

Helsinki bulletin



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SERBIA'S REGIONAL OFFENSIVE

Collapse of the world order, uncertainties about the course the new US administration would take, as well as Russia's growing presence in the Balkans greatly influence the regional dynamics. EU's mobilizing power has melted down over the years while severe rivalry of out-of-Europe actors has blocked pro-European forces and led the region towards regression. Serbia expects US President Elect Donald Trump to be less focused on the Balkans than his predecessors had been – actually that he would make a deal with Russia on spheres of influence in the Balkans. Assessing

that America's new President's foreign policy would be more based on deals than principles, experts and analysts have been finding an analogue in the well-known Yalta Agreement on the spheres of interest.¹ For several months now this belief has been reflected in the acts and rhetoric

1 „Should we expect another Yalta Conference to recognize Putin's new and actual sphere of influence?“ wonders Germany's ex-foreign minister Joshka Fisher. *Danas*, December 6, 2016; according to some domestic analysts, „Yalta II“ would result in giving away Ukraine (along with Krimea), Belarussia, Syria and, probably,

of most exposed ministers of the Vučić cabinet. Besides, analyses and speculations about unsustainability of Bosnia-Herzegovina and Macedonia are rather frequent; and the “solution” to the problem that is being offered is the establishment of a Greater Albanian, a Greater Serbia and a Greater Croatia.² And this is considered to be the only guarantee to the stability of the Balkans now that the concept of multi-culturalism has turned obsolete.

In the international vacuum left after Britain’s split with EU and then Trump’s victory in the US, and international community’s poor interest in the Balkans, Serbia – with Russia’s support – has been reviving ambitions to impose its unfinished national project on the region. Serbia has been daily campaigning against all its neighbors while fueling tensions, giving lectures on “morale” to the entire region and emphasizing “bad situation of the Serbs in the region.” Foreign Minister Dačić even said he “awaited eagerly” some issue of importance to Macedonia or Montenegro to pop up at the international agenda – and then they would see “what position Serbia would take.” Such attitude towards neighbors questions Belgrade’s officially proclaimed policy for membership of EU, which implies constructive regional cooperation.

Serbia’s national elite had looked forward to international circumstances that would make it possible for it – with Russia’s assistance – to round off its national program. Russia has been playing a major role in nourishing this delusion since its thesis that “Serbs should be happy for not joining EU” had found an echo in Serbia’s public opinion. The same refers to Montenegro and Macedonia. Russia’s officials have been emphasizing that Serbs’ strong affection for

Serbia too Russia. Milan Mišić, „Unreliable Guide to 2017,” *Politika*, December 19, 2016.

2 See, Timothy Less, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/bosnia-herzegovina/2016-12-20/dysfunction-balkans>.

Russia and President Putin stand for “rich and valuable national heritage” while their Russophilia is crystal-clear to every observer, including those in the West.³

Russia’s Ambassador to Serbia Alexander Chepurin says that any policy for solving regional problems without Serbia – let alone “against Serbia’s interests” – will fail, and that long ago Serbia’s had to turn to other arms suppliers. In 2016, he says, bilateral cooperation in all the spheres grew and he hopes that the year 2017 would be “brilliantly successful to Russia-Serbia relations.”⁴

Despite strong reactions to Dačić’s statements throughout the region, Belgrade claims that Serbia has to build “a bridge of confidence” with its neighbors, but sees that most of ex-Yugoslav states do not make their decisions independently. Most ex-Yugoslav republics, some argue, are puppets on the string. “Neighbors have trouble with the truth while Belgrade is hurt by their treachery...Therefore no one has the right to be angry with Belgrade for defending its interests.”⁵

Fragile stability of some neighboring countries – especially Bosnia, Macedonia and Montenegro – also plays into the hands of Serbia’s policy of destabilization. While on the one hand they are contributing themselves – either informally (Montenegro) or formally (Bosnia-Herzegovina) to domestic instability, Serbia is, on the other,

3 <https://www.fakti.rs/rossiya/bondarev-srbi-treba-dabudu-veoma-srecni-sto-nisu-u-eu-isto-vazi-i-za-crnu-goru-i-makedoniju>.

4 <http://kremlin.rs/%D1%87%D0%B5%D0%BF%D1%83%D1%80%D0%B8%D0%BD-%D1%82%D0%B2%D1%80%D0%B4%D0%B8-%D0%B4%D0%BE%D0%B1%D1%80%D0%BE-%D1%98%D0%B5-%D1%88%D1%82%D0%BE-%D1%81%D0%B5-%D1%81%D1%80%D0%B1%D0%B8%D1%98%D0%B0-%D0%BD%D0%B0/>.

5 <https://rs.sputniknews.com/analize/201701041109499395-makedonija-susedi-ivica-dacic-kosovo-saradnja/>.

trying to profit from it and realize some interests of its own.

ATTITUDE TOWARDS CROATIA

Serbia has always considered Croatia its major rival in the region; and ever since the latter joined EU and NATO, Serbia has intensified its campaign against it. No opportunity is being missed to nail Croatia on the Ustashi movement. Criticism of Croatia also indirectly addresses EU. In a protest note to Zagreb in 2016, Belgrade “expresses its concern over anti-Serb sentiments in the Republic of Croatia that have been growing without hindrance and clearly tend to escalate.” “Croatia is a country that rehabilitates a fascist creation that existed in other countries too, though these counties are not, unlike Croatia, glorifying such creations,” commented Minister Đaćić on the occasion.⁶

In his address at the ceremony marking Orthodox Christmas in Zagreb, the Serbian Premier’s envoy Vladimir Božović used the same theses as Slobodan Milošević, especially when referring to allegedly threatened Serbs in Croatia and Serbia’s intention “to defend them with all means available.”⁷

SERBIA’S DOUBLE-STANDARD POLICY FOR B&H

Anti-Bosnian activism of RS President Milorad Dodik has been growing rapidly. After the referendum on the entity’s national holiday, he has been preparing the terrain for secession.

6 <http://mondo.rs/a924348/Info/Ex-Yu/Ivica-Dacic-Srbija-salje-protestnu-notu-Hrvatskoj.html>.

7 <http://rs.n1info.com/a219313/Svet/Region/Hrvatsko-ministarstvo-kritikovalo-govor-Vucicevog-izaslanika.html>.

Marking January 9 as RS national holiday is not only a challenge to Sarajevo but also to the international community. However, no one has properly responded yet to the clear provocation by B&H Presidency present chairman Mladen Ivanić who had ordered a part of Bosnian army troops to salute the parade staged on the occasion.

B&H Constitutional Court proclaimed the RS Day – January 9 – unconstitutional. Paying no heed to Sarajevo’s and the international community’s disapprobation, Dodik reminded that “many were against marking this anniversary but the ceremony was held anyway.” Addressing the ceremonial gathering, he said that RS, founded 25 years ago, was a legal-statehood frame for the people with still fresh memories of the atrocities of WWI and WWII. “We shall never give up our identity, our state, our Republika Srpska,” he said. As he put it, RS is mostly interested in having its original authorities restored, those envisaged under the Dayton Accords but “illegally taken away from it.” If that cannot be, he added, nothing would stop RS from seceding from B&H. “Republika Srpska is a God’s creation and no one could possibly keep it in today’s B&H.”⁸

Serbia’s President Tomislav Nikolić said in Banjaluka that “no one will ever manage to put an end” to special relations between RS and Serbia, and that was the stance of everyone in Serbia. His message clearly demonstrated his support to the idea of Serbia-RS unification – in fact, that he “sided with what his brother Mile was making no bones about.”⁹ “We are dreaming

8 <http://www.jutarnji.hr/vijesti/svijet/milorad-dodik-sanjamo-o-ujedinjenju-republike-srpske-sa-srbijom-predsjednik-srbije-nikolic-slazem-se-s-onim-sto-brat-mile-otvoreno-kaze/5486371/>.

9 <http://www.jutarnji.hr/vijesti/svijet/milorad-dodik-sanjamo-o-ujedinjenju-republike-srpske-sa-srbijom-predsjednik-srbije-nikolic-slazem-se-s-onim-sto-brat-mile-otvoreno-kaze/5486371/>.

of even more special ties” between Serbs from both banks of the Drina River... We are repeatedly having that dream, and it will come true one fine day.” His suggestion is that B&H should transform into a union of independent states, stressing that RS had been established “some others” were after destroying Yugoslavia – “Now that RS has been established, protecting it is our duty.”¹⁰

Ex-president of RS, Professor Emil Vlajki, takes that RS should “have the guts” to declare a confederation – otherwise, it could easily disappear.¹¹

The European Council – that held the past referendum on the entity day illegal – takes proper functioning of democratic institution that implies implementation of decisions made by the Constitutional Court, a priority. Therefore it appeals against the rhetoric of divisions and for vital political and economic reforms.¹²

The US Embassy in Sarajevo also stressed that “disrespect for the decisions by the B&H Constitutional Court violates the role of law” – and everyone who breaches the law should be taken accountable. Any threat to security and stability is being taken most seriously, says the Embassy.¹³

Aleksandar Radić, military analyst from Belgrade, takes Dodik has little room to maneuver in: he cannot separate Serbs from B&H army force while strengthening of the RS police would be seen as an act against peace and security.¹⁴

10 Ibid.

11 <https://rs.sputniknews.com/analyze/201701041109414313-neka-se-putin-pobrine-da-nas-ponovo-ne-bombarduju-2/>.

12 <http://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/dan-republike-srpske-obiljezavanje/28221055.html>.

13 <http://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/dan-republike-srpske-obiljezavanje/28221055.html>.

14 http://www.b92.net/info/vesti/index.php?yyyy=2017&mm=01&dd=11&nav_

High Representative for B&H Valentin Inzko said that as far as the international community was concerned there was only “the Dayton” Bosnia-Herzegovina and Republika Srpska legalized on November 21, 1995 in Dayton. Should we start celebrating “holidays” like January 9, commented Inzko, it might easily occur to someone to celebrate, say, April 10, the day the Independent State of Croatia (NDH) had been established (WWII).¹⁵

CONTINUED DEMONIZATION OF KOSOVO

Belgrade has been persistently campaigning against Kosovo and Albanians despite of and contrary to the provisions of the agreement it signed with Prishtina. It has been campaigning internationally against Kosovo’s membership in global organizations such as UNESCO. Last year it managed to obstruct Kosovo’s accession to UNESCO. Soren Jasen Peterson, the ex-head of the UN Mission to Kosovo, said recently that Serbia has been sparing no effort to destabilize Kosovo’s independence and that EU should condition Serbia more resolutely.¹⁶

To all criticism of its attitude towards Kosovo Belgrade retorts that, on the contrary, it is Pristhina that destabilizes Kosovo by refusing to establish “the community of Serbian municipalities.”¹⁷

Serbia’s Ambassador to UNESCO Darko Tanašković argues that “Kosovo’s membership of UNESCO would have heavy consequences on

[category=167&nav_id=1219064.](#)

15 <http://mojabanjaluka.info/infograda/clanak/31529/-skandalozno-incko-uporedio-srpsku-sa-ndh->

16 <https://rs.sputniknews.com/politika/201701041109502433-dacic-danska-diplomatija-/>

17 Ibid.

Serbs' identity and their cultural heritage in the province."¹⁸

Ramush Haradinaj's arrest in France on the grounds of Serbia's warrant added fuel to the fire of Serbia-Kosovo relations and blocked their dialogue until further notice. The French court has set Haradinaj free on bail for the time being. Serbia's is still expecting France to extradite him – a hope that stands poor chance.

Simultaneously, Serbian media are bombarding the public with the thesis that, in retaliation for Haradinaj's arrest, "terrorist KLA veterans" are scheming abductions of Serbia's leaders in visit to Kosovo.¹⁹ Allegedly, they would try to liberate Haradinaj through blackmail and force Serbia to withdraw the indictment against him. Milorad Drečun, the chairman of the parliamentary committee for Kosovo and Metohija /KiM/, remarked that incidents in "Kosmet" should not be ruled out in the period to come, and that "KiM is risking acts of terrorism."²⁰

ASSAULT AT MACEDONIA

Macedonia has been in serious political crisis for rather long time; hence, its sustainability is now frequently the matter of speculations. After the early parliamentary elections last December Albanian parties united and so became decisive to constitution of a ruling majority and election of the Premier – Gruevski or Zaev.²¹ Some even argue that their "new" negotiating power could install an Albanian prime minister in Macedonia.

18 <https://rs.sputniknews.com/politika/201701041109491269-Tanaskovic-Kosovo-Unesco/>

19 Vecernje Novosti, January 12, 2017

20 Ibid.

21 Predsednik Makedonije Đorđi Ivanov je poverio mandat za sastav vlade dosadašnjem premijeru Nikoli Gruevskom, ali je neizvesno hoće li on uspeti da obezbedi većinsku podršku u Sobranju.

And it was against such background that Belgrade decided to start campaigning against Macedonia – and mostly because of its recognition of Kosovo's independence and advocacy for Kosovo's membership of UNESCO. Having included Macedonia into his "offensive at the region," Minister Dačić said that – although convinced that relations with Macedonia had to be friendly – he could not turn a blind eye to its recognition of Kosovo and advocacy for its accession to UNESCO, the more so since Serbia had recognized Macedonia under its constitutional name – "the key issue of Macedonia's statehood." "As the question of Kosovo is vital to Serbia," he said, "Macedonia's vote against Serbia's stance is undermining our friendship."²²

Skopje labeled his statements "petty diplomatic scandals" and "nervous revanchism." Nino Ružin, Macedonia's former ambassador in Brussels, called them "extreme gestures by a front man of the Vučić cabinet, infamous by his similar rhetoric about Croatia and Croatia and Kosovo politicians."²³

MONTENEGRO: A PERMANENT TARGET

Though Premier Vučić's attitude towards Montenegro and its premier, Đukanović, has been more or less correct, all other actors at the political scene, including the media, have been persistently belittling the Montenegrin state and its identity. Ever since Montenegro opted for the membership of NATO the campaign against it has become harsher, and the support to Montenegro's opposition with extremely anti-Montenegrin stance stronger. Serbian Orthodox Church /SPC/ and all right-wing parties

22 <https://rs.sputniknews.com/politika/201701031109490440-dacic-skoplje-odgovor/>

23 <https://rs.sputniknews.com/analize/201701041109499395-makedonija-susedi-ivica-dacic-kosovo-saradnja/>

(DSS, SRS, SNS, Dveri, DJB and other groups) persistently negate Montenegro and treat it as a Serbian land. The attempt at staging a coup d'état on the election day was prevented but it demonstrated, at the same time, the hookup between Belgrade-Moscow and the Montenegrin opposition to oust Milo Đukanović and obstruct Montenegro's membership of NATO.

"We all have to do something to prevent Montenegro from joining NATO; not only Russia but also European conservative forces and Euro-skeptics who are far from being few in Europe. At least we need to put across a message to Montenegrin masses that we stand by their anti-Atlantic choice," says Russian historian Nikita Bondarev of the Institute for Strategic Studies.²⁴ "Should other actors at the global scene (Russia or China) be totally inert, the West would manage to have Montenegro in NATO. Montenegrin opposition cannot all by itself stand against NATO's propaganda or, God forbid, military machinery."²⁵

RELIANCE ON RUSSIA

Consequently and at all levels, especially in the UNSC, Moscow has been standing for the "Dayton Bosnia" as it is. Likewise, it has been consequent in sticking to the UN Res. 1244 for Kosovo. Both cases illustrate Moscow's hypocrisy – while it has been defending inviolability of territorial integrity in the Balkans (Bosnia-Herzegovina and Serbia), it stamps on the same principle in its neighborhood (Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, etc.). This is why Dodik is so important to Moscow; it has been emphasizing itself that "at this point Dodik is the only one

who guarantees the safeguard of the Dayton Bosnia."²⁶

Russia has been treating Bosnia as a frozen conflict zone; it says, "Not a single territorial or national problem that had caused the civil war in the first place has been solved." And these problems have not been settled only because a post-Dayton Bosnia as such in principle suits Milorad Dodik.²⁷ Hence, wiping RS away from the map of the world politics starts a chain reaction, questions the Muslim-Croat federation, the Brcko district, and whole B&H as it is now. Further on, holds Moscow, denying rights and freedoms to Serbs' autonomy in Bosnia and hoping that would be the end of the process would be quite unrealistic.²⁸

Russian Ambassador to B&H Ivanov said he supported RS legitimate rights and its special status as one of the entities, including all authorities possible in economic, cultural, legal and other domains.²⁹

Dr. Nikita Bondarev of the above-mentioned Institute for Strategic Studies (RISI) argues, "At this time Dodik is the only one guaranteeing the safeguard of the Dayton Bosnia."³⁰ "Dodik is probably Russia's most reliable partner in the region," says his colleague Dr. Engeljart of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Slavic Institute.

Except for the energy industry Russia plays no significant part in the economy of the Balkans. Russia mirrors all the region's failed transitions and transformations. Alliances made with Russia are based on people's frustration and resistance to the values of today's Europe.

24 <https://www.fakti.rs/rossiya/bondarev-srbi-treba-dabudu-veoma-srecni-sto-nisu-u-eu-isto-vazi-i-za-crnu-goru-i-makedoniju>.

25 <https://www.fakti.rs/rossiya/bondarev-srbi-treba-dabudu-veoma-srecni-sto-nisu-u-eu-isto-vazi-i-za-crnu-goru-i-makedoniju>

26 http://ruskarec.ru/politics/2017/01/11/eksperti-putin-tretira-dodika-kao-politichara-svetskog-ranga_678211

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid.

29 <http://kremlin.rs/>.

30 http://ruskarec.ru/politics/2017/01/11/eksperti-putin-tretira-dodika-kao-politichara-svetskog-ranga_678211

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Serbia has not given up its ambitions. It takes the present-day international context favorable to these ambitions and, therefore, must not miss the opportunity to double-check the international community's response.

Nationalistic rhetoric is always strengthened when a need arises to cover up for the lack of legitimacy and inability to transform the country into a modern one.

Apart from insisting on RS statehood, marking of the RS Day (January 9) is also an attempt at legitimizing violence and war crimes committed in the 1990s, all of which fits into Dobrica Ćosić's thesis about "Serbs liberation war in B&H."

This way or another Serbia claims Montenegro, Kosovo and Macedonia. Ever since the international community began frequently treating the Western Balkans as an "unfinished business" its claims have been more open.

Belgrade's policy (blackmail and threats) questions Serbia's pro-European orientation. Russia's more and more overt support to "non-European course" testifies that Moscow has infiltrated many institutions and built or fueled anti-Western sentiments with its propaganda.

Decline in Euro-enthusiasm is the "outcome" of snail-paced movement towards EU and growingly evident loss of hope among EU member-states – at least for the time being. Frustration and general dissatisfaction play into the hands of populism and the Premier's authoritarianism.

Although it is presently going through a crisis, EU has to clearly define its policy for the Western Balkans. Verbal support is not good enough without clear-cut goals. EU should provide more assistance to the society's pro-European segments; and, be aware that by supporting unconditionally Premier Vučić it was an actual accomplice in destruction of institutions and the media, and in the choke of criticism and resistance.

Bosnia is a key to stabilization of the Balkans and this is why the Dayton Accords have to be revised. Bosnia's entities have not been partitioned fairly: the largest community, and not only Bosniak, has been allocated the smallest territory. A revision should follow not only ethnic principles but, above all, economic and geographic. New dimensions need to be included into the policy for integration implemented over the past two decades: to start with common denominators to all the peoples of B&H should be tracked down and defined. The same refers to all the newly emerged states in the territory of Yugoslavia.