Serbia

JELENA MILIĆ

As the largest predominantly Orthodox and Slavic country in Central Europe not yet a member of the European Union, Serbia is an easy target for Russia’s soft power. The Kremlin is now counting on the “Putinisation” of this Western Balkan state to show Russian citizens that its policy towards the West has strong support in some parts of Europe.

At the end of July 2014, Aleksandar Vučić, the Serbian prime minister, informed the society and members of Serbian parliament that the country was in a really difficult situation. He emphasised that it is the parliament who needs to decide whether to follow the European Union and impose new sanctions on Russia or not. Vučić mentioned on that occasion that Serbia could not survive another round of gas price increases and although membership in the EU is Serbia’s foreign policy objective, it needs to pursue its own national interests above all. What interests was he referring to? We do not know for sure. What is certain, though, is that democratisation is never mentioned as one of them. Why should the price of gas rise in Serbia as a result of its support for EU’s sanctions? Serbia already pays Gazprom more than many other European countries like Germany, France, the Netherlands, Finland, Italy and Denmark. So why is the Serbian political elite so concerned about possible Russian energy blackmail?

From myth to reality

The growing support for Russia among Serbian society is a result of two processes. One of them is the adaptation of the history of Russian-Serbian relations and how it relates today to the goals of the political elite. The official historical narrative consciously skips very important periods in Serbian history such as the interwar period, almost the entire period of Yugoslavia from the Tito-Stalin split until the
escalation of the crisis in Kosovo and the NATO bombings, and the period of the first democratic government of Serbia of the late prime minister Zoran Đinđić. All of these periods have one thing in common: moments of poor Russian-Serbian relations which from 2000-2003 could not follow the dynamics of Serbia’s relations with the West. The elite has also ignored the fact that fewer and fewer Serbs speak Russian and that Russian culture is much less attractive for Serbs than the western one. Knowledge of Russian was simply pushed out by knowledge of English.

Serbs who decide to leave their country in search of better economic perspectives do not choose Russia as a destination. Public opinion is being fed with half-truths on the large volumes of Russian-Serbian trade and the great importance of Russian aid. A typical example is the free trade agreement signed with the Russian Federation in August 2000, which is being largely showcased by Serbian officials as an exclusive gesture of Russian friendship towards Serbia. Meanwhile, all the goods produced in Serbia when the agreement was signed were excluded from it. Not much has changed since then. Also the reasons for the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia in 1999 have never been truly explained to the Serbian public. Instead, it is repeated as a mantra that the only country that helped Serbia in those hard times was the Russian Federation. However, the fact that Russia did not oppose UN sanctions against Serbia (Yugoslavia) in the early 1990s remains widely unknown, or deliberately omitted.

A large wave of fabricated historical narratives began in 2007 when the West was preparing to recognise the new status of Kosovo. It quickly overwhelmed the Serbian public and it is still a dominant narrative. Russia’s firm stand then was that Kosovo is an integral part of Serbian territory and any secession would be unlawful. Belgrade’s Kosovo policy was based on the principle of protecting its territorial integrity and sovereignty so it gradually intensified its relations with Moscow. Russia became a key international ally of Serbia and both countries soon began to co-operate not only on the international scene, but also in many other fields. This became the glorification of the “traditional Russian-Serbian friendship”, which is currently accompanied by the tale of a strong economic foundation.

This policy turned out to be successful, as a majority of Serbs rely on traditional sources of information which are under the prevailing influence of the political elite. It is no wonder why the very unfavourable oil-gas industries agreement between Serbia and Russia, signed in 2008, did not face any backlash from Serbian society. Through this agreement, Serbian dependence on Russia became real and it gained a significant economic component. Until then, its nature was mostly mythical.
Russia is perceived today by the majority of Serbs as its closest ally. Serbian citizens have one of the most favourable opinions of Russia of all states. While more than 50 per cent of Serbs have a positive opinion (25 per cent describe it as “very positive”) of Russia, 82 per cent of Serbian citizens views NATO in a negative way. The United States has only a slightly better image. The EU enjoys more credit, but 43 per cent of Serbs still perceive it negatively. The conclusions of the polls are rather sad as the vast majority of aid to Serbia comes from NATO and the EU states.

The current government did not launch this pro-Russian narrative, but it has fostered it. It is a mistake to think that the main reason for the cherishing of pro-Russian sentiment in society is strictly connected with Serbia’s increasing economic and energy dependence on Russia. In fact, it is about the reluctance to further democratise Serbia.

**European integration the Serbian way**

The second process that is bringing Serbs closer to Russia is the rise of cult of personality and homogenisation of society by viewing the outside world through conspiracy theories. Both Aleksandar Vučić and Vladimir Putin owe their unquestioned authority to weak institutions, a politically dependent judiciary and...
media, the privileged position of the Eastern Orthodox Church in comparison to other religions, a non-transparent financial system and the partisan subordination of the parliament, national security institutions and the oligarchs. In both countries, the cult of personality has become a significant component of the state’s political system. On the social level, the state promotes a collective identity while individualism and human freedoms are met with open contempt. Serbs gave a strong mandate to Aleksandar Vučić, to whom the separation of powers does not mean much. In Serbia, just like in Russia, autocratic leadership is widely accepted and warmly welcomed by citizens. Thus, Serbia’s “Putinisation” is on-going, despite its formal progress towards the EU which should in its essence mean the opposite process.

It is partially true that Serbia has never had a strong democratic tradition. When Slobodan Milošević was defeated in the first round of presidential elections in 2000 and backed out, the young Serbian democracy faced serious challenges which made it difficult to work properly and to put it fully on a European track. Serbia had to co-operate with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, take on the secession of Montenegro and engage in the normalisation of relations with Kosovo, just to name a few. The Zoran Đinđić government tried to implement the EU’s and the US’s conditionality policies and this approach was kept to some extent even after his assassination, but with much less pressure. The new government under Vojislav Koštunica continued the politics of rapprochement with the EU, although it failed to effectively fulfil most of the EU’s conditions. The hallmark of period of rule by president Boris Tadić and his Democratic Party, who succeeded Koštunica, was the capture of high-profile war criminals Radovan Karadžić and Ratko Mladić. But everything has its price. At the same time, the internal situation in Serbia became far from satisfying: the level of corruption among the ruling elite soared and the tempo of democratisation slowed down. This style of governance characterises Serbian politics today.

Aleksandar Vučić signed the Brussels Agreement on the normalisation of relations between Belgrade and Pristina, which was a milestone in Serbia’s foreign policy coerced by the West, but it did not change Vučić’s leadership style to which the West still turns its blind eye and can be seen as a mirror image of Putin. All the critical voices against the government are currently labelled as anti-state and anti-reform. The government strategy is designed to curtail opposition, civil society and the free media. The majority of Serbs stay indifferent when it comes to their freedom. The relevant public opinion polls show that their perception of democracy is predominantly based on their social and economic position and only 30 per cent of them perceive democracy as the best system of governance.
The Putinisation of Serbia

The Kremlin’s aggressive foreign policy has resulted in an increasingly complex conflict with the West. It is now counting on the “Putinisation” of the Western Balkan states to keep low institutional and democratic standards even once these countries finally join the EU. Then they can serve as an example that joining the EU does not bring any desired outcomes like democratisation or a better living standard. Another reason why Moscow wants to keep Putin-style leadership in the Western Balkans is to show Russian citizens that its antagonistic policy towards the West has strong support in some parts of Europe.

Serbia, as the largest predominantly Orthodox and Slavic country in Central Europe which is yet to become a member of the EU and does not want to become member of NATO, in a dire economic situation with the public exposed to strong propaganda, is an easy target of Russia’s soft power. High-level meetings between Serbian and Russian officials in the last two years are unusually frequent. This is despite the fact that in the last two years Serbia has made significant formal steps towards EU integration. The same logic is applied to Russian foreign policy behind attempts to delay further integration with the West of other states in the region such as Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro. Rapprochement with the EU is presented by the Kremlin as the forced democratisation of the region and pulling it away from the “traditional Slavic-Orthodox brotherhood”, which is nothing but a self-proclaimed zone of Russian interest.

The annexation of Crimea, the war in eastern Ukraine and the activities of pro-Russian separatists unveiled how further democratisation could be dangerous to countries which are in the orbit of Russian influence. In recent months Russia has more actively interfered in Serbian internal politics. Organised or spontaneous co-ordination of Serbian and Russian interests, both those publically and behind closed doors (not necessarily state level, but also private) resulted in a specific linkage of significant groups and individuals and the creation of the so-called “Putin’s orchestra” in Serbia. Its members are placed in all strategic institutions: within the cabinets of Vučić and President Nikolić, in business, the energy sector and security agencies. There are also members in NGOs, cultural organisations, the academic community, sport and media. There is more and more evidence that some members of “Putin’s orchestra” are financed directly from Moscow.

The main goal of “Putin’s orchestra” in Serbia is to undermine public support for European integration and delay Serbia’s rapprochement with the West. Another important actor in Serbian political landscape which has a similar aim is the Serbian Orthodox Church. It is becoming highly reliant on the Russian Orthodox Church even though it previously differed from its Russian equivalent in the field of social freedoms. Leonid Reshetnikov, head of the Serbian branch of the influential Russian
Institute for Strategic Studies was recently decorated by the Serbian Orthodox clergy for his contribution to Russian-Serbian dialogue. Reshetnikov is a propagator of the organic unity of church and state, and spokesperson of an adjusted version of Huntington’s idea that “orthodox civilisation” is the counterweight to the West. He is one of the most prominent bandmasters of this orchestra.

Unfortunately, the activities of the Putin orchestra in Serbia have brought fruit. In early August, The Office for EU Integration announced the results of its regular survey of support for EU integration. For the first time in years this support dropped down below 50 per cent. Only 46 per cent would vote yes on a referendum on EU membership of Serbia this time, which is a drop of five per cent since December 2013.

**Strengthening mutual ties**

Intensified attempts to strengthen mutual ties between Serbia and Russia were initiated by the Kremlin as soon as the Council of the European Union announced in late 2013 Serbia’s readiness to start negotiation talks with the EU. At the beginning of 2013, Serbia received from Russia a loan for 800 million US dollars for the modernisation of its railways. Later that year it received an additional $500 million loan to plug budget holes and stimulate economic growth. The turning point was a visit to Serbia by Nikolai Patrushev, who has been Secretary of the Security Council of Russia since 2008. Unfortunately, the media did not pay much attention to this significant visit. It resulted with the establishment of a number of organisations and websites in Serbia whose primary goal is to spread pro-Putin propaganda in the country. They do not have direct support from top state officials, but their existence would not be possible without the government’s invisible hand. The main hub of Russian propaganda appears to be the University of Belgrade.

In mid-November 2013, the Serbian and Russian ministers of defence signed an important military agreement. During Sergey Shoigu’s trip to Belgrade, Vučić stated that “Serbia is not going to join NATO but it is not going to join a Russian bloc either”, but since then, the dynamics of military co-operation with Russia have significantly increased. Serbia’s military sector, deeply compromised by war crimes, arms trafficking and political assassinations, needs major reforms if Serbia is willing to join the EU. The process of integration with NATO would be very helpful in this field, but Belgrade remains militarily neutral and thus does not pursue some of the security sector reforms demanded for NATO membership. The Serbian “neutral” position has been broken up by numerous military contacts with foreign partners, but gradually switched to predominantly a bilateral level with a disproportional emphasis on relations with Russia since the Ukraine crisis. Serbia was the only European state that participated in the “Dance of Tanks” military show in Moscow.
in August 2014. Earlier this year, Serbia held its largest military exercise with only the presence of Russian officials. Serbia’s military trade with Russia, as announced by Serbian and Russian officials, will grow in the near future, which will surely have a negative impact on the dynamics of integration with the EU, in particular due to the new set of sectoral sanctions imposed by the EU against Russia.

In the energy sector, after the comprehensive gas and oil agreement from 2008, Serbia and Russia recently signed three deals on the construction of the South Stream pipeline. A clear lack of transparency of these agreements, as well as a poor information campaign, in particular about warnings that have been coming from the European Commission and the Secretariat of the Energy Community of the South East Europe of which Serbia is a member, raises alarm about this extremely expensive project. In the case that the South Stream is not built, Serbia will find itself in a very precarious position, which is not the case with other EU member states involved in the project. Belgrade stands to receive no compensation for the costs already connected with the South Stream construction. Furthermore, Serbia has to indemnify Russian companies that are involved in the project on Serbian territory if the project continues. The Russian Federation has already become, irreversibly, a majority owner of Serbia’s largest oil and gas company, the Petroleum Industry of Serbia (Naftna Industrija Srbije).

Despite Bulgaria’s announcement on the cancelation of construction until the EU and the EC rules on South Stream, Serbian officials recently informed the public that the construction of the first 30 kilometres of the pipeline with Russian companies will be completed by the end of the year. The good news is that the route has been changed and now heads towards Hungary, which actually means that the pipeline will connect to the existing one from Ukraine, not a hypothetic one from Bulgaria.

**Loyalty check**

Belgrade’s indecisiveness in the Ukrainian conflict additionally highlighted its dependence on Russia. Although it backed Ukraine’s territorial integrity, it immediately issued an official statement underlining its everlasting friendship with Russia. A grotesque comparison between the annexation of Crimea and the Kosovo issue was used first by Vladimir Putin and then repeated by many Serbian officials, including foreign minister Ivica Dačić. Both of them deliberately failed to
mention the peace talks that took place over Kosovo before the NATO bombing, the drastically different position of Kosovo Albanians in Kosovo than those of Russians in Crimea, best illustrated by several mass graves of civilians, or the peace process under the auspices of the international community after the NATO bombing. All of these factors make comparisons between Kosovo and Crimea impossible. A slightly more assertive position on Ukraine’s territorial integrity “even with Crimea” was presented by Aleksandar Vučić. In fact, the way in which Crimea broke away is very dangerous for the Western Balkans because it creates space for the further disintegration of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Republika Srpska), Serbia (Sandžak) and Macedonia (the western part of the country), something that is rarely mentioned in Serbia.

Štefan Füle and Catherine Ashton paid a visit to Serbia soon after the new government was formed in May 2014. At the same time, Belgrade rolled out the red carpet for Sergey Naryshkin, Chairman of the State Duma, who came to Belgrade to check its loyalty. Naryshkin who is on the list of EU and American sanctions was welcomed by President Nikolić, gave a speech at the Serbian National Assembly and at the University of Belgrade. Not a single media mentioned that Naryshkin was targeted by western sanctions.

In July 2014, the Serbian prime minister visited Moscow. He came back with a mouth full of promises regarding the possible liberalisation of the Russian market for the Serbian car industry. Although it is officially denied that Serbia’s co-chairmanship in the OSCE in 2014 and 2015 was discussed during talks with Putin, it is worrying that two former Serbian ministers of foreign affairs, both members of “Putin’s orchestra”, Ivan Mrkić and Vuk Jeremić, will be in charge of this task. Russia’s priority is to put the Transnistria issue high on the agenda and to remove the Ukrainian crisis from it. Despite the cooling of relations between Russia and the West, Vladimir Putin is expected to visit Serbia in October and take part in the pomp-filled celebration of the 70th anniversary of the liberation of Belgrade. If the invitation was sent by the Serbian side it does not speak well of Serbia’s willingness to comply with EU policies. If Putin invited himself – it perhaps is an even worse sign for Serbia.

**Time for reflection**

The way in which the downing of the Malaysian airliner and a set of new sanctions against Russia were interpreted by Serbian officials and the media suggests that Russia has the Serbian political elite over a barrel. A short-term and pretty far fetching injection of Russian money may be very tempting for Serbian politicians who are
struggling with poor economic conditions. It would bring effects sooner and could be more profitable for the elite than the long-term reforms demanded by the EU.

The question on how the West perceives the activity of “Putin’s orchestra” remains open. Yet, any means to counter them are unknown. The good news is that the international community recently took a more realistic view on what is going on in Serbia. One of its biggest concerns turned out to be the suppression of media freedoms and the disappearance of critical opinions towards the government. Additionally, the donors’ conference called “Rebuilding Together” held in July for Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina on the floods that hit the region this year showed that the EU and the West in general is, unlike Russia, prepared and willing to help.

Despite all the weaknesses of the Serbian opposition and the silence of the civil society, the ball is in their court. It would be good for Serbia if they realise there were people in Serbia like those who were present on the EuroMaidan in Kyiv in February 2014. They should reunify once again and explain to the society the disastrous consequences of the Russification of Serbia. If Serbia continues to maintain a relatively high support for the integration with the EU, there is hope that the process of further democratisation will not be endangered.

One of the most important tasks for Serbia’s security in the coming years is a serious reflection on the diversification of energy resources and on increasing energy effectiveness. It is also crucial for Vučić to pick co-workers more carefully and exclude from his inner circle those who put economic interests with Russia before their own country. Unfortunately the drums of the Putin orchestra are getting louder and louder, this time openly presenting Russian counter-measures towards the West as a development option for Serbia, openly calling for actions that would maximise benefits for them. The EU and the genuine pro-EU forces in Serbia should immediately warn about the pitfalls of this short term and immoral path.

Translated by Bartosz Marcinkowski

Jelena Milić is a political analyst and director of the Belgrade-based think tank Center for Euro-Atlantic Studies. She previously worked as a political analyst and researcher for the International Crisis Group and the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia.
1. Results of early parliamentary election – After Vučić, Vučić

Serbia has, after early parliamentary elections in the spring of 2014, received a new-old Government, headed by Prime Minister Aleksandar Vučić of the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS). The entry of the Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS), headed by Ivica Dačić into the new Government is considered as a direct consequence of Russian influence. Namely, in this way, Russia does not have to invest additional effort and time to change the players through which it articulates its significant political and financial interests in Serbia. However, SPS has lost a lot with the loss of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, which is now led by the SNS. This is not only related to the ability to influence the political-judicial-commercial developments through the uncontrolled parts of the Ministry of Interior and other parts of the security system which are now under the authority of the SNS, but also about the fact that the Serbian public has an uncritical affection for the Armed Forces and the Police, which brings a lot of votes to those who are at their forefront. For the first time in Serbia, the ruling coalition includes a political party, the Alliance of Vojvodina Hungarians (SVM), which at least formally advocates for Serbia’s entry into NATO.

Based on this, one could hope that at least the process of criminalization of the rare individuals who also publicly advocate this policy will be slowed down, which was, until recently, the trend. Unfortunately, the way in which the heads of state, followed by the pro-government media, which is the majority, marked the 15th anniversary of the start of NATO bombing of Yugoslavia, paints a completely different picture – that the policy of strengthening cooperation with NATO and the actual policy of EU integration will be jeopardized due to the pressure from Russia.

For the time being, Aleksandar Vučić demonstrates a lack of will or power to confront this. Both options are contrary to speculation that he is secretly sending signals that, in the long term, he is in favor of Serbia’s NATO membership. There are growing indications that he also has an ambivalent relationship towards Serbia’s European integrations, primarily because of his lack of a visible response, in any case.
way, to the growing Russian pressure directed against them.

Both the previous and future Prime Minister of Serbia have, in the period following elections but before formation of a new Government, travelled to Moscow, which pro-Government media reported on quite inarticulately.

Based on the above, based on Vučić’s style of government while he was Deputy Prime Minister and his first days as Prime Minister, but also based on the general state of mind in Serbia, one can assume that the process of Putinization of Serbia will continue rapidly, now with the growing pressure and barren effect of pro-Putin factors in the state and society – Putin’s Orchestra. The nearly complete electoral and organizational collapse of political parties, former bearers of any democratization and Europeanization of Serbia, the technocratization and confusion of the progressive part of the civil society, as well as the still ambivalent relationship of the political West, and primarily the EU, towards the actual situation in Serbia.

Given everything that was mentioned above, it is not surprising that in Serbia, although a state formally preparing for the start of accession negotiation with the EU, the main characteristics of Putinization have a growing foothold. Their main implementer is Aleksandar Vučić himself – the lead violin of Putin’s Orchestra in Serbia, whether the EU, the USA and primarily Germany wanted to hear this or not. Under the term Putinization we consider the following: party instead of democratic control of the security system; a clientelistic and unreformed judiciary, controlled media, an arbitrary relationship towards tycoons, tolerance and encouragement of endangering secular principles of the state system by one, pro-Government religious organization that is also the main arbiter of social dynamics; a poor human rights record and creation of a cult of personality; the rendering of separation of powers as senseless: the weakening of institutions; the criminalization of political and economic competitors; the re-writing of history; populism and fatalism.

2. The state of the security system was once again neglected in the election campaign and in the Prime Minister’s keynote address

In the period between the formation of the previous Government and the early parliamentary elections, Serbia was shook by several serious scandals caused by the poor state of the security system due to: leaks of information, lack of norms, party abuse and a disturbed balance of blackmail that is a result of a dependent judiciary. The recent floods in Serbia have laid bare the very bad state in the field of civil protection as well, an important part of the security system. Even the heads of state themselves recognized previously that the situation in the sector is poor. One is struck, above all, by: the poorly defined responsibilities of relevant stakeholders and command hierarchy; unclear procedures of communication of local authorities with the relevant agencies and the state level; lack of a systemic approach to protection of critical infrastructure and tolerance of widespread illegal construction.

In spite of all of this, the election campaign, as in all previous election campaigns in Serbia since the beginning of democratic
consolidation, failed to mention the poor state of the security system, despite having certain crisis situation as an opportunity for giving promises that were later forgotten. There were no election promises of improving the state in the areas in which it is needed: democratic oversight and normative framework of horizontal communication and a vertical chain of subordination of certain parts of the system. The issue of the material-technical equipment of the system was also not considered in more depth. It all comes down to confusing the society with announcement and cancellation of procurement of equipment that is inconsistent with the actual security risks of Serbia. The lack of strategic planning in this field is also caused by the rash manner in which the policy of military neutrality was adopted, primarily because of Kosovo. It dominates the entire security sector and significantly affects the impossibility of its reform, which the Center for Euro-Atlantic Studies already wrote about in detail in its report For a More Dynamic Reform of the Security Sector in Serbia. This policy is now strengthened by the bare pressure of Putin’s Orchestra in light of the increasingly intensive activities of Moscow in the region and in Serbia. Emphasis on the policy of military neutrality was obvious already in the first statements of the Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of Defense. The hierarchy of security challenges and risks in Serbia is political rather than pragmatic – Kosovo is still the greatest security risk. This weakens the possibility of adequate response, as well as the possibility for a strategic partnership with NATO, the only geographically-close system of collective defense, which would also help in streamlining costs in the security system.

The Commissioner for Information of Public Importance and Personal Data Protection Rodoljub Šabić and Ombudsman Saša Janković pointed out to the many normative shortcomings, primarily those regarding constitutional freedoms in the field of protection of privacy of citizens and the practice which violates these, as early as in 2012. One of the recommended fourteen measures for overcoming this situation was adoption of a new Law on the Security Intelligence Agency (BIA). The Center for Euro-Atlantic Studies has elaborated these recommendations and published an Action Plan for their adoption in its report Extreme Makeover. Alongside the mentioned fourteen measures, it was pointed out that it is necessary to adopt a law on security vetting, which is a constitutional obligation of the state which has not yet been fulfilled. It is also necessary to review the results of implementation of the Law on Data Secrecy (including adoption of the necessary bylaws, declassification of old documents, conduction of investigations, issuance of security certificates...) and adopt serious amendments of this Law or adopt a new one, as the existing Law does not deal with declassification of old documents of conduction of investigations. There also exist problems with other specific regulation dealing with archives or judicial proceedings, as indicated by representatives of the Office of the Council on National Security and Classified Information Protection (National Security Authority – NSA).

The state in the security system did not earn a place even in the several hours-long keynote address of the new Prime Minister. The Serbian Progressive Party, as an absolute election winner, simply continued with party overtaking of control over the security system. Even the Western international community failed to mention this issue as important, focusing solely on continuation of implementation of the First Agreement on the principles governing the normalization of relations between Serbia and Kosovo (Brussels Agreement) and consolidation of the extremely difficult economic situation.

3. Brief reminder why the issue of security system reform in Serbia must be a perennial priority but is not

Let us recall the main circumstances from recent Serbian history due to which reform of the security system must be a permanent priority, but is not. In Serbia, as well as in the international community, it seems that the beginning of dismantling of the murderous Milošević regime implemented through non-
violent methods of struggle has been forgotten. This strategy implies very challenging compromises with representatives of the previous regime, not only those who violated their citizens’ human rights by operating in the system, but also the creators and implementers of war crimes in the region and in Kosovo, followed by political assassinations, primarily from the security system. Additionally, non-violent methods of dismantling non-democratic regimes also involve legal continuity which prevents radical personnel changes of the compromised staff, which was also the case in Serbia.

The process of genuine democratization of Serbia was from the very beginning delayed by the fact that the new regime of Prime Minister Đinđić had authority only at the national level, while at the federal level, due to the circumstances around Montenegro’s participation in elections and nature of the policy of Vojislav Koštunica. This led to the formation of a nucleus headed by General Aca Tomić, which could not be described as ever being committed to genuine democratization of Serbia. The same has already then, intensely maintained special relations with Russia, despite the alleged support for European integrations. Such a constellation of factors required years of focusing on continuation of dismantling the Milošević regime in the security system which Serbia, due to a number of objective and subjective reasons, never had. All of this has distracted political attention and resources for security system reform.

4. Review of the new-old appointment in the security system

Judging by the profile of people who came to head important parts of the security system and foreign affairs following early parliamentary elections in 2014, substantial reforms in this field, on which the potential of our deviation from the ever growing pressure of Putin to stop not only cooperation with NATO, but Serbia’s EU integrations as well depends on, will still not be realized.

4.1. Ministry of Defense

Instead of Nebojša Rodić, considered to have been fond of more intensive cooperation with Russia and who replaced Aleksandar Vučić at this position, the new Minister of Defense, who also comes from the SNS ranks, is Bratislav Gašić. Serbia has therefore changed three ministers in the period of less than two years. Gašić is considered as a man who will, in the Ministry, without much question, implement the plans of the new Prime Minister. Gašić is, among other, known in the Serbian public as the person who publicly called upon the former Minister of Foreign Affairs, the controversial Vuk Jeremić, also encouraged by Putin’s Orchestra, to join the SNS team.

Gašić’s first statement were discouraging, especially those related to the fact that Kosovo is still considered at the greatest security risk, as well as those about the possibility of re-introduction of regular military service. Let us remind that in the midst of the election campaign, the Chief of Staff of the Serbian Armed Forces Ljubiša Điković, seriously compromised by the role of his units in the conflicts in Kosovo, disturbed the public with his statement that he is receiving increasing requests for the re-introduction of regular military service. The Ministry of Defense was forced to react with an official denial.

Gašić has, in his first addresses, assessed that not much has been done in the Serbian Armed Forces in the period between 2000 and 2012 (when Aleksandar Vučić comes to head the MoD), and that is seems that the Ministers of Defense were „more concerned with self-promotion than the job that they were supposed to do“, despite the undoubted reform steps that were taken in the MoD during this period, from standardization to raising the level of operability with NATO, professionalization of the Armed Forces and creation of conditions for participation of our Armed Forces in UN and EU peacekeeping and peace building missions.

The expert public assumes that the trend of allegedly successful political cooperation of the Ministry of Defense with the Ministry of
Defense of Russia, with which it has almost no technical cooperation on one hand, and successful technical cooperation with NATO, with which it has no political cooperation on the other, will continue. Yet another change of the Minister of Defense is likely to affect the pace of harmonization of the Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP) with NATO that Serbia has been working on over the past two years already, as it is assumed that the new Minister may want to first go through the extensive document of approximately sixty pages. The trend of slowing down the pace of Serbia’s cooperation with NATO can also be expected due to the NATO focus shifting towards Ukraine, preparations for the summit in Wales, as well as increased activities in Montenegro, which is trying to secure an invitation for membership. This too can have implications for the pace of harmonizing the IPAP in NATO itself. Having in mind the unusually harsh rhetoric and inaccuracies intentionally promoted in the public, even by the President and Prime Minister of Serbia, as well as the Russian Ambassador to Serbia, which accompanied the marking of the 15th anniversary of NATO bombing of Yugoslavia and the crisis in Ukraine, one can assume that, under growing Russian pressure, cooperation will be slowed down even further.

It is also worrying that no one from the expert and wider public reacted to the mentioned inaccuracies. The Atlantic Council of Serbia failed to react on any occasion. Among the few prominent public advocates of Serbia’s membership in NATO, the majority has an ambivalent position on the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia. Putin’s Orchestra has carried out a new wave of criminalization of the few in Serbia who consider that there were legitimate geopolitical and regional circumstances that led to the bombing, which was not condemned by the Serbian public.

The Western international community continues with the trend of having the level of cooperation with NATO in Serbia reliant upon the preparedness of members of the Serbian Armed Forces to train and cooperate, instead of having this dependent on a political decision of the state leadership brought on the basis of a rational evaluation of security and defense risks, needs and abilities of Serbia. Alliance and Member State officials too, if possible in any way, avoid the topic of the bombing, in the best case mentioning the “set of circumstances” that led to it. The statement of NATO Secretary-General Fogh Rasmussen, that it (the bombing) prevented genocide in Kosovo, was met with cynicism and ridicule by the majority in Serbia.

The new Directors of the Military Intelligence (VOA) and Military Security (VBA) Agencies have not been appointed yet. The former VBA Director, Svetko Kovač, was dismissed without explanation back in January 2014. The new Secretary of State at the MoD is Zoran Đorđević, and the new Assistant Ministers are: Miroslav Jovanović, Miloš Janković, Jasminka Todorov and Srbslav Cvejić.

### 4.2. Security Intelligence Agency (BIA)

Aleksandar Đorđević, who replaced the previous Minister of Defense in this position, remained to head BIA. From 1998 until 2001 Đorđević worked at a law firm of Veljko Guberina, one of the main actors in the return of radical nationalism at the scene in Serbia in the nineties. In 1990 with the introduction of a multi-party system in Serbia, Guberina came to the forefront of the People’s Radical Party (NRS), which restored its work in the country at the time. Tomislav Nikolić, now officially the lead violin of Putin’s Orchestra in Serbia was also a member of the NRS, later joining Vojislav Šešelj’s Radicals.

It should not be forgotten that the daily newspapers Danas and the internet portal Peščanik have, already in 2011, tried to open, unfortunately unsuccessfully, the topic of the role of Russian personnel - the so-called Red Orchestra – in the security system of Serbia, primarily the Serbian Armed Forces.

### 4.3. Ministry of Foreign Affairs

The new Minister of Foreign Affairs is the former Prime Minister Ivica Dačić. Dačić has,
unfortunately, in the first days of the new function, compared Kosovo and Crimea, pointing out to the “double standards of the West”, completely overlooking a series of UN SC resolutions pointing out to the crimes in Kosovo, negotiations at Rambouillet, opinion of the Permanent Court of Justice, negotiations on the new status of Kosovo, and a series of other events that make it impossible, although Putin and his Orchestra in Serbia do, to compare Crimea and Kosovo.

4.3.1. The Brussels Agreement

Formation of the new Government coincided with the first anniversary of the signing of the Brussels Agreement and the escalation of the crisis in Ukraine.

Implementation of the Agreement was somehow objectively delayed by elections in Serbia and the announced forthcoming elections in Kosovo. However, the Constitutional Court in Serbia assessed as unconstitutional previously agreed provisions related to recognition of diplomas, cadastres and registry books over the past couple of months, which will undoubtedly have long-term implications for the possibility of normalization of relation. The Constitutional Court of Serbia will also review the issue related to integrated border management.. Furthermore, the issue of freedom of movement is still unresolved. The Serbian public reacted predominantly negatively to the possibility of transforming the Kosovo security forces into Armed Forces. Serbian leaders in Kosovo, who were given legitimacy through obtaining support in recent elections, even announced the formation of alternative forces. One gets the impression that, if substantial normalization of relations between Belgrade and Pristina is sought, the approach to negotiations must change, by starting with from topics and challenges. The current approach, in which the Prime Ministers and EU representatives, with the support of the USA, decide on the details, is evidently limited in scope.

4.3.2. Serbia and the crisis in Ukraine

Serbia demonstrated its political indecisiveness around Ukraine, conditioned by economic and political dependency on Russia and the issue of Kosovo, already during the mandate of the so-called technical Government, by linking the impossible – giving support to territorial integrity of Ukraine and simultaneously highlighting eternal friendship towards Russia, without reference to what Russia is currently doing in Ukraine. The EU itself contributed to the wrong perception of Serbian politicians now established in the wider society as well, that Serbia can remain non-aligned on this matter until its eventual, formal membership in the EU. It is not good if the current political elites do not understand the challenges and dilemmas that the EU and its Member States are faced with regarding Ukraine, and how deep the crisis in relations with Russia is. It is even worse if they do understand, but still refuse to at least have a clearer political position on developments in Ukraine. It is not only about the Copenhagen criteria and their interpretation, or parts of Chapter 31 – Common Foreign, Security and Deference Policy, which Serbia is yet to negotiate on with the EU, or the Agreement on Stabilization and Association, that also mentions obligations of both parties on harmonizing foreign policy. Public opinion in Member States, without whose support any further expansion of the EU will be more difficult, could question whether Serbia would was a sympathetic partner in difficult times, and thus seriously affect a final decision on membership.

It is interesting, but also dangerous, that the majority of political analysts in the country, those supporting Serbia’s European integrations, play to the beat of Putin’s Orchestra, making parallels between Crimea and Kosovo.

The grotesque analogy Kosovo-Crimea, first used and presented by Putin himself, is especially dangerous for the Western Balkans because the logic, methodology and arguments used in defense of the Russian annexation of Crimea can arguably be used to “justify”
requests for referendums and possible secession of northern Kosovo, Sandžak, Republic of Srpska, western Macedonia...

4.3.4. Serbia and NATO aspirations of Montenegro

Since Aleksandar Vučić’s coming into power in Serbia in 2012, Serbia and Montenegro improved their relations, previously jeopardized, among other, by actions of Tadić's emissary Mlađan Đorđević. Unlike Serbia, Montenegro acted strategically since the beginning of the crisis in Ukraine, harmonizing its policies with the policies of the Western international community, increasing in this way its admission to NATO this year. In this way, Montenegro has also shown the voters in the EU that it is becoming a partner in solidarity and that it is harmonizing its policies with the policies of the EU prior to concluding negotiation on Chapter 31 – Common Foreign, Security and Defense Policy. The increased pressure of Moscow on Montenegro, at moments not only inappropriate, but totally bizarre, was, because of this decision, evident even before the escalation of the conflict in Ukraine, reaching a level of open threats. It is supported by Putin’s Orchestra within Montenegro, which was, during the previous year, getting louder, as in Serbia, primarily through the money streamlined to certain media and organizations. Those familiar with the situation in Montenegro claim that changes in editorial policies of the daily Vijesti and weekly Monitor, coincided with the beginning of the influx of Russian assets. Therefore, just like in Serbia, the actions of openly pro-Putin organizations are strengthened through the editorial policy of the mainstream media. Official Belgrade was, as in many other situations, publicly silent regarding this trend, which in Serbia culminated in the demonization of a legitimate decision of Montenegro and its democratically elected leadership, by officials of the Serbian Orthodox Church.

The reasons for such behavior should be sought in the fact that Montenegro’s NATO membership would put an end to the obviously still existent hopes in some circles in Serbia, Montenegro and Russia, that its independence is of temporary nature. It would also contribute to regional stability, which is obviously not in Russia’s interest. However, above all, although not a necessary precondition for EU membership, Montenegro’s NATO membership would, having in mind the strengthened Russian anti-European action in the region, probably reduce the mentioned pressure and thus create conditions for a smooth continuation of the already challenging European integrations of Montenegro. This should be given serious thought by the pro-EU option in Montenegro itself, if it has not yet formed its position of Montenegro’s NATO membership.

4.3.5. Serbia and NATO aspirations of BH

Resolving the issue of immovable defense property at the national level is a requirement for Bosnia and Herzegovina to commence using its NATO Membership Action Plan (MEP) in full capacity. However, leaders from the Republic of Srpska (RS) refused all solutions offered so far by conditioning the registration of immovable defense property with resolving the issue of all state property. In short, the Republic of Srpska is suggesting to have the state property of Bosnia and Herzegovina divided on entity or local levels of government, which would leave the country virtually asset less. In this way, the key policy objective of the leaders from the Republic of Srpska is tacitly achieved: to prevent continuation of the process of integration of Bosnia and Herzegovina into NATO.

Informally, they explain this with their reluctance to support membership of Bosnia and Herzegovina in NATO as long as Serbia does not change its attitude towards possible membership. It is indicative that this is contrary to their position of support of BH’s NATO membership over the previous years. This shift is considered as a direct consequence of outstanding efforts of the President of the Republic of Srpska, Milorad Dodik, who advocates secession. On the occasion of the Russian annexation of Crimea, Dodik recently
stated: „Russia’s actions are solely directed towards creating a neutral environment for political decisions and dialogue within Ukraine. This has my support”, becoming thus the lead violin of Putin’s Orchestra in BH. Absurdly, instead of the impression of Aleksandar Vučić distancing himself from Dodik due to the radicalization of his views becoming clearer now, exactly the opposite is happening – a new degree of convergence. This is best seen in the way in which Vučić related to the floods in BH.

As in the case of Montenegro, NATO membership of BH would likely frustrate those working on the disintegration of BH. Aside from BH, they are obviously also present both in Serbia and in Russia. NATO membership of BH would contribute to long-term stabilization in the region as well, which is again not in the interest of Moscow and Putin’s Orchestra.

4.4 Ministry of Interior (MUP)

For the six years which he spent at the forefront of the Ministry of Interior, Ivica Dačić did not implement a single reform, personnel-wise or organizational, primarily due to the very stable balance of blackmail with which compromised actors sustain each other in public life, often also in freedom from criminal liability. The best example of the existence of a balance of blackmail is the subsistence of the Police Director Milorad Veljović at this function. It is estimated that during his six-year tenure in MUP, Dačić employed around 4,000 party activists, even though OSCE assessments show Serbia does not need more than 30,000 to 35,000 members in the Ministry of Interior.

The new Minister of Interior is Nebojša Stefanović, of the SNS, who previously served as the President of the National Assembly. Stefanović is also seen as an unquestionable implementer of Vučić’s wishes and policies, both in the party as well as in the Ministry of which he is now formally in charge. The selection of State Secretaries is still underway. Assistants to the Minister are: Predrag Marić, Željko Kojić and Slobodan Nedeljković.

4.5 Parliamentary Committees for the control of security services, defense and internal affairs

The Security Services Control Committee, into which new members are already elected, has not yet elected its President. In the previous term, this function was performed by Jadranka Joksimović (SNS), and the Committee mainly dealt with defining detailed procedures for its own functioning. It remains to be seen whether good democratic practice of having one of the two Committees controlling the security system led by a representative of the opposition will be respected.

The publicly unfamiliar Marija Obradović from SNS has been appointed to the forefront of the Defense and Internal Affairs Committee. She replaced Dušan Bajatović from SPS. The Committee did not meet regarding the recent catastrophic floods in Serbia.

4.6 Energy, infrastructure and mining Ministries

Aleksandar Antić from SPS was appointed to head the Ministry of Energy and Mining, having no experience in this field. In the previous term this Ministry was led by SNS cadre, energy by Zorana Mihajlović, often targeted by Russian diplomats and the Gazprom leadership, and mining by Milan Bačević, close to the President of Serbia Tomislav Nikolić. Bačević was also considered as the first man of SNS for liaison with the United Russia party. Mihajlović is the new Minister of the new Ministry of Construction, Transport and Infrastructure, while Bačević, who failed to save his ministerial position, will probably get a comforting place in diplomacy. Dušan Bajatović, SPS, remains at the forefront of Srbijagas for now. The removal of Mihajlović from the Ministry of Energy and the subsistence of Bajatović are considered a direct consequence of demands from Moscow. In this way, another, perhaps crucial, Ministry in Serbia is given to the party already known to play in Putin’s Orchestra – SPS.

Here, the continuity of action of Putin’s Orchestra in certain state bodies in Serbia
should also be noted, primarily in the sectors of security and energy. Sources of the Danas daily in the security circles during the Government of Zoran Đinđić and the mission “Sablja” claimed already in 2012, that appointing the Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS) party official Radomir Naumov as President of the Board of the Electric Power Industry of Serbia, and then, in 2004, as the Minister of Energy, was “inspired” by interest relations with Russia. In this capacity, he signed dozens of contracts with Russian firms. DSS-cadre continued to lead energy policies during the Governments of Vojislav Koštunica: after Naumov it was Aleksandar Popović, at the time when the greatest privatization in democratic Serbia began – NiS. Naumov, however, continued to be active institutionally, but as a Minister of Religion. He will later be present in various privatization committees.

Despite the fact that many consider Russia as Serbia’s best friend, DSS, who openly campaigned to stop EU integration and strengthen institutional relations with Russia, failed to exceed the threshold. Experts believe that the reason for this is that the Serbian public, despite the rhetoric on the importance of EU integrations, recognized Vučić’s SNS as the main stronghold of unbreakable cooperation with Russia, even at the cost of EU integrations. SNS essentially did nothing to dissuade them of that. In the city Government, SNS introduced DSS, and Siniša Mali was appointed as the Mayor of Belgrade. Mali is also considered as an unquestionable implementer of Vučić’s plans. In his resume there are spots indicating a good understanding of Russian companies in the region.

5. The dynamic of internal relations in SNS

Within SNS itself, there was obviously a lot of tension over Vučić’s decision to bring non-party figures into the Government, who were not actively involved in the election campaign. Before the new cabinet was announced, there were many speculations whether the SNS President of the Board, Radomir Nikolić, Tomislav Nikolić’s son, will take on one of the leading positions in the Government. Radomir was, by the way, employed for a time in a branch office of Srbijagas.

The complex inner dynamic in SNS will be one of the main parameters, alongside Putin’s Orchestra on one hand, and the will and power of the EU to keep Serbia on its current course of slow convergence on the other, that will affect whether Serbia will move towards the political West or the political East in due course. Aleksandar Vučić, who is increasingly showing his true political face of an idea-less autocrat prone to micromanagement, inflates his rating in the wider public primarily through mainstream media. Despite his passive-aggressive manner of addressing journalists from almost all media, based on the number of positive articles and frequency of appearance in these, only Putin can pose as competition. The Ombudsman Saša Janković excellently speaks about self-censorship and the general state of the Serbian media in his Annual Report. One gets the impression that both the new and the old members of the Government are willing to endure Vučić’s humiliating manner of speaking and acting.

4.7. European integrations

Jadranka Joksimović, President of the Security Services Control Committee in the previous term was appointed as the Minister without portfolio in charge of EU Integrations. Expert circles consider that this architecture of state bodies: Minister without portfolio, Serbian European Integration Office and the Chief Negotiator, will be quite complicated for functional coordination of all stakeholders.

6. Putin’s Orchestra and the Western international community

Let us also have a look at the main characteristics of the other two parameters that will decide on the fate of the value-political course of Serbia - the strengths of Putin’s Orchestra and the policies of the Western international community.
6.1. Putin’s Orchestra

Putin’s Orchestra in Serbia has grown and became more tuned already in mid-last year, following a visit of Nikolai Patrushev, Secretary of the Security Council of the Russian Federation. Since that period, a large number of newly-formed organizations that almost entirely deal only with activities promoting Putin’s propaganda in Serbia appeared. Some previously established media portals with a clear Putin propaganda strengthened their presence in the public sphere as well, intensively reporting on the activities of the mentioned organizations. They form the core of Putin’s Orchestra outside of state institutions. For their views and attitudes they usually do not have formal public support of the national leadership, but without the invisible hand of the Government their increasing media and public presence would be impossible. The main state amplifier of this part of Putin’s Orchestra is the University of Belgrade, which is of particular concern. In the media sphere, these are the dailies: Večernje Novosti, Kurir, Politika, Informer, as well as the majority of political TV talkshows.

The unacceptable activities of the mentioned organizations, such as the making of lists of “Serb-haters” face an ambivalent reaction of the authorities. They (the authorities) never explicitly condemn such actions, and in the best case scenario give statements such as “we condemn any kind of violence”, which actually equates the actions of human rights activists with abusers from right-wing organizations.

One of the most recognizable modus operandi of the mentioned organizations, besides arbitrary criminalization of the pro-Western option in Serbia, is the non-hesitation to contaminate the public with inaccuracies or assessments completely taken out of context. Unfortunately, the openly pro-Western option too is small, quiet and inert to react to all the inaccuracies. It is also questionable whether there is any media space for it. The mentioned fifteenth anniversary of the NATO bombing is, alongside the already mass occurrence of over-dimensioning the extent of economic cooperation and potential for it with Russia, a good example. During those days, many scientific papers were published, mostly financed by Russian assets, analyzing the effects of depleted uranium, but not a single one considers the possibility that the accident at Chernobyl could have also affected some of the mentioned findings.

Part of the public that was loudly against the wars in the former Yugoslavia, for example, anti-nationalist and pro-human rights oriented, has now become anti-globalist, often with confusing views on Putin and Ukraine. Translations of papers on Ukraine of the great Timothy Snyder on the Peščanik portal are praiseworthy. Unfortunately, mainstream media in Serbia, unquestionably under the control of the Government, do not provide space for such an argumented analysis of developments in Ukraine. And because of this, as well as because of the complete disintegration of the opposition, the rhetoric of the Putin’s Orchestra falls onto very fertile ground. In the majority of Serbian media, Putin is an absolute hero of unquestionable action.

The field for the erosion of public support for European integrations, a primary objective of Putin’s Orchestra in Serbia, is very successfully prepared by the Serbian Orthodox Church (SPC) as well. With the acceptance of the Brussels Agreement it has gained a large space in the creation of daily politics. It increasingly relies and calls for cooperation with the Russian Orthodox Church, from which it has up to now significantly differed in its position on social freedoms. The SPC honored Leonid Reshetnikov, Director of the increasingly influential Russian Institute for Strategic Research in Serbia (RISI). Reshetnikov is a promoter of organic unity of the state and religion and is an advocate of the Huntington rhetoric of a creation of a special Russian civilization as a counter-balance to the West. He is one of the main conductors of Putin’s Orchestra who does not hesitate to even brutally attack the legitimate leadership of Montenegro when it does something that is not according to Moscow’s will. And the SPC gave its support to its priest Afmilohije Radović, who placed an actual orthodox curse against the
Montenegrin leadership for their decision to join the economic sanctions against Russia.

Resistance of the state to such Russian creating of a new situation in the field, with the support of Putin’s Orchestra within Serbia itself, is too weak. It leaves space for doubt whether the alleged commitment to European integrations, primarily of SNS, was simply an excuse for coming into power, which will disappear at the same time when public support to EU integrations does, as it did not at all stand up against its organized erosion. This was best seen during the parallel visit of the EU Enlargement Commissioner Stefan Füle and High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy, Catherine Ashton, on the one hand, and the Russian Duma Speaker Sergei Naryshkin, on the other. Naryshkin, who self-invited himself to Serbia, probably at the suggestion of Putin himself in order to test Serbia’s loyalty, is on the list of Russian officials targeted by EU and USA sanctions because of the annexation of Crimea and Russian operations in eastern Ukraine. Despite of this, he was received by the President of Serbia Tomislav Nikolić, the Serbian Parliament and the University of Belgrade. Almost none of the media, nor any official in Serbia, announced to the public the fact that Naryshkin is under sanctions. At the same time, his Bulgarian colleague wisely came up with another obligation and denied Naryshkin hospitality, despite the fact that Bulgaria is no less dependent on the import of Russian energy resources than Serbia.

Following the elections in 2012, when the reformed representatives of the Milošević regime came into power led by own interests and priorities, and a part of them even formally supported the normalization of relations between Serbia and Kosovo, the Western international community decided to once again strip down the criteria that a Candidate State needs to fulfill in order to start negotiations with the EU. This decision itself was not without merit, but is seems that the methodology of its implementation was flawed. The new Government, led by the trio Vučić, Nikolić, Dačić, was declared as reformist and pro-European, before they made any specific actions. This demoralized the previous actors of any such democratization of Serbia and gave the new Government a green light to overpay the process of normalization of relations with Kosovo both at the internal and foreign policy plan, increasingly showing its true authoritarian face.

One gets the impression that the Western international community has finally returned to a somewhat more realistic course of public disclosure of their assessments of events in Serbia. Over the past year, since the signing of the Brussels Agreement, and even before it, while it was preparing the field, it was evidently ready to value the positive trends in this field much more than the negative in others. The return of the EU to public disclosure of positions is good for Serbia, especially given the fact that after the elections it became clear that the inner critical voice on the actions of the current Government, except for economic measures, almost disappeared.

Sonja Biserko, President of the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia, recently stated a series of strong arguments on why the EU should, despite the negative trends in Serbia, speed up and simplify the process of accession. However, Serbia and others need to do much

6.2 The current policy of the Western international community in Serbia and the region

The question of how seriously the Western international community considers the already visible results of activities of Putin’s Orchestra in Serbia, as well as what measures can be taken to silence it, remains open. This also, without doubt, depends on the will of Serbian officials to be helped in this, primarily through support in EU integrations. If they care about the idea of modernizing Serbia and its membership in the EU, they would have to demonstrate this more clearly already, even at the cost of antagonizing the Kremlin. The previous silence and confusing messages of EU and Member State officials should not be, as they are now, understood as long-term support and understanding for the Serbian policy of sitting on two chairs.
more in order to coax the EU, taught by the bad experience of such an approach in the case of Bulgaria and Romania, to take such a decision. It seems that the public in Serbia does not understand the severity of challenges that the EU and its Member States are faced with, from articulating common measures towards the Kremlin, the situation in Ukraine, redefining of their security and defense policies, to negotiation on the Trade and Investment Partnership with the USA (TTIP). This is also followed by the very uncertain European Parliament elections and elections for new leaders of the European Commission. There is a chance that, due to the lack of interest of large political parties, anti-EU powers of the extreme right and left come out as victorious, also giving legitimacy to Putin, which will bring new challenges for the EU and potentially discourage it from enlargement towards the Balkans.

7. Where now?

In such circumstances, Serbian officials need to do everything they can in order to help the EU help Serbia. It is not only the matter of significant systemic financial support and help for rehabilitation of recent flood damage, but also the help from social floods that threatens us. There is great danger that, under the pressure of Putin’s Orchestra, its own dilemmas, challenges and misconceptions, Serbia gives up on democracy. It is, by the way, not only about merely counting votes or anarchy in which everyone can say what they want, as it is often vulgarized in Serbia.

Recently, the American non-governmental organization National Institute for Democracy (NDI) and the Belgrade Center for Free Elections and Democracy highlighted this danger. The main findings of their latest research show that the attitude of Serbian citizens towards democracy as a political system is increasingly dependent on their socio-economic status and that today, there is only 30 percent of those who consider democracy as better than any other form of government. It seems that Putinization, as a model of governance, also has significant support in Serbia, which is even more dangerous than the support that Aleksandar Vučić, the lead violin of Putin’s Orchestra in Serbia has.

If this trend continues, in parallel with the loud trumpeting of Putin’s Orchestra on the economic-political-social domination of Russia growing by the day – despite facts showing that the economic situation is worsening, and support for the annexation of Crimea given only by few rogue and failing states, or intimidated satellites – it will be increasingly difficult to argument in Serbia, why are rich countries democratic, as the Harvard Professor Ricardo Hausmann does. Once the trend of illusions overcomes the trend of factual decision-making, and one of them is that all countries that have undergone the process of EU integration are, despite the economic crisis, still among the richest countries in the world even if they do not have natural resources – as excellently noted by Gerald Knaus of the European Stability Initiative in his paper Why they look West - Ukraine, poverty and the EU – society usually falls into a prolonged decline, which Serbia should certainly remember.
Preliminary parliamentary elections have been scheduled in Serbia. One of the main features of the campaign is to avoid the topic of Kosovo, foreign and security policy, and regional cooperation, almost entirely. The economy is supposedly the main topic, although no one discusses in which value system it is to be observed, and on what foreign policy course will its fundamentals be based. Even the energetic Saša Radulović cannot come forward on this issue – he should be more direct regarding the West. The Liberal Democratic Party considers some things as self-explanatory and does not emphasize them in the campaign, which is already becoming frustrating and brings into doubt the honesty of their Atlanticism, or to say the least, their knowledge of how important determination on this subject is. Even stranger is that the electorate for this issue is larger than the average result attained by LDP in parliamentary elections. This electorate is, again, left without an option to vote for.

The main tone of the campaign has been imposed, naturally, by the Deputy Prime Minister and President of the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) Aleksandar Vučić. Almost undisturbedly, he not only advocates, but also demonstrates clear Putinization of the country, which he initiated the very first day of assuming his mandate as Vice President. It is manifested in weak institutions, dependent media, non-transparent flows of money and a complete politicization of the security system, instead of strengthened democratic control over it.

He created an image in the public that those who criticize his “great efforts and sacrifices for Serbia” and the SNS are themselves against reforms, do not think with their own head and are on Miroslav Mišković’s payroll, a tycoon who was held in prison for a couple of months, only to be allowed to leave the country even though a judicial process is still in place. Threats of judicial processions through the media, with saucy details from “sources familiar with the investigation” in high volume selling media that Vučić controls have become one of the main technologies of aleksandar Vučić’s reign. It now bluntly comes down to confrontation with all types of political opponents, and not on implementation of reforms, as he claims. Unless under the term of reform Vučić refers to the “privatization” and humiliation of the Emergency Situation Sector of the Ministry of Interior, which we have seen in the Feketić Affair, and the establishment of partization of...
the entire security system, which we see in wiretapping affairs of Vučić and his party colleague, Serbian President Tomislav Nikolić, especially focused on the unconstructive critique of the work of the Ministry of Interior (MUP) headed by Prime Minister Ivica Dačić, the introduction of the “fast lane” and the bypass of tenders for investors with cash, this time those allegedly coming the United Arab Emirates. Vučić’s rhetoric in the campaign, as well as politics as it seems, regarding relations with Russia, have not moved from having to mention strategic relations with Russia in the same sentence in which the importance of European integration for Serbia is highlighted. And even what he cannot be denied from the start of his mandate, the formal support for the Brussels Agreement and normalization of relations between Serbia and Kosovo, threatens to erode in the middle of the election rhetoric in which clear statements about the West expecting from Serbia to have Serbia and Kosovo as two separate legal entities are avoided, with allowing the deeply compromised Aleksandar Vulin, Minister without portfolio in the Government of Serbia in charge of Kosovo and Metohija, to manage policy towards Kosovo.

Unfortunately for Serbia, neither partization of the security system, nor the ambiguity of the approach towards Kosovo, or the compliance with Russian interests, or misuse of the media are not Vučić’s original invention. He simply, at the price of his own survival in power and formal support for EU integrations, raised the totalitarian level of his predecessors for a notch. A monument to the Azerbaijani dictator Heydar Aliyev, in hope that fast cash and investment will flow in from Azerbaijan, was placed in the Tašmajdan Park in Belgrade in 2011. In the presence of the then Serbian President Boris Tadić and Belgrade Mayor Dragan Đilas, placed today on opposite sides, the monument was unveiled by the then President of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev, Heydar’s son. Hence, the pact of non-aggression between Vučić, who is prepared to give, without a urbanistic plan or tender Belgrade as a whole, and not just one park and political pride, to the UAE and Tadić’s New Democratic Party comes as no surprise. In fact, weren’t Tadić and Jeremić, then Foreign Minister and Tadić’s political creation – the price of Tadić having support in the Democratic Party, provided by Jeremić’s father who is closely related to Russian interests - the ones who formally, so cheaply sold Serbia’s gas industry to the Russians? We had, obviously false, hopes for at least some freedom from the Russians, at least in some aspects of foreign and security policy (at least some money came in the end from Azerbaijan).

In Serbia overwhelmed by pre-election combinatorics, the opportunity that the SNS “shares responsibility” in the new Government with the Democratic Party of Serbia - the only party that has a clear policy in this elections campaign: No to the EU, only intensive institutional, political and economic cooperation with Russia saves Serbia - is rarely taken into consideration. Having also in mind that Serbia is on the brink of bankruptcy, but also the natural fondness these two parties have for conservatism and authoritarianism, as well as the increasingly expressed anti-Westernism - no matter what Vučić, who is not impervious within his party, said - this is a very possible scenario that must be taken into consideration much more seriously than until now. Tadić obviously lacks course and policy so he would easily find his way around. He has already cohabitated with Koštunica.

The South Stream is still erroneously presented in the election campaign as an economic, and not a primarily political, investment project on whose economic incompetence, as well as Putin’s stubbornness on the non-use of foreign exchange reserves, even Russian economists point out to. The obvious alliance of LDP with
SNS in the run up to elections has blunted LDP’s blade regarding critique of energy policy. Comparative analysis of the economies of the South and North Stream, which also has difficulties primarily because of the increasing influx of shale gas from the USA, is either not followed, or is deliberately suppressed in Serbia. The bravest statement that the direct actors of the political campaign in Serbia today can give against Gazprom in Serbia is on the poor management of the Socialist Party of Serbia cadre heading the NIS enterprise in Serbia, Dušan Bajatović, which is only a small part of the mosaic.

The fact that the statistics on both, the scope of economic cooperation between Serbia and Russia, and on the state of the Russian economy, as well as those on the alleged economic recession of the almost entire West, are in contrast with reality, should worry the public, and not Nenad Popović, DSS Vice President and the most agile in promoting this approach, or anyone else.

One is under the impression that the EU and the USA are, despite the abovementioned, still convinced that whoever wins the elections, Serbia will remain on the course of European integration. Having in mind the developments in Ukraine, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and even Bulgaria, that have one common characteristic with the atmosphere in Serbia – Russian influence, this is a lightly assumed position which the West should review as soon as possible.

Vučić, Nikolić, as well as Dačić or Tadić would not be the first, nor the last externally created newborn Europeans who would, due to an increasingly evident conflict of ideologies and governance styles, or money which they urgently need, thank the West - who aided their climb to power in tired, transitional states on the verge of becoming, or have already become, captured states - and turn to Russia. There they are, Azarov, Yanukovych and Snowden are already there, or are on their way.

Russia has no problem of democratic or consensual practice of decision-making as the West does, no moral dilemmas on the manner of conducting international relations or pressure for respecting the rule of law and human rights, or the obligation of respecting previously adopted budgets. It operates faster and makes financial and political decisions, as any totalitarian state that is. Hence the greater for playing on small points, despite not offering a viable, strategic vision, including also confrontation with its own problems and dysfunctionalities, like the West does.

Let us briefly review the very concerning development of events in Ukraine that the West and Serbia can both learn from. The competence of the just released former Ukrainian Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko, a controversial businesswoman favoring cults of personality and not necessarily the rule of law and respect for human rights, and her political allies - who were just placed onto important posts in Ukraine - to resist this sort of Russian magnetism is also questionable. The first thing that freed Tymoshenko said on Euromaidan was that she would love to see Yanukovych on trial. Very similar to the promotion of the "national-tabloid" justice emphasized by Vučić. Both Ukraine and Serbia must do better. With rule of law and respect of human rights against those who are corrupted and/or undemocratic.

Of course, the current state of affairs in Serbia, and the same goes for BiH, Ukraine and Bulgaria, can by no means be blamed solely on the “inert” West or the agile Putin’s Russia, which obviously skillfully penetrates in the space opened by the West too fast. The West, of course, has its share of responsibility, including the sometimes overly strong reliance on individuals who can realize their current interests such as the normalization of relations between Serbia and Kosovo or the preservance of Ukraine and BiH as a whole, in the face of continuous crisis management of the Western
Balkans and now Ukraine as well, often at the cost of developing independent institutions and democratization processes in these countries which it, otherwise, undoubtedly supports.

The entire region of the Western Balkans should be concerned over the lack of reality of people that many progressive circles look up to, such as the one demonstrated by the Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek, arguing that Edward Snowden and Pussy Riot, Russian girls who rotted in Putin’s prisons which did not prevent Snowden from seeking asylum from Moscow, are part of the same global rebellion. Without a more realistic perception of global events, both from the Right and the Left, it will be difficult for the entire region to choose one functional political economic course which is actually available – Euroatlanticism. Unfortunately, neither is the West itself free from drawing quick conclusions on developments in the region, and now in Ukraine, without determining the facts, which demonstrated through tightening progressive circles to give their unreserved support to the Ukrainian protesters, allegedly because they are fascists and ultra-nationalists, a spin systemically spread by official Moscow. However, the pendulum is faster to get back in place in the West than it is here. I warmly recommend an article by Timothy Snyder “Fascism, Russia, and Ukraine”.

The main culprits of the current harsh economic situation in the region, as well as the foreign policy confusion, as it must once be said, are the inert public in these countries. The ones who refuse to face the wheels of globalization, the consequences their political decisions had on the quality of their lives. The citizens who for more than a decade, in their free environment and through democratic procedures choose the political elites. The ones who do not solve the complicated situations in their countries but use them for remaining in power - and mainly do not risk to fundamentally change them, even at the cost of falling levels of support. The responsibility of political elites, and the citizens whom these are mainly the picture of, is greater in BiH and Serbia than the responsibility of those in Ukraine, who were only offered membership in the Eastern Partnership by the EU, not also the opportunity of full membership, which is a geopolitical blessing that many other developing states do not have. The citizens of Ukraine still do not have a liberalized visa regime with Europe. On the other hand, Russian influence and interest in that country are much greater than in the Western Balkans. The case of Bulgaria which is, due to Russian influence and despite being an EU and NATO member, slipping into political anarchy, caused also by great political apathy as a predominant reaction to the Putinized form of rule, is also cautionary, which is something that is rarely talked about in Serbia at all.

Despite obvious similarities in some aspects, a debate on the real consequences of the crises in the mentioned countries, or the possible solution scenarios that would contribute to the process of democratization and Europeanization in them, is not present in Serbia (the phrase of stabilization is deliberately omitted). The reaction of all Serbian state leaders to the developments in Bosnia and Herzegovina was shameful. No one showed interest in peace and prosperity of Bosnia as a whole, and all of its citizens, or an understanding for the unquestionable moment of explosive social unrest.

According to Serbian officials, developments in BiH are primarily orchestrated from the West with the aim of destabilizing and abolishing the Republic of Srpska and have nothing to do with great unemployment and late salaries, while corruption and dysfunctionality of the state are flourishing. Interestingly, the same thesis has
been promoted by all Russian state media as well. The Serbian state leadership, as well as the opposition - if something like that still exists - mainly remain deafeningly silent on developments in Ukraine. There is no position in the corruptness of the Ukrainian state leadership who, in order to conceal its primary nature and remain on power, recently drastically reduced some basic rights of citizens, limited the activities of civil society, and the moved into a brutal and violent crackdown on protesters, of which a large majority has legitimate requests for the fight against corruption above all, and only then for democratization of the country, its approximation to the EU and an end to the process of Putinization. The media controlled by Vučič, or the Russian Embassy in Serbia, often share misinformation on the number and influence of extremist Ukrainian right-wingers on the wave of rebellion against the Yanukovych regime.

This choice of the Serbian state leadership is obviously a policy aligned with Russian politics in the region, despite the fact that Serbia formally started negotiations with the EU. The process of approximation to the EU also means adopting the same views as the EU has, at least in the fields where is has a common position. The key topic of the election campaign should be the model of managing the country, reform of the security system and its foreign policy orientation that is, reaching a final decision on whether Serbia is headed towards the political East or the political West. The opening of negotiations with the EU certainly isn’t this, but it does represent a move in the right direction. Just like the foreign policy course, the model of state management in Serbia is still undecided upon.¹ For now, Putinization prevails which is, once more, manifested in weak institutions, dependent media, non-transparent flows of money and a complete politicization of the security system, instead of strengthened democratic control over it. Unfortunately, until now these topics have not been open in the campaign, despite the fact that over the last year and a half, Serbia was shaken by affair after affair, caused precisely by the situation in these fields. It is also discouraging that the so-called opposition politicians fail to understand the seriousness of the moment in which Serbia and the regions, as well as the entire Eastern Europe are in. Their entire campaign is based on unbearable vanity and unsettled accounts.

However, the West too could do better and more in the fight against the growing Putinization in Serbia and other mentioned countries. This primarily refers to Germany. It is good that the German President Joachim Gauck noted the need for Germany to assume greater global responsibility at the recent Security Conference in Munich. Hopefully this refers to a clearer position towards Russia, one that is more often agreed among partners. Gauck’s announcement has been very much notices and welcomed by the USA. It came at a time of a great debate on whether the USA should against enter into one post-great war phases when it licks its own wounds and focuses solely on internal politics. Such a development of events, in parallel with intentions of NATO to focus primarily on itself in the forthcoming period, would certainly not be good news for Ukraine or for the Western Balkans (let’s concentrate on these areas). The EU is needed but is not enough to achieve a success story in the Western Balkans and Ukraine, and even Bulgaria, such as the one achieved in the Czech Republic, Republic of Slovakia, Poland, and hopefully also Hungary in the end. The news that the economy of the Visegrad Four together is now the fifteenth world economy by force has, unfortunately, been missed in Serbia.

Joseph Nye is right to demystify the alleged USA isolationism, saying that the USA should naturally choose its battles and does not always have to intervene militarily; however, the spectrum of peaceful measures that the USA and the West can generally apply and the mistakes that they cannot repeat is still big and

powerful. For it, it is necessary to have the confidence between the USA and Germany rebuilt, severely impaired by the Snowden revelations, which Ivo Daalder point to in his paper. Daalder, perhaps in a slightly arrogant manner, but rightfully highlights: “The reality is more complicated. German society, not least those who for decades lived under the spying eyes of the East German regime, is especially sensitive to government surveillance of individuals. At the same time, technology has evolved so rapidly that it is difficult to comprehend the extent to which legitimate counter-terrorism surveillance now involves gathering large amounts of data, and how crucial such gathering is to preventing terrorist acts. The more we live our lives online the more we are all vulnerable to surveillance–domestic as well as foreign, governmental as well as corporate.”

Germany must show greater understanding and give more importance to the recent negotiations to establish a free trade agreements between the USA and EU, regardless of whether this might, in the short-term, jeopardize the competitiveness of its energy sector. Balancing with Russia is also very often caused by this regard, at a very high stake of democratization of Ukraine, for example, and one gets the impression of BiH and Serbia as well.

As regards the EU, the targeted financial and travel sanctions against official of the Ukrainian regime suspected for excessive use of force, adopted as a measure the other day by Foreign Ministers of EU Member States, make sense only if the West becomes more serious in applying the already existing financial regulations, as pointed out by Transparency Ukraine. Were these applied until now, Yanukovych and others would not have the riches they do. They do not only trade with Russia, and their finances are most often in tax havens with which the West still lacks the strengths to confront. Opportunism in international relations is normal, but it must be much measured much better and more often. The EU’s decision to ban the export of weapons and police equipment in Ukraine is a mere formality. In Ukraine, unfortunately, there are so much weapons and ammunition that a war can be waged for a long time, even under a theoretically firm embargo, although Syria and Bosnia indicate that something of the kind is impossible to realize. The question of availability of the same, which Bosnia makes us so eerily reminiscent of, is much more important. Hence the hypocritical note of Obama’s recent call to “both sides” to refrain from using it. This call was an insult to those who initiated this wave of discontent primarily with corruption in Ukraine, peacefully demonstrating for days in the freezing cold.

The Western media-political intensification of the logistical problems with which the organizers of the Winter Olympics in Sochi were faced with, went too far and seemed more as a lack of power than a criticism of Russia. The focus was drawn away from what it must remain on – if Russia managed to defend the Olympics from terrorist attack, at what price was this done, from the procession rights of the those suspected for terrorism in Dagestan, the rights of their families and fellow citizens, and further on. Now that the Olympics are over, Russia will intensify its projects of strangling democratic processes in the Western Balkans, Ukraine and even in Bulgaria. The power of the West should be in its ability to create a situation in which it screws Gazprom’s pipes, at it’s borders, as a response to Russian blackmail and not to just express concern and impose inefficient sanctions; to openly ask Belgrade, Kiev, Sarajevo and Sofia whether they wish to go to the East or the West, to choose Putinization as a form of governance or not.

Ukrainian priest during protests in Kiev. Source: Facebook
Serbia is faced with a choice – continuation of European integration and cooperation with NATO, as necessary but still insufficient processes for continued democratization of society and catching up with the stable and developed political West; or continuation of Putinization (Jelena Milić, *The New Century* no.4 August-September 2013), which obviously has support among the Serbian public itself, but is now accompanied by the naked Russian interest to “help” us in that process.

This is why it is good for Serbia that at its December session, the European Council adopted recommendations to have Serbia open negotiations with the EU in January 2014. Let us hope that the same will soon happen with the signing of the Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP), an agreement between Serbia and NATO through which relations with NATO would raise the level of cooperation from the Ministry of Defense to the Serbian Government level.

When it comes to relations with the EU, it is especially good that the “Negotiating Framework” adopted by EU ministers clearly states that normalization of relations between Belgrade and Prishtina will be included in Chapter 35, “at an early stage of negotiations” on membership with Serbia. It also states that “regulation of relations with Prishtina could be included in other chapters in duly justified cases”, and that “Serbia must ensure that its attitude towards Kosovo does not create barriers or influence Serbia’s implementation of the EU acquis”. That “Serbia will, as part of its

---

* The title Sad Stream is a game of words from the Serbian title for the pipeline - “Južni tok” where upon replacing the first letter of the pipeline’s title it is spelled „Tužni tok“, which translates to „Sad Stream“. 

---

*Leonid Reshetnikov,
Director of the Russian Institute for Strategic Studies (RISI)*

“Traveling towards the EU is like buying a ticket for the Titanic. On the other hand, one cannot join the EU without joining NATO. NATO is the key for joining the EU. For now it is like this. You cannot be pregnant a little. If you are pregnant, then you are pregnant. This is not written anywhere in public documents, but it is how it happens in practice. And the opinion of some politicians that you can join the EU without joining NATO is very much naive. Just look at the absurd that we reach. Serbia which has been linked to Russia for thousands of year, and we never went to war against each other, never found ourselves in opposing camps, might now find ourselves in completely opposing camps. I believe that every responsible politician must understand that joining NATO is not a simple move and that he will be held responsible for it before God. Our common history and life is all God-given. We are one orthodox brotherhood. We cannot betray that orthodox brotherhood and have them bring us to pieces. There are two US bases in Bulgaria now. And in line with the rules of the Army Chief of Staff, our rockets are aimed at those bases. Just in case.”
efforts to comply with the acquis – the laws and regulations of the Union, specifically ensure that adopted laws, and their geographical ratios, do not work against normalization of relations with Kosovo, is also pointed out. The conclusions of the meeting of EU foreign ministers make it clear that “the Council of Ministers will continue to closely monitor Serbia’s further efforts “for visible and lasting progress in normalization with Kosovo”, with each side continuing its own way and not hindering each other’s’ path towards the EU. In this new phase of relations with the European Union, Serbia must “pay particular attention to rule of law, especially judicial reform and fight against corruption and organized crime, public administration reform, independence of key institution, media freedom, further improvement of business conditions and the economy”. (B92, 17. 12. 2013.)

It would be good to have Serbian and EU officials interpret the conclusions in the same way from the very start. One gets the impression that the British-German non paper is to a great extent well-woven into the conclusions, which is good for Serbia in the long-term, primarily given the fact that the Brussels Agreement itself is written in a way which leaves a lot of space for arbitrary interpretation.

The same Summit also discussed the future of the EU Common Security and Defense Policy. The Summit in November already adopted a rather extensive set of conclusions in which, among other, the EU is called upon to take more responsibility in guaranteeing security; and for the CSDP to have a strong role in the comprehensive approach of the EU to crisis management; but also that more cooperation between Member States is needed. The focus is also placed on improving the situation in the defense industry, with the reminder that this industry fosters economic growth, innovation and provides jobs. (EU Security and Defence news, issue #76, December 2013)

Significantly less was written in the Serbian media on this part of the Summits work, compared to the famous date of the Intergovernmental Conference, despite the fact that Serbia, in the process of enhancing cooperation and fulfilling the expectations of the EU which relate to the EU CSDP, did a lot in this field in the past period. Or maybe it is precisely because of this, that is, because of the Russians, so little is said on this publicly.

The Republic of Serbia signed two important agreements in the field of security and defense policy with the EU already in 2011:

1."Agreement between the Republic of Serbia and the EU, which establishes a framework for the participation of the Republic of Serbia in EU operations for crisis management" and

2."Agreement between the Republic of Serbia and the EU on security procedures for exchanging and protecting classified information". (Ministarstvo spoljnih poslova Republike Srbije, 4. 12. 2013.)

The mentioned agreements were a prerequisite for participation of Serbian soldiers and police officers in international missions led by the EU, whose number and profile is steadily increasing, which is a multifaceted benefit for Serbia. The Serbian Ministry of Foreign Affairs also points out that the establishment of trust through exchange of classified information with the EU, and the creation of a basis for participation in EU operations, is important in the sense of building a new partnership with the EU in the field of security and defense.

However, it seems that the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, but also other centers where Russian foreign policy is articulated and implemented, whose representatives in Serbia are growing in numbers, primarily the Russian Institute for Strategic Research RISI, have their own view on these agreements as well as on Serbia’s convergence to the primarily to the EU, and not NATO. And there is a growing number of channels for dissemination of these, such as the newly-established Internet portal FAkTI, with unclear ownership structures.

One gets the impression that the pre-existing portals promoting more intensive cooperation between Serbia and Russia, such as Pravda and Nova srpska politička misao, became more active over the past couple of months. They
regularly, in synergy, publish articles from FAKTI, and other sources, now on a daily basis, which was previously not the case for a long time. It is similar when it comes to daily newspapers such as the Politika daily and Večernje novosti and the weekly magazine Novi Standard. You can now read in Politika how NATO reminds of the Third Reich (Politika, 14. 12. 2013). Unfortunately, the quality of arguments often put forward in support of intensification of Russian-Serbian relations is not always adequate. They do not even shy away from confuting facts such as those related to the volume of trade between Serbia and Russia, especially in comparison with the volume of trade with the EU (Jelena Milić, Blic blog, 14. 12. 2013.). Facts on the weaknesses of the Russian economy, which even Russian officials no longer hide, are being refused as well. Especially interesting is the one promoted by the first man of the portal FAKTI, a former correspondent from Moscow Djuro Bilbija, that Serbia should establish relations with Russia similar to those that Israel has with the USA. Bilbija oversees the “trivial” $118 billion which the USA, in the form of official grants, gave to Israel since the Second World War (Jeremy M. Sharp, U.S. Foreign Aid to Israel, 11.4.2013.). The majority of the newly-established and resurrected internet portals published a very informative interview with the RISI Director General- Lieutenant Colonel Leonid Reshetnikov, which was recently published, as FAKTI and NSPM say, an influential Moscow newspaper Stoletije. Reshetnikov who was, prior to his arrival at the Institute, Head of the Institute of Information and Analytical Administration of the Foreign Intelligence Service of the Russian Federation, in the mentioned interview, among other, compares RISI with the American RAND Corporation (NSPM, 16. 10. 2013.)

Reshetnikov became better known to the Serbian public when, during the summer, at the Faculty of Philosophy of the Belgrade University, whose pro-Russian infrastructure the Center for Russian Studies also recently resurrected, assessed that “Serbia has a choice – you are either on the Titanic or on our boat. Our boat may survive, but the Titanic will surely sink!” (Novi Standard, 11. 6. 2013.). The Titanic is, by the way, the EU and the political West in general. He gained Serbian glory in fall, when he directly accused the Serbian Minister of Energy, Zorana Mihajlović, for the sabotage of the South Stream. (RTV, 6. 11. 2013.) Somewhat at the same time when Reshetnikov compared the EU with the Titanic, the formally quieter Secretary of the Security Council of the Russian Federation Nikolai Patrushev, one of the most important and closes associates of Russian President Vladimir Putin was on a visit to Serbia (Akter, 23. 6. 2013.). Prior to his arrival to the position of “Chief of all Russian secret services”, he headed the famous Russian Federal Security Service. The focus of the meeting that Patrushev had with Serbian high officials was cooperation in the field of security and defense. That topic was also one of the main points of the Agreement on strategic partnership between Russia and Serbia finally signed prior to his visit. Official sources report that the possibility of exchange of security information in the fight against terrorism and organized crime was also discussed during the visit, as well as plans for further joint projects and investments in the defense industry.

One gets the impression that precisely since that visit, which passed quite quietly among the Serbian public, having in mind Patrushev’s influence, as well as how often, when and where he travels, as well as what happens in those countries afterwards, a wave of naked Russian pressure on Serbia began. That too, is also good for Serbia in the long-term because Serbian-Russian relations finally began to be seriously debated among the Serbian and international public, but only if Serbia continues the process of European integration and cooperation with NATO.

The wave, whose sea foam – the position of Srbijgas Director Dušan Bajatović and his discussions with Minister of Energy Zorana Mihajlović, which culminated with a denial of the Ministry that Gazprom signed off $50 million of debt (Blic online, 17. 12. 2013.), followed by undiplomatic statements of Shoigu and Russian Ambassador to Serbia Alexander Chepurin which were extensively written on (Jelena Milić, Less is also more than the “30 pieces of silver” mister Chepurin, it is a pity that
you do not understand, 17.10.2013.), resulted in the signing of two Russian-Serbian Agreements.

The first one, the Agreement in the field of defense between Russian and Serbia was signed by the Serbian and Russian Defense Ministers, Nebojša Rodić and Sergey Shoygu, during Shoygu’s rather spectacular visit to Belgrade in mid-November. The Serbian Deputy Prime Minister Aleksandar Vučić obviously had an exceptionally difficult task of defending the policy of Serbian military neutrality from Russian expectations. “Serbia will not join NATO, but neither will it join the Organization of the Collective Security Treaty which is under the umbrella of Moscow. Her goal is to be militarily neutral country”, Vučić stressed at the time.

The influential Večernje novosti evaluated the signing of the agreement as “After a dull decade and a half, this Agreement defines the relations of armed forces of these two countries on an entirely new basis. Although it is an umbrella agreement, based on which further military agreements will be negotiated, already now, its first results will be cooperation in the field of aviation, air defense and ground troops. Indications of a stronger partnership are joint exercises, but participation of armored units of the Serbian Armed Forces has also been announced at the tank competition which is to be held next year in Russia. Building stronger relations between the Serbian Armed Forces and the Armed Forces of Russia is envisioned as well. (Večernje novosti, 13. 11. 2013.)

Although some military analysts presented this agreement as relatively generalized and less important (Radio Slobodna Evropa, 13. 11. 2013.), they should certainly pay attention to it, as well as to future activities in intensifying military cooperation between Serbia and Russia, on time.

The second agreement, also uncomfortably non-transparent, is the Agreement on construction of the South Stream through Serbia, which was followed by an unusually fast commencement of operations on it (Večernje Novosti, 24. 11. 2013.)

Serbia and the Russian Federation actually signed three contracts on the South Stream – a protocol on the loan, a contract on transport and a contract on carrying out activities of public interest. It appears that there is no consensus on the legal content of any of the three mentioned contracts. Whether Russia banned Serbia for crediting its part of investment in the South Stream from the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) remains an open question, as well as whether the gas connection at Niš is built using grants from the European Fund for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA). Similar is the situation regarding the agreements Russia signed with EU Member States, through which the South Stream is supposed to pass, and their harmony with EU policies, primarily the framework of the famous (Energy Community of South-East Europe, 19. 12. 2013.)

Based on a series of interpretations of Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev, on the primacy of individual agreements and European legislation, the only thing that could be concluded is that even the Russians themselves are not sure in the stability of the mentioned contracts, and that the route of the pipeline through Serbia is gaining importance precisely because of this. In Heller’s famous book “Catch 22" there is a part when and American soldier and a skilled smuggler explains how he buys eggs at 18 cents, sells them for 16, and earns 4 cents for each egg. Here is what Medvedev says on the relation of the mentioned contracts: “From an international law point, EU laws represent national legislation, and intergovernmental agreements between Russia and EU Member States are regulated by international law. In international law, and law as a whole, there is a principle of primacy of international law over national legislation.”

Regardless of how much the pro-Russian lobby in Serbia tried to explain how Russia is doing Serbia a favor with having the pipeline go through us, perhaps even ambiguously through us, and not Romania, it seems that there is another reason behind this decision. In this way the pipeline does not pass EU Member States’ territory exclusively, which would probably strengthen the position of the EU in the ever more obvious dispute with Russia, on the legal foundations of the South Stream. EU officials
have only recently started publicly speaking about the conundrums associated with the project. Both the Russian and the EU position, as well as the entire confusion and timing of when this question if finally opened leave a saddening and worrying impression. Deputy Director General for the Internal Energy Market at the European Commission, Klaus Dieter Borhart, stated only in mid-December at a conference on the South Stream that the bilateral contracts which the Russian Gazprom concluded with states involved in the South Stream project, among which is Serbia as well, are contrary to EU regulations and that they need to be renegotiated (B92, 10.12.2013.), to which the EU Member States to which this applies agreed. On the other hand, Bajatović is adamant that there will be no renegotiations (Tanjug, 5.12.2013.). Nevertheless, the position of the EU was reiterated by the European Commissioner for Energy, Günther Oettinger, who stated "Serbia is a member of our energy community and must accept our market rules. Serbia's accession negotiations with the EU, which should start at the same time as the EU-Russia negotiations on the revision of the contracts are two linked and parallel processes. Next month in Moscow I will meet with the Russian Minister of Energy Alexander Novak in order to start negotiations on the revision of bilateral agreements in accordance with the mandate I was given by the Member States. There will no longer be a bilateral". (Blic online, 19.12.2013.).

News that officials from the region of the Western Balkans signed a Memorandum of Understanding between Azerbaijan, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Montenegro on cooperation in the project consortium Shah Deniz, as well as the Trans Anatolian Pipeline (TANAP) and the Trans Adriatic Pipeline (TAP). Total value of these projects is $35 million. The European Commission announced that in the long run, the decision on the project could ensure 20 per cent of Europe's gas needs.

The signing was also welcomed by the European Commission. On the day when everyone in Serbia was waiting to hear what Brussels will say on when and how negotiations between Serbia and the EU will commence, no one in Serbia, intentionally or not, paid attention to this statement of the European Commission on the matter (Europa press releases database, 17.12.2013.). The Politika daily reports that the documents signed in Baku encompassed investment decisions related to the project Shah Deniz, as well as the Trans Anatolian Pipeline (TANAP) and the Trans Adriatic Pipeline (TAP). For Serbia, which is currently in a media black hole from which, just as from the Russian embrace, it must urgently escape if it wants recovery, this is perhaps most important in terms of Russians and the world: "European buyers are fighting to find alternatives to the Russian gas giant Gazprom, whose contracts are tied to the price of oil, which often makes it more costly compared to spot markets." In short, the rest of the world ties the price of gas to gas, which is more readily available and cheaper (Politika, 18.12.2013.).
The American Foreign Affairs (Foreign Affairs, 17. 12. 2013.) sees the signing of the Memorandum a lesson for the EU that when it tries for something hard enough, it can achieve extraordinary results, which the signing of the mentioned agreement in fact is. It is suggested that in the same way it refused to give up on Caspian gas, the EU should neither give up on its influence in former states of the former Soviet Union. Hardly anything is said on the Balkans. The USA is, on the other hand, criticized for focusing nearly all of its attention on Iran, instead of keeping it on the post-Soviet Eurasia as well. Russian missiles Iskander M (SS 26 STONE, NATO classification) deployed first in Kaliningrad, followed by deployment in the southern Russian army district, seem to have finally returned greater US interest in all of Europe, along with that related to the trade agreement with the EU, which was also systemically ignored in the Serbian public, and the construction of the missile shield (Večernje novosti, 17. 12. 2013.).

Let’s remind ourselves that at last year’s NATO Summit in Chicago, NATO Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen announced that NATO plans to establish a complete “anti-missile umbrella” over Europe by 2022. NATO’s so-called “European shield” involves deployment of the most advanced US anti-missile systems Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD), also including the most sophisticated mobile radar observation system with X-band over horizon 3D effect - AN/TPY-2 (E-novine, 17. 12. 2013.). The Russians did not like this one single bit, and when the chance arose to slowly establish communication between the West and Iran, they showed that very explicitly.

Serbia, as the abovementioned, superficially follows the saddening developments in Ukraine, which has also balanced and traded between Russia and the EU for long, reducing everything to short-term economic benefit, ignoring the transformative effects of European integration. In Serbia, no one has officially publicly commented on the brutality of the Ukrainian authorities against the protesters, or on the systemic reduction of the number of protesters in Kiev in pro-Russian press. The Ukrainian opposition requests the details of the agreement with Russia, that is, to hear what Ukraine gave in return. In Serbia there is no opposition. The American POLITICO concludes that Putin just bought himself an entire state (Politico, 17. 12. 2013.). Maybe the question is whether Ukraine is the first one at all, and certainly the question is whether it will be the last one that Putin puts under his own rule in this manner.

Serbia does not even superficially follow another saddening story, that of a paralyzing political crisis and the Putinization of Bulgaria (Javor Siderov, The New Century no.4, August-September), even though it is a member of the EU and NATO in which Russians are very much present. And it should. Just as the EU and NATO should follow it more carefully.

It remains to be seen how all of the above will affect negotiations between Serbia and the EU. It seems that it is precisely this new phase of relations between Serbia and the EU, already previously expected to commence at the end of 2013 or beginning of 2014, that was the main target of the Russian wave of naked pressure from which we have not yet managed to pull out of, and not Serbia’s eventual membership in NATO, which is far-fetching anyway. Official Belgrade, it seems, is still trying to balance between the EU and Russia, which is very dangerous and must end soon, if we wish for Serbia to move forward, which also means choosing full EU integration. The fact that dissemination of poor and inaccurate arguments in debates on the future of Serbian-Russian relations can be interpreted as a sign of weakness as well, should not have us deceived. A weak and still value-confused Serbia can be seduced even by weak Russia, and the formal processes of cooperation with the EU and NATO can easily become a dead letter.
ABOUT THE CENTER FOR EUROC-ATLANTIC STUDIES

The Center for Euro-Atlantic Studies – CEAS is an independent, atheist, socially oriented left liberal think-tank organization, founded in 2007 in Belgrade. With its high quality research work CEAS generates precise analysis in the field of foreign, security and defense policy of the Republic of Serbia. Simultaneously, CEAS publicly promotes innovative, applicable recommendations and creates practical policy whose aims are:

- Strengthening of the socially oriented, left liberal democracy in Serbia
- Adopting the principle of precedence of individual over collective rights, without disregard for the rights which individuals can only achieve through collective action
- Development of the concept of transitional justice and the establishment of mechanisms for its enforcement in the Western Balkans region, exchange of positive experiences, emphasizing the importance of mechanisms of transitional justice for a successful security sector reform in post-conflict societies in transition towards democracy;
- Acceleration of the processes of Serbian EU integration and strengthening of its capacities for confronting global challenges through collective international action.
- Strengthening cooperation with NATO and advocacy for Serbian Atlantic integration
- Strengthening a secular state principle and promoting an atheistic understanding of the world,
- Contributing to the erection and preservation of a more open, safe, prosperous and cooperative international order, founded on the principles of smart globalization and equitable sustainable development and the international norm of ‘Responsibility to Protect’

CEAS fulfills the mentioned activities through various projects assorted in four permanent programs:

- Advocacy for Serbian Euro-Atlantic Integration
- Security Sector Reform in Serbia
- Transitional justice
- Liberalism, Globalization, International Relations and Human Rights

CEAS is an active member of the REKOM coalition which gathers more than 1,800 civil society organizations, individuals from all the countries stemming from the break-up of former SFRY. Among them are also missing persons’ parental and family societies, veterans, news reporters, representatives of minority ethnic communities, organizations for the protection of human rights, etc. The REKOM coalition suggests that governments (or states) establish REKOM, an independent, inter-state Regional Commission for the Establishment of Facts on all the victims of war crimes and
other heavy human rights violations undertaken on the territory of the former SFRY in the period 1991-2001.

During 2012 CEAS became an associate member of Policy Association for an Open Society – PASOS, the international association of expert non-governmental organizations (think-tanks) from Europe and Central Asia which supports the erection and functioning of an open society, especially in relation to issues of political and economic transition, democratization and human rights, opening up of the economy and good public governance, sustainable development and international cooperation. PASOS now has 40 full and 10 associate members, amongst which is the prestigious European Council on Foreign Relations from London - ECFR, and, until now, only the Belgrade Center for Security Policy - BCBP, from the non-governmental sector in Serbia.

During the same year, the Center for Euro-Atlantic Studies became the first civil society organization from the region of South-Eastern Europe to join the International Coalition for the Responsibility to Protect – ICRtoP as a full member. The coalition brings together non-governmental organizations from all over the world to collectively strengthen normative consensus for the doctrine of Responsibility to Protect (RtoP), with the aim of better understanding the norm, pushing for strengthened capacities of the international community to prevent and halt genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity and mobilize the non-governmental sector to push for action to save lives in RtoP country-specific situations. Among the prominent members of the Coalition are organization such as the Human Rights Watch - HRW and the International Crisis Group – ICG.

In April 2013 CEAS became the first civil society organization in Serbia to join the Commission of Associations of the Serbian Chamber of Commerce for Public-Private Partnership in the Serbian Security Sector. The Commission encompasses, among representatives of private security companies, representatives of the Ministry of Interior, as well as other state bodies and institutions who are, through taking care of state administration, also responsible for cooperation between the public and private security sector.

In September 2013 CEAS became a member of the Sectorial Civic Society Organizations – SEKO, for the rule of law sector. The program of cooperation with civil society in the planning of development assistance of the Office for Cooperation with Civil Society, especially the programming and monitoring of the use of the IPA in 2011, predicted the formation of a consultative mechanism with CSOs seeing the Sectorial Civic Society Organizations (SEKO) as the key stakeholder. The Sectoral Civic Society Organization is a consortium of civil society organizations of no more than three partners of which one is the lead partner.
THE CENTER FOR EURO-ATLANTIC STUDIES

ADDRESS: DR DRAGOSLAVA POPOVIĆA 15/II/15

11000 BELGRADE, SERBIA

TELEPHONE/FAX +381 11 323 95 79

WWW.CEAS-SERBIA.ORG

OFFICE@CEAS-SERBIA.ORG