

Helsinki *bulletin*



HELSINKI COMMITTEE
FOR HUMAN RIGHTS IN SERBIA
address: Kneza Miloša 4,
Belgrade, Serbia
tel/fax. +381-11-3349-170; 3349-167;
e-mail: office@helsinki.org.rs
<http://www.helsinki.org.rs>

NO.154 // JANUARY 2020



V. Putin and A. Vučić, January 2019. visit to Belgrade

Photo: President office

FOREIGN POLICY: VACILLATION FREED FROM FORETHOUGHT

Against the backdrop of global geostrategic shifts Serbia has neither defined the main objectives of its foreign policy nor the values to rest it on. In the situation of global commotion, the Balkans had become a point of rivalry between powerful international players. Instead of firstly gauging its potentials with realism, Serbia has been practicing a maladjusted foreign policy, marked by controversies and confused priorities.

Nonexistence of a clearly defined strategy is the main obstacle on Serbia's road towards Europe, but also in its relationship with neighboring countries. All this mirrors the country's disorientation and its dependence on the outside circumstances and actors.

Though declaratively committed to EU the regime actually maintains the status quo, i.e. the country's "political neutrality" that basically boils down to "four pillars" of its foreign policy

(Russia, China, EU and US), the former regime had defined. The present on has only further upgraded relations with the Euro-Asian Union and China.

Local actors without clear-cut visions are easy preys and easy to manipulate: this is especially noticeable in the case of Serbia and Republika Srpska. Scores of scenarios for recomposition of the Balkans are taking the entire region back to the past, wiping out on the way everything accomplished over the past – 30-odd years in the construction of a Balkan architecture (NATO, EU, Council of Europe).

Serbia is neither clearly orientated nor has a development plan for domestic arena; neither is it ready to stake the stock of devastating policies pursued over the past 40 years. It is practically tumbling down under the burden of so many corruption scandals, permanent brain drain, regional tensions it has been generating, choked down media and freedom of expression, and the growing tendency towards authoritarianism.

Since 2000, Serbia's pro-European orientation has never been questioned – at least not officially. Over initial transitional years the great majority of citizens have supported this course. However, over the past years, citizens' disposition to the country's membership of EU has been spiraling down; findings of recent surveys show that 90 percent of interviewees believe that Russia protects Serbia's interests (in Kosovo in the first place) and is its biggest donor (although Russia is not even on the list of top ten donor countries).

Main decision-maker in foreign policy, President Aleksandar Vučić, only contributes to general confusion with his contradictory statements. His announcement that in 2020 Serbia's Assembly will adopt a resolution on military neutrality is supposed to be a warrant against the country's membership of NATO.

On December 24 Defense Minister Aleksandar Vulin presented the Defense Strategy and the National Security Strategy before the parliament. The said strategies, he said, would best protect the country's national and defense interests – safeguard of sovereignty and territorial integrity, military neutrality, concern for Serbs outside Serbia borders, EU integration and efficient rule of law; however, the documents refer just to one foreign policy priority – “absolutely unacceptable independence of Kosovo.”

The documents stress out military neutrality as their “key element.” They (the documents) “strengthen Serbia's resolve for military neutrality,” as the Minister put it, preclude membership of any alliance, but also promote cooperation with the East and the West alike. He also announced a joint military drill with China – “to learn their way, Chinese are in no military alliance, and I only wonder how come that we have not conducted such drill so far,” explained Vulin.

These latest documents can barely substitute for a serious foreign-policy strategy. Adopted, they testify that Serbia is not for membership of EU from the bottom of its heart and that the present situation of EU actually plays into its hands. True, in his exposé in 2016 the President argued at the parliamentary rostrum about Serbia, “proud and self-confident” at the international arena. He was speaking about “Serbia on its path towards EU, Serbia that protects its independence and Serbia that cherishes its good relations with all of its true friends worldwide.” In her first public appearance Premier Ana Brnabić was also listing the same priorities, claiming at the very beginning that Serbia's “main strategic goal is membership of the European Union.”

EUROPEAN PROSPECTS FURTHER AND FURTHER AWAY?

For six years, Serbia has been negotiation accession to EU with many ups and downs. However, this proclaimed orientation of its is more and more questioned now, either by supporters of EU integration at home or by foreign players with the last say about Serbia's prospects in Europe: on the one hand, because of the country's sluggishness about endorsing basic European values – democratic standards, the rule of law, and human rights and freedoms – and, on the other, because of its stronger and stronger ties with other international players and organizations, Russia and China in the first place. EU is growingly critical about nontransparent, corruption-prone functioning of Serbia's relations with those partners.

Up to now, Serbia has managed to open 18 chapters in the accession negotiations – and out of the figure, only two have been temporarily closed. The government is anxious for good reason – chapters 23 and 24 (the rule of law, human rights and media freedoms) are crucial for endorsement of European values, and this also includes the chapter 35 dealing with normalization with Kosovo. The progress made in having those three chapters closed is minimal, if any.

SERBIA SHARES NOT EU VALUES

Brussel's and Washington's suspicions about Belgrade have grown over past couple of months because of Serbia's accession to the Euro-Asian Union (EAEU) last October. The Analytical Center of the European Parliament – the analyses of which are keeping European MPs posted – questioned "Belgrade's commitment to the

European Union." According to it, Serbia, "frustrated with its slow movement towards the membership of EU, has made room for closer ties with Russia and China."

Although still generally keeping the door open to Western Balkan states, EU is preoccupied with problems of its own, as well as with a new balance of forces that are now being crystallized within it.

For the time being, France is openly reserved about the process of enlargement; President Macron is prioritizing EU's internal reforms that also imply the attitude towards enlargement. A new format as such would imply accession in phases, including the possibility of rewards (accession to European funds while negotiations are still going) and of punishments (delayed or ceased accession).

The announced new strategy for enlargement was met with protests and disappointment in the region; it undermined regional enthusiasm for the membership of EU, and made room for some other agendas to its local and growingly authoritarian leaders.

According to Serbian Minister for European Integration Jadranka Joksimović, a changed format applied retroactively even to candidates that have already started accession negotiations would be totally unfair.

Regardless of Belgrade's actual reservations about reforms and standards that precondition the membership of EU, Serbia considerably depends on assistance from the Commission and individual member-states alike. EU member-states are its biggest investors, especially Germany with its 450 production facilities providing jobs to some 52,000 Serbian workers.

ATTITUDE TOWARDS USA

The United States of America have withdrawn considerably from the Balkans at the time of Barack Obama's presidential terms. This policy remained the same with Donald Trump in the Oval Office. Serbia and US cooperate most dynamically in the military field, and especially so after 2006 when Serbia signed the PFP with NATO. In 2015 it signed the IPAP1 agreement, and recently the IPAP2; apart from the military aspect, the two agreements imply scores of other reforms. Serbia is involved in more than twice as many activities with US than with any other country worldwide. However, poor transparency of Serbia's strategic and operative priorities is complicating the two countries cooperation in the defense domain.

Over past months US has sharpened its attitude towards Serbia on account of Serbia's permanent vacillation. So, the report by the US Defense Ministry of May 2019 stressing out the growth in Serbia-Russia military-defense cooperation over past years has been pulled out of the hat recently; the report also lists in detail the equipment Serbia has purchased from Moscow, its frequent military exercises with Russians, quotes that Serbia provides the most lenient environment for Russian influence in Western Balkans and that relations with Russia have been by far less developed before Vučić and his SNS came to power in 2012. Referring to cooperation between Serbia-Russia intelligence services, the report observes that Serbia is the only country cooperating with Moscow in this field.

Professor at the John Hopkins University Edward Joseph calls it a signal not to be ignored, since it stands for "the most interesting element of the report." It cannot be said that Vučić has been vacillating only in relationships, he says, adding that the cooperation between the two intelligence agencies is much more than vacillation – once you enter the arena of espionage

and cooperation in this sphere – that's totally incompatible with the West and the European Union. And this is the reason why he argues for a change of the West's attitude towards Serbian President Vučić.

The United States are still perceived as a major player in the region. Belgrade hoped that its new administration would support the idea about Kosovo's partition, and here it pinched its highest expectations on national security adviser Richard Bolton.

BOOTLICKING ATTITUDE TOWARDS RUSSIA

Russia's expansion in the region coincides regional countries' unconsolidated states of affairs, vulnerabilities, unfinished identities, etc. – with everything that makes them liable to influence and pressure. Russia started developing instruments of public policy planning to strengthen its soft power in parallel. Kremlin sees Serbia as a strategically important point vis-à-vis Europe, and hence a suitable window dressing for its growing power. This is the more so, since Serbia has already adequately positioned itself. Though the country is formally and existentially dependent on the European Union, the great majority of its citizens have tender feelings for Russia. Russian presence is most evident in the presence of its scholarly and cultural elites at a variety of conferences (usually addressing geostrategic and historical issues). "EU is not so anxious about Russia's influence as it is about circumstances that make that influence possible – the absence of the rule of law and responsibility, captured state and corruption," says Dmitar Bečev, the expert in Russian influence.

Historian and senior researcher at the Slavic Institute of the Russian Academy of Arts and Sciences Alexander Pivovarenko points out that

“most of Moscow’s actions boil down to a simple principle according to which Russia counts on the Balkan’s well-known doubts about EU enlargements and so it expands its presence in Serbia in the areas it is possible. It fuels citizens’ disappointment /in EU/ by implementing scores of major infrastructural projects.”

In the meantime, however, Moscow openly manifested its dissatisfaction. As it seems, Russia is in the background of arms export from Valjevo’s “Krusik” factory to privileged private parties, a scandal shaking Serbia for months. Allegedly, Russia bears grudge against American-Serbian arms export deals (mostly through Saudi Arabia), and this is why it why it launched the scandal with the assistance from a Bulgarian partner. A sensational video-recording showing a Russian spy (who left Serbia back in June) handing over a bagful of money to a citizens of Serbia hints that “there is no smoke without fire.”

At this attempt at putting across a message to Moscow, Serbia’s government released that “the situation is serious,” a called a meeting of the National Security Council. Moscow’s response was that the vide-recording was a provocation. Spokeswoman for the Russian Foreign Office Maria Zaharova said she understood not the Serbian government release about “a serious situation.”

Judging by statements the two presidents gave following on their recent meeting one could barely tell how much the issue had been discussed. However, a shotgun Putin presented to his Serbian counterpart (the shotgun that once belonged to King Milan Obrenović, the most fervent Austria-phile of all Serbian rulers) was more than an associative gesture. As historian Dubravka Stojanović put it, a shotgun as a gift carries a message that Serbia-Russia relationship is far from being so “brotherly” as Vučić has been insisting on.

Serbia cares much about Russia’s support in the matter of Kosovo – the support that is at the same time Moscow’s trump card. Besides, Serbia is almost completely dependent on Russian gas. As for Russia, it takes Serbia’s support to it in international organization significant. So, for instance, Serbia has not imposed sanctions on Russia or signed resolutions critical about its policy; Serbia is the only Balkan country that on December 9, 2019 voted against UN General Assembly’s resolution appealing to Russia to withdraw its troops from Crimea.

Most dynamic Belgrade-Moscow relations belong to the military domain, mostly to purchases of Russian arms. At the same time, this is what makes the West most watchful. Indicatively, following on the purchase of Russian choppers, President Vučić said that “Serbia will stop buying arms,” which was probably his response to strong criticism from the West. Although Serbia’s military cooperation is much more developed with the West, first of all with US, Vučić has never outdone himself in advertising this.

Latest developments show that Russia has trumps capable of keeping Serbia in the state of the so-called neutrality, and can destabilize the Serbian President whenever it deems it necessary. Vučić is not the only player it can count on, but is still a relevant one due to massive support he is enjoying. Via Serbia, Russia has been holding the entire Western Balkan hostage of its contention with the West.

Roman Dobrohotkov, the editor of the Russian “Insider” site, says that for long time and quite openly Russia has been waging “information war” in Balkan states. “Actually, Russia is after snatching sovereignty from Serbia and other Balkan countries, and will do all in its power to prevent them to take shelter under NATO umbrella. Because as such these countries will be in the position to talk with Russia without beating about the bushes, the way Baltic and East

European states are communicating with it now. Putin worries about something like this taking place in the Balkans.”

FLIRTING WITH “PUTIN’S UNION”

On October 25, 2019 in Moscow Serbian Premier Ana Brnabić signed the agreement on the accession to the Euro-Asian Union (EAEU). With her signature under the document Serbia became a part of the free trade zone that includes Russia, Armenia, Belorussia, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.

Though pro-governmental media were trumpeting about the doors open to Serbia for a market of 180 million people to absorb 99.5 percent of Serbian products tax-free, the document itself is pretty insignificant from the economic angle. Namely, up to now Serbia has signed free trade agreements with Russia, Belorussia and Kazakhstan; total annual exchange with two new members, Armenia and Kyrgyzstan, is a bit above 135 million dollars, an almost negligible figure when compared with Serbia’s overall foreign exchange.

Besides, the list of Serbia’s free trade export commodities mostly numbers agricultural products and foodstuff. Once again, nothing came out of Vučić’s years-long, high expectations that Zastava automobiles would figure fine at the Russian market.

Accession to “Putin’s union” (as some label the Euro-Asian Economic Union) is more in the service of politics than economy; yet, it is still not clear whether the damage (political) would exceed benefits (economic). In 2018 Serbia-Russia exchange amounted to 3.6 billion dollars, 500 million more than in 2017. Out of the former figure, Serbia’s export totals 1 billion.

Having joined EAEU Belgrade has taken – at least symbolically – one step away from Brussels, and a step closer to the East. Two months earlier, in August 2019, Serbia was strongly criticized at the EU conference of foreign ministers; agreements of the kind the Premier would sign in Moscow, are taking Serbia away from its strategic goal – membership of EU – concluded the conference. Brussels administration also reminded that “every bilateral agreement with a third party has to be broken when a country accedes to EU.”

However, there is no doubt that the “room so opened” delights Russian geostrategists. Igor Panarin of the Euro-Asian Collective Security Treaty, established at Moscow’s initiative, says that future Euro-Asian Union will be the organization with four capital towns – St. Petersburg, Kiev, Alma-Ata and Belgrade. “The Euro-Asian Union could be presented as a Russian global geopolitical project for development in the 21st century, and an integrally national idea by Russian people and Euro-Asian peoples close to it,” he says.

During his visit to Belgrade Russian Premier Dmitry Medvedev said that making a “choice” between the West and the East should not be imposed on regional states; instead, those states should be making choices of their own, the ones that best suit their interests.

CHINA: EASY ACCESS TO CAPITAL, NO CONDITIONING

China has been finely penetrated European market, mostly through East European and South European countries. Serbia seems to be a pillar of this policy. China and Serbia have signed documents on strategic partnership on two occasions: in 2009 as the time of Ju Jintao’s presidency and with Boris Tadić in Serbia, and then

in 2006 when incumbent Chinese President Xi Jinping paid a visit to Belgrade, and Tomislav Nikolić acted as his counterpart. Serbia is one of the countries of the “16 + 1” platform that preceded the even more ambitious “Belt and Road” initiative. Over past couple of years political closeness between the two countries got a most prominent economic dimension. China is mostly investing in infrastructural project and mining. It is already the owner of the Bor copper mine and the Smederevo ironworks (abandoned by Americans). What makes the common interest is, on the one hand, Serbia’s need to ensure reliable financial injections to its impoverished, almost destroyed economy, and, on the other, China’s attempt to have its overflowing reserves of foreign currency invested as close as possible to the European market.

SERBIA AND THE REGION: PERMANENT TENSIONS

Serbia is destined to be a part of the region at levels of security, economy and culture. However, regional relations are below the level that would meet the interests of each individual country, but also of all of them taken together. Bilateral relations are burdened with the legacy of the 1990s and unsettled issues of those times.

Almost every country in Western Balkans has a “crisis generating” potential, mostly because of absence of democratic tradition and unfinished transition. Besides, regional context is marked by traumas of the war that have not been overcome, and permanent territorial and ethnically-based aspirations. Those aspirations have on the upswing ever since the Balkans was started to be treated as “unfinished business.” Belgrade’s policy is still undermining all ex-Yugoslav republics.

Despite tons of revealed facts and more than two decades since the end of the wars, Serbia has made little progress in facing up the past. Interpretations of the wars wagged on the Yugoslav territory stands major stumbling blocks on the way. And this considerably affects regional relations. Unless Yugoslav and international contexts of the time are objectively reconsidered, along with the way Serbian elites have generated the war, one could barely expect any quality progress to be made in foreseeable future.

According to statistics Serbia’s biggest foreign exchange partners – except for EU member-states as first on the list – are signatories of CEFTA (Bosnia-Herzegovina, Macedonia, Montenegro, Albania and Moldova). Actually, Bosnia-Herzegovina takes the third place considering Serbia’s annual export of 888.5 million Euros, while on the fourth another CEFTA country, Rumania to which goods worth 683.7 million Euros were exported. The latter figure mostly refers to exports to Republika Srpska, rather than to Bosnia as a whole.

Serbia is a key factor of regional destabilization and is going to be such as long as it would not give up its pan-Serbian ambitions. Serbia’s national elites have been looking forward to international circumstances that would make it possible for it to round off, with the assistance from Russia, its national project. Actually, Russia has been fueling Serbia’s delusions; it has practically embedded itself in the public sphere with the thesis that “Serbs should be most happy for not being a part of EU.” To Russia, keeping Western Balkans out of EU and fueling local disputes equals undermining of EU’s reliability and unity.

Serbia’s has always perceived **Croatia** as its major rival in the region; and ever since Croatia joined EU and NATO Serbia has been intensifying its campaign against it. It misses no opportunity for pining “Ustashi movement” on Croatia. Critical remarks addressed to Croatia are

indirectly addressed to EU itself – for tolerating resuscitation of fascism. As for Croatia it failed to attain what has been expected of it – regional leadership.

By insisting on the narrative about huge losses Serbia suffered in WWII, especially on the number of Serbs killed in the Jasenovac concentration camp, Serbia has been treating the 1990s wars as a rightful revenge. Once the Serbian Progressive Party came to power in 2012, the Belgrade-Zagreb axis, established by presidents Tadić and Josipović was left to rust, and Belgrade turned to Budapest. Ever since relations with Hungary have been on the upward curve, especially on the grounds of the two-country's disrespect for liberal values. Cooperation with the Visegrad Group is seen as an opportunity for letting behind the context of Western Balkans, heavily burdened with the legacy of the war.

As for **Bosnia**, Republika Srpska (RS) is seen as spoils of war not to be given up just like that. RS is on the priority list even of the latest security strategy. Stability in the Balkans will be questionable as long as the issue of Bosnia remains unsettled. International players tasked with monitoring implementation of the Dayton Accords have failed to build B-H statehood identity, and this is way makes plenty of room for destabilization. By supporting Milorad Dodik and his stances, Russia is preventing the High Representative (Valentin Inzko) from using his Bonn authorities against Dodik's strategy for deconstruction of B-H.

Montenegro's Euro-Atlantic course, especially its membership of NATO, strongly clashes with Serbia's traditional aspirations, the more so since Serbia sees it as "a Serbian country" and its statehood – temporary.

Montenegro's new geostrategic position (NATO) challenges future relations between Belgrade and Podgorica – and not only because Russia

will be doing all in its power to sabotage Montenegro's standing through Belgrade but also because of Serbian political and intellectual elites' "conditioned reflex" that makes it incapable of breaking the vicious circle of its frustrations and taking the course Podgorica has been resolutely following for years.

Through the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Serbian community in Montenegro, as well as with the support from Russia, Serbia has been undermining Montenegro's consolidation. The latest example of such activity is the campaign against Montenegro's new law on religious communities, the last step in the process of rounding off the country's sovereignty and statehood.

Serbia's unreadiness to take a constructive approach towards the issue of **Kosovo** only prolongs its agony. The so-called inner dialogue about Kosovo testified that the great majority of participants stands for status quo, frozen conflict or partition of Kosovo.

Status quo is advocated by all who believe that international circumstances would change in favor of Serbia and that the problem of Kosovo would be settled in a recomposed Balkans – the Balkans with some newly drawn borders.

For the time being, Belgrade's idea about Kosovo's partition has been taken off the agenda. There is still no telling whether and in what format Belgrade and Pristina will resume their seats at the negotiating table. Elections in Kosovo changed its political landscape; if Albin Kurti becomes Kosovo's premier, dialogue will definitely not be a priority of his cabinet.

Albanians are continually demonized regardless of the Brussels Agreement that implies normalization between Belgrade and Pristina. At the international arena Serbia's foreign policy has been outdoing itself to talk the countries

that have recognized Kosovo into withdrawing their recognitions (up to now, 16 countries have withdrawn recognition). Serbia's elite would not acknowledge Kosovo's independence and argues that the criminal enterprise by Serbian political, military and police leaders (the case of "Six") put at trial in The Hague has never been proved. Crimes committed in Kosovo, they say, had been conjecturably ascribed to condemned general and politicians, and circumstantially to the state of Serbia.

Over past couple of years, the way Belgrade has behaved on a variety of occasions only laid bare the disturbance it has been creating in the region, especially in the case of Montenegro and Macedonia. Siding with Russia and its tamper in the Balkans, Serbia has lost considerable credibility. Considering its ideological and political closeness with former Macedonian premier Gruevski, Belgrade was far from being happy with the rise of Zoran Zaev and his party. In April 2017 VMRO-DPMNE protesters broke into the Macedonian Parliament, intent to prevent a representative of an Albanian minority party to be elected parliamentary speaker; a serious scandal broke out when it was revealed that an officer of Serbia's Information Security Agency (BIA) and an employee of its Embassy in Skopje had been in the crowd that forced its way into the parliament. Belgrade also responded heatedly when North Macedonia voted for Kosovo's membership of the Council of Europe. Autocephaly of the Macedonian Orthodox Church – SPC would not recognize – remains a problem between the two states.

Following on Zaev's election and to protect itself from Russian and Serbian meddling, North Macedonia was moving speedily towards the membership of NATO. In the meantime, Serbian-Macedonian relations have been somewhat improved – the two countries even signed an agreement on joint control over borders. Early elections scheduled for March 2020 will subject

relations between the two countries to a test, especially in the case Zaev turns out as a loser.

CONTROVERSIAL "LITTLE SCHENGEN" PROJECT

The controversial initiative called "Little Schengen" is just one of Vučić's many arbitrary, ad hoc motions; actually, he is the one who both strategically and tactically decides the country's foreign policy (Ivica Dačić, as the official foreign minister, is mostly tasked with campaigning for withdrawal of recognition of Kosovo's independence). Planned as a regional project for Western Balkan countries that are not in the membership of EU, the initiative has attracted by now just two countries, North Macedonia and Albania, apart from Serbia.

The project was launched shortly after Skopje and Tirana failed to have accession negotiations with EU opened. That was what probably motivated Zoran Zaev of North Macedonia and Albania's Edi Rama to accept Vučić's invitation and come to Novi Sad where the initiative for full freedom of movement of people, good and capital between countries of the region was publicized. Although the troika of leaders met in Ohrid and Tirana following on the Novi Sad meeting, the other potential participants in the project have been ignoring it so far.

Actually, all countries in the region are members of CEFTA, the organization with the same purpose as the imagined "Little Schengen." Kosovo's representatives have not been invited either to Novi Sad or Ohrid; they were invited to Tirana, but did not show up there. According to Professor at the Hopkins University Edward Joseph, "Little Schengen" will isolate Kosovo; by launching the initiative President Vučić is trying to find a substitute for the shelved dialogue with Kosovo.

Montenegrin President Milo Đukanović did attend the summit in Tirana but joined not the initiative. Montenegro maintains that it has already “opened its borders to all international organizations and initiatives.” Montenegrin Minister of Economy Dragica Sekulić said that there were no trade or other barriers between her country and other countries, adding that she understood “the need of the countries that have posed barriers to one another to promote some new initiatives now.” Besides, as some Montenegrin analysts like Vasilije Kostić put it, Montenegro’s accession to “Little Schengen” could cause some problems, and “some damages to Montenegro and its accession to the European Union.

Asked about “Little Schengen” Secretary General of the Council for Regional Cooperation Majlida Bregu just briefly commented on it – she stressed out the need for easier cooperation between “six regional economies, adding, “Every initiative that helps to overcome barriers in our region has to be taken under consideration.”

Most skeptical about Vučić’s latest initiative was political analyst Nikola Samardžić. “Little Schengen is not an anteroom to Schengen, but an alternative to entering into Europe’s joint institutional space of freedoms and rule of law.” Economist Vladimir Gligorov also takes that Europeanization is irreplaceable when it comes to Balkan countries’ development and modernization; no doubt that regional liberalization is welcome to normalization and political stability, he adds, but all other benefits are limited since CEFTA already exists.” Another obstacle to regional cooperation, as he put it, is that such common market cannot stand from a customs union at the same time, since some countries have established different trade relations with third parties (for instance, Serbia with Russia) whereas the rest have not.

Opponents to the initiative see it as an emerging alternative to integration, acknowledgment that admission of new, full-fledged members of EU is barely possible. This is why Montenegro and Kosovo, strongly committed to EU membership, said no to the project.

INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

Serbia has neglected its active participation in proceeding of UN bodies. Policy that would have rehabilitated at the international arena has not characterized its return under the auspice of UN following on its isolation. Except for Vuk Jeremić’s one-year presidency of the General Assembly, Serbia has not had any prominent role in a single UN body. All this results from the absence of some well-thought-out foreign policy, devastated Ministry of Foreign Affairs and deficit in professional cadre. The same as other institutions the Foreign Ministry is undergoing disintegration – and nothing hints at some serious reformist moves, including renewed human resources.

Serbia chaired OSCE (from January 1, 2015) at the height of the Ukrainian crisis. Its mediation in the dispute was barely noticeable.

It has been by far more active in obstructing Kosovo’s candidacy for membership of international organizations (Council of Europe, Interpol, UNESCO, etc.)

One cannot but wonder whether Serbia has moral and professional credibility for coping with worldwide situations similar to which it is not ready to settle in its own region. Considering its closer and closer relations with Russia and China, Serbia, considering human rights situations in those two countries, is barely in the line with policies of its partners in the West.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Bearing in mind new dimensions the reality in the Balkans is getting on almost daily basis – the dimensions that are mirroring the region's internal dynamics, as well as those of Europe and the world – solidarity in the Balkans is imperative for prevention of new conflicts and lessening of existing tensions. In this context, Serbia's foreign policy has to be more crystal-clear.

Being a central country of the Balkans, Serbia has been trying to profit from a political and economic context it deems beneficial to it. In this sense, Belgrade has been demonstrating self-confidence, believing it could make progress by diversifying its relations with Russia and China. Its place as a transit middle point also influence its attitude given that Corridor 10 stands for the sphere of interest of EU, US and other players (Russia, Turkey) alike.

Serbia's unreadiness for radical reforms and distancing itself from its imaginary regional hegemony, stand in the way of its modernization and presenting itself as a European country.

While expecting some "better times" to come, Serbia has lost the capacity to communicate with the world, and especially with its own region. Although identity-building and cultural policies are main drivers of international and national relations alike, Serbia is biased about other countries and underestimates its neighbors undergoing the same processes as it.

Serbia disregards the fact that the phenomenon of "coming to one's senses" is of global nature; this is why it should not ignore the fact that all of its neighbors are revaluating the past (the same as it is), the times of Serbia's hegemonic aspirations.

Serbia's orientation towards EU is not value-based; in fact, it's been demonstrating its affinity for illiberal values practically on daily basis. Prospects of EU membership is important

given that accession process is a process of "values adoption" the same time. Serbia has made little progress on that road.

The proposed change in the EU enlargement strategy only encourages Serbia's movement towards illiberalism and towards players that are posing no preconditions. Knowing EU's true strategy for the Balkans is crucial now. Without prospects for the membership of EU, the Balkans may easily backslide to nationalism and old conflicts it has barely overcome.

Although Serbia's cooperation with NATO is the most developed, Russian-Serbia cooperation is on the rise and is growing more important than ever before in the past 30 years. Serbia has been modernizing its armed forces at bigger speed than any other country in the region (including Croatia). However, its present format of military cooperation with Russia has reached its maximum, unless its leadership decides to have the country join ODBK.

Regional context is most important to Serbia since only seen as such the entire region will be considered relevant in the domain of security. Serbia's security is inseparable from EU's security. The fact remains that Serbia is surrounded either by NATO member-states or the countries on their way to the membership of NATO. Although membership of NATO become an imperative, Serbia is still turning its back to it, which plays into Russia's hands.

Even should EU get reformed (and it certainly will) Serbia's Europeanization would be a priority for the country's modernization and breaking out of its vicious circle of poverty. Serbia's most important foreign trade is with its neighboring countries, some of which are EU member-states.

Regardless of how significant development of relations with Middle East countries and Russia are, Serbia cannot attain some higher level of foreign trade with them, given that it lacks potential for such huge and also faraway markets.