

Helsinki *bulletin*



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NO.118 // JULY 2015

CHAIRMANSHIP OF OSCE DRIVES SERBIA OUT IN THE OPEN



FONET

Serbia is now in the second half of its one-year chairmanship of the Organization for European Security and Cooperation /OSCE/. Generally, over the first six months the regime and its diplomacy have managed to strike a balance between different and often opposing interests of many member-states. Interests have clashed most dramatically when it came to the Ukrainian crisis testing Europe's policy of collective security for two years now.

Serbia has also tried to maintain its own "balance" on the proclaimed policy of neutrality: to be equidistant to Brussels and Moscow.¹ Some domestic analysts have argued that Belgrade's

¹ As of January 2014 Serbia has been in the process of accession to EU. Since then, however, Serbia has been at odds with Brussels about the common foreign policy: Belgrade has not only denied to join Brussels by imposing sanctions on Russia but has been growingly in discord with Brussels' foreign policy, especially when it

neutral position was almost ideal for mediation between the West and Russia.² However, this neutrality turns to be growingly unsustainable. Generating confusion, it makes both sides more and more suspicious of Belgrade. This was more than evident in the case of the Great Britain's draft resolution on the Srebrenica genocide and Moscow's veto on it in the UNSC at the eleventh hours.

The chairmanship of OSCE revealed Serbia's capacity for political management, both domestic and international. The state that has been a "geopolitically open system"³ ever since Yugoslavia's disintegration, as an analyst termed it, the state without a consistent domestic and let alone foreign policy – from Koštunica' "neutrality," through Tadić's "three pillars" to Vučić-Đačić's "enforced" one – is capable only for "perverse performances."⁴

This December Serbia will host a major jubilee: the 40th anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act of 1975. In the bipolar world Europe's collective security (including US and Canada) functioned within the frame of *detante* (relaxation of strained relations). But in today's dramatically changed circumstances Europe's security faces new challenges. As it seems, OSCE member-states will have to discuss seriously the security architecture of the continent and its possible reconstruction.

SFR Yugoslavia's international and diplomatic repute four decades ago exceeded the country's actual size and invested it with respect worldwide. The same refers to its contribution to

came to Russia's involvement in the Ukrainian war over annexation of Crimea.

2 Helsinki Bulletin No. 112.

3 Danas, July 1, 2015.

4 Ibid; Commentator Željko Pavićević says that building of „secret Russian bases in Niš“ on the one hand and signing the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) with NATO on the other is in foolish discord.

drafting the Helsinki Final Act and baskets accompanying it. Though aspiring to this part of Yugoslav heritage, Serbia is far from acting like Yugoslavia or attaining its repute.

Though no one yet criticized Serbia openly, there are more and more indications that its "tightrope walking" between Russia and the West could be a fiasco. In the atmosphere resembling increasingly that of the cold-war era this "tightrope" is thinner and thinner.⁵

WORK DONE SO FAR

Putting forth its candidacy for OSCE chairmanship in 2012 Serbia was doubly ambitious: collectively, believing that Belgrade could participate successfully in international affairs like it used to once it was the capital of Yugoslavia; and personally, so to speak, as a personal ambition of the former "steroidal" foreign minister, Vuk Jeremić. Like in the case of the Yugoslav crisis, no one anticipated Russia's annexation of Crimea and its involvement in the conflict in Eastern Ukraine causing the biggest security challenge in Europe.

This placed Serbia, willy-nilly, in the center of the crisis it was not up to. However, since the governing structure of OSCE changed in the meantime (the chairmanship is actually performed by a *troika* – the former, the present and the future chairman) Belgrade shares the burden of responsibility for all failures with Berne and Berlin.

Though the Ukrainian crisis had not escalated in the meantime because of non-implementation of the Minsk 2 agreement (February 2015)

5 Not long ago in Vienna the Panel of Outstanding Figures (the newly established mechanism of OSCE) presented its report on Europe's security, and all of its participants complimented Serbia on its chairmanship; only Russia's representative was reserved.

the status quo is more and more unsustainable. And despite the fact that OSCE is not a key player (the Minsk agreement was reached by the so-called Normandy Four – Germany, France, Russia and Ukraine) there is no doubt that it plays a major role in mediation, observation and reconciliation.

Also, as Serbia's Foreign Minister Ivica Dačić put it, OSCE has the advantage of being the only organization recognized by all the sides involved, and the only organization capable of bringing them at negotiating table.⁶ Since the beginning of Serbia's chairmanship the number of OSCE observers has been doubled (from 500 to 1,000), its mission in the terrain prolonged, while the Trilateral Commission – Russia, Ukraine and OSCE – formed four work groups: for political, humanitarian, security and economic issues.

In this context, according to Dačić, the chairman wants to be a key factor in the search for a lasting political solution. "Serbia's top priority in its capacity as the chairman of OSCE is to change the course of the extremely critical situation," he said in his address to OSCE Parliamentary Assembly in early July in Helsinki.⁷ This was what he announced on several occasions but did not paid a visit to Kiev yet.

RUSSIA'S AND THE WEST'S EXPECTATIONS

For Russia the British draft resolution on the 20th anniversary of the Srebrenica genocide in UNSC was a litmus test to determine Serbia's loyalty. Moscow had made it clear that it would veto the resolution should Belgrade ask it to. At first Premier Vučić and Foreign Minister Dačić claimed they would never ask such a

thing. That looked only logical given that otherwise EU member-states Serbia would like to join, would interpret it as a provocation. On the other hand, domestic officials were probably expecting Russia to veto the resolution on its own initiative.

However, a couple of days before the UNSC session (scheduled for July 7) President of the Republic Tomislav Nikolić asked Russia's President Putin to veto the document and thus, according to the Politika daily, "put an end to the agony of the public in Serbia."⁸ Some analysts take that Nikolić wrote to Putin without having consulted the government and by acting on his own placed Premier Vučić in an awkward situation.⁹ What is more probable, however, is that the President and the Premier in this case operated in unison.

This (un)expected turn of events gave rise to new dilemmas in the West. It is obvious, as Boško Jakšić of the Politika daily says, that "Russians are seizing every opportunity, Srebrenica included, to get their foot in the Western Balkans' door."¹⁰ Following the vote in the SC observers began speculating what Moscow would ask from Belgrade in return.¹¹

Brussels and Washington alike have their doubts about Belgrade since Serbia, though a candidate for the membership of EU, follows not the common EU policy (denying to impose sanctions on Russia). The West anxious about a possible agreement on major international issues the two sides could reach.

Among other things, this anxiety can be related to what Aleksey Pushkov, the president of the

6 Conference "Prospects of Serbia's Foreign Policy," Belgrade, June 26, 2015.

7 Politika, July 10, 2015.

8 Ibid.

9 Editor-in-chief of the Vreme weekly Dragoljub Žarković, Blic, July 6, 2015.

10 Politika, July 3, 2015.

11 According to Serbia's officials Russia asked nothing in return; Danas, July 10, 2015.

Duma Committee for International Affairs and head of the Russian delegation in the CoE Parliamentary Assembly, said he expected from Serbia. Apart from hoping that Serbia would not yield to “the pressure from the West” and impose sanctions on Russia, Kremlin would like to have Serbia on its side in some upcoming initiatives. More precisely, to have Serbia’s vote for two draft resolutions to be submitted to OSCE Parliamentary Assembly: behind the veil of condemnation of neo-Nazism one would condemn Baltic states and Ukraine the anti-Russian stance of which Moscow interprets as “Nazi” and “neo-fascist,” while the other to “lifting sanctions” from Russian parliamentarians in the Council of Europe.

In January 2015 Russian parliamentarians walked out of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe in protest for being deprived of vote. Head of the Russian delegation Aleksey Pushkov said on the occasion that because of such attitude of the Council of Europe other organizations such as OSCE are becoming more and more important. “We are going to focus our attention on OSCE,” he said.¹²

However, after her meeting with Pushkov, Head of Serbia’s parliamentary delegation in OSCE Dijana Vukomanović said, “My colleagues from the four-member Serb delegation would vote for draft resolutions in accordance with their own conscience and beliefs.”¹³

And yet, at the OSCE parliamentary session in Helsinki in early July Serbia’s delegation did not have to have its say at all since Russia’s two draft resolutions were not placed on the agenda when Finland denied visas to Russian parliamentarians.¹⁴ OSCE parliamentarians

12 Politika, June 22, 2015.

13 Ibid.

14 Foreign Minister Ivica Dačić phoned his Finish colleague to ask him to issue visas to Russian parliamentarians. Danas, July 1-12, 2015.

adopted with majority vote the resolution condemning “the continuation of Russia’s action in Ukraine.”

SERBIA IS SUSPICIOUS, TOO

Serbia’s officials feel being more and more ignored, especially when seeing that in some major issue Russia and EU alike “forget” about Serbia. Foreign Minister Ivica Dačić said that at the recent Economic Forum in St. Petersburg Chairman of the Management Board of Gazprom Aleksey Miller had told him that EU and Russia had negotiated on the construction of the “East Ring” pipeline from Azerbaijan to Slovakia, skipping Serbia. Commenting on EU’s offer to Russia, Dačić said he could not have imagined “Brussels officials being such hypocrites.”¹⁵ “When Russian gas is to be delivered to Serbia, that’s a political problem, and when it goes of Western and North Europe, that’s economy that has nothing to do with politics,” he added.¹⁶

While accusing EC – which said no comment to his statement – of hypocrisy, Dačić refrained from reproaching Russia for not having informed him about the negotiations at an earlier date (the above-mentioned project with uncertain outcome has been in circulation for almost twenty years now).¹⁷

President of the Gas Association of Serbia Vojislav Vuletić claims, “EU does not want us in its gas related plans as were are neither in its membership nor that of NATO, and have not imposed sanctions on Russia.”¹⁸

Sitting on two chairs – as many describe Serbia’s attempt to please both Brussels and

15 Politika, June 21, 2015.

16 Ibid.

17 EU and Russia have not agreed on the project again. .

18 Politika, June 24, 2015.

Moscow – seems to become less and less comfortable.

SERBIA IS MORE AND MORE CONFUSED

The chairmanship of OCSE made in no way Serbia to make its geo-strategic choice at long last. On the contrary, statements, emotional reactions (inappropriate allegations against the West for Britain's draft resolution) and accompanying pathos (of President Nikolić's letters to Russia's President Putin and Queen Elizabeth II of the Great Britain) are reverting Serbia's officials to the currents of the past they have renounced declaratively.

The main reason why Serbia has not yet taken a consistent political stance on international affairs is its mainstream political and intellectual elite denial to recognize today's balance of power and adopt the value system established in the post-cold war Europe. This values system, as Simo Vuković of the European Center for Peace and Development put it, "implies also historical judgments about the character of the 1990s, including those on the Srebrenica genocide and KLA as a liberation army in Kosovo."¹⁹

By accepting this value system Serbia would position itself differently at the international scene and move speedier toward the membership of EU – which is crucial to regional stability. Otherwise, one can hardly expect neighboring countries to start trusting Serbia and its intentions.

Because of all these circumstances the Serb elite would not recognize or is incapable of recognizing, Serbia's parliament has not discussed, let alone adopted a document on the

¹⁹ Danas, June 29, 2015.

country's foreign policy since the ouster of Slobodan Milošević.

This is notably reflected in regional relations that, over the past three years, have been dramatically oscillating and even aggravating, especially when speaking of Serbia's relations with Croatia, Kosovo and Bosnia-Herzegovina.²⁰

THE WEST'S INTENSIFIED ACTIVITY

The British draft resolution on Srebrenica revealed how precarious and inferior Serbia's international standing is. By vetoing the resolution Russia (like Serbia) demonstrated disrespect for UN highest judicial bodies, and unwillingness to join the international efforts for activation of UN preventive mechanisms (such as R2P).

The Srebrenica incident – the assault at Premier Vučić – further energized the West's communication with the entire region. The visit by US Secretary of State Victoria Nuland was most indicative in this context. In an interview with RTV of Serbia she appealed for putting history in proper perspective and calling developments in the past what they really were. She invited the Serbian Premier for a visit to US and a meeting with Vice-President Joseph Biden, whom he had not met with during his visit in May.

As a central Balkan state Serbia is a major factor of regional stability. However, the very fact that OSCE Mission is still present over here testifies of persistent security risks (OSCE has its missions in Macedonia, Kosovo and Bosnia). Serbia itself is among these risks. The

²⁰ President of the New Party Zoran Živković said, „We have bad relations with Bosnia, Croatia, Hungary and Rumania, no relations at all with Bulgaria, while our relations with Macedonia are unclear.“ Danas, July 1, 2015.

Macedonian crisis, problems in the implementation of the Brussels Agreement, Kosovo's resistance to the establishment of a special war crimes court, the decision on a referendum in Republika Srpska, the Srebrenica incident, etc. – this all indicates that the Balkans may sink back into new conflicts.

The international community's diplomatic activities in the Balkans indicate that US and EU

are aware how important stabilization of the Balkans is and, in this context, resolution of the hotbeds of crisis – from the Greek crisis, through revision of the Dayton Agreements to speedy opening of negotiating chapters for Serbia's accession to EU. The momentum created by force of circumstances is a new opportunity for the Balkans to wake up from its years-long lethargy.

CONCLUSION

The tenets on which OSCE (CSCE at the time) was founded forty years ago in the bipolar world of the cold war have been “for long exposed to the pressure from new realities,” actually ever since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989.

Developments in Europe over the past year or so, as well as turmoil in other parts of the world, will probably force OSCE member-states to reconsider the security structure the organization rests on. This structure remained the same as it was at the very beginning despite other dramatic changes the world has undergone in the meantime.

Serbia has not demonstrated readiness to adjust itself to new international circumstances. Its policy (and aspirations) is still stuck in the plan for rearrangement of the Balkans. In this it failed in the 1990s, but this is what it has not yet given up.

The chairmanship of OSCE revealed all the blurriness of Serbia's foreign policy and inferiority of its elite still aspiring to the international influence and repute of the SFR of Yugoslavia.

Serbia's actual limitations – laid bare by its chairmanship of OSCE – are “recommendations” for speedier opening of initial negotiating chapters in the process of EU accession. This could put an end to dilemmas about Serbia's place. The regime's flirting with Russia only revealed its poor understanding of national interests against the new international backdrop and inability for accepting the realities.