

Helsinki *bulletin*



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RED CARPET FOR PUTIN



FONET

Russian President Vladimir Putin's brief visit to Belgrade attracted considerable attention at international arena carefully listening to messages about traditional friendship Belgrade and Moscow were exchanging during Putin's six-hour stay. Above all, all this was in the sign of a military parade (marking the 70th anniversary of Belgrade's liberation in the WWII) actually staged in Putin's honor despite all official explanations.

Putin dropped by on his way to Italy to the Euro-Asian summit with his Ukrainian colleague Petro Poroshenko. In diplomatic terms he surely wanted show the world that at this point there were still capitals seeing him as a most welcome guest. More importantly, with the West still in search for a response to his geostrategic provocations, he wanted to demonstrate that Moscow was successfully widening its maneuver space across the regions

influenced by its traditional geopolitical ambitions: and the Balkans is surely among these regions.¹

By the very act of inviting the Russian President Belgrade had emphasized the self-perception of a shrewd and important diplomatic player: the one that balances well the proclaimed policy for the membership of EU as its strategic goal and the strengthening of its “Eastern connection” with the country close to its “historical, religious and spiritual” heart. Commentator for the *Politika* daily Miroslav Lazanski capsulated this closeness saying, “On that day at least the international media – of those from the territory of the former Yugoslavia in the first place – was focused on Belgrade, while Serbia seemed to have taken over the role of the ex-Yugoslavia; in positive sense, speaking of economy, traffic, trade, policy, military industry...”²

Though internationally isolated for causing the biggest post-Cold War crisis in Europe (intervention in Ukraine and annexation of Crimea), Vladimir Putin did not play on Belgrade’s hospitality to further sharpen his country’s relations major European states. Addressing the military parade he only spoke about the common struggle against fascism but also seized the opportunity to diplomatically remind of the contribution by other allies of the anti-Hitler coalition. However, he missed not the opportunity (like Medvedev in 2009) to warn Baltic and East European countries against the growing neo-Nazism. Unfortunately, he said, the “vaccine” against the Nazi virus developed

1 „Realistically, Russia’s influence in the Balkans will grow in foreseeable future. Here I have in mind to major factors: construction of the South Stream Pipeline and partition of Ukraine. Russia is strengthening its influence through South East Europe,” says Dr Dragan Petrović of the Institute for International Policy. Blic, September 21, 2014.

2 *Politika*, October 18, 2014.

at the Nierenberg trials is less and less effective in some European countries. “Overt manifestations of neo-Nazism have become common in Lithuania and other Baltic states. In this context one cannot but be anxious about the situation in Ukraine and the coup d’état staged in it in last February by nationalists and other radical groupings,” he said.³

In an interview with the *Politika* daily Putin touched on US President Barack Obama’s recent statement earmarking Russia the bigger security threat than the Islamic State. This is he responded, “This is not the first setback in the relationship between our two countries. We hope our partners would realize how irrational their attempt to blackmail Russia is, and keep in mind what hovers over any discord between two big nuclear powers and threatens the world’s stability. As for my country, we would develop readily a constructive cooperation and genuine respect for the interests of both sides.”⁴

According to well-informed sources,⁵ Putin had five messages for his hosts: Russia is pleased with Serbia’s stance on the Ukrainian crisis; it expects that during its presidency of OSCE in 2015 Serbia will be showing understanding for Russia’s position; Russia expects Serbia not to give up the construction of the South Stream Pipeline; Moscow fully supports Serbia’s territorial integrity and sovereignty (supports Kosovo’s partition)⁶; and, Russia looks forward to

3 *Politika*, October 16, 2014.

4 *Ibid.*

5 *Večernje novosti*, 15. oktobar 2014.

6 The Head of Russia’s Office in Pristhina already said that Serbia and Kosovo should exchange territories; “That’s one of better solutions,” said Foreign Minister Dačić commenting on his statement. Russia is not after Bosnia’s stability, let alone after Serbia’s and Kosovo’s membership of NATO and EU. Instability in the Balkans suits Russia: it can role-play a crisis manager. Consequences of Serbia’s long-term economic ropes with Russia, especially in the domain of energy, would be unforeseen. Serbia’s

further strengthening of economic cooperation with Serbia.

Despite several ceremoniously signed agreements, mutual trade, especially Serbia's exports to Russia, will not grow significantly. The reason why is quite a simple one: neither Serbia's agriculture nor industry ("Zastava Automobiles") is productive enough to profit from the West's sanctions to Russia. The most intriguing agreement is the one on the privileged status for the employees of the so-called Russian Humanitarian Center in Niš; no chance that it will leave Serbia's partners in the West indifferent.

Serbia leaders Tomislav Nikolić and Aleksandar Vučić believe that notwithstanding Putin's visit they had managed to safeguard Serbia's "prestigious neutrality."⁷ This will turn to be impossible in almost no time. Though no official from the West (except for the US Ambassador Michael Kirby not attending the military parade) openly reproached Serbia for inviting Putin, Western capitals' reservations and anxieties about it were more than obvious.

President Nikolić's speech glorifying the history of the Serbian army as the history of liberation wars, freedom loving movements, "an epos of sacrifices for the country and the nation, and for salvage of other countries and nations...for centuries"⁸ was not exactly music to

ruling elite behaves irresponsibly when it comes to national interests.

7 Comparing Serbia and Ukraine, Serbian President Tomislav Nikolić said in an interview with TV Channel „Russia 1,“ „A part of Ukraine wanted to join the EU, and another was for Russia. Serbia has no dilemmas of this sort. It wants to be with both Russia and the EU. And both Russia and the EU should make sure we get this.“ Politika, October 12, 2014.

8 <http://www.novosti.rs/vesti/naslovna/politika/aktuel-no.289.html:515042-Nikolic-Srbija-je-bila-na-karti-svskog-osvajaca-ali-nikad-nije-vodila-osvajacke-ratove>.

the region's ears: it totally skipped over Serbia's responsibility for the 1990s wars.

The military parade scheduled for October 16 instead for October 20 (the official date of Belgrade's liberation) just to show honor to Putin was a culmination of servility to "the big brother." Like on the occasion of Medvedev's visit to Belgrade in 2009,⁹ the incumbent regime (regardless of President Nikolić's title of a Chetnik duke he had never renounced since 1993) was forced to recognize historical facts; hence, only the flags of Red Army and partisan troops that liberated Belgrade were seen fluttering in the military parade.¹⁰ Nevertheless, this far from settled Serbian elite's key controversy about the "leftist" (partisan) and the "rightist" (Chetnik) anti-fascist movement.

PREPARATIONS FOR THE PARADE

As said above, the Russian President visited Belgrade on his way to Italy. The Belgrade regime was informed well in advance that his visit could in no way coincide with the date of Belgrade's liberation. And so in due time they proclaimed that the 70th anniversary would be marked for ten days (starting October 10).

So it happened that the military parade marking allegedly the Liberation Day was scheduled for four days earlier. Even Serbia's mainstream and generally Russophile public and its outstanding figures saw this as awkward and undignified.¹¹ "No one in Moscow would

9 That was when Medvedev „restored“ October 20 as the Liberation Day the Koštunica cabinet had abolished in its revisionism and promotion of Chetnik quislings.

10 At the head of the parade were banners of Serb troops in the Balkan wars and the WWI.

11 „The Russian President is always a dear and most welcome guest, and citizens of Serbia have always manifested these feelings to him, even at the times domestic authorities or foreign embassies were not exactly enthusiastic about his visit...And he is the more so dear to

reschedule the May 9 parade,” said Dragan Šutanovac,¹² the MP of the Democratic Party and former defense minister. Other opposition MPs shared his view, additionally pointing to a costly parade at the time Serbia was forced to cut down people’s salaries and pensions.

US Ambassador to Serbia Michael Kirby spoke his mind a month before Putin’s visit. In an interview with *Večernje Novosti*¹³ he wondered how come that organizers failed to invite representatives of other countries the soldiers of which, in Red Army uniforms, also fought in the struggle for Belgrade. This, precisely, refers to Ukrainian soldiers. He also criticized Belgrade for hosting the Russian President at such delicate moment in international relations. “You can have good relations with Russia, China and USA. But our positions on visits by Russian and Chinese officials are not the same. The Chinese have attacked no one, while the Russians have,” he said.¹⁴ Polemicizing with his colleague, Russian Ambassador Alexander Chepurin said Ambassador Kirby had little knowledge of history¹⁵ and reminded him of NATO intervention in 1999. All that Premier Aleksandar Vučić had to say about the dispute was, “This is all about their affairs I wouldn’t meddle in.”¹⁶

Adviser to the President of the Republic Oliver Antić also commented on the upcoming parade. Soldiers with Chetnik banners and emblems should be parading too, he said, as that

us now that he comes to mark the jubiliary anniversary of Belgrade’s liberation by the Red Army in the WWII. However, adjusting the date of the central manifestation to his schedule is something tasteless and undignified,” wrote the editor of the New Serb Political Thought, Đorđe Vukadinović. *Politika*, September 30, 2014.

12 *Politika*, October 14, 2014.

13 *NIN*, October 9, 2014.

14 *Vreme*, October 9, 2014.

15 The US Ambassador referred to “the Ukrainian Army” rather than to the “Ukrainian front.”

16 *Vreme*, Octobr 9, 2014.

would only do justice to the truth.¹⁷ The organizers, however, did not pay respect to that “justice” of his; this once at least they decided not to fabricate historical facts. Moreover, the *Politika* daily was marking the occasion with a series of articles bylined by a youth member of the anti-fascist movement in Belgrade. He testified that together with Ljotić’s troopers and other collaborationists and German troops, Chetniks had been “defending” Belgrade from the Red Army and the partisans.

On the eve of the celebration Belgrade authorities decided to name two streets by partisan commanders Koča Popović and Peko Dapčević. Even newspapers published several stories about their roles in Belgrade’s liberation, but avoiding mentioning their brothers-in-arms from other parts of Yugoslavia. Nine generals commanded the troops liberating Belgrade: seven out of nine were Montenegrins. Newspaper stories ignored them all, the same as they bypassed the name of Marshal Josip Broz Tito and the Yugoslav People’s Army.

To demonstrate its “inner reservations” about partisans and the People’s Liberation Army the present regime made a senseless gesture by parading banners and emblems of Serb troops in the Balkan wars and the WWI. In his ceremonial address President Nikolić “explained” this saying that the parade was marking the 70th anniversary of Belgrade’s liberation and the 100th anniversary of the beginning of the WWI (!). Out of all partisan commanders he named Koča Popović only.

“Partisans are pulled out of hat for external while Chetniks for internal use: externally, we are red, while black internally. That’s yet another proof that everything is possible over here; and that is really dangerous in politics,” said historian Dubravka Stojanović.¹⁸

17 *Danas*, October 3, 2014.

18 *Danas*, October 16, 2014.

A PARADE OF CONFUSION

The parade itself was in the sign of an ideological confusion. Composition of VIPs watching parading soldiers and military equipment (mostly outdated and varnished) was most indicative. Most conspicuous of all in VIP seats were ICTY defendants generals Dragoljub Ojdanić and Momčilo Perišić. General Ljubiša Diković was at the head of the parade. Some time ago, the Humanitarian Law Fund revealed details about his military engagement in Kosovo and demanded his deposal. The regime responded not to the Fund's well-documented arguments. This was yet another testimony of Serb elite's moral insensibility and lack of political will for coping with the past.

Andrija Mandić, the Chetnik duke and present leader of Serb opposition party in Montenegro, attended as an invited guest. Invitation was not sent to Montenegrin President Milo Đukanović, although numbers of Montenegrins participated in Belgrade's liberation. "Throughout history and especially on such major dates Montenegro has been emphasizing Serbia's victories against fascism. There is no need reminding anyone of the numbers of Montenegrin units and outstanding Montenegrin commanders taking part in the liberation of Belgrade. With good reason can we be proud of the role we played in Montenegro and other countries in the region," he said.¹⁹ RS President Milorad Dodik, Russia's and Putin's favorite, was also seated among VIPs.

The parade was brimming with anti-fascist emblems (hammer and sickle, red star and the like) but combined with – as a reporter for the *Danas* daily put it – "Considering their Chetnik reputation and many other contradictory messages and details...our decision-makers left the impression of people committed to conflicting

19 <http://mondo.rs/a736942/Info/Ex-Yu/Djukanovic-Mi-kad-slavimo-ne-zovemo-druge.html>.

ideologies by turns, attempting to adjust themselves to confusing goals of the Serb policy of the moment."²⁰

ECONOMIC COOPERATION

Once again (like in 2011) Vladimir Putin announced a 10-billion-USD investment in Serbia. Russia's investments in the past three years amounted to 148 million Euros. In the next three years, said Putin now, Russia might invest 10 billion USD in chemical industry, agriculture and high-tech. Exports – like Fiat automobiles and dairy products like cheese – were agreed on in principle.²¹

According to economist Mihailo Crnobrnja, Putin did refer to a high-potential economic exchange but the problem is that nothing concrete was agreed on. Besides, he adds, construction of the South Stream Pipeline remained an open question.²²

Professor Ljubodrag Savić takes that such costly investments are unrealistic: true, Russia is a big country, but we have the problem for not being able to put to good use loans given to us such as the one for railroad construction, he says.²³ Moreover, he adds, we do not produce enough commodities like cheese, meat or milk the Russian market calls for. "As our livestock industry is in dire straits we cannot produce enough high-quality products in just one year," he says.²⁴ "Serbia is not a solution to Russia's food shortages. Russia imports 30-billion-Euros food. No matter how hard we try we can only supply one percent of its needs," says his colleague Mijat Lakičević.²⁵

20 *Danas*, October 18-19, 2014.

21 *Politika*, October 18, 2014.

22 *Ibid.*

23 *Ibid.*

24 *Ibid.*

25 <http://pescanik.net/srbija-u-neprirodnom-polozaju/>.

SOUTH STREAM AND ENERGY MONOPOLY

Serbia should not give up the construction of the South Stream pipeline, demanded Putin among other things. The issue itself stands among major discords between Belgrade and Brussels; let alone that the construction of the pipeline would ensure Russia a monopoly on energy supply in Serbia (and Republika Srpska), while Serbia would turn dependent on only one supplier of gas and oil.

In its 2014 Progress Report Brussels publicized in early October Brussels warned Serbia that the agreement on the South Stream construction signed with Russia was not in accord with the EU legislation. In Brussels the issue is also being closely connected with the Ukrainian crisis. EU High Representative Federica Mogherini said that “political conditions for the project are not yet ripe, considering the situation in Ukraine.” “If and when these conditions become normal again, technical negotiations on the construction may begin,” she explained.²⁶

Washington also looks askance at the South Stream, especially at “monkey business” accompanying it, as US Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland put it.²⁷ Although her harsh rhetoric mostly targeted EU member-states in preparation for the construction of the South Stream pipeline (Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Hungary, Romania and Slovenia), Serbia can hardly be excluded from this context.²⁸

In Serbia, construction of the South Stream has been postponed constantly. In the meantime, the media leaked news about drastic growth of the project expenses (by 45 percent).

²⁶ Danas, October 8, 2014.

²⁷ Politika, October 6, 2014.

²⁸ Ibid.

That would be an extra 1,400,000-Euro-burden on Serbia questioning the very rationality of the project.

Vladimir Putin’s reply to a reporter’s question about the South Stream (an obviously prearranged one) at a press conference in Belgrade was ambiguous and kind of metaphoric – something in “two for love” style.²⁹ It remained unclear whether higher costs make Russia consider postponement of the project or was putting across a message to the EU that it is ready to accept European energy rules.

THE NIŠ CENTER

The Russian-Serbian Humanitarian Center was opened on April 25, 2012 for prompt reactions against fires, natural and industrial disasters. It also provides services in the territories of Croatia, Montenegro and Macedonia.

In an interview with Politika, Putin pointed out the significance of the Center. In the past years, he said, Russians have many times intervened in emergencies in the Balkans. In May 2014, they “helped to evacuate citizens from the flooded areas.” Russia sent over 140 tons of humanitarian aid.

Russia’s Deputy Minister for Emergencies Vladimir Artamanov paid a visit to a newly opened Center for Management of Emergencies within the Russian-Serbian Humanitarian Center. “I saw that the Center operates efficiently and develops smoothly, and that local citizens fully support its management. It proved its efficiency during the May floods: the Russian rescue team worked shoulder to shoulder

²⁹ Putin said, “The South Stream is like love; it can be a happy one only if both sides in that wonderful process want to continue their relationship. RTS, live broadcast of the press conference, October 16, 2014.

with its Serbian counterparts,” he said on the occasion.³⁰

The media announced that an agreement on the status of the Center would be signed during Putin’s visit: however, no news stories about the very act were published after or during the visit. Considering the West’s interest in the Center everything dealing with it was kept under wraps. One cannot but be concerned with Russia’s growing insistence to get the cooperation in the domain of security and defense stronger, a pressure on Serbia it could not or would not resist for various reasons – and all this at time when the West speaks more and more about the necessity that candidates for EU membership should better adjust their policies to that of the EU.

REACTIONS FROM THE WEST

The US Ambassador’s statement was actually the only expression of Western dissatisfaction spoken aloud. Other manifestations were practically contrary to it. In the days of “counting down” the moment of Putin’s arrival to the Belgrade Airport, Serbian officials were receiving encouraging messages from all other parts of the globe.

According to some analyses, even the EU Progress Report on Serbia was less critical than it should have been: it encouraged Serbia to “pursue its course” and thus “justify the decision on the beginning of accession negotiations.”³¹ True, the foreign policy section of the report quotes that Serbia adjusted its policy to that of the EU by 62 percent, which is by far lower than in 2013 (89 percent). This fall is mostly to be ascribed to EU decisions on sanctions against Russia for the Ukrainian crisis Serbia has declined. “(The report) avoids to

³⁰ Blic, October 17, 2014.

³¹ Danas, October 14, 2014.

openly criticizing Belgrade’s more and more evident cooperation offers to Moscow, although this could figure as a political battlefield in the future,” says German professor of international law Franz Lotar Altman.³²

For the time being Western officials tolerate Serbia’s “double game” – probably through their gritted teeth. On the eve of Putin’s visit, US Secretary of State Joseph Biden telephoned Aleksandar Vučić twice. The media reported that in a friendly conversation Biden “express America’s respect for and support to the reforms Serbia has launched, and said he hoped it /Serbia/ would remain a factor of stability in the entire region of the Western Balkans.”³³

During his visit to Belgrade in early October Austria’s Foreign Minister Sebastian Kurz showed understanding for Serbia’s “special situation” and said it /Serbia/ could “contribute to keeping channels with Moscow open.”³⁴ Dušan Šidanski, the special adviser to the former President of EC Joseph Manuel Baroso, also takes that Serbia, while presiding OSCE in 2015, could mediate the negotiations aimed at “normalizing relations between the EU and Russia.”³⁵

Serbia’s officials claim they are aware of the necessity of adjusting the country’s foreign policy to the EU, but usually emphasize that this is a process to be rounded off by the end of accession negotiations.³⁶

However, more and more signals indicate that Europe and US will be not showing

³² Ibid.

³³ Vreme, October 9, 2014.

³⁴ Danas, October 8, 2014.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ „Serbia is obliged to adjust its foreign policy to Brussels by the end of the accession process. To have it adjusted now is unrealistic,” said Foreign Minister Ivica Dačić, Politika, September 22, 2014.

understanding for Serbia's "specific situation" for much longer. This depends on whether or not the cease-fire in Ukraine turns into "a peace process," says Tim Judah, British reporter and expert in the Balkans. If it turns not, "Serbia will be able no longer to sit on two chairs," he says.³⁷

To all appearances, neither will EU wait to Belgrade to adjust its foreign policy to Brussels till the end of the accession negotiations. "Serbia, like all other candidate states and potential candidates, assumed an obligation of conformity in the security and common defense policy, which entails imposing restrictive measures such as sanctions," said Maja Kocijančić, the spokeswoman for EU diplomacy.³⁸

In the period to come we could expect a stronger pressure from EU to take sides, admitted President Tomislav Nikolić.³⁹

That is why some speculate that Brussels wants to open the negotiating chapter 31 – on foreign policy and security – as soon as possible. The area has been screened twice in the past couple of months, once in the presence of Foreign Minister Ivica Dačić.

GAMBLING WITH THE FUTURE

Putin's brief visit to Belgrade, the exalted welcome domestic officials gave him, including the military parade in his honor, plus parading Russian pilots and planes seem to have tensed the atmosphere in which Serbia has balanced its foreign policy so far. Serbia's top officials continue stressing out the country's commitment to EU as its strategic goal. President Tomislav Nikolić reiterated it in his welcome

37 „RTV B92, October 2, 2014.

38 Politika, October 15, 2014.

39 Politika, October 16, 2014.

speech, and Premier Vučić at the joint press conference with President Putin.

However, some questions remain open: for how long shall Brussels be tolerating the ever stronger political and "spiritual" ties between Belgrade and Moscow, and Serbia's neutrality?; does Moscow really mean it when claiming its support for Serbia's movement towards EU?⁴⁰ and, has Serbia itself definitely made up its mind about the course to pursue considering public opinion polls according to which 70 percent of interviewees welcomed Putin's visit while the percentage of those in favor of EU-membership has been about 50 in the past couple of years.

This crucial dilemma mirrors Serbia's ongoing double play – a growingly risky one from the angle of geostrategy. The international situation has changed since the time when the former Yugoslavia (the present regime likes to compare itself with, though without any solid argument) had balanced skillfully between the two confronting blocs.

Russia's latest "offensive" in Serbia – with the monument to Russian Emperor Nikolai II newly erected in downtown Belgrade, the world premiere of Nikita Mikhalkov's "Sunstroke", the upcoming visit of Russian Patriarch Cyril, "The Karić Brothers" award bestowed on Putin and, above all, Putin's presence at the military parade – can hardly found an echo in Western capitals. "Does it means that while ratio tells us to pursue the European course, our heart at the left still directs us towards our pan-Slovene,

40 „Serbia has the position that Russia tries to deny to Ukraine. Namely, Serbia has SAA with it key section of free trade, and it has a free trade agreement with Russia. For Russia, this is incompatible in the case of Ukraine. According to some Russian sources, such stance might hint that the same would apply to Serbia," says Vladimir Gligorov of the Vienna Institute for International Studies. Danas, October 1, 2014.

Eastern Orthodox brothers in the East?" asks commentator Boško Jakšić with good reason.⁴¹ If so, Serbia's foreign policy is halved, he concludes.⁴²

Serbia's society, show the latest public opinion polls, is truly halved. And this applies to the ruling (SNS-SPS) political elite and its electorate. Even the non-parliamentary opposition, including its most conservative and right-wing parts, strongly influences almost all strata. This bloc, though scattered in different groups (Dveri, Obraz, 1389, etc.) and parties (Third Serbia, Serb Radical Party, Democratic Party of Serbia), should not be underestimated: it is very agile in public life, luring people with nationalism and Russophilia. Based on Serbia's traditional anti-Westernism, it counts on a geo-strategic turnabout once international circumstances change. The recent election of Sandra Rašković Ivić the President of the Democratic Party of Serbia announces maybe a new coalition of right-wing parties that would stand

for a strong opposition to the ruling elite's "Euro-philia."

Considering domestic and international constellation, Serbia should make up its mind about political course as soon as possible. Sitting on two chairs or "riding two circus horses" (the metaphor analysts and commentators like to use describing Serbia's behavior) is not exactly comfortable. "The end of the 'mini' Cold War is not in sight and picking out the last minute for taking sides will be the biggest challenge. The fall will be extremely painful if that last minute is missed," says commentator Zoran Ćirjaković.⁴³

The Premier's and the President's statements about Putin's visit and relations with Russia are most ambivalent. Speaking about his father in an interview, the Premier said he /his father/ had respect for his /the Premier's/ endeavor but "as a big and genuine Russophile fears I might move to the West too much."⁴⁴

41 Politika, October 8, 2014.

42 Ibid.

43 Politika, October 15, 2014.

44 <http://www.novosti.rs/vesti/naslovna/politika/aktuel-no.289.html:515007-Vucic-Moj-otac-rusofil-plasi-se-dane-pridjem-Zapadu>.

CONCLUSION

What adds to the controversy of the military parade is the fact that Serbia had formally opted for European integration, which implies harmonization of its foreign policy. Serbia is facing a difficult challenge: to pursue its movement towards the membership of EU or give it up and strengthen its ties with Russia. Even if the Premier is truly for EU the resistance within his own party and general anti-Westernism of the Serb elite will be a huge stumbling block in the way of Serbia's movement towards the West that ensures its real interests.

Putin's visit to Belgrade laid bare the growing risks to the Western Balkans' accession to EU as the consequence of Russia-US/EU tensions.

The entire region should go for a more comprehensive, common energy policy that would make it less dependent on Russian energy supplies.

With this in mind, the Western Balkans should develop a cross-border energy network of its own.

Consequences of Serbia's long-term economic ties with Russia, especially in the domain of energy, are unforeseen. The incumbent regime behaves irresponsibly when it comes to national interests.

If the West really wants to have the Western Balkans within EU, EU itself should speed up the region's democratization and economic recovery. Failed transition and stagnation are the main causes of the region's political wandering.

EU should develop an all-inclusive, European energy strategy to encompass the Western Balkans as well. One-sided arrangements with Russia cannot be prevented otherwise, the more so since some EU member-states are making the same deals.