

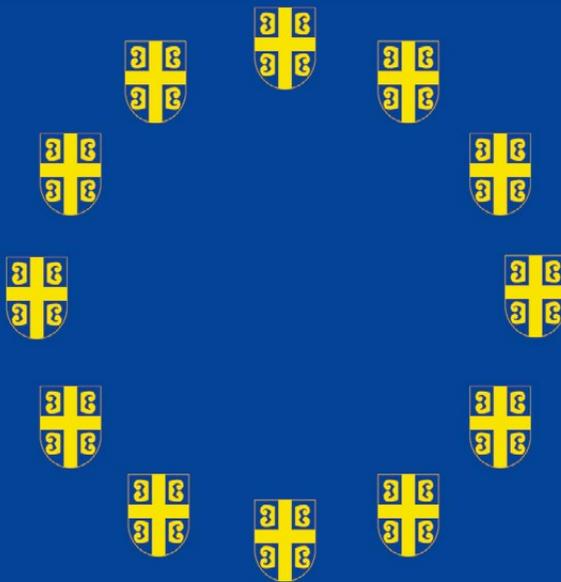


HELSINKI COMMITTEE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS IN SERBIA

REPORT ON HUMAN RIGHTS IN SERBIA IN 2014

POLITICAL CULTURE VS. EUROPEANIZATION

abridged version



Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia

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Political Culture vs. Europeanization

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Belgrade, 2015

Report on Human Rights in Serbia in 2014

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I – INTRODUCTION

Serbia at the Crossroad

Serbia is once again at crossroad that calls for the engagement of its entire society. The steps the government has made toward EU accession are insufficient, the more so since the government itself is not unanimous about the course. This is more than evident in the implementation of the Brussels Agreement.

The great majority of citizens knows nothing or knows little about what a membership of EU implies. Besides, most major national institutions such as Serb Orthodox Church, parts of the Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences (now trying to change its course), influential intellectuals and parts of the civil sector are not committed to the values on which EU rests. Turbulence within EU itself and disorientation of some member-states play into the hands of EU opponents and fuel their resistance.

Human rights and freedoms have regressed considerably over the past three years, the backsliding itself escalating during the state of emergency declared because of floods (May 15-23, 2014) and in the aftermath. Requiring expertise and, above all, preventive measures, the crisis situation itself revealed the government's weaknesses and its attitude toward key issues of further democratization.

The relationship between the central and local self-governments is fragile and highly politicized. As such it is threatening to citizens' safety in crisis situations. From the point of human security, decentralization proved to be essential.

The economy – the domain in which the government is expected to make the biggest progress – is in critical state. SNS won the elections on demagoguery: hence, it will be faced pretty soon with social demands implying radical reform of the system and economic liberalization. This will be the biggest test for the government considering all the promises given in the election campaign (“Belgrade Waterfront,” war on corruption, contracts on billion-dollar loans, etc.).

Only active citizenship, the civil sector and the media could compensate for non-existent parliamentary opposition. Their duty is to alert of every misuse of power. The problem is, however, that everyman dreads poverty more than tyranny.

The government's attitude toward Republika Srpska still rests on the policy for "the safeguard of the Dayton Accords and Republika Srpska." Moreover, not only the administration but the entire national elite support Milorad Dodik.

The manner in which Serbia will be organized is utterly uncertain. SNS has not even hinted the course it plans to take, while in practice continuing to centralize the country, especially Vojvodina. Vojvodina stands for the biggest defeat of the parties advocating autonomy. Belgrade-seated parties' attitude toward the Province, even when they speak up for autonomy, proved to be ambivalent.

The Ukrainian crisis caused doubts about the government's orientation. The fact that shortly after the elections and at the peak of the Ukrainian crisis Aleksandar Vučić and Ivice Dačić scurried to Moscow also raises some questions. Statements on Ukraine alerted Western observers scrutinizing every movement in Belgrade-Moscow relationship. At this time the said relationship is crucial for the government's positioning vis-à-vis reforms and European integration, and membership of NATO in particular.

The 2014 elections were the elections for "the best contractor" of the "pragmatic nationalism" policy to advocate close cooperation with EU and the West on the one hand, while denying their values and nourishing pan-Slavic emotions (ties with Russia) and the postulates of Serb nationalism on the other.

Election triumph of the SNS is fatal to Serbia's political life. Pluralism has all but disappeared. The Parliament – never a mechanism of control anyway – will be playing even a smaller role now. Partisan influence is bigger than ever before.

The present government – actually the former one reshuffled – has not gone public with a concrete program so far. It has wasted two years on campaigning against other parties (especially DS). The media that

have always been in the service of the regime are now exceeding worst expectations.

Putin's visit to Belgrade is a warning to EU and US alike. If the West really wants to have Western Balkans in EU, EU shall have to speed up the region's democratization and economic recovery. Failed transition and stagnation are the main reasons why the region wavers politically. EU shall have to pay special attention to local political cultures to adjust its developmental strategy adequately. Western Balkans badly needs EU's bigger and more comprehensive involvement.

Worsening of economic situation can easily generate social radicalism. If the government does nothing to change things for the better, various forms of extremism, especially ethnically motivated extremism at national and regional level, can be expected.

Serb political elite knows little or not enough about Russia's policy. To a large extent Yugoslavia disintegrated because of Milošević's expectation of Russia's involvement. Not even he understood that Russia acts in its interests alone. Serbia's seesaw between the West and the East threatens national interests, considering its EU and NATO surrounding.

Given the country's and the society's geo-strategic ambivalence, EU and its member-states such as Germany need to be more agile in this sense, having in mind global turmoil and reshuffle taking place in Europe as well, and further fueling Serbia's and some other Balkan states' ambivalence.

The situation of the media has never been as dramatic as in the past couple of years. Control over the media and suppression of critical thinking threaten pluralism. The government's crackdown on the civil sector and independent media is counterproductive to the government itself. Serbia needs free and independent media, and the civil sector resistant to governmental manipulation.

Moral norms and criteria for Serbia's administration need to be resumed. This implies reform of the educational system and respect for the decisions made by international courts.

Conclusions and recommendations

Consequences of the ethnic concept of the state – the consequences of the 1990s wars – still affect the situation of minorities: ethnic, religious and vulnerable groups. The civil sector has been working for years and years on lessening the gap between the majority and minorities, which the radical nationalism has left behind. However this gap can hardly be overcome without the government's inclusiveness policy.

The legacy of the 1990s wars and revisionism threaten Serbia's recovery and regional normalization. The 20th century history of the region – and that of the 1990s in particular – has to be objectified. To this end, EU has to be more active in the prevention of further historical fabrications.

Having rehabilitated the Tchetnik commander, Serbia identified itself with the party defeated in WWII. By legitimizing the Tchetnik policy of genocide against non-Serbs it practically renounced anti-fascism. The court decision on rehabilitation exemplifies Serbia's attitude toward the 1990s wars and war crimes, inspired by the Tchetnik ideology in WWII.

The criticism of Šešelj's temporary release from the ICTY is based on the perception of the Tribunal as a venue of global justice fostering hope about non-impunity for crimes; hence, his release disappointed and discouraged not only victims but also all those who believed in justice.

The Serb authorities failed to respond properly to this release, manifesting thereby how lame their reformist promises were; if made bona fide, these promises should imply bona fide overcoming the past.

Comments boiling down to the thesis about Šešelj as "an innocent victim of the Hague dungeon" and West's conspiracy against Serbia because of its relations with Russia and Putin indicate that Serbia persists on "not being at war" and not only relativizes crimes, but reaffirms nationalism as its only ideology. All this plays into the hands of the radical right-wing, constantly on the upward curve.

Overcoming the past is a key to regional stability given that, every now and then, incidents (such as Šešelj's release) testify of the region's deep-rooted nationalistic matrix.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE GOVERNMENT OF SERBIA

- Make strategic decisions on Serbia's future so as to avoid having to choose sides; under the burden of consequences of the failed transition and the legacy of the 1990s wars, Serbia cannot withstand pressures;
- Adjust the foreign policy to EU, considering the commitment to its membership; this is the most rational solution for a devastated country;
- Search for alternative sources of energy together with the region so as to be less dependent on Russia; this would prevent Russia from pulling strings whenever it suits its confrontation with the West;
- Provide support – together with the legislative branch – to independent institutions by acknowledging and implementing their recommendations; laws and bylaws they drafted have been on the parliament's waiting list for years; the documents known as "14 systemic measures" the Citizens' Ombudsman and the Commissioner for Information of Public Importance put forth in 2012 – meant to improve the rights of citizens working for the security sector and protect citizens from unauthorized wiretapping – has not been approved and implemented in full;
- Punish discrimination against LGBT persons in all domains to remove both causes and consequences; exemplify anti-discriminatory policy by taking action in the cases of discrimination filed with the Citizens' Ombudsman, the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality, the Provincial Ombudsman and non-governmental organizations;
- Banish discriminatory contents dealing with sexual orientation and gender equality from textbooks and other educational tools for elementary and secondary schools, and universities;

- Systematically educate public servants in the implementation of anti-discriminatory legislation in educational system, healthcare, the police and other services;
- Work on awareness raising against family violence – bearing in mind the growing number of cases of battered women and abused children – and facilitate access to services to multiply discriminated women;
- Develop and implement a comprehensive strategy against peer violence;
- Introduce civic education as a mandatory course in elementary and secondary schools, learning from the experience of developed countries;
- Promote and encourage self-employment of the young, and raise people's awareness about the governmental concern in this regard;
- Refrain from using the media to promote the Premier and his party; such practice has already confronted the government with OSCE and other international organizations, but EU politicians as well as Angela Merkel;
- Considering the traditional model of minority segregation, develop the curricula for the majority population to make them aware of the society's diversity and ethnic minorities' contributions to it, to culture, sciences, etc.; uphold the diversity of ethnic communities and simultaneously work for interaction between various ethnic communities;
- Take measures for bigger participation of ethnic minorities in political and public sphere, and ensure – at long last – availability of textbooks in minority languages; refrain from politicizing minorities' education, culture and media.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE CIVIL SECTOR

- Keep in mind that the entire society needs to be engaged to ensure that the government sticks to the proclaimed strategic goal – the membership of EU; animate EU to cooperate closer with social strata committed to this goal;
- Promote and explain EU values to citizens so as to enlarge the pro-European front; campaigning for Serbia's movement towards EU implies not only spreading the information about EU assistance to Serbia but also about the country's obligations deriving from its support;
- Keep steady communication with the European Commission and the European Parliament; initiate meetings between civil sector activists and newly elected members of EP to enable the exchange information about functioning of European institutions on one side, and Serbia's realities on the other;
- Sensitize EU to the significance of the civil sector's partnership with it in the implementation of the Brussels Agreement, especially to the role the civil sector can play in integrating two major ethnic communities in Kosovo.
- Keep raising awareness about the civil sector's readiness to contribute to accession negotiations between EU and Serbia, especially in chapters 23, 24, 35, 31, 10 and 26, considering the civil sectors' experience and expertise exceeding those of public servants;
- Intensify civil sector cooperation at regional level, involving as many as possible young people to be turned into regional leaders capable of thinking "regionally."

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

- Considering serious crisis in the region and Serbia, bear in mind that European ideas are the only alternative to radical nationalism and chauvinism, and that EU is the only rational choice for the Balkans and Serbia;
- To properly adjust the policy for Serbia (and the region) bear in mind the level of democratization attained (in Serbia and throughout the region), specificities of political culture and historical legacy, and the mainstream values;
- Mindful of Serbia's ambivalence about EU, resistance to this orientation by a considerable part of the political arena, as well as Russia's attempt at curbing it, affirm the engagement in the entire Balkans with substantial economic support to encourage the region's development; only prospects of progress could prevent various spheres of interest from disintegrating the region;
- Integrative policy for Serbia over the accession process necessitates EU's involvement in the reform of the security sector; signatories of the Common Security and Defense Policy agreement should initiate this new approach considering CSDP mostly being in their competence;
- React promptly against the longstanding violation of religious rights and freedoms;
- Speak up about the rehabilitation of the Tchetnik leader in WWII considering its negative impact on regional relations; bear in mind that the Tchetnik ideology Slobodan Milošević has taken over ended up before the ICTY; promoters of that ideology such as Vojislav Šešelj, Ratko Mladić or Radovan Karadžić are standing trial for it;
- Take a clear stance on the nature of the 1990s wars; this is the only way for Serbia to start facing up its own past at long last, the more so since by rehabilitating Mihailović it has put across a message to the region and democratic Europe that it renounces not the policy of confrontation with neighbors and territorial aspiration.

II – SOCIOPOLITICAL CONTEXT

Failed Transition Invalidates Human Rights

In a wider context of developmental crisis, Serbia's political stagnation played into the hands of entrepreneurs who seized – under new circumstances – the biggest portion of public and state property in the privatization process. This only furthered the typical symptom of blocked modernization. But the new class of businessmen has not distanced itself from the ideology of centralism.

Democracy is not only induced by the government but also based on the grassroots. Serbia's political energy in the 1990s was harnessed for territorial expansion and after the regime's ouster in 2000 for maintaining some territories by diplomatic means. The unsolved territorial and statehood issue slowed down Serbia's consolidation, the same as impeded the emergence of free and independent citizenship. Slobodan Milošević's rule invoked lofty national goals whereas post-October changes hardly favored strong, political institutions and liberal values crucial to the abolishment of centralism. That was the main challenge to all politicians after the change of 2000. Authoritarianism that tolerates arbitrariness in all domains still prevails. A responsible and agile political nation has not been created yet in Serbia.

Consolidation of the state and political institutions and – in this context – consolidation of democracy was weighted by the legacy of Milošević's rule: grossly criminalized and corrupted society, mainstream elites' inability to distance themselves from the greater nation project and bad economic management. In this context the present regime – notwithstanding its declaratively pro-European policy – stands in its own way. Its political culture and ideology are diametrically opposite to the Europeanization project. It is not only short of professionals the project badly needs but lacks moral principles. Hence, it cannot mobilize the society for such a lofty goal.

Over the past fifteen years Serbia has adopted human rights legislation but as it failed to build strong institutions, create a politically favorable social climate and breed responsible political elites the situation of human rights hardly changed when compared with the previous period. It even worsened in some aspects. Almost all citizens feel unsafe and are anxious. More than ever before the society depends on a party in power.

Not only has Serbia failed to make any progress in the domain of human rights but also to create a climate propitious to these rights. Many fundamental rights are being violated or undermined, especially the freedom of expression, rights of vulnerable groups, social pluralism, academic freedoms and critical thinking. In addition, continued implosion of the judiciary affects all citizens who cannot even expect governmental institutions to help them solve their problems without unnecessary delay. Trials are protracted for years and years. Serbia is among the states with the biggest number of cases awaiting justice from the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg (over 10,000).

Serbia has not yet developed a strategy for transitional justice to cope with the problems emerging from the 1990s wars. The War Crimes Court reduced considerably its activities. Governmental institutions have not properly responded to Vojislav Šešelj's temporary release from the ICTY allowing him to seriously undermine relations with the neighborhood with his overall performance once back home.

Budget saving measures – especially reduced pensions and salaries in public services – negatively affected the biggest majority of population and additionally threatened citizens' social and economic rights.

Serbia's fundamental problem in the process of democratization and promotion of human rights is practically non-existent society – or a very weak one. The civilian concept is in embryo and strongly challenged not only by the government but the society as a whole. The concept of human rights is perceived as an Anglo-Saxon implant of a "new" imperialism that chokes national identity. Expectations that the post-communist transition would transfer the governance from the state to an individual were too high. Regional tradition with its value system and democratic potential, have not been taken into consideration. Institutions as such cannot

guarantee such orientation but what can be thorough reforms of educational system and social values. The mainstream elites would not yet accept liberal values that imply individual accountability.

The Citizens' Ombudsman's 2014 report also emphasizes that the situation of human rights causes anxiety. "The rule of law and legal safety, the respect for the principle of good governance, organization and capacity of the administration and, above all, the economic situation were not up to the task of ensuring citizens' rights and their dignified life," quotes the report.

The reports stresses out the vulnerability of extremely poor citizens, children and the youth, persons with disabilities, members of ethnic minorities, including the Roma, persons deprived of their liberty and institutionalized psychiatric patients.

Gender, ethnic and other stereotypes are still deep-rooted. Hence, social distance towards some minorities is still extremely high. This notably refers to LGBT persons, people from other ethnic groups and minority religious communities. This is what the 2014 report by Commissioner for Equality Nevena Petrušić concludes. Most complaints submitted to the Commissioner, says the report, were against legal persons and governmental agencies thus testifying of institutionalized discrimination.

The exercise of human rights, including protection against discrimination, are above all determined by society's value system, the one based on tolerance, equality, freedom of expression and assembly. These values are guaranteed under the law but the everyday life is a different story, especially the everyday life of minority groups. Serbia has adopted the Anti-discrimination Strategy for the Period 2013-18 but it has not been put in practice yet despite the Action Plan specifying governmental agencies responsible to counteract discrimination in their domains (education, labor and employment, family relations and the right to inheritance, medical and social protection, housing, and so on).

International organizations such as Human Rights Watch /HRW/ and Amnesty International, as well as EC Progress Report, alert of these problems. In 2013 governments of West Balkan countries have done little to solve longstanding human rights problems, said HRW on January 21,

2014 in Berlin. Progress they made in the domains of accountability for war crimes, struggle against discrimination and neutralization of human rights violation of the Roma, and in prevention of ill-treatment of journalists and LGBT community was rather limited, noted HRW. Besides, they have not found lasting solutions to the problem of refugees and internally displaced persons.¹

According to HRW, the Roma in the entire region of the Western Balkans are faced with discrimination in medical care, education and housing.² Further on, journalists, LGBT persons and human rights defenders are challenged with hostile atmospheres, including life threats and assaults.

EC Progress Report notes that human rights legal and institutional frames are in place but Serbian authorities should continually work on their implementation. It also emphasized the need for consistent implementation of minority rights in education, access to the media and religious observance in minority languages.³

CoE Commissioner for Human Rights Nils Muiznieks warns of the threatening trend of violence against women. At his Facebook profile he provided alarming information about the situation in early 2015: in couple of months only 26 women were killed, meaning as many as in the entire 2014. This trend, he says, must be stopped.⁴

1 Danas, May 26, 2015.

<http://publicpolicy.rs/arhiva/131/balkans-more-effort-needed-to-end-abuses-nbsp-reinforced-human-rights-protection-required#.VWRn60-eDRY>.

2 Ibid.

3 http://www.seio.gov.rs/upload/documents/eu_dokumenta/godisnji_izvestaji_ek_o_napretku/serbia-progress-report14.pdf.

4 Ibid.

Institutional Collapse Threatens Reforms

Over the past two decades many institutions have been so much devastated that hardly any functions or, put it otherwise, all of them are more or less dysfunctional (judiciary, education, healthcare, security structures, etc.). While the “old” system was demolished a new one has never been established. Intellectual rigidity and group interests at the political arena – and beyond it – stand in the way of reforms. The international community – EU, OSCE and the Council of Europe in the first place – have done much for the reform of some segments of the administration (army, police, judiciary, etc.) but the outcome was feeble. And the situation, in the case of Serbia, can hardly change for the better without a much stronger pressure from the outside /EU/.

Democracy has not consolidated. It demonstrates weaknesses characteristic for all transitional countries. Citizens do not trust the administration and the overall political representation. Political elites are more or less in hookup with the grey zone. Speaking of societies such as the Serbian one should always take into account its character and especially the fact that all changes and reform it has undergone are superficial.

Premier Aleksandar Vučić's ratings /50%/ derive from the social climate or to deficient legitimacy of other political players. So it happened that one man – the Premier – represents the entire political system. Ever since the Progressists won the elections in 2012 Premier Vučić (first vice-premier at the time) has been working on destruction of all other political actors. He first discredited the former regime thus contributing to devastation of the Democratic Party /DS/, which, in plain truth, itself worked hard on its destruction. Then he placed all major media under his control and marginalized the civil sector, and all individuals or groups critical of his government. The office of the President of the Republic has also been marginalized. True, Tomislav Nikolić himself, incompetent and incapable

as he is, much contributed to his marginalization. At the same time some tycoon have been either arrested or criminalized. And so, as Vučić put it in an interview with CNN, “tycoons rule Serbia no more.”⁵

“We now have a chancellor system with the Premier as the lord and master appointing, disbenching and promoting officials at will,” says politicologist Vladimir Goati.⁶ However, Vučić’s popularity depends much on what he manages to accomplish in 2015 for, as Goati puts it, “the love for him will be proportional to the size of citizens’ wallets.”⁷

For the time being Vučić may count on the support of the international community, EU, US and Germany in the first place. The year 2015 will be a great challenge to him considering Serbia’s chairmanship of OSCE – and consequently Moscow’s pressure on it on the one hand, and EU’s and US’s on the other.

Popularity of the Serb Progressive Party /SNS/ rests solely on the popularity of Aleksandar Vučić. The party itself has meager human resources – a huge impediment to the Premier’s ambitiously announced reforms. In 2014 SNS dismissed almost 100 out of 160 municipal branches that, to its assessment, operated badly.⁸ Permanent changes at local level cause grudge among party membership.

“The hunger for power” is most evident at local level where election results have been revised and management structures reorganized – “wherever possible and even when not possible.” All the time SNS has been trying to force DS in power in Vojvodina to resign.

The main reason why Serbia stagnates is that the present regime “recognizes not the capacity for change.” Vučić mostly relies on “persons with no integrity, on petty profiteers, while what is left after all those grand phrases is a void threatening to burst like a soap bubble.”⁹ Vučić failed to attract the “alternative.” Young and educated people joined the mid-

5 <http://www.blic.rs/Vesti/Politika/520749/Vucic-za-CNN-Tajkuni-vise-ne-vode-Srbiju>.

6 Nedeljnik, December 18, 2014.

7 Ibid.

8 http://www.b92.net/info/vesti/index.php?yyyy=2014&mm=12&dd=26&nav_category=206&nav_id=940652.

9 Danas, March 16, 2015.

dle-aged elites, fully aware that there is no future for them in Vučić's Serbia.¹⁰

“Technology” of rule: permanent production of enemies

Though pompously announced three years ago when the present regime came to power, changes and reforms have not even begun. The complex and devastating situation of Serbia necessitates not only strong political will but extreme professionalism aware of the realities – at home and in the world alike. The regime is at loss at this terrain: it has not expertise in the management of the administration. So it constantly produces enemies to veil incompetence and resistance to change among ruling elites in the first place. Pointing a finger at those to blame for citizens' disappointment and frustration keeps the Premier in good graces. His monopoly on all governmental offices deprives relevant ministers of independent decision-making. But such concentration of power limits the very Premier's room to maneuver in.

Premier Vučić became popular when he announced the struggle against corruption. However, he hardly did much in fighting corruption over the past three years. Anti-corruption campaigns serve to maintain social tension and make people believe the government is coping with accumulated problems.

Miroslav Mišković, the owner of Delta Holding Company has been hostage to this policy. He has been standing trial for more than two years now and the end of proceedings is not in sight. When he arrested Mišković, the symbol of “unjust opulence,” the Premier's popularity skyrocketed. However, proceedings against him are being unduly protracted while Vučić seems to have no exit strategy to have it rounded off elegantly. Mostly accused of corruption, apart from Mišković, were DS officials. True, DS is most responsible for the widespread corruption, which is why it fails to consolidate now and establish itself as a promoter of a new policy.

10 Ibid.

However, the alleged struggle against corruption turned insufficient for maintaining tensions. So the focus was shifted to “foreign enemies,” especially to critics of the situation of the media. Head of EC Delegation to Serbia Michael Davenport was accused of undermining the Serbian cabinet just because his Delegation has financially assisted the Balkan Investigative Journalism Network /BIRN/. Vučić fumed at BIRN’s series of stories about under-the-counter dealings in draining of the Kolubara basin mines.

The polemic over the tender for draining the biggest site flooded in May 2014 started on January 8 when BIRN publicized in a story titled “Draining the Mine and the Budget” that Serbia Electricity Supply Company /EPS/ had engaged a consortium with no experience in draining and thus blew up the costs. Vučić accused BIRN reporters of “being paid” by Mr. Davenport to fabricate information. The Independent Journalists’ Association of Serbia /NUNS/ called his reaction an open pressure on media freedoms meant to choke critical thinking, and his discourse – the discourse characteristic of the past and now unacceptable in a democratic society and the country aspiring at membership of EU.¹¹

Vojislav Šešelj’s temporary release from the ICTY was also interpreted as the West’s conspiracy against the Vučić cabinet. Minister of Labor and Social Issue Aleksandar Vulin called it a political message from the ICTY and an attempt at Serbia’s destabilization.¹²

In the finals of the election campaign in 2014 Vučić qualified all his opponents as “extremists.” He primarily referred to DS and its then leader, Dragan Đilas, considering DS’s warning of “Bosnian” or “Ukrainian” scenario in Serbia.

Quoting an unidentified source from security services, the Informer daily (close to the Premier) claimed that in its report the Security-Intelligence Agency /BIA/ had warned that “tycoons, foreigners and extremists have been planning to incite ‘spontaneous’ riots in Serbia by the autumn at the latest, leading to conflicts and violent change of the regime.”

11 <http://www.glaskragujevca.net/?p=21850>.

12 http://www.rtv.rs/sr_lat/politika/vulin-pustanje-seselja-pokusaj-destabilizacije-vlade_534181.html.

According to the paper, “BIA agents can produce the evidence for ‘a black scenario’ in plan for Serbia.”¹³

Apart from mobilizing the electorate on the eve of the elections this SNS tactics also indicates its post-election strategy and announces repression, said analyst Đorđe Vukadinović. “As it seems, in an event of an outburst of dissatisfaction the regime will ascribe it to some ‘scenario’ thus presenting a social revolt as a complot against it,” he said.¹⁴ Professor Sr-bijanka Turajlić calls everything Vučić say “mere propaganda,” adding “Every populism is risky, his included. People start believing in some fairy tale ending, in a prince on a white horse who will turn Serbia the frog into a princess. This simply is no good.”¹⁵ Vukašin Obradović of the NUNS also takes that the regime fabricates enemies as it believes that this could motivate citizens to vote for it. “That’s an obvious manipulation. I regret to say that some media are in the service of political parties...They are underestimating citizens who cannot but be aware that all these stories are nothing but empty words.”¹⁶

People are anxious and frustrated for many reasons, and the only question is what might trigger off a social revolt, warns journalist Tanja Jakobi. “A weak state fuels the fear of chaos, and fears are easy to manipulate.”¹⁷

Protests against internet censorship culminated after the cyber-attack on the “Hourglass” /Peščanik/ website. The site was attacked after having publicized an article by a team of scholars claiming that some sections of Interior Minister Nebojša Stefanović’s doctoral dissertation were plagiarisms.

Restriction of the freedom of expression at internet escalated during the May 2014 floods in Serbia. The police arrested three persons for

13 <http://www.vecernji.hr/svijet/srpska-sigurnosna-sluzba-upozorila-vladu-srbije-da-se-spremaju-nemiri-925869>.

14 <http://www.vesti-online.com/Vesti/Srbija/387925/Drzavni-udarna-mozak-biraca?mobile=false/print/print/print>.

15 <http://www.slobodnaevropa.org/content/predizborna-srbija-manipulacija-strahom/25292041.html>.

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid.

“causing panic” with their writings at social networks, and kept them in custody for a month. After strong reactions by domestic public and OSCE they were released to defend themselves while free. During the floods hackers attacked several websites criticizing the steps the government had taken.

The Premier especially crusaded against OSCE Representative for Freedom of the Media Dunja Mijatović for having reported on the threatening media situation in Serbia. As she appealed to Serbian authorities to stop interfering into online media, he wanted her to provide a single evidence of the government’s hacker-attack on “The Other Side” and “Teleprompter” websites or removal of some blogs from the online edition of the Blic daily.¹⁸

“What we are challenged with now is the policy trying again to directly interfere into the media, exert pressure on them and control them in most obvious way,” said Ms. Mijatović.¹⁹ “We observe intimidation. There are attempts at curbing criticism through passing new laws overnight, and all that in the name of security, struggle against terrorism or protection of juveniles...In a way these are legitimate actions any government would take to protect its citizens. But when you look into some cases resulting from these new laws you can see that the laws had actually been used for everything else except for protection of citizens.”²⁰

The manner in which the government polemicized over the censorship shows its ignorance of and disrespect for OSCE and “the so-called independent institutions.” The regime seems not to know that freedom of the media is its responsibility. Its quarreling discourse was meant to be a serenade to its populist-oriented electorate prone to blaming “foreign mercenaries and domestic traitors” and “international circles” for everything.

18 <http://www.naslovi.net/2014-06-02/akter/vucic-razgovarao-da-dunjom-mijatovic-iz-oeps/10235350>.

19 <http://www.cenzolovka.rs/ono-sto-vidimo-je-da-postoji-sve-vise-zastrasivanja-postoje-pokusaji-da-se-zaustave-kriticni-i-provokativni-glasovi-a-sve-u-ime-sigurnosti/>.

20 Ibid.

Staging of the Pride Parade was also presented as extortion from the West. However, the event itself was overshadowed by the incident in which gendarmes beat up the Premier's brother, Andrej, just for having seen who he was from his ID, as the Premier himself explained. His party colleagues even went so far as to interpret the incident as an assault on the state.

The incident took place when Andrej Vučić (in company with Mayor Siniša Mali's brother) escorted by military policemen tried to pass through the police cordon guarding the Pride Parade. When stopped he snatched a gendarme by his vest and threatened to have them all "dismissed," the word has it. According to gendarmes, one of Vučić's military escorts then pulled out a gun so they had to go after them all. The Premier's brother and his escorts tried to run away from the scene only to run into another group of gendarmes. Some broadcasters aired the video-recording showing the conflict with the second group of gendarmes, while the video-recording took by the Gendarmerie – and showing Vučić's initial verbal and physical assault on gendarmes was "pulled out of the camera and taken away."²¹ Citizens' Ombudsman Saša Janković raised the question of how come military policemen were escorting the Premier's brother. Instead of getting a proper answer from the authorities he was placed on a black list.

The Humanitarian Law Center's /FHP/report claims that Head of General Staff Ljubiša Diković bears command responsibility for war crimes committed in Kosovo in 1999. The Center publicized its findings about Diković's complicity several years ago, but it was only in this recent report that it provided new evidence about it. The Center says that the "Rudnica Dossier" on the ground of which it accuses Diković has been compiled from authentic military and police documentation, interviews with survivors, family members of victims, forensic findings, testimonies by officers of the Yugoslav Army and police officials before the ICTY and other relevant material.

Commenting on the report Vučić said it was all about a continued campaign against the most popular institution in Serbia. Assaults on the Serbian Army, he explained, begun after everything its soldiers had done

21 http://www.danas.rs/danasrs/hronika/niski_zandarmi_tvrde_da_je_andrej_vucic_prvi_pretio.3.html?news_id=289844#sthash.1l4XHJUf.dpuf.

to protect Serbia from the floods and then took up after the big parade celebrating Belgrade's Liberation Day. This is all closely connected with the attempts at Serbia's instability, he concluded.²²

The "wiretapping affair" during the Trilateral Commission meeting in Belgrade's Crown Plaza Hotel provided yet another opportunity for the Premier to speak of "power centers" working against him.

The counter-subversive squad of the Interior Ministry detected a hidden camera and microphone in the "Adriatico" hall of the hotel where Vučić has had several meetings during the event. Some conjured that foreign agents have also been involved considering the "Trilateral."

According to a press release the Crown Plaza Hotel published at the website of Mišković's Delta Holding Company, "every banquet hall in the hotel is equipped with a camera telecasting recording at the screen outside the hall, but no camera has a microphone to register sounds."²³

Minister of Justice Nikola Selaković said that the case itself – having taken place in a hotel owned by Miroslav Mišković – and other activities testify that tycoons were planning to oust the government.²⁴

In fact, SNS has not yet realized how significant institutions are, let alone tried to reform them and make them functional. Instead, the party sticks to its time-tested populist pattern that won it the elections – it has been "occupying" the media and showering citizens with video-clips, photos and stories about the government working round the clock and officials of ruling parties being present in the field all the time.

Insisting on some alleged plots against the government, especially the Premier, and comparing the latter with Premier Zoran Đinđić, SNS officials have been promoting the thesis that "people affected by the anti-corruption struggle are planning his /the Premier's/ assassination."

22 <http://www.vestinet.rs/tema-dana/vucic-kampanja-protiv-vojske-srbije>.

23 <http://www.novosti.rs/vesti/naslovna/drustvo/aktuelno.290.html:518174-Selakovic-Pokusaj-prisluskivanja-premijera>.

24 Ibid.

Early elections: pragmatic nationalism carries the day

The victory of Serb Progressive Party /SNS/ and its leader Aleksandar Vučić in the early parliamentary elections and in local elections in Belgrade was nothing unexpected but came as a shock nevertheless. The percentage of the vote they won exceeded even a heavy vote for Slobodan Milošević in the first multi-party elections in Serbia in 1990. Commenting on this outcome, Vojislav Koštunica, leader of Democratic Party of Serbia /DSS/ said, “The structure of the new parliament associates 1990s – just once key actors, SPS and SRS, switched seats with SNS...Western powers crucially contributed to this electoral outcome, which perfectly suits them.”²⁵ In other words, with almost an absolute (two-third) parliamentary majority, SNS can form a government at will.

Unlike its orthodox counterpart, “Serb pragmatic nationalism” that carried the day tries to fit into Europe’s model and realize its original project within it: to safeguard Kosovo within Serbia (or North Kosovo at least), to establish the Greater Serbia and to economically recover the country – the goal that cannot be attained with Russia’s assistance but only with the support of EU. Membership of EU ensures unimpeded communication with Serb “corps” in the territory of ex-Yugoslavia and keeps the idea of unification alive.

A major consequence of SNS’s electoral triumph – the outgoing Premier, Ivica Dačić, labeled ‘a political tsunami’²⁶ - is a quite novel configuration of Serbia’s political scene. Apart from the “Progressists,” parliamentary seats will be occupied by three political groupings only – Socialist Party of Serbia /SNS/, Democratic Party /DS/ and New Democratic Party /NDS/. Under the Constitution, three minority parties – Alliance of Vojvodina Hungarians /SVM/, Democratic Action Party /SDA/ and Albanian Party for Democratic Action /PDD/ will also be represented in the new parliament as their seats are not preconditioned by the 5-percent election threshold.

25 Press conference by DSS, March 16, 2014.

26 Press conference by SPS, March 16, 2014.

Three parties represented in the parliament since their establishment – Democratic Party of Serbia /DSS/, United Regions of Serbia /URS/ and Liberal Democratic Party /LDP/ - failed to pass the election threshold.

As it seems, the electorate went in for most catchy promises on offer. SNS election campaign went in for best salable commodities – populism and demagoguery. “Having suspended democracy”²⁷ Serbia showed that it lost trust in democratic processes that failed to open vistas to everyman. It punished the parties that – as voters’ saw it – had been preoccupied with themselves and “their cadres” only rather than concerned with public interest. And this turned upside down its political arena.

Several factors played into the hands of the Progressists, most of all the good timing: Aleksandar Vučić’s popularity reached its peak on the account of his struggle against corruption. Combining traditional nationalism and populism with alleged modernism SNS and Aleksandar Vučić won over considerable portions of the right-wing, conservative electorate (potential voters of DSS, Dveri, Serb Radical Party and others), and the liberal one, logically inclined towards DS, URS or LDP. Last but not least, they ensured their success through aggressive and occasionally brutal smear campaigns against their political opponents with the helping hand from most of the influential media outlets.

Ivica Dačić, SPS leader and the outgoing Premier, came out as the second best. His coalition won about the same number of votes and parliamentary seats as in the 2012 elections. This shows that his coalition has consolidated and entrenched itself firmly at the political scene. Their election result is the more so significant since they have been ruthlessly criticized by both the opposition and their pre-election coalition partners throughout the election campaign.

DS and NDS alike passed the election threshold with much ado, while LDP and URS failed to. And so the so-called civil option suffered defeat.²⁸

27 Analyst Đorđe Pavićević, TVB92, March 16, 2014.

28 Not a single party with the term “democracy” in its name won in any municipality; minority parties came out victorious only in their communities (Alliance of Vojvodina Hungarians was successful in Vojvodina, Party for Democratic

This was the cost the opposition paid to its inconsistency, confusing orientation, splits and, generally, to being at a loss against the backdrop that was new to it. A part of the present opposition /DS/ failed to adequately respond to SNS strategy for smearing the former regime, while the rest flirted with SNS with an eye to a partnership in the government.

DS suffered a debacle in Vojvodina as well. The defeat is the more so heavy since the party had triumphed in the May 2012 elections in the province. Since then it has been enjoying in a comfortable majority in the provincial parliament in tandem with League of Social Democrats of Vojvodina /LSV/ and Alliance of Vojvodina Hungarians /SVM/.

Vojvodina has been the target of Belgrade's "centralistic" parties ever since 1990s. As of 2012 has been going against Vojvodina by "rearranging" local self-governments to "reflect" the composition of the central government. Novi Sad was the first to fell victim to their campaign. So far – and despite many disposals in other towns and municipalities, including SNS victory in several local elections – the provincial government has sustained this heavy pressure. But now, in not a single municipality did DS / or NDS for that matter/ won the majority of vote. The parties at the level of the province /in the assembly and the government/ are still in power – but it is hard to expect the Progressists, now triumphantly campaigning through Serbia, to leave Vojvodina to the Democrats.²⁹

The Brussels Agreement with Prishtina and its implementation earned SNS the West's support and sympathy. Catherine Ashton, EU high representative for foreign affairs, sent her congratulations and promised to visit Belgrade once a new cabinet was formed. As for Berlin, Christian-Democratic Union messaged that "with its clear-cut commitment to membership of EU, SNS managed to double its vote,³⁰ but also reminded that the road to Brussels led through Prishtina.³¹ Russian Ambassador to Serbia

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Action in Sandzak, and Democratic Activity Party in South Serbia).

29 SNS Vice-President Goran Knežević said the the Vojvodina government had lost legitimacy in the province and called the Provincial Premier to resign; Informer, March 20, 2014.

30 Politika, March 18, 2014.

31 Politika, March 18m 2014.

Alexander Chepurin stressed out the good relations between Belgrade and Moscow (“Russia is very close to Serbia’s heart,” he said during the election night).

Having convincingly won the elections Vučić can now “decide on both the cabinet and the opposition.”³² Besides he had obligated himself and the future cabinet to the fulfillment of considerable, though rather blurred promises. This especially refers to economic reforms and Serbia’s overcoming its dramatic financial and economic crisis. Though the reform was a catchword of his election campaign he never explained what “hard and painful” cuts its implementation implied meant to everyman. On the eve of the election campaign he signed a contract with United Arab Emirates on a one-billion-dollar loan to partially compensate the budget deficit and pay off salaries and pensions over a couple of months.

The arrest of narco boss Darko Šarić (who actually gave himself up) only contributed to Vučić’s image of an iron-willed fighter against organized crime (and corruption). His “omnipotence” will be tested in the period to come. For, as German expert in the Western Balkans Johanna Deimel put it, “from now on he will be responsible for the future of the state, be it good or bad.”³³ Some analysts hold that Vučić faces two possible options – “he might either meet his promises and thus go down in history or prove himself incapable of meeting his promises and – bearing in mind the opposition as it is and the media as they are – join the democratic oligarchy.”³⁴ Đorđe Vukadinović, editor-in-chief of *Serb New Political Thought* magazine, SNS victory is a bit “overwhelming” and as such “counterproductive considering all the responsibility on the shoulders of SNS and its leader Aleksandar Vučić.”³⁵ Florijan Biber, professor at the Graz University, says, “Absolute power is a threat to Serbia’s democracy, especially because of inefficient mechanisms of control over the government, scarce independent institutions, most media loyal to the regime and the

32 Editor-in-chief of the *Nedeljnik* magazine Veljko Lalić, *Nedeljnik*, March 20, 2014.

33 *Danas*, March 20, 2014.

34 *Naše Novine*, March 18, 2014.

35 *Politika*, March 18, 2014.

fact that two out of three opposition parties would rather team up with the Progressists than criticize them.”³⁶

The elections that have practically rubbed out the opposition left the regime almost without any control. This is the more so since the media have so much compromised themselves that they can hardly present themselves as promoters and protectors of public interest. Everything indicates that SNS will remain in power for long. Srećko Mihailović, a highly reputed public opinion analyst, says Aleksandar Vučić will not “leave his present post soon.”³⁷ “Because,” he explains, “Vučić has destroyed both the opposition and Democratic Party that will not recover soon.”³⁸ Having lost the elections the parties that failed to pass the election threshold also lost the right to subsidies and lost their donors – all that will make it hard for them to survive till next elections the more so since they have not been working on their ideological and program identity, alternative to the regime.

May floods lay bare bad governance

In the spring of 2014 Serbia and the entire region were affected by strong downpour. Political elites’ decades-long offhandedness and managerial incapacity jeopardized human lives and properties almost throughout Serbia in the May floods. The government proved to be incompetent to govern the country in crisis situations. On the contrary, it used the crisis for a political showdown with the opposition and turned the media into its mouthpieces. And in the process it totally ignored citizens’ safety while blaming all and sundry for its own incapacity.

As Premier Vučić put it himself, because of the authorities’ untimely and inadequate measures against the floods, 24 persons drowned, four were missing and 26 died natural deaths on May 29, 2014 in the territory of eight municipalities. The damages in 24 municipalities were assessed at

36 Danas, March 25, 2014.

37 Danas, March 17, 2014.

38 Ibid.

one billion and 532 million Euros. The government claimed the damages were bigger by 15 percent at national level.

The government – Premier Aleksandar Vučić and his party in the first place – acted amateurishly and confusedly, only adding to the panic of citizens affected by the floods. By controlling the media through intimidation, labeling alleged culprits (“enemies of people’s unity in the defense against the floods”), dispatching volunteers and managing the situation with emphasized centralism it only multiplied the potential threat to human lives.

The Progressists once again manifested the mindset typical of the Radicals in the 1990s. Their control over the media choked any criticism of the government. Critical comments at social networks were under hacker-assaults.

On the Russian chessboard

Over the past eight years Serbia has been given a major role in Russian President Vladimir Putin’s strategy for the Balkans. Observers in the West have growingly focused, therefore, on Russia’s economic, diplomatic, security and cultural “offensive” in the Balkans, especially in Serbia, Republican Spike and Montenegro. Considering the fragility of Balkan states, and their problematic transition and immature political class, Moscow seems to be achieving its goals rather successfully with the helping hand from anti-Western circles.

Serbia’s influential pro-Russian bloc, the one opposing the country’s membership of EU and eager to see it in the Euro-Asian Union, is rather encouraged by Russia’s presence in Serbia. “The Golden Fleece has never been in the West but in the East,” they say.³⁹

39 The metaphor is taken from the article “In the Search for the Golden Fleece” by a founding-father of the Third Serbia, Aleksandar Đurđev. „Serbia’s systematic molding to EU has been openly promoted as a goal with no alternative, as a religion we should observe obediently and in the long run. The diplomatic precedent that favors EU – the artificial creation of political elites sharing the same interests – can easily marginalize Serbia in the long run and undermine Serb-Russian relationship built on sound foundations for centuries.” Danas, July 8, 2014.

By the “Putin doctrine” the Balkans has been turned into a zone of rivalry between “the Russian world” and the hostile West, the zone in which Russia promotes its interests on the one hand, and stifles the values alternative to its model of authoritarian rule on the other.⁴⁰ The Western Balkan – with Republika Srpska denying Sarajevo, Serbia denying Kosovo’s independence, Macedonia thorn by Macedonian-Albanian skirmish and Montenegro with its confronting Montenegrin and Serb blocs – is pretty disposed to Russia’s actions.

Russia supports Serbia’s neutral position, which, as Georgy Engelgarat of the Russian Institute of Slavic Languages put it, “gives Serbian politicians more space to maneuver...between big powers, while maintaining their freedom.”⁴¹ Russia is powerful on the account of its energy, given that the “the mother nature will be forcing every regime to cooperate with Russia regardless of all the opposition.”⁴²

Serbia is still ambivalent about a most pressing challenge facing today’s Europe: the Ukrainian crisis. In words, Serbia is committed to membership of EU while maintaining “the best possible relationship” with Russia.

The frequency of Russia-Serbia high-level meetings over the past couple of months testifies of the importance Russia attaches to Serbia. The Ukrainian crisis opened a new chapter in Russian diplomacy now trying to protect “national interests” at all costs. The fact that Serbia has obtained accession negotiations and that the entire region has been included in the West’s strategy for EU and NATO membership only intensified Russia’s efforts towards slowing down or undermining these processes until it settles a score with the West.

Since May 2012 Tomislav Nikolić has paid five visits to Russia. Ivica Dačić, in his capacity as the Premier, visited Moscow in the spring of 2013. The word has it that Dačić and Vučić had been in Moscow before they formed the present cabinet (April 2013) – the information has never

40 David Clark and Dr Andrew Foxall, “Russia’s Role in the Balkans,” June 2014, the Henz Jackson Society.

41 Geopolitika, July, 2014.

42 Ibid.

been officially confirmed. In November 2013, for the first time after a fourteen-year break, the Russian Minister of Defense paid a visit to Belgrade. It was Sergey Shoygu. Aleksandar Miler, director general of "Gaspromnjet," attended the South Stream ceremony in November 2013. In early 2014 President of Duma Sergey Narishkin paid a visit to Serbia. Growingly frequent are cultural exchanges and scholarly conferences, including the launch of a book by Leonid Reshetnikov, director of the Moscow Institute of Strategic Research and adviser to Kremlin, and a conference on "the orange revolution" in Banjaluka.

To all appearances, Russians provide financial support to some right-wing non-governmental organizations and, probably, certain media outlets. It is common knowledge that Russia has been financing some right-wing organizations and parties in West Europe; analogically, it does the same in Serbia. There are signals that Moscow will enter Serbia's media market: allegedly, Russian companies ("Gaspromnjet") plan to buy a television station. The fact that Željko Mitrović, owner and editor-in-chief of TV Pink, accompanied Premier Vučić during his visit to Moscow plays into the hands of such calculation.

In Serbia, Russia relies on its strong alliance with Serb Progressive Party. Alexander Konuzin, former ambassador to Serbia, actively participated in the party's election campaign in 2012. President Nikolić is known for his love of Russia. Since elected the President he has been meeting with Vladimir Putin quite often. Referring to Serbia's relations with Moscow, Nikolić said, "Serbia is grateful to the Russian Federation for Russia's stance towards Kosovo and Metohija and its commitment to the international law."⁴³

In its campaign in the Balkans Russia posits that EU is disunited and unable to fully articulate its interests in the domains of foreign policy and energy. Hence Russia's relatively easy "deals" with EU member-states. Austria is the latest example.

43 Ibid.

South Stream: (un)expected cancellation

Russia's canceling of the South Stream project was a blow to the Vučić cabinet that had banked on it for profit. The South Stream had been interpreted as Serbia's great chance for energy leadership in the region. In early 2014 Russian Ambassador to Serbia Alexander Chepurin declared that the "new pipeline is a solution to energy resources problem for the vast region of South Europe."⁴⁴

The project itself had been proclaimed "a business enterprise of the century." However, it has been a matter of controversy from the very beginning: while some claimed Serbia had thus sided with Russia, sold its oil industry /NIS/ for "peanuts" and jeopardized its "energy independence," the others were arguing that South Stream would ensure Serbia's energy demand in the long run by supplying it with "clean and cheap energy."⁴⁵

Russia's decision to cancel the South Stream – now a definite one – put Serbia in a cleft stick: to opt for Russia or the European Union. This hard news was more than a disappointment to Serbia's officials: they could hardly believe their ears. By trying to convince themselves that "nothing is final yet" – that there are still chances for the project's implementation – the political elites only demonstrate their inability for recognizing realistically today's international relations, especially those along Moscow-Brussels-Washington line.

In parallel with growing tension between the West and Russia grew the pressure from both sides on Serbia to make its choice. The collapse of the South Stream project and the Ukrainian crisis further strengthened this pressure: patience for Serbia's "golden mean" is coming to an end. Johanna Deimel, deputy director of the German Association for the South-east Europe, said that having to choose between Russia and EU Serbia had already "opted for EU" as its "priority." In the new situation related to the gas pipeline, she said, EU promised Serbia it would not close the doors on it.⁴⁶

44 <http://www.geopolitika.rs/index.php/sr/intervju/675-2013-12-29-12-24-04>.

45 <http://www.energoportal.info/>.

46 <http://www.blic.rs/Vesti/Politika/517446/Rusija-i-Zapad-zahtevaju-da-se-Srbija-opredeli>.

The red alert following the South Stream project from its very inception has never been taken seriously in Serbia. During his October 2014 visit to Serbia Russian President Putin himself told Serbia's leadership that construction of the pipeline was uncertain.⁴⁷

The Russian President delivered this "very hard news" – as Premier Vučić⁴⁸ called it – from the meeting with Turkish President Taip Erdogan in Ankara. That was when the two heads of state announced a new project – a pipeline from Russia to Turkey.

According to some analysts, the South Stream pipeline has been more of a political project than an economic one from the very start. Actually, it was only meant to erase Ukraine from the transport map: all the countries on its course – from Bulgaria through Serbia to Hungary and Austria and Italy – have received their gas supplies from Russia through pipes built in Ukraine.

Moscow accused EU for having to cancel the project. Namely, Brussels had insisted on construction standards adjusted to EU's, something Russian investors would not accept.

Serbia's chairmanship of the OSCE: an opportunity or a risk?

The one-year chairmanship of the OSCE as of January 1, 2015 is the biggest challenge for Serbia's foreign policy and diplomacy ever since the sanctions against it were lifted fifteen years ago. At the same time the chairmanship will be testing its actual potentials and vision.

Complex international circumstances – above all the Ukrainian crisis that has shaken Europe and affected the relations between big powers over all hotbeds of crisis worldwide challenge Serbia even more. Serbia has not yet taken stock of its recent past: this is why the OSCE Mission still operates

47 When reporters asked him about the South Stream construction, Putin replied "It's two for love" alluding to EU energy standards that stand in the way of Moscow's plans; RTS, October 16, 2014.

48 This is what Premier Vučić actually said over telephone conversation with his Russian counterpart Dmitry Medvedev. Danas, December 9, 2014.

in Serbia (as of 2001) monitoring the rule of law and human rights, the police reform, democratization and the media.

Formally, Serbia negotiates with the EU its full-fledged membership: however, it has not yet adjusted its foreign policy with that of the EU, which is mandatory for all member-states. At the same time Serbia is among pillars of Russia's strategy for the Balkans that highly depends on its energy supplies. In this context, while moving towards the EU, Serbia will be requested more seriously than ever to adjust its foreign policy – and that trouble it the most during its chairmanship of the OSCE. Serbia is declaratively committed to the membership of the EU but its elites have not reached a consensus on the country's geostrategic orientation. Major segments of the society strongly oppose Euro-Atlantic integration. This primarily refers to the Serb Orthodox Church /SPC/ and almost the whole spectrum of the right-wing parties and organizations. The media that are financially assisted from Russia (such as Pečat or Geostrategija) but also dailies like Politika, Večernje Novosti and the like have been also campaigning against NATO. The ambivalent stance that can be summarized as “We love Russia, but move towards the EU”⁴⁹ exposed the country to pressure from both sides.

The question is whether Serbia will be able to mediate the Ukrainian crisis – presently in planetary focus - as expected in its capacity as the OSCE chairman. Many doubt it has capacity for the task. Serbia neither has the potential nor credibility for reconciling Russia and the EU. Some take that the chairmanship of the OSCE is a great opportunity for Serbia “to play the role of a mediator and smooth EU-Russia relations,” as Dušan Šidanski, special adviser to the European Commission put it.⁵⁰ Russian Ambassador to Serbia Alexander Chepurin also sees the chairmanship as an opportunity for Serbia and says, “That's not only a challenge but also a great opportunity for Serbia to prove itself in the best light.”⁵¹ As for others, they argue that Serbia would gladly renounce its new role under today's international circumstances. As US Ambassador Michael Kirby

49 Foreign Minister Ivica Dačić, Blic, November 16, 2014.

50 Danas, October 6, 2014.

51 <http://www.blic.rs/Vesti/Politika/523844/Kirbi-i-Cepurin-Predsedavanje-OEBSu-izazov-i-prilika>

noted, Serbia would have probably thought twice before applying for the chairmanship had it been able to predict the Ukrainian crisis.⁵² According to this school of thought, small countries can hardly hold the road when big ones are in conflict.

Some somehow associated the role of a mediator between the East and the West with Yugoslavia's once prestigious position between the two blocs, and especially with its late president Josip Broz Tito. "Nikolić, Vučić and Dačić are now openly promoting 'neo-Titoism' in Serbia's foreign policy," says Zoran Panović, editor-in-chief of the *Danas* daily.⁵³ However, reminds the editor, "foreign policy and domestic policy of interethnic tolerance, cooperation and anti-fascism are fundamentally interrelated and cannot be pursued partially."⁵⁴

Foreign Minister Ivica Dačić denies this simile, saying "The present government was the first to recognize the realities of the new order and act accordingly."⁵⁵ "Serbia has finally become a partner whose views are respected and paid tribute to... In other words, this has nothing to do with 'neo-Titoism.' We are just playing a game of cards with suits we hold in our hands," he explains.⁵⁶

Ex-foreign minister Vuk Jeremić⁵⁷ also had the "neo-Titoist" ambition; probably that was why he nominated Serbia for the chairmanship of the OSCE, counting, among other things, on the 40th anniversary of the Helsinki Conference when OSCE /CSCE at the time/was established. At that time Tito and Yugoslavia played a major mission of "reconciliation" and consensual agreement between East and West European countries. For the time being this major anniversary of Europe's "security umbrella" is overshadowed by the biggest crises after the WWII – the conflict in Ukraine and high tensions between Russia on the one hand, and EU and US on the other.

52 Ibid.

53 *Danas*, January 10-11, 2015.

54 *Danas*, 10-11. January 2015.

55 *Danas*, January 12, 2015.

56 Ibid.

57 Jeremić used to invoke the „Titoist“ tradition while visiting the countries in Africa and Asia to persuade them not to recognize Kosovo's independence.

Kosovo: Serbia sticks to its strategy

Local elections in Kosovo, called in its entire territory for the first time ever (November 3), demonstrated once again the major trait of Serbia's policy for "recognition" of the new reality in the region, for Kosovo this time.

Local elections were of major importance for the Serb community in Kosovo: for the first time they were called under Kosovo's law in four municipalities with majority Serb population (Kosovska Mitrovica, Zubin Potok, Leposavic and Zvecan). Though marked by obstructions, anti-election campaign, boycott, verbal and even physical violence resulting in the closed down polls in Mitrovica North, the elections were a major step towards the region's social and political stabilization. This is the more so important since this part of Kosovo has been among the unsafest areas in Europe in the past 15 years. In spite of the fact that local institutions – the judiciary, the police, etc. – had been in the hands of local Serbs, organizationally and politically supported by the official Belgrade, no one has taken the responsibility for the extremely high crime rate and citizens' sense of insecurity.

When it comes to the Serb community casting a ballot, the gap between Serbs in the North and those living south of the Ibar River remained deep. Moreover, the elections seem to have deepened the gap considering mass turnout of voters in the South (over 50 percent) and hardly ten percent of registered Serb voters in the North going to the polls.

Yet another division within the Serb corps was manifest in the elections. The seeds of it were sowed by Belgrade authorities: by favoring one electoral list, the Serb Civil Initiative /GIS/, they wanted to secure their influence on the future community of Serb municipalities. This clearly obstructed the Serb Liberal Party /SLS/, almost the sole relevant political force of Kosovo Serbs up to now.

Considerable differences Belgrade officials on the one hand, and the entire conservative bloc on the other displayed while preparing themselves for the elections derived from two different scenarios – both coming to naught on the Election Day. The conservative bloc (Democratic Party of

Serbia, Serb Orthodox Church, Serb Radical Party and extreme right-wing group) had called for a boycott and, indeed, the boycott actually worked in Kosovo North. The regime, for its part, did its best to keep the elections under its control. It aimed, among other things, at ensuring the victory of the GIS list in Kosovo South and thus destabilizing SLS participating in the Kosovo government for years now. This goal was partially achieved: GIS won the elections in Gracanica, the biggest Serb enclave in Central Kosovo. Despite the presence of strong police forces in Kosovo North the regime did not manage to secure an adequate turnout of voters. Therefore, it had to orchestrate incidents because of which several major polls had to be closed down hours before the polls closing time.

It was evident that the regime either cannot or does not want to control extremist groups. The fact that these groups were let in Kosovo and were active regardless of numbers of Serb policemen indicates that their presence was either ignored or could not be prevented. The regime's attempt at placing Serbs south of the Ibar under its control is threatening: the Belgrade regime could control the entire process of Kosovo's consolidation in the long run. Moreover, it could stir up radicalization of the Albanian population.

Russia's support to "Kosovo is Serbia" policy⁵⁸ and its attempt at "maintaining the status quo"⁵⁹ also throw light on Kosovo elections and the present government's attitude.

Having decided to recognize the outcome of the elections regardless of voters' turnout the European Union gave its consent to repeat elections in the three polls in Mitrovica North as yet another opportunity for Serbs to cast a ballot. Namely, Premier Ivica Dačić had stressed out that the entire "concept" would fail should an Albanian be elected Mayor of Mitrovica. "In that case it would be impossible to constitute local self-government and the community of Serb municipalities. Conflicts, even armed conflicts, could break out as well," he said.⁶⁰ Such rhetoric plus adequate

58 Russian Ambassador in Belgrade Alexandar Chepurin in an interview with the Pecat magazine, November 8, 2013.

59 Ibid.

60 Danas, November 11, 2013.

security and political preparation were effective: in the repeat elections on November 17 voters' turnout was over 20 percent.

Under Belgrade-Prishtina Agreement the Kosovo elections crucially determine a fixed date for the beginning of Serbia's accession negotiations with EU. What Serbia demonstrated in these elections obliges EU to be cautious when negotiating with Serbia. Implementation of the Brussels Agreement is crucial not only for Serbia and Kosovo, but also for consolidation of the entire region. The more so should EU strengthen the civil society and, along with other factors, involve it in the process of implementation of the Agreement.

The judiciary and the administration collapse

Palliative solutions to systemic problems cannot lead toward much needed systemic reforms. Moreover, in the absence of a well-thought-off concept these solutions have actually blocked the reforms.

Lawyers had been in strike (more than five months) protesting against the Law on Notaries. The strike virtually blocked the anyway devastated judiciary.

Unqualified and unprofessional cabinet, along with constant brain drain – or young and educated people under the thumb of incapable politicians – made the administration inefficient as never before. It is impossible to morally renew the society when tabloids are setting the standards of morality, says sociologist Vladimir Vuletić. And one can hardly look up to economic prosperity when consumer demand of one-half of total population boils down to bread and milk, while the other half, dreading the poverty line, saves money by investing it into unproductive real estate. And political renewal, adds Vuletić, is hard to expect as long as political changes are made at individual level only without touching the system.⁶¹

61 Politika, April 16, 2015.

The media landscape reaches critical point

The media and professional journalism, imploding for decades, actually put an end to public debates on social, economic and political problems or processes of any significance, especially those dealing with the recent past, transition and opening of accession negotiations with the European Union /EU/. In 2014 undermined media freedoms and citizens' right to timely and proper information were trending down (like in early 2015); in fact, the trend reached critical point.

In the past three years media freedoms have become the topic number one of the social agenda. The media have been used for the sole purpose of promoting leader of the Serb Progressive Party /SNS/, Premier Aleksandar Vučić, on the one hand and discrediting political opponents and differently minded people on the other; to any criticism of such situation the regime responded with hostility, threats and repression. The most frequent attributes of Serbia's media landscape are censorship and self-censorship. These actually sophisticated methods of keeping the media under control and journalists under pressure have been described in detail in several publications including two reports of the Anti-Corruption Council (in 2011 and 2012) and the study "Soft Censorship, Strangling Serbia's Media" by Jovanka Matić (2013).

What marked the year 2014 were discontinued TV programs, cooked up scandals compromising political opponents, defamation of the media and journalists critical of the Premier and the government, and verbal and physical assaults against journalists.

Citizens were considerably deprived of the right to information of public interest, whereas self-censorship infected a much larger area than the media one. According to historian Branka Prpa, the problem is not only in the shows taken off air but in abolishment of public debate as the only way of exposing what actually bothers citizens. "We are being bombarded with 'daily policies' that produce and cover daily events, mostly unimportant ones, but deal not with crucial problems of the society. We do not have a public corpus at our public scene – a free university and free mass media," Prpa told the round table on media freedoms organized by

the Municipality of Vračar.⁶² Round tables and forums assembling governmental officials and civil society representatives only simulated public debates and never addressed Serbia's most pressing problems.

The Parliament lacks authority

The Serbian Parliament has been challenged with its inadequate authority while MPs with the position in the power structure. According to a survey conducted by the Open University, the executive branch's attitude towards the parliament is among the biggest obstacles to its functioning. This is evident in various aspects of parliamentary proceeding from passing of the laws (many of which are adopted under summary procedure) to the control over the executive branch of the government.

The situation of the parliament cannot only change for the better through a strong pressure on the executive branch, development of unbending parliamentary procedures and raised awareness about the government's responsibility to the legislation. In the above-mentioned survey the interviewed MPs said civil society organizations were among their most precious associates on the road towards a better functioning parliament. This is why the civil sector – apart from governmental structures and political processes – can be a key link in the chain of strengthening of the role of the parliament.⁶³

Economy: resistance to reforms

While in late 2013 and early 2014 the country's economy was growingly in dire straits, Serbia's political elite was mostly preoccupied with re-arrangement of the power – for which it had to call early parliamentary elections, the time-tested maneuver for postponing reforms and deeper

62 March 10, 2015. http://www.b92.net/info/vesti/index.php?yyyy=2015&mm=03&dd=10&nav_category=12&nav_id=966748.

63 <http://www.mc.rs/upload/documents/istrazivanje/042914-Istrazivanje-Kontrolna-uloga-Parlamenta.pdf>.

cuts into the economic sphere. Serbia will pay dear this political maneuvering: in 2014 its GNP fell by 1.8 percent and industrial production by 6.5 percent.

The budget deficit in 2014 reached 6.7 percent of GNP despite the saving measures through “solidarity taxation” of net monthly salaries higher than 750 Euros initiated in October 2013, and cuts in pensions and salaries in public sector. Deep recession was only partly due to the May floods undermining the production of electrical power and mining. It was rather an indicator of paralysis of the economic system and huge financial problems.

Regionalization and decentralization: resistance and fear of secessionism

Regionalization and decentralization are political issues calling for a political consensus and constitutional amendment. The 1990 Constitution centralized Serbia: all ensuing endeavor for decentralization was in vain. Though not only Vojvodina but other regions too have been calling for decentralization no agreement on it at political level was ever reached. The 2006 Constitution only further cemented the centralistic concept. Regionalization and decentralization are opposed to out of fear of territorial and national fragmentation. In addition to institutional obstacles standing in their way, decentralization and regionalization have been “expelled” from the public discourse. Investing lower levels of governance with more authority is strongly opposed although that would improve functioning of the state administration. Moreover, Serbia would have better access to European funds for regions.

Serbia and its neighbors: coerced cooperation

Over the past fifteen years the Western Balkans, the war zone, has gradually turned into a region committed to European integration. The wars in 1991-95 and 1999 were followed by the post-conflict period of consolidation and stabilization. All countries in the region are evidently

trying to speed up their integration into the EU. They have opened a variety of channels for multilateral cooperation. Most important of all is the development of bilateral cooperation between West Balkan states considering the legacy of the 1990s wars. Many domestic problems of each individual country, however, stand in the way of improved bilateral relations. Political elites' inability for transitional progress – primarily in the economic sphere – revert them to nationalism and the ideology of national homogenization under the pretext of danger from the outside. This is particularly notable in election campaigns.

Serbia and the world: Serbia opens to the world slowly and hesitatingly

The fact that Serbia has never renounced the legacy of the 1990s wars largely determines its position in the region and attitude toward it, as well as its general positioning in international relations. At the international arena, Serbia “behaves *ad hoc* usually displaying strong emotions of humiliation and defeat, and denies recognizing the realities at the same time.”⁶⁴ This frustration, inconsistency and unsolved dilemma about its geo-strategic commitment marked its foreign policy throughout 2014.

Its proclaimed commitment to accession to EU, verified by the opening of accession negotiations, is put to the test. Its attitude towards the escalation of the Ukrainian crisis and Russia's role in it revealed against its traditional oscillation between the East and the West. Though claiming its support to Ukrainian territorial integrity, the present regime has not joined the countries of the West in their consensual condemnation of Russia and economic sanctions imposed on it. Practically throughout 2014 and despite the pressure from both sides Serbia has tried to keep “equi-distance” to Brussels and Moscow. Such position will probably prove unsustainable in 2015.

64 Sonja Biserko: „Maintaining the Delusion about its Significance,” *Danas*, January 17-18, 2015.

Controversies of Nation-State identity

Serbia has not consolidated itself as a state nor would it accept its internationally recognized borders. Like other ex-Yugoslavia's successor-states, Serbia has been building a new national and state identity. The process itself is lumbered with the recent past and defeats that are being suppressed. Not a single government has answered to some fundamental problems dominating the society ever since the 1990s. Devastating consequences of the policy of war have not been placed at the social agenda, although they are the roots of all other problems. Besides, resistance to a new value system seriously undermines reforms. EU's requests are perceived as ultimatums and blackmails rather than as prerequisites for the country's development and modernization. Since the national issue is still kept open, the elites need a unified and homogeneous nation. Populism stands in the way of the promotion of civil values. Revisionism – especially of the WWII – is in the service of building a new national identity. Revisionism emerged back in the 1980 to support the theses that prepared Serbia for the wars. Today it is being used to justify these wars.

The problem of national identity plagues unfinished nations – the countries with no symmetry between ethnic and state aspects of nation, and primarily the countries in pain with the discrepancy between the two. But the problem of national identity, says philosopher Milorad Belančić, should be perceived in the context of the problems people are faced with when it comes to various identities: personal, ethnic, professional, customary, cultural, etc. Identities as such are not crucial problems; the main problem is in providing metaphysical advantage to one identity over the others. This is evident in the case of nationalism that manifests its privileged position by requesting self-denial from other identities and at the same time uses its privileged position for building an ideology everyone is bound to respect.⁶⁵

65 <http://sveske.ba/en/content/o-srpskom-stanovistu-mi-pa-mi>

The thesis about Serbs' guiltlessness of the 1990s wars is a dangerous one as it fuels expectations that sooner or later international constellation would change in Serbs' interest. Another thesis about being "surrounded" from all sides suggests that Serbia is constantly threatened by enemies. This thesis was used to start the war in 1990s – as the "war was a necessary defense." It implies that everyone is against the Serb nation rather than against the country provoking wars.

In the post-conflict period the question of wars and Serbia's responsibility has not been raised considering the never-ending discourse about "those guilty of wars. The society has never been faced with the true origins of the wars and Serbia's policy on their eve and in their course. The society has never distanced itself from the policy of Slobodan Milošević, Dobrica Ćosić and other promoters of the war project. So, for instance, analyst Slobodan Antonić says that "the final statement about Milosević and his era has not been made yet" and "considering global developments, many are more and more looking up to Milosević as a symbol of resistance to imperialists trampling underfoot of nations and states just to ensure free plunder of global resources."⁶⁶ Moreover, for him Milošević's plan "was neither bad nor unrealistic, on the contrary...Its implementation was the only problem. Milošević's biggest fault was that he wanted to do everything by himself."⁶⁷ "His biggest successes by which he will go down in history is his resistance to NATO and independent decisions he had been making as a head of a sovereign state, not asking permission for any of them from US or EU embassies in Belgrade," says Antonić.⁶⁸ In his funeral oration for Slobodan's brother, Borislav, two years ago Metropolitan Amfilohije said, "Slobodan Milošević has forever inscribed himself in our memory and in the book of eternal life. His life and his mission had been in the spirit of saint martyr of Kosovo, Tsar Lazar, and Lazar's mission."⁶⁹

When it comes to causes of Yugoslavia's disintegration – in which Serbia played a crucial role – Serb nationalists and revisionists call for "a fair

66 Geopolitika, February 2015.

67 Ibid.

68 Ibid.

69 Pečat, No. 366, April 24, 2015.

distribution of guilt” or go as far as claiming that Serbia had not been in war at all.

In 2014 Belgrade hosted several conferences marking the 100th anniversary of the outbreak of the WWI, all of which interpreting developments from the angle of Serbia’s present-day foreign policy. One of these conferences, the biggest one, was organized by the Forum for the World of Equality and the St. Andrei Foundation from Russia. All these debates – as well as in the public debate in general – crystallized the stance that some books such as “The Sleepwalkers” by Christopher Clark and “WWI: Causes and Consequences” by Margaret Macmillan were stressing out not only Germany’s and Austro-Hungary’s guilt but also that of ruling circles in Russia and Serbia. The fact that these two historians are from the West, their views were used for staging anti-Western campaigns and for promoting Russophilia. In brief, with this anti-Western campaign the predominant right-wing bloc has been preparing the terrain for changed international constellation playing into Serbia’s hand with Russia’s assistance.

“The Sleepwalkers” raised a hue and cry in Serbia since mainstream, nationalistic historians called it a revisionist pamphlet putting all the blame for WWI on the Kingdom of Serbia. The more anxious were they about the book considering Clark’s repute as a historian and the fact that his book among most interesting ones published on the occasion of marking the 100th anniversary of the outbreak of WWI. The same as Clark, Macmillan compares Young Bosnia with Al-Qaeda, and Serbia’s ties with Serbs in Bosnia (and Macedonia) with Iran’s with Hezbollah. For Macmillan, Gavrilo Princip was an assassin and terrorist led by the idea of murder but with no idea about – what after. Actually, her book speaks not of Serbia’s guilt of the outbreak of WWI or was meant to revise its history.

Macmillan received tons of emails from Serb nationalists enraged with the statement that “Serbia’s position on the eve of WWI and Iran’s position today are much the same since segments of governments are sponsoring terrorist activities. Gavrilo Princip was a terrorist going for violence to attain his goals and giving no thought to consequences.”⁷⁰ She also

70 <http://www.slobodnaevropa.org/content/istoricarka-margaret-mekmilan-za-rse-srbija-1914-kao-danasnji-iran/25173524.html>.

said that Serbia's dread that the past could influence its present was ungrounded, adding that that is no criterion by which countries are valued at international arena. "It crosses no one's mind to say that Germany cannot be an EU member-state because of its Nazi past or Britain because of its attitude toward Irish."⁷¹

WWI was played on for creating the best possible image of Russia and its protection of Serbia. In this context, a monument to Tsar Nikolay was raised in 2014 in downtown Belgrade, flanked by three major institutions (the Presidency, the Parliament and the City Hall). The monument is a gift of the Russian government.

Revisionism of WWII has been on for several decades. Marginalization of the partisans and promotion of the Tchetnik movement as an anti-fascist, right-wing one renounces fundamental values of anti-fascism, internationalism and tolerance. So we are having spoken and written arguments about "national anti-fascism" or "Milan Nedić's patriotic government," and alleged mass graves of communist terror revealed. All this is in the service of normalization of fascism and, in this context, of tolerance to extreme right-wing in Serbia.

Revisionism is not based on historical sources but on particularism and simplifications all of which are characteristic of "authoritarian nationalism" Serbia has been subject to for almost three decades. Nationalization of history, including the history of Yugoslavia, banalized both fascism and anti-fascism.

The case of Tchetnik leader Draža Mihailović, rehabilitated in May 2015, is paradigmatic. Historian Branka Prpa comments on the case saying, "The court proceedings for rehabilitation of Draža Mihailović are meant to put right solely procedural shortcoming of his trial in 1946. Namely, from the viewpoint of peacetime standards of fair trial, these procedural failures are used to have the entire trial of Draža Mihailović, accused of war crimes and collaboration in WWII, annulled." "Those insisting on this trial are well aware that conventional rehabilitation proceedings would raise the question of victims and produce documentation testifying of Tchetniks' responsibility in WWII; of course, they would never win in such a process.

71 Ibid.

And that is why they are after legal formalities defining Mihailović's guilt they would later on use for full rehabilitation of Draža Mihailović and the Tchetnik movement," she explains.⁷²

Ever since SNS came to power the focus has been on marginalization of the so-called Second Serbia marked from the very beginning of the wars by ethics evident in its protest against the war and nationalism, as historian Milorad Belančić puts it. According to him, the key motive behind the ongoing criticism of the "Second Serbia" is "soft" rehabilitation of Serb ethno-nationalism that suffered defeat in the last decade of the 20th century.⁷³ "Serbia must disperse political fogs and myths standing in the way of its reconstruction into a modern and democratic political community. Serbia is the only European society restoring 'the old regime' /the Milošević regime/," writes Prof. Milan Podunavac.⁷⁴

"There is no alternative to Europe" – the motto of the former and the present regime – is the key point of resistance assembling Serb nationalists who would never accept Euro-Atlantic integrations. They take that Yugoslavia, in any of its forms, was fatal to Serbs. All the three Yugoslavia's were deadly delusions of the Serbs, says Michael Đorđević, arguing that establishment of Yugoslavia was the worst outcome of WWI for Serbia and the Serb nation. Serbs and their elites, he explains, had no experience in governance of and life in a multiethnic and multireligious state as it major decision-makers. "They knew not how to respond to frequent and public under-the-counter actions and intrigues by Croats and Slovenians."

In his book "The Spirit of Self-denial" Milo Lompar propound the thesis about Yugoslav orientation denationalizing Serbs. "There is no alternative to Europe," he argues, is the ideology of Serb secular priests, recidivists of Titoism. So he insists on the maintenance of Serb culture as a whole to testify of the wholeness of the Serb nation no matter how separated it is at the moment: Serbs north of Sava and Danube rivers, Serbs west of the Drina River, Serbs in Montenegro, Serbs in Macedonia, and Serbs in Kosovo and Metohija should not succumb to denationalizing

72 Dani, March 6, 2015.

73 Ibid.

74 Danas, September 22-23, 2012.

processes imposed on them by secular priests. National institutions, therefore, should unite. As an alternative to these trends Lompar suggests the integrationist model for Serb culture, combining three religions and predominant European traditions.⁷⁵

The Kosovo component of Serb policy, argues Lompar, is “its everlasting constant, it was a constant at the time Kosovo was within Serbia and it is a constant now that it has been occupied /by NATO/. Serb politicians hopes, he continues, that recognition of the state of Kosovo – and all moves by Brussels are leading toward it – would unburden Serb policy of the Kosovo component, is naïve. They can just bottle it up /the Kosovo component/ for some time. Their shame is the shame of us all, as we have attained political unity on the idea of high treason. To set ourselves on the thorny, uncertain and zigzagging path of renewal in the aftermath of the historical defeat in the 20th century we must find a productive answer to the West’s challenge. And that answer should combine a set of decisions that imply strict national egotism and self-consciousness, advocates Lompar.⁷⁶

In the same mood many Serb intellectuals lament the situation of Serb culture threatened by cosmopolitan intellectuals in the country. They lament growing oblivion of national tradition, religion and language; they complain of non-existent cultural climate and public opinion. All we have, they argue, are savagely aggressive media brainwashing the population that is at loss.

People who think seriously, feel and create are marginalized and more or less grouped in mouse holes of their privacy that at least protect them from the flood of primitivism, snobbism and profiteering of arrivistes, and from brutal cynicism and demagogy of those in control of power and money, they say. “They, Serb globalists, looking forward to a shortcut to ‘cultural, democratic Europe’ are dreaming an archaic dream, the same one the presumptions sons of the farming Serbia have dreamt since the

75 <http://www.e-novine.com/kultura/kultura-tema/102580-Samo-Srbi-ljudi.html>.

76 Pressrs.ba – Banja Luka, Strandard.rs.

late 18th century, the dream that usually ends up in an inferiority complex for everything coming from the West.”⁷⁷

Leaning on this thesis Russia’s presence in Serbia further extends it to Eastern Orthodoxy. So Russian analysts claim that “Serbia’s missions corresponds with the missions of the Russian people, the Greek and the Bulgarians;” hence, “we should together be pillars of the Eastern Orthodox civilization as alternative to the rest of the world.”⁷⁸ Alexander Dugin, Russian politicologist and influential adviser to President Putin, stresses out that Russia has always been an ally to the Eastern Orthodox Serbia. “The more Russia is pro-Russian, the more it returns to its origins and its Eastern Orthodox roots, the more shall it be aware that it must support Serbia. Even at crucial times the ‘Russian’ Russia is duty-bound to put the “Serb” Serbia right, the Serbia that would not betray Kosovo nor itself; the Serbia that continues its heroic struggle⁷⁹...We can create the Greater Europe in which Serbia too will take its proper place as European avant-garde of the Eastern Orthodox civilization.”⁸⁰ Russian film director Nikita Mikhalkov hopes Serbia would be more independent once EU disintegrated. He advocates dictatorship of responsible people, saying, “We need a vertical of power and a horizontal of culture and economy. And that’s a cross, that’s the Eastern Orthodoxy. If we safeguard that vertical of power and that horizontal of culture and economy, if we safeguard that cross, we shall be saved; along with our mindset; and along with the Eastern Orthodoxy, of course.”⁸¹

While trying their best to entrench a model of culture based on “Serbhood” Serb nationalists are most concerned with low birth rate. Because of negative birth rate Serbia “loses” about 35,000 citizens each year. Besides, some 15,000 people leave Serbia on annual basis. In other words,

77 Miladin Ševarlić, key note address to the series of lectures “Tradition: the Foundation of the Serb Culture,” October 28, 2014;

78 Geopolitika, October 2014.

79 <http://www.intermagazin.rs/aleksandar-dugin-srbijo-izdrzijos-malo-rusija-se-budi-i-sve-ce-vratiti-nazad/>.

80 Ibid.

81 Nikita Mikhalkov, Geopolitika, March 2014.

over the past ten years Serbia “lost” 500,000 citizens. Almost for sure, Serbia will “lose” about the same number of people in the next ten years, meaning that – if nothing changes – Serbia will have two million people less in 2050.⁸²

The problem is, takes Slobodan Antonić, that the cultural milieu / value system/ of the Serb population was molded by the marketing model of rich Western societies. This model, he argues, is marked by normative consumerism, hedonism and egotism. For him, demographic collapse can be curbed only if “status expectations” for “lifestyle” change along with a change in the predominant cultural model. And this change can initiated and implemented to the biggest extent – only by the elite.⁸³

Serbia’s traditional elites are after establishing a clear-cut identity-building policy and the safeguard of historical memory and tradition that are more or less fabricated. But the gap between the glorified past and the frustrating present is too big and only makes people feel humiliated and losers. Serbia’s inability to overcome the past by acknowledging responsibility of Yugoslavia’s disintegration and ensuing wars in the first place is in the root of the problem. However, incapable to accept the truth Serbia keeps blaming everyone else.

82 <http://www.novosti.rs/vesti/naslovna/drustvo/aktuelno.290.html:531203-Slobodan-Antonic-Tri-televizora-a-jedno-dete>.

83 Ibid.

Rehabilitation of Dragoslav Mihailović Renounces Anti-fascism

On May 16, 2015 Belgrade's Higher Court rehabilitated Gen. Dragoslav Draža Mihailović, the commander of the Royal Army in Homeland, and restored his civil rights "taken away from him in a political-ideological trial by the communist regime in 1946." Though the court's decision does not mention the term rehabilitation the society perceives is as if it does, especially adherents of the Ravna Gora movement and its ideology.

The proceedings were initiated in 2006 by Mihailović's grandson, Vojislav, law professors Smilja Avramov and Kosta Čavoški, the Serb Liberal Party and the Association of the Yugoslav Army in Homeland. They requested annulment of the death sentence to Mihailović for collaboration in WWII. The trial opened on September 16, 2010 and was suspended twice.

The decision on his rehabilitation testifies not only of ongoing revisionism but also of Serbia's schizophrenic policy. Anti-fascism has been relativized and banalized in Serbia for the past twenty-five years, even since disintegration of Yugoslavia, itself founded on anti-fascist consensus. The legacy of partisans has been wiped out since the 1980s in parallel with the rise of nationalism and historical fabrications. The Tchetnik ideology has been incorporated in Milošević's program for the establishment of a big, ethnically pure state at the expense of neighboring republics. The program has even taken over the methods (war, crimes, ethnic cleansing, etc.) used in the same areas (especially in Eastern Bosnia) in the WWII.

Quite unexpectedly the decision provoked diametrically opposite reactions by general public in Serbia, especially among historians. Liberal historians of younger generation such as Srđan Milošević, Milivoj Bešlin, Dubravka Stojanović or Olga Pintar, but also their elders like Latinka Perović were warning of deadly effects of the said decision, especially considering the present context and the recent past. Swords were crossed even

within the ruling coalition and between many public figures that used to side with Milošević.

“The decision created a bleak atmosphere. Many have looked forward to having it, and now when it is made everyone wanders what next. It is most important for Serbia to what it is it wants after all. This is a unique case of rehabilitation in Europe and will have consequences on the region. For with such a policy Serbia has closed the doors to itself to every single country in its neighborhood. With such luggage it is not welcome in Bosnia-Herzegovina or in Croatia. The decision places Serbia at historically archaic margins contrary to our times,” say historian Latinka Perović.⁸⁴

Speaking of the decision’s long-term consequences, Latinka Perović warns that they will run deep continuing to shake the Serbian society, but also negatively affecting the country’s regional relations, notably those with Bosnia and Croatia.⁸⁵

She stresses out the violent character of the Tchetnik movement and the rehabilitation’s threat to Serbia proper. The court’s decision, she says, will boomerang on the regime. It will intensify domestic conflicts, raise tensions and block changes. “Nothing good will come out of it. The decision will fuel violence in Serbia at local level, which is too frequent anyway. It will act like a tonic to local groups that are now ousting legally elected self-governments with clubs and knives will be now...I am afraid these violent usurpers would grow stronger. They are serious threats to people’s safety. And they are many in Republika Srpska. Now they could easily find excuse for their violence in, say, the danger of the Wahhabis.”⁸⁶

Historian Milivoj Bešlin takes that anti-fascism is not only the problem of the present attitude towards WWII in Yugoslavia but also towards the 1990s wars. “The mainstream nationalism does not rehabilitate the Tchetniks in the name of historical justice or truth, as nationalists claim, and not even for the sake of the Tchetniks themselves and their commander,

84 http://www.slobodna-bosna.ba/tekst/37248/latinka_perovic_nove_straze_djenerala_draze.html.

85 Ibid.

86 Ibid.

but so ensure the life of their ideology unburdened of historical responsibility and stigma of collaboration with fascism and crimes.”⁸⁷

His colleague Srđan Milošević takes that the arguments for the so-called national reconciliation go for “washing out” the national history of crimes, collaboration and treason. “Once they realized that anti-fascism is, after all, a value to be affirmed, they found an ‘ingenious’ pattern of WWII interpretation, tailored to the nationalistic mantra: ‘ours’ were all anti-fascists and Draža Mihailović most of all! A handful of those that were not such as Milan Nedić and Dimitrije Ljotić collaborated with Nazis because they had to; they actually sacrificed themselves and for that should have their place in national pantheon. If some Serbs did commit some crimes, they were just nameless renegades. To be fair, one should acknowledge that Serb communists had also committed crimes, but they should be forgiven for them, especially Koča (Popović) and Leka (Ranković). And Koča should be amnestied more than Leka (who was too close to Tito) because they were both Serbs and, though infected with ‘red virus,’ were anti-fascists – of the second rank, true (the Tchetniks were of the first rank), as the one who had ordered crimes in the first place was Tito, a Croat. And that’s all to it.”⁸⁸

For Bešlin ignoring and defaming one’s own anti-fascist movement, destroying and systemic negligence of the monuments to the People’s Liberation Army, massive renaming of streets and squares (900 renamed in Belgrade only), writing-off of national holidays, etc., testify more of the present than of the past; testify of what a society wants to remember of its rich and complex past depending on the value orientation it is eager to promote.⁸⁹

Milivoj Bešlin takes that the rehabilitation of the Tchetnik commander directly affects the region’s fragile stability. “Developments in the WWII can be only perceived in the Yugoslav context; the Tchetnik movement operated in almost the entire territory of the country and what crucially determined its ideological and military activity was the attitude toward

87 http://helsinki.org.rs/serbian/aktuelnosti_t42_06.html.

88 http://helsinki.org.rs/serbian/aktuelnosti_t42_06.html.

89 http://helsinki.org.rs/serbian/aktuelnosti_t42_05.html.

non-Serb population. Especially implicative, including internationally (British-Turkish relations) were their massacres of Bosniaks in Sandzak and Eastern Bosnia with all the characteristics of genocide (“exterminate,” “cleanse,” “final solution,” “seize the moment,” “punish,” etc.).”⁹⁰

Before the court’s decision this historian warned that the Trial Chamber of the Higher Court had to act with more responsibility than usual since not only legal issues or the issues of historical interpretation were at stake but the character of the society we were building. “The Nuremberg Trials (one could now criticize for much more formal shortcomings but no one thinks of doing it) were meant to put across a deeper lecture in history than required by the acts of individual defendants. By rehabilitating the leader of the Tchetnik movement Serbia would identify itself with the party defeated in WWII. The effects of such an action would be impossible to abstract or negate, as it would testify of moral relativism that would heavily burden the Serbian society in the future. If the court decides on rehabilitation – and considering Croatia’s recent tendency to suppress Jasenovac from collective memory in favor of Bleiberg – the two major countries of the region will be obviously distancing themselves from anti-fascist foundations on which Yugoslavia had been constituted.”⁹¹

Historian Dubravka Stojanović says, “The Tchetnik movement looked ideal to post-Milošević authorities: it was anti-communist and anti-Yugoslav. And this led us to ‘anti-anti-fascism,’ as Todor Kuljić termed it, which moves Serbia further away from European values.”⁹²

Miroslav Lazanski, journalist and commentator for the *Politika* daily, argues that the court’s decision in the case of Gen. Mihailović has nothing to do with national reconciliation since it was made “for the sake of our present rather than the past.” “Young people in this country are interested neither in partisans nor in Tchetniks, as all they care for are good jobs. In the spiritual vacuum of our reality anti-fascism should not be theatrical because Serbia is better known for its quislings than anti-fascists.”⁹³

90 Ibid.

91 Ibid.

92 <http://pescanik.net/dubravka-stojanovic-intervju/>.

93 <http://www.politika.rs/pogledi/Miroslav-Lazanski/Draza-u-ime-naroda.sr.html>.

Serbia's First Deputy Premier and Foreign Minister Ivica Dačić said that the rehabilitation decision publicized at the time the entire world was celebrating the 70th anniversary of the glorious victory over fascism was neither a step toward reconciliation nor the truth; on the contrary, it only deepened the rifts.

No court decision, says Ivica Dačić, can erase or annihilate history. "We witness the attempts at revisionism and relativization of victories and defeats made worldwide," he released. He reminded the Higher Court of King Peter II Karađorđević's words broadcast live by Radio London on September 12, 1944. "My dear Serbs, Croats and Slovenians, at these crucial times and glorious times for Yugoslavia when victorious Soviet armies are standing at our borders at one side and American and British at the other, when the day of our victory breaks full, I invite all Serbs, Croats and Slovenians to unite and join the great People's Liberation Army under the command of Marshal Tito. With my knowledge and consent, the royal cabinet of Dr. Ivan Šubašić has signed important and useful agreements with this people's army of ours, which has been recognized and supported unanimously by our great allies, Great Britain, Soviet Union and United States of America...All those who count on enemies and act against the interest of their own people and its futures, all those unwilling to respond to this appeal, will never get rid of the stigma of treason, either in the face of the people or history."⁹⁴

Oliver Antić, one of the lawyers for the defense and adviser to President Tomislav Nikolić, takes that the decision on Mihailović's rehabilitation provides foundation for regional reconciliation, considering 10,000 Croats, 8,000 Muslims and 6,000 Slovenians fighting "under Draža's banner." For him, the decision was to be expected: eleven years ago, Serbia passed the law equalizing the movement led by Mihailović with the partisan movement, and proclaiming it anti-fascist.⁹⁵

94 http://www.danas.rs/danasrs/ukratko/dacic_sramna_odluka_o_rehabilitaciji.83.html?news_id=93122.

95 <http://www.blic.rs/Vesti/Drustvo/559195/Antic-Rehabilitacija-osnov-za-pomirenje-u-regionu>.

Commenting on the case Premier Aleksandar Vučić tried to take a neutral position. However, he raised doubts about sincerity of his commitments. He said he was aware that some were delighted with the decision, while others sad and angry, adding that “the sooner we overcome these feelings, the closer shall we be to the victory of a decent, modern and prosperous Serbia.” “The decision cannot resurrect Mihailović, nor a contrary one would make him more dead than he is. We have had more than enough Serb division and it’s high time to put an end to them. There is only one Serbia, our common homeland, common to all of us so different, and, therefore, we shall look up to the future together rather than split over the past.” He added that Serbia should be a democracy, a country of victories, proud of its spirit of anti-fascism.⁹⁶

President of the Belgrade Branch of the Alliance of Soldiers of People’s Liberation Army /SUBNOR/ (in the 1990s SUBNOR sided with Milošević) Bora Ercegovac called the decision on rehabilitation “rubbing salt in the wound.” He said it would bring no good either to Serbia or its neighborhood, but only deepen the gap between countries. “This shameless decision annihilates everything Serbia had done in the struggle against fascism that earned it global acclaim,” he said explaining that the trial to Mihailović had been open to public.⁹⁷

“The decision on annulment of the sentence /to Mihailović/ will divide deeply the anyway divided society in which political differences are turning into death-and-life struggles, while violence provoked by political differences into our everyday life,” released Democratic Party, stressing out that the rehabilitation was only a logical outcome of the fact that “Tchetnik duke Tomislav Nikolić was elected the President of Serbia.”⁹⁸

Promoters of the Tchetnik movement since the 1980s Vuk Drašković and Voijislav Šešelj were pleased as Punch with the court decision. Anyway, programs of both parties and their leaders before the outbreak of the

96 <http://www.telegraf.rs/vesti/politika/1568733-vucic-o-rehabilitaciji-draze-srbiji-je-dosta-deoba-na-cetnike-i-partizane>.

97 Ibid.

98 <http://www.blic.rs/Vesti/Drustvo/559197/DS-Rehabilitacija-Draze-ce-duboko-podeliti-srpsko-drustvo>.

1990s wars had reincarnated Moljević's program of the 1940s on "a homogeneous Serbia" put into practical effect by Draža Mihailović.

Leader of the Serb Renewal Movement /SPO/ Vuk Drašković said the annulment of the sentence to the Tchetnik commander in WWII not only rehabilitated the man commanding the first anti-fascist guerrilla in Europe but also his army and the entire Serbia. The decision, as he put it, removed the anathema from Serbia for having sided with the Third Reich by supporting the leader of the liberation movement and the defense minister of the cabinet in exile.⁹⁹

As for leader of the Serb Radical Party /SRS/ Vojislav Šešelj, the decision on the rehabilitation was the only decision the court could have made and the day of its proclamation should be proclaimed "the day of pan-Serb reconciliation." "The history of WWII should be left to historians, while we, descendents of Tchetniks and partisans, should be building Serbia's future together," he told the press in front of the Palace of Justice. Mihailović, he added, is a Serb hero who fought bravely in WWII only to be turned into an innocent victim of the communist regime. However, the decision should not put an end to criticism of the communist regime after WWII, he concluded.¹⁰⁰

Reactions to the court decision were particularly emotional in Sandzak, which was only logical considering Tchetniks' massacres of Bosniaks in WWII. Graffiti glorifying Aćif-efendija Hadžiahmetović, leader of troops defending Novi Pazar from Tchetniks, appeared in the town.¹⁰¹ The Bosniak National Council unanimously condemned the rehabilitation of Tchetnik duke Draža Mihailović.

99 <http://www.blic.rs/Vesti/Politika/558947/Draskovic-Rehabilitacija-Draze-je-rehabilitacija-Srbije>.

100 <http://www.newsweek.rs/srbija/49864-seselj-o-drazinoj-rehabilitaciji-jedina-odluka-koja-je-mogla-bit-doneta-ovaj-dan-da-se-proglasi-danom-sveopsteg-srpskog-pomirenja.html>.

101 Rehabilitation of Aćif Hadžiahmetović, a.k.a Aćif-efend, the post-war regime shot in 1945 had been initiated before the Higher Court in Novi Pazar.

Regional reactions

Croatia reacted strongly to the rehabilitation; its former and incumbent officials called it “scandalous” and warned that it could easily impair Serbia-Croatia relations.

Croatia’s Justice Minister Orsat Miljenić was “absolutely aghast” at the rehabilitation of the Tchetnik commander Draža Mihailović. “That’s such a gross mistake as rehabilitation of Hitler, Mussolini or Ante Pavelić would have been,” he said.¹⁰²

Ex-president Stjepan Mesić takes that the court decision on rehabilitation in no way sets right any miscarriage of justice by the communist regime but directly denies undeniable historical facts. For him, the very act is nothing but “shutting the eyes to the truth” about the past and a fatal concession to the threatening pan-Serbian nationalism. “No doubt that this will impair the ongoing process of normalization and reestablishment of mutual trust and understanding,” he said. “Countries that rehabilitate notorious war criminals of WWII can be hardly seen as convincing candidates for the membership of the united Europe built on the foundations of anti-fascism,” he concluded.¹⁰³

From the standpoint of Tomislav Karamanko, leader of the Croatian Democratic Union /HDZ/, Serbia’s rehabilitation of Mihailović could affect the relationship between the two countries. “The Tchetnik movement left bloody trails in Croatia, and the act surely would affect relations between the two countries.”¹⁰⁴

MP and Vice-president of Serb Democratic Alliance Milorad Pupovac said that he, as an anti-fascist and adherent to the partisan movement, disapproved strongly the court decision on rehabilitation.¹⁰⁵

There were also many reactions to the rehabilitation in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Šemso Tucaković, professor of political sciences, said, “Adherents

102 <http://www.politika.rs/rubrike/Drustvo/Reagovanja-u-regionu-na-rehabilitaciju-Mihailovica.lt.html>.

103 *Ibid.*

104 *Ibid.*

105 *Ibid.*

to the Tchetnik ideology are at the helm of Serbia's administration, in executive, judicial and legislative branches...Rehabilitation of Draža Mihailović is only a logical outcome of the nationalistic option now in power in Serbia. That means that Serbs have not yet renounced nationalistic, fascist and aggressive ambitions in Bosnia."¹⁰⁶

"The Tchetnik movement was among the biggest criminal, military organizations in WWII and Mihailović himself one of the biggest war criminals...He lines up side to side with Ante Pavelić, Benito Mussolini and Adolph Hitler. Allied forces had renounced him. King Peter the Second, whose army minister he was, renounced him in 1944 and appealed to all Serbs to place themselves under Tito's command. Winston Churchill and Franklin Roosevelt too renounced him in the middle of WWII having learned about his crimes against Bosniaks, Croats, and others, while Joseph Stalin had never recognized him at all," he added.¹⁰⁷

Raif Dizdarević, veteran partisan and Yugoslav high-ranking official, argues that the trial had not been ideologically motivated. "That was a trial of war crimes and of the war criminal with plenty of documents evidencing the criminal nature of that movement and army. The court decision only revives the evils of the past and neo-fascism. For, the Tchetnik movement was a fascist movement as testified by its racist and criminal policy. Rehabilitation of that evil acts like a tonic to all neo-fascist organizations and manifestations in the region and beyond it...and is a blow to Serbia's progressive forces."¹⁰⁸

106 Ibid.

107 Ibid.

108 <http://www.avaz.ba/clanak/177968/latinka-perovic-ovo-vodizaostravanju-sukoba#sthash.0g0cD9oi.dpuf>.

Vojislav Šešelj: A Symbol of Normalized Crime

Vojislav Šešelj, leader of Serb Radical Party /SRS/, was temporarily released from ICTY. The Trial Chamber's decision was not unanimous. It triggered off many reactions and fueled new conspiracy theories against Serbia and the Balkans, speculations and doubts. The decision itself was unique for being made despite many of its legal shortcomings. Conditions for his release did not restrict his public appearance and political activism in Serbia. Hence, the ICTY decision undermined fundamental postulates of the UNSC Resolution establishing the tribunal. Bothered most of all by his return were his former party colleagues, President Tomislav Nikolić and Premier Aleksandar Vučić.

The media mostly argued for two theses: one, that ICTY failed to prove his guilt and kept him, an innocent person, "in dungeon" for twelve years; the other, that some Western countries planned his release to destabilize the Vučić cabinet. The latter theses was particularly insisted on by members of his cabinet constantly creating a climate of threat – from the West in the first place and then from domestic mercenaries and traitors. The government did not take any stand whatsoever about his actual responsibility for the 1990s wars.

In Serbia, Šešelj's return made a sensation for a week following on his first Belgrade rally and provocative statements. Nevertheless, there is a deeper meaning to his political positioning on the program that started the 1990s wars: no official has ever distanced himself from this policy. His rhetoric against Euro-Atlantic orientation play into the hands of the right-wing bloc, consolidated after the agreement on cooperation between the Dveri and DSS. Almost all outstanding intellectuals from the right-wing (Đorđe Vukadinović, Slobodan Antonić, Kosta Čavoški et al.) are siding with the bloc.

The region reacted strongly to Šešelj's warmongering rhetoric. Reactions were notably strong in Croatia. Croatia initiated a EP resolution condemning his rhetoric and demanding the Serbian government to distance itself clearly from his policy. To this, Serbia's authorities responded fiercely, calling the resolution "an insult to Serbia"¹⁰⁹ and Croatia "stuck in the past."¹¹⁰ "The European Parliament allowed Croatia to use it in its election campaign," said President Nikolić.¹¹¹

Serbia's opposition also responded inadequately. Actually some opposition leaders had hoped the "Šešelj factor" would be an agent for the ouster of "unbearable" Vučić.¹¹² However, as journalist Teofil Pančić put it, Šešelj himself with his cannibalistic attitude had brilliantly smashed to smithereens this delusion, thus preventing the disoriented part of the opposition from making fools of themselves any further.¹¹³

As for Serbia, not a single government after Milošević's ouster has gathered up its courage to take stock of the war. Šešelj just reminded them of their failure. Serbian elites are still parroting that Serbia has not been at war that had been initiated by secessionist republics (Croatia and Slovenia) with the helping hand from the West, while in Bosnia Muslims had been those to declare war on YPA, and the like.

Šešelj's comeback is a test for Serbia's ethics, political and civilization values, all of which the incumbent government totally ignores. By not responding to his rhetoric and distancing itself from it, the government only fueled the fire of radical nationalism that threatens Serbia's course to EU. Statements by highest officials such as Aleksandar Vučić, Tomislav Nikolić and Ivica Dačić indicate that they would not take stock of their own war records, and draw the line on the once policy, especially for Kosovo and Bosnia. Tactlessly, they called the European Parliament's resolution

109 Aleksandar Vučić,

110 Danas, November 29-30, 2014.

111 Ibid.

112 Teofil Pančić, <http://www.slobodnaevropa.org/content/pancic-izduvavanje-faktora-seselj/26707823.html>.

113 Ibid.

“humiliating.” And by not distancing themselves from Šešelj the government actually called into question its reformist, European course.

Šešelj has been prosecuted clumsily in ITCY from the very beginning. The Šešelj case actually revealed all the court’s systemic deficiencies. Fragile for starters the indictment against him had not encompassed the time of his formal ties with Milošević; and that was crucial for proving his involvement in a joint criminal enterprise. Keeping him detained for so long – four years since his trial was over – is the biggest failure.

The developments related to his release indicate that the international community also has to take stance on the character of the 1990s wars and thus put an end to manipulations standing in the way of regional consolidation.

Šešelj in Serbia

The moment his plane landed at Belgrade Airport Šešelj started provoking and giving warmongering statements. He first bragged about having “blasted the Hague Tribunal and proved to all and sundry that it was an illegal and anti-Serb court.” “Finally, they threw me out of jail...I’ve neither asked for anything nor signed anything. They just told me ‘You go now’ and kicked me out.”¹¹⁴ Then he said he would take revenge against his former associates, Vučić and Nikolić, by revealing their doings in the wartime. And he promised never to give up the “Greater Serbia” plan – the very mission of SRS, as he put it – and “implement is by all peaceful means available.”¹¹⁵

He notably went after Croatia. He said he would not give up the Karlobag-Ogulin-Virovitica borderline and that “sooner or later Croatia would have to withdraw from Republika Srpska Krajina.”¹¹⁶ He even stressed out that his actions were playing into the hands of Ivo Josipović’s

114 <http://www.vijesti.ba/vijesti/regija/246208-Seselj-Rasturio-sam-Tribunal.html>.

115 <http://www.vijesti.ba/vijesti/regija/246347-Seselj-Miroljubivim-sredstvima-Velike-Srbije.html>.

116 <http://www.vijesti.ba/vijesti/regija/248249-Seselj-Hrvatska-mora-povuce-Republike-Srpske-Krajine.html>.

election campaign, while calling Vesna Pusić his favorite Croatian politician because of her “Tchetnik pedigree on her mother’s side.”¹¹⁷ “In Serbia Vučić shuts me out from the media, so I am grateful to Croatia’s stupidity that compensates for it.”¹¹⁸ When he learned that Prosecutor Bramertz filed for his return to The Hague, he said, “Serge Bramertz is a fool. I’ve promised nothing as they simply kicked me out. I will never go back by my own free will. Let’s see what will happen if my main accomplices in ‘war crimes,’ Tomislav Nikolić and Aleksandar Vučić, try to have me arrested at the Court’s request.”¹¹⁹ He also boasted that he had contributed to large extent to the suicide of Milan Babić, former president of Republika Srpska Krajina,¹²⁰ and repeated that he had been very glad to learn that Đinđić was dead.¹²¹

For days prior to his arrival the media had speculated about preconditions for his release and its effects on the incumbent regime. Minister of Labor Aleksandar Vulin was the first official to address the press saying that the leader of the Radicals’ release “was an attempt to destabilize the Serbian government and intimidate Premier Aleksandar Vučić.”¹²² This was, he explained, as if the ICTY put across the message to Vučić – “You want Putin in Belgrade, you want a parade /in his honor/, so you’ll have to give up the ‘both Russia and EU’ policy.”¹²³ Branko Ružić of the Socialist Party of Serbia /SPS/ said he was glad that the historical injustice done to Serbia and one of its citizen was rectified at least fragmentarily.¹²⁴ Bishop

117 <http://www.cazin.net/vijesti/clanak/vojislav-seselj-josipovicu-pomazem-u-kampanji-a-pusic-cijenim-zbog-cetnickog-pedigrea>.

118 <http://www.cazin.net/vijesti/clanak/seselj-hrvatska-mi-dize-publicitet-necu-se-dobrovoljno-vratiti-u-hag>.

119 <http://www.vesti-online.com/Vesti/Srbija/453245/Seselj-Bramerc-je-budala>.

120 <http://www.blic.rs/Vesti/Politika/515397/Seselj-Doprineo-sam-tome-da-Babic-izvrsi-samoubistvo>.

121 <http://www.telegraf.rs/vesti/politika/1301179-seselj-o-ubistvu-premijera-drage-mi-je-da-je-djindjic-mrtav-video>

122 Politika, November 7, 2014.

123 Politika, November 8, 2014.

124 Ibid.

Irinej also condemned the ICTY for “the 12-year illegal imprisonment of Šešelj” whom he called “a tragic galley slave.”¹²⁵

The Hague Tribunal in the dock

The Šešelj case revealed the systemic deficiencies of the Hague Tribunal. For, says Nena Tromp, chief investigator in the case of Milošević, the indictment raised against him covered the period 1991-93 in the territories of Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Vojvodina. “At the time these crimes were committed Šešelj was not an official according to law. Therefore, it was hard to determine his responsibility measured by his formal power and control even when it came to the volunteers of his Serb Radical Party. While he dispatched volunteers to fight in Vukovar he was not their formal commander...All the volunteers in Vukovar were under the command of the YPA. However, at the time of the Kosovo conflict Šešelj was a member of the cabinet – a part of the executive power in his capacity as the Deputy Premier – but the indictment did not cover that period.”¹²⁶

Then, reminds Nena Tromp, we have the trial itself and developments related to it. The ICTY and contemporary courts of law stick to high standards for the respect of defendants’ human rights. Therefore, Šešelj was provided every opportunity to defend himself and have a fair trial. The Tribunal as a whole – as well as the circles beyond it – was most sensitive to any criticism of fair trial. So, in his case too, any discussion about imposing a lawyer on him was out of question considering the developments in the Milošević case. In the meantime Karadžić also decided to defend himself. When they tried to deprive Šešelj of that right he went on hunger strike and the trial started again from the scratch. Šešelj was entitled to exercise this right and was exercising it in his specific manner...It was clear then that he would be the one to hold the stage in the courtroom.¹²⁷

Šešelj himself also protracted the trial by obstructing proceedings, insulting the court, revealing confidential information (which he publicized

125 Ibid.

126 Večernji list, November 27, 2014.

127 Ibid.

at his website), etc. For contempt of court he was punished with total 56 months in jail. He paid no heed to the rules of communication; he was filing all sorts of complaints and was intimidating witnesses all the time (for witnesses for the Prosecution turned into witnesses for the defense during the process). It is not true that he was not inadequately cured, given that he was receiving the same medical treatment as all citizens of the Netherlands.

Following on the reactions to Šešelj's release, ICTY Chief Prosecutor Serge Bramertz requested the Trial Chamber to withdraw the decision on early release and order him back. According to Bramertz, Šešelj's behavior upon return to Serbia undermines the argument for his early release. "The Chamber's trust in Šešelj was groundless," he said.¹²⁸

Croatian President Ivo Josipović also wrote to ICTY President Theodore Meron wishing to draw the attention of the international community to the principles and reasons for which the ICTY had been established. He said he would present the Šešelj case before the UN SC.

Serbia's ruling elite strongly reacted against the Prosecutor's motion while parroting the thesis about the attempt at Serbia's destabilization. Defense Minister Branislav Gašić said, "It is on the Hague Tribunal to decide on Šešelj's release or return, and the government of Serbia has nothing to do with it...For me, this circus is nothing but a political pressure on Premier Vučić. Obviously it doesn't suit someone to have Serbia as a functioning state."¹²⁹ Labor Minister Aleksandar Vulin said on the same occasion, "I entreat the Trial Chamber to leave Šešelj in Serbia," explaining that Šešelj could "incite a conflict with the police" trying to arrest him at the ITCY request.¹³⁰ Vice-Premier Rasim Ljajić said, "Everything about Šešelj's release entails scandals and legal precedents...Prosecutor Bramertz's request is the last in a row – a typical hot potato game. To wash its hands of everything, the Hague Prosecution now want the Trial Chamber to withdraw its decision."¹³¹

128 Danas, December 3, 2014.

129 Ibid.

130 Ibid.

131 Danas, December 3, 2014.

The opposition comments on the request differently, arguing that it in no way affects political situation of the country. Nemanja Šarović, vice-president of SRS, says, “Vulin is actually Vučić’s mouthpiece and as such reveals Vučić’s panic.”¹³² Professor Zoran Stojiljković takes that Šešelj cannot destabilize Serbia and that all this is “a typical production of a political event leading to an unnecessary social drama.”¹³³

Serbia in the European Parliament

The Šešelj lifted the veil from regional relations which had never been so bad before as it seems. In almost no time Serbia deteriorated its relations with Croatia, Albania and Turkey; this implies not that its relations with Kosovo, Bosnia or Montenegro are any better.

As proposed by Croatian MPs, the European Parliament passed a resolution on Vojislav Šešelj to condemn his hate speech and appeal to the Serbian authorities to distance themselves from his statements, and investigate possible breaches of domestic legislation.

Explaining the reasons why the European Parliament should address the issue, Croatian MP Tonino Picula said, “First of all, I take that the European Parliament is the institution duty-bound to react promptly at all manifestations of political pathology. Not only once in the 20th century have we experienced that the so-called madness of an individual in disturbed societies could set fire to conflict and harm millions of people. I believe Europe has learnt its lesson from the two world wars. However, the developments in the territory of ex-Yugoslavia in early 1990s are still fresh in our mind, especially in the minds of Croats. And especially fresh on November 19 marking the anniversary of hardship of Vukovar and Škabrnja, which coincided with political activism of one of the protagonists, Vojislav Šešelj.”¹³⁴

132 Ibid.

133 Ibid.

134 <http://www.slobodnaevropa.org/content/picula-za-rse-zasto-trazim-raspravu-o-seselju-u-europskom-parlamentu/26699871.html>.

As for Vojislav Šešelj, he said he was proud of the resolution that showed that he had “broken through” the media blockade Aleksandar Vučić had imposed on him. The strategy of “throwing the media bait” to Croats was crowned with success, he added.¹³⁵

Premier Aleksandar Vučić called the EP resolution insulting, disturbing and a disappointment to Serbia.¹³⁶ “Some wanted to humiliate Serbia in this way, but we will not allow anyone /to humiliate us/. It’s been by-gones since Serbia was a punching bag...Citizens of our country should learn a lesson from this, realize how they are treating us, seeing us, and how many challenges and hardship – some of which we had not expected – we shall have to cope with on our European course in the near future... If this resolution was passed for the benefit of the upcoming presidential elections in Croatia, I must say that was irresponsible. The European Parliament lent a hand to hatred and xenophobia.”¹³⁷ He and President of Republika Srpska (Bosnia-Herzegovina) Milorad Dodik shared the view that the EP resolution in no way contributed to cooperation between the countries and peoples of the Western Balkans.¹³⁸

Vuk Drašković, leader of the Serb Renewal Movement /SPO/, said, “Croatian MPs had initiated the resolution as they were anxious about Šešelj’s statements threatening territorial integrity of Croatia, which is in the membership of both EU and NATO...They shared their fear with the European Parliament, which insulted itself with this resolution having undertaken the role of the international tribunal that had tried Šešelj and released him before passing a sentence. However, the European Parliament puts a person on trial but releases not its sentence. Once the passions calm, most MPs will feel uneasy.”¹³⁹

135 <http://www.blic.rs/Vesti/Politika/515473/SVI-PROTIV-SRBIJE-Nemacki-mediji-Na-Balkanu-je-novo-ledeno> -.

136 Ibid.

137 Politika, November 27, 2014.

138 Politika, November 30, 2014.

139 Ibid.

According to Prof. Predrag Simić, former diplomat, the Šešelj case is “a product of the election campaign in Croatia.”¹⁴⁰

In Minister Rasim Ljajić’s view, the “entire action” was taken just to strengthen position of some Croatian presidential candidates – this year and in parliamentary elections scheduled for 2015. “The Hague exported its problem to Serbia, unable to finalize the case that took eleven years and is not finished yet.”¹⁴¹ Commenting on the resolution Foreign Minister Đačić said that was yet another argument for closing down the Tribunal.¹⁴²

Croatia’s response to Belgrade

Premier Zoran Milanović’s decision to turn down the invitation to the December Regional Summit of fifteen heads of government China has convened in Belgrade also testifies of badly disturbed relations between Belgrade and Zagreb. “If someone invests so much energy and time in the protection of the Serb minority in Croatia to his own detriment, that someone is I, my party and my cabinet. Therefore, I expect others to speak fairly about some developments at least. For instance, about the behavior of an esteemed gentleman who had been expelled from the Hague Tribunal. All I ask are good manners, especially because all of them made the same political company in the 1990s. All I ask them is to call it an evil and distance themselves from it. I believe the former government would have done it. This one would not for some reasons of its own. Under such circumstances it would be foolish of me to show up there.”¹⁴³

Croatia’s Minister of Foreign and European Affairs Vesna Pusić said her country’s policy for Serbia would not change, adding, “It would be most welcome should the Serbian authorities distance themselves from the warmongering statements by the accused war criminal Vojislav Šešelj.”¹⁴⁴

140 *Ibid.*

141 *Ibid.*

142 <http://www.tanjug.rs/novosti/154420/dacic--ukinuti-haski-tribunal.htm>.

143 <http://www.slobodnaevropa.org/content/milanovic-otkazao-posetu-beogradu-zbog-seselja/26715026.html>.

144 <http://www.politika.rs/rubrike/dogadjaji-dana/Seselj->

However, Croatia's ex-President Stjepan Mesić thinks differently about President Zoran Milanović's way to the Belgrade Summit. "The propaganda-political skirmish between Zagreb and Belgrade – in public, in the media or by the means of demonstrative denial to attend a major multilateral meeting – benefits no one but surely greatly pleases Šešelj."¹⁴⁵

Most commentators in Croatia take that the state reacted with good reason to Šešelj's public statements but that everything turned into euphoria, which ultimately plays into the hands of nationalists and the right-wing in the midst of the presidential campaign.

"If Šešelj is crazy, as people are saying these days, then Croatia is sort of politically crazy...The reaction that borders on hysteria indicates that Croatia is not politically mature and lacks self-confidence. Investing the country's entire political energy into a showdown with a man on political margins speaks badly about the country," says Milenko Čulić.¹⁴⁶ In his view early release granted to Šešelj is a bigger burden on Belgrade than on Zagreb. "All I can say listening to their parroting about wishing him good health is that they do not know what to do. As they all come from the same political flock one should not have expected them to condemn him in the grand manner. What troubles me more is a generally insensitive attitude towards crimes committed either by Serbs or Croats that prevails in both countries, and has nothing to do with Šešelj."¹⁴⁷ Viktor Ivančić, journalist and writer, holds that Šešelj's comeback can only fuel radicalization of the Croatian society that has been spiraling over past years.¹⁴⁸

As for Aleksandar Vučić, he tries to maintain the image of a politician dedicated to regional cooperation. "As for our policy for the region, we remain a stability factor, we insult no one or challenge anyone. Serbia's domestic policy does not boil down to looking over its neighbor's fence and

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dvojezicne-table-i-odnosi-Srbije-i-Hrvatske.sr.html.

145 Danas, December 2, 2014.

146 <http://www.slobodnaevropa.org/content/milanovic-otkazao-posetu-beogradu-zbog-seselja/26715026.html>.

147 Ibid.

148 <http://www.slobodnaevropa.org/content/viktor-ivancic-tihi-dosluh-rpskog-i-hrvatskog-nacionalizma/26705196.html>.

searching for a culprit in someone else's backyard. Some others, probably incapable of implementing radical economic reforms, envy Serbia. They would like to be like Serbia, so they need to some political excuse... We are committed to regional cooperation but will never accept collective responsibility some try to impose on us."¹⁴⁹

The meeting of foreign ministers in the European Parliament – several days after the resolution was passed – turned into a heated polemic between Minister Dačić and Croatian MPs. Dačić criticized the resolution arguing that it benefited not regional peace and stability. Croatia's MP Andrej Plenković retorted that Serbia has never distanced itself from Šešelj's policy and would never be able to pursue its European course unless it endorsed European values. Right-wing MP Ruža Tomašić joined in. She accused Dačić of arrogance and having come to Brussels to lecture everyone. "You've been Vojislav Šešelj's close associate for years and never renounced the Greater Serbia project," she said.¹⁵⁰

149 <http://www.novosti.rs/vesti/naslovna/politika/aktuelno.289.html:521285-Vucic-Pustili-Seselja-pa-krive-Srbiju>.

150 <http://www.kurir.rs/vesti/politika/polemika-u-ep-dacic-hrvatima-svako-ima-svog-seselja-clanak-1627530> <http://www.kurir.rs/vesti/politika/polemika-u-ep-dacic-hrvatima-svako-ima-svog-seselja-clanak-1627530>.

III – THE MEDIA

The Media Landscape Reaches Critical Point

The media and professional journalism, imploding for decades, actually put an end to public debates on social, economic and political problems or processes of any significance, especially those dealing with the recent past, transition and opening of accession negotiations with the European Union /EU/. In 2014 undermined media freedoms and citizens' right to timely and proper information were trending down (like in early 2015); in fact, the trend reached critical point.

In the past three years media freedoms have become the topic number one of the social agenda. The media have been used for the sole purpose of promoting leader of the Serb Progressive Party /SNS/, Premier Aleksandar Vučić, on the one hand and discrediting political opponents and differently minded people on the other; to any criticism of such situation the regime responded with hostility, threats and repression. The most frequent attributes of Serbia's media landscape are censorship and self-censorship. These actually sophisticated methods of keeping the media under control and journalists under pressure have been described in detail in several publications including two reports of the Anti-Corruption Council (in 2011 and 2012) and the study "Soft Censorship, Strangling Serbia's Media" by Jovanka Matic (2013).

What marked the year 2014 were discontinued TV programs, cooked up scandals compromising political opponents, defamation of the media and journalists critical of the Premier and the government, and verbal and physical assaults against journalists.

Citizens were considerably deprived of the right to information of public interest, whereas self-censorship infected a much larger area than the media one. According to historian Branka Prpa, the problem is not only in the shows taken off air but in abolishment of public debate as the only way of exposing what actually bothers citizens. "We are being bombarded

with ‘daily policies’ that produce and cover daily events, mostly unimportant ones, but deal not with crucial problems of the society. We do not have a public corpus at our public scene – a free university and free mass media,” Prpa told the round table on media freedoms organized by the Municipality of Vračar.¹⁵¹ Round tables and forums assembling governmental officials and civil society representatives only simulated public debates and never addressed Serbia’s most pressing problems.

Premier Aleksandar Vučić’s autocratic tendency toward choking the democratic potential of institutions, says media expert Jovanka Matić, is not to be attributed that much to his personality as it is to his authentic, radical ideology and the ideology of his party, the Serb Progressive Party / SNS/. “This ideology would not put up with dissonance. Consolidation of democracy calls for a different political orientation of parties in power, and that different political orientation cannot be without a different political culture,” she says.¹⁵²

In 2014 the parliament passed three major media laws in accordance with the Media Strategy of 2011 and EU standards.¹⁵³ However, these media laws can hardly change the media landscape for the better in several years to come. According to findings of the opinion poll (conducted by the Bureau of Societal Research), over 50 percent of 158 members of NUNS and UNS /Independent Journalists’ Association of Serbia and Journalists’ Association of Serbia) take that the newly adopted media legislations had no effect on the situation of Serbia’s media. Zoran Gavrilović of the Bureau says that the poll shows that *TV Pink* and tabloid *Informer* are considered pro-governmental media, along with *Kurir* and *Večernje Novosti*. “Some TV stations broadcasted not a single second of criticism of Premier Aleksandar Vučić,” he added.

151 March 10, 2015. http://www.b92.net/info/vesti/index.php?yyyy=2015&mm=03&dd=10&nav_category=12&nav_id=966748.

152 *Danas*, 3. October 3, 2014.

153 The laws on public information, on broadcast media and on public broadcasting services.

Serbia's media market is small, poor, dysfunctional, non-transparent and unregulated. Against such backdrop, says Jovanka Matić, a newsroom can make profit only with a permit from centers of political power. For instance, TV Pink, established in the Milošević era and financially most powerful broadcaster thanks to its advantageous position and a helping hand from parties in power, has been adjusting its program to the regime all the times. However, according to some media sources, even this powerful TV station is in serious financial difficulties and its owner (Željko Mitrović) is in the red.

The Anti-Corruption Council's long expected report on media ownership and control of the media was publicized in March 2015. However, the report was moderated following the Ministry of Culture and Media's review. The Ministry explained that the work on the report started before new media laws that would make all the difference were passed.

Governmental and party officials treat the media as their mouthpieces. More than 50 percent of citizens take that for them the media are not instruments for assessing the government's efficiency, while 43 percent argues that not a single politician respects the principle of journalistic integrity, show the findings of the survey conducted by the Bureau of Societal Studies /BIRODI/. Zoran Gavrilović of the Bureau says that the media in Serbia are turning into means of propaganda and bulletins through which "those in power distribute capital."¹⁵⁴

The media skeptical about activities of the Premier and the government more frequently react at some moves at daily basis than raise crucial questions and dig into these issues systematically. They are not capacitated enough for investigative journalism besides being between a rock and a hard place of market brutality and pressure from the government.

The regime targets the media promoting European policies, refraining from hate speech and advocating the culture of human rights and social dialogue. Such are the *Vreme* weekly, the independent Balkan Investigative Journalism Network /BIRN/ or portal *Peščanik /Hourglass/*. On the

154 *Politika*, March 5, 2015, Monitoring of Political Communication in the Media, Konrad Adenauer Foundation and BIRODI.

other hand, the media violating journalistic code such as tabloid *Informer* have all the sympathies of Premier Vučić.

Serbia's major daily, *Politika* (in state ownership by 50 percent) busily criticizes civil society activists and independent media. This is most evident in the columns penned by its editor-in-chief and longstanding president of Journalists' Association of Serbia, Ljiljana Smajlović.

When it comes to TV programs most drastic but also illustrative is the example of TV Pink, as described in a story published in the *Blic* daily under the headline "Television Promotes Bullies and Criminals" (February 19, 2015). TV Pink is the most powerful station with national frequency, other stations often see as a raw model. It strongly influences public opinion and shapes the taste of its viewers. Airing entertainment at first, it began with newscasts in 2000. According to the story in *Blic*, its "stars" are liars, criminals, bullies that beat their wives and arrogant drivers causing traffic accidents.

In one of its most popular show TV Pink hosted musician Aleksandar Stanimirović, the frontman of the Amadeus Band, the one who tried to run his jeep into the *Blic* newsroom accusing the paper's journalists of extortion. The police prevented him from running into the newsroom, turned his case to the Prosecution and confiscated his guns and 80 bullets.¹⁵⁵ Further on, the station stood by its anchor Vladimir Stanojević who had brutally beaten his partner, Ana Marija Žujović, and allowed him to justify his act in front of cameras and promise never to do such a thing again. His colleague, Milan Kalinić, continued anchoring most popular shows such as "Pink Stars" and "Audition" although having caused a traffic accident in which three Hungarian citizens were badly injured.¹⁵⁶ TV Pink also hosted its former newscaster Radomir Počuča, presently fighting in Eastern Ukraine for pro-Russian separatists. The court has issued an arrest warrant for him for not showing up at the trial as the accused of lynch calls against "Women in Black."¹⁵⁷ In its shows TV Pink often hosts criminal Kristijan Golubović who had been punished with eight years in

155 *Blic*, February 19, 2015.

156 *Ibid.*

157 *Ibid.*

prison for distribution of heroine. In one of these shows he boasted of being “an urban Robin Hood,” exhibited his drawings and announced a solo exhibition.

More and more complaints for violation of journalistic code are being addressed to the Press Council. A smearing campaign against actor Goran Jevtić, who has a leading role in the play “Madame Minister,” which many see as directly targeting the Premier, figures as a most illustrative example. Offering no proof whatsoever, the high-circulation *Blic* daily ran a story headlined “Actor Goran Jevtić Raped My Son” with a follow up next day. *Blic* has blatantly breached the journalistic code by publishing a story based on personal allegations rather than on a sentence. The journalistic code prescribes that journalists shall respect the presumption of innocence.

Serbia’s chairmanship of the OSCE in 2015 did not result in any way in less intense assaults against media freedoms. On the contrary, Premier Aleksandar Vučić has openly crossed swords with OSCE representative on several occasions, especially with OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media Dunja Mijatović accusing her of not telling the truth about censorship in Serbia.¹⁵⁸

Promises Serbia’s highest officials gave at the OSCE conference on the protection of journalists’ security and integrity could hint a change in the regime’s attitude toward the media.¹⁵⁹ Namely, foreign minister and minister of culture, Ivica Dačić and Ivan Tasovac, pledged themselves to implementation of the media legislation, claiming the media freedoms were at the top of the list of Serbia’s priorities. Besides, the conference witnessed the first meeting ever between Premier Vučić and Ms. Dunja Mijatović.

158 Premier Vučić’s letter to Dunja Mijatović, *Blic*, June 2, 2014, <http://www.blic.rs/Vesti/Politika/470311/Vucicevo-pismo-OEBSu-Dajte-dokaze-o-cenzuri-ili-se-izvinite>

159 The conference was held in Belgrade on March 26-27, 2015.

Media legislation

In August 2014 the parliament passed three media laws: the Law on Public Information and the Media, the Law on Broadcast Media and the Law on Public Broadcasting Services. This signaled the beginning of the implementation of the Media Strategy of 2011 that calls for the adoption of yet another ten or so regulations (amendments of or supplements of the existing laws, and new laws). The media legislation is scrutinized under chapters 8, 10 and 23 of the accession negotiations with the EU. Since August 2014 till March 2015 no progress in media freedoms was registered, or citizens' right to proper and timely information improved.

Free market competition and monopolies are the most problematic aspects of Serbia's media landscape.¹⁶⁰ It was only in August 2014 that Serbia's jurisprudence recognized these notions. Major provisions of the Law on Public Information and the Media relate to privatization of the media, project financing and media register.¹⁶¹ The process of state-run media or those in the ownership of the province of a municipality is to be ended by July 2015. This deadline was set in earlier public information laws but never met. Unless privatized by the said deadline a media outlet shall transfer its capital to its employees for free, provides the Law. In the case of employees refusing to take over free shares, this media outlet shall be closed down.

According to the list of potential buyers of 49 media outlets, as publicized by NUNS,¹⁶² most of them are natural persons who have nothing to do with journalism or the media. Privatization awaits 74 local media with total 2,500 employees. For instance, the company "Feedback Consulting and New Media Production" is interested in buying some ten media outlets in Vojvodina, including the provincial daily *Dnevnik*. The owner of the company is 27 years old Danijel Kulačin. According to the Independent Journalists' Association of Vojvodina /NDNV/ this young man is close to

160 "Medijske slobode Srbije u evropskom ogledalu," 2012.

161 Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia No. 84|2014; available at http://paragraf.rs/propisi/zakon_o_javnom_informisanju_i_medijima.html

162 Večernje *Novosti*, December 6, 2014.

the Third Serbia party. (As a member of the election commission Kulačin was officially registered as a representative of the Third Serbia.)

Kulačin is also known as a founder of organizations that received millions for their projects from city department of culture.¹⁶³ Apart from Kulačin, one of the biggest companies in Serbia, MK Group owned by Miodrag Kostić, is interested in buying the Novi Sad-based *Dnevnik* daily. As for privatization of *Politika*, student Miloš Paunović from the town of Kovin figures as an interested party, while a car repair shop is eager to buy the well-known local paper *Pančevac*.¹⁶⁴

The Law on Public Information provides a novelty – project financing of the contents of public interest. All media outlets, independent production groups, citizens' associations, and natural or legal persons that are not founders of any media shall be entitled to apply to calls for projects, provides the Law. The biggest challenge will be the allocation of program funds. Impartiality and independence of the entire process will depend on the composition of the grant commission but also on the way the term public interest is interpreted. To define the term in tandem with civil society representatives and citizens NUNS has launched a project in three municipalities. Its project might serve as a model of defining public interest.

Further on, all the information contained in the media register will be available online. The main purpose of the register is to secure transparency of media ownership. Average sales in a calendar year and amounts received from local administration or state subsidies will make the entries of the register. The register will also include data about natural and legal persons more than 5 percent of shares of capital stock, about a publisher's business partners and other publishing houses in which these persons have more than 5 percent of shares in capital stock; about amounts of subsidies at all levels of public administration and about average sales. The media outlets not entered into the register shall not be entitled to apply for grants.

Prevention of cross-ownership is supposed to encourage media pluralism in the first place. Entries of the register are so planned as to help

163 *Blic*, December 5, 2014.

164 The data date from December 2014.

restrict “the influence one commercial enterprise or group might have on the media sector.”

Cross-ownership of the print media shall not be allowed if their circulation exceeds 50 percent of total sales, while 35 percent of total viewers or listeners in the case of the broadcast media. The Association of Publishers assembling the biggest ones such as *Kurir* or *Blic* opposed the provision, arguing that there should be no limit to the print media given that cross-ownership was crucial to their survival and development. The Ringier Springier Company owns several papers such as *Blic*, *Alo*, *NIN* and *24 Hours*. According to Tijana Bajović, deputy director general of the Company, the papers in their ownership keep informed more than three million of people in Serbia.¹⁶⁵

The ban on cross-ownership will affect the broadcast media the most. The Law provides that one owner shall not possess several electronic media the total audience of which exceeds 35 percent. At present *TV Prva* and *TV B92* are in the ownership of one legal person, the Greek Company “Antena Group.” “Who will decide whether or not a broadcaster has reached 35 percent of total views, who will be in charge of measuring the ratings? The Law fails to detail these mechanisms,” warns Prof. Rade Veljanovski.¹⁶⁶

The Law on Broadcast Media¹⁶⁷ (of August 2014) provides that the parliament shall elect nine member of the Broadcasting Council, nominated by authorized institutions, by majority vote; the old law had the same provision. As of now, politicians will have less influence on the Council given that the parliament (the Committee for Culture and Information) no longer nominates three but only two members, and terms of office for all the nine are the same. The rest of the membership of the Council shall be nominated by the Assembly of the Province of Vojvodina, accredited university, associations of broadcasters the membership of which possesses at least 30 broadcasting licenses, journalists’ associations with the membership of at least 500, associations of film and theater artists and composers, civil society organizations, councils of national minorities (by agreement),

165 *Blic*, December 4, 2014.

166 *Politika*, October 3, 2014.

167 http://paragraf.rs/propisi/zakon_o_elektronskim_medijima.html.

and churches and religious communities (by agreement). The provision that one member of the Council shall come from Kosovo has been erased.

The new law prevents political parties and legal persons with non-transparent ownership structure from owning the broadcast media. It sets the deadline for digitalization – June 17, 2015.

The former Broadcasting Agency was transformed into the Regulatory Body for the Broadcast Media (REM) but having much the same competences. It issues broadcasting licenses (at the period of eight years maximum), sets rules, controls operation of the broadcast media and inflicts penalties when necessary, and submits its annual reports to the parliament. REM is authorized to take away broadcasting license from a media outlet having broken some rule – for the period of 30 days at first, and then permanently.

Public information and broadcasting acts allow owners of cable systems to own the broadcast media too, under the condition that they are two separate legal persons. This made it possible for *TV N1* to start airing program. *TV N1* is in the ownership of the United Group, the same as cable operator SBB. The American Fund KKR, one of the three biggest American investment companies, has the majority share in the United Group.

However, the provision does not stand in the way of unfair competition. Namely, it disadvantages televisions airing programs solely via cable operators and figure as potential rivals.

The Law on Public Broadcasting Services was also passed in August 2014. In a way, Premier Vučić has met the promise given in the election campaign: TV fees are annulled for the time being, while RTS and RTV will be subsidized till 2016. As of 2016 citizens will have to pay TV taxes to be collected through electricity bills like before. Now that TV fees are annulled, RTS depends more on the government and its subsidies. The Law provides both subsidies for public broadcasting services and their income from commercials to be aired only in situations described in detail.

Publication of a job opening for the post of RTS Director General has been postponed till the adoption of the Law on Public Broadcasting Services.¹⁶⁸ This can undermine unbiased selection of applicants given that

168 The job vacancy for RTS Director General was publicized in February 2015.

RTS is still subsidized. So far the government has strongly influenced RTS through personnel policy. Following the public call the RTS Board of Managers elects the Director General by two-third majority vote. The Director General is appointed for the 5-year term, and the same person can be elected twice at most.

Control of the media and pressure on journalists

Undermining of media freedoms and pressure on journalists culminated in 2014; the trend continued in early 2015. For the civil society this is the topic No. 1 on the agenda of human rights and fundamental freedoms. The resistance to the trend grew noticeably among online media, but conventional ones defying it are few – just a handful of the print media. Though marginalized they strongly criticize the government, insist on citizens' right to information of public importance and critically dissect the Premier and minister in their columns. TV stations – above all those with national coverage – are devastated the most. For unbiased and timely information citizens can only turn to major regional cable televisions such as *Al Jazeera* and *N1* and the *Radio Free Europe*.

Topics the regime wants to sweep under the carpet and obstruct stories about them mostly relate to those critical about the Premier's work (and that of people close to him), the government and members of the cabinet, but also the stories that seriously raise the question of corruption. The Premier is especially "touchy" when it comes to the stories about his family and affairs related to his brother Andrej. Several major international organizations (such as Reporters without Borders and Amnesty International) warned in their reports of growing pressure on the media in Serbia. The OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media Dunja Mijatović and EU officials have alerted of this trend throughout 2014.

Executive Director of Reporters without Borders Christian Mihr said, "Censorship in Serbia is neither direct nor transparent but is easily proved."¹⁶⁹ The pro-governmental *Politika* daily belittles the organi-
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A new director is expected to be appointed by early May 2015 at latest.

169 *Politika*, February 20, 2015.

zation's report on Serbia and disputes validity of the questionnaire on the basis of which the Reporters without Borders have come to such conclusion (the questionnaire is being filled by journalists, university professors, lawyers and media experts). Bojan Biblija, reporter for *Politika*, writes, "True, the questionnaire is good as such – but its findings depend on those have filled it. Since only Reporters without Borders seem to know who the 'experts' for the situation of the media in Serbia are, it would be interesting to know whether the organization asks them about their political affiliation."¹⁷⁰

Media expert Jovanka Matić takes that the media in Serbia are "economic hostages." "Financially dependent, they are forced to operate in the interest of some political and business circles that control their financing," she says.¹⁷¹ "Unlike in the Milošević era there are no sources of financing to encourage socially responsible journalism and make it possible for the media to survive in longer run. A model of media financing to promote analytical and critical journalism has not been created," concludes Matić.¹⁷²

In March 2015 the Anti-Corruption Council publicized its latest report on media ownership structure and control over the media in Serbia.¹⁷³ Unlike the first one of September 2011 that practically found no echo whatsoever, this one was presented to the parliamentary Committee for Media and Culture Referring to most pressing problems Vice-president of the Council Miroslav Milićević quoted non-transparent ownership and financing, influence via subsidies, privatization vs. independence of the public broadcasting services, censorship, self-censorship and tabloidization of the media landscape. The Council put forth 24 suggestions for governmental consideration.

The Council reported that ownership of more than one half of the media in Serbia was blurred. It made no bones about the media in the

170 *Ibid.*

171 *Danas*, October 3, 2014.

172 *Ibid.*

173 Report available at <http://www.antikorupcija-savet.gov.rs/Storage/Global/Documents/izvestaji/izvestaj%20mediji%2026%2002.pdf>.

ownership of ministers, politicians or members of their families were financed by Serbia's taxpayers. For instance, the Gašić family owns three local televisions in South Serbia. Vladan Gašić, son of the Defense Minister Bratislav Vladan Gašić, figures as the owner of TV Zona from Niš and Sports TV from Kruševac, while his father, the Minister, used to own TV Plus in the same town. While he was the Mayor of Kruševac the City Hall paid his station 100,000 Euros for advertizing.

In the period between two reports (September 2011 – March 2015), says the Council, political parties were unwilling to give up their influence on ownership structure of the media and editorial policies. Further on, one half of the most influential media outlets are actually owned by the companies registered abroad, while the media having the government as a stakeholder are under the direct control of political parties.

Subsidies are major mechanisms of control over the media. The government approved an interest-free loan of 160,000 Euros to the *Tanjug News Agency*, says the reports, while having subsidized it with two million Euros only a year before. Annulment of TV fees for RTS even better testifies of the control over the media. So it happened that in 2014 RTS was subsidized with 60 million Euros and had a 20-million debt written off. Considering its property and subsidies, *Tanjug* will have the upper hand in the process of privatization when compared with independent news agencies (*Beta* and *FoNet*).

In mid-2014 several shows were either taken off the air or rescheduled: the talk shows guesting individual critical of Premier Vučić and the government. So the talk shows "Impression of the Week" (TV B92) and "Problem" (Studio B) were taken off the air, while "The Forefinger" aired by radio and TV B92 was rescheduled.¹⁷⁴ The trend continued in early 2015: the show "Reporter" was taken off the air in March after a broadcast on corruption in Serbia's football teams.¹⁷⁵ Explanations given by manage-

174 http://www.danas.rs/danasrs/drustvo/pravo_danas/kaziprst_nastavlja_uzivo_na_b92.1118.html?news_id=291704#sthash.VkAfJPVF.dpuf.

Playwright Biljana Srbljanović, known for her political activism, appeared as a guest in the last "Forefinger" show of the station.

175 Shows of the "Reporter" series have been postponed for indefinite period of time

ments of these TV stations were hardly convincing (poor ratings or expired contracts).

“The Impression of the Week” was a cult show Olja Bečković has hosted and authored since the 1990s. TV B92 began airing it in 2002.¹⁷⁶ The station’s management suggested to Ms. Bečković to move her show from national frequency to the cable, INFO Channel. She turned them down. Veran Matić sided with her arguing that the move to the cable would degrade the cult show. Ever since foundation of the Radio B92 and then the television station under the same name Veran Matić has been the station’s editor-in-chief. He testified that “The Impression of the Week” has been the most popular and best quality show of the station’s program scheme according to all public opinion surveys.¹⁷⁷

Ms. Bečković’s lawyers claim that TV B92 breached the contract with her. The editor-in-chief of the *Mreža* Production Group, the producer of the show, confirms that the contract was valid till March 1, 2015. Calling the station’s offer an ultimatum, Olja Bečković, says, “I was blackmailed by the offer that the only way for me to continue my work in November /2014/ was to move my show to the *Info Channel*.” That could not be a business decision but a political directive, as it would be beyond the reason for a TV station to give up profit, she added.¹⁷⁸ “I am not willing to be a pioneer of a non-existent cable channel. I would move to it the moment it becomes functional and starts airing other information programs as well

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since the management decided that these broadcasts could endanger journalists’ lives.

176 The show was on air for the last time on June 29, 2014. Its guest was Vladimir Beba Popović, the director of the Institute of Modern Policies and shadow adviser to Premier Aleksandar Vučić. He used to be the head of the Communication Bureau at the times of Zoran Đinđić’s premiership. From the very start “The Impression of the Week” opened its season on September 1 and closed it on July 15. On June 2014 the author of the show announced her next guest, Minister of Culture Tasovac, for a week later. After her announcement she was told that the season would be cut for two shows. In late summer she was informed that the autumn season would open on September 21 and moved to Info Channel in November. (The interview with Olja Bečković, *Politika*, September 29, 2014.).

177 *Blic*, September 16, 2014

178 *Naše novine*, September 27, 2014.

such as ‘Insider,’ ‘Forefinger’ and newscaster,” she said.¹⁷⁹ (*TV B92’s* Info Channel was meant to air the station’s political-information programs. The management has not managed to make its editorial policy recognizable for years now. Its programs have been solely on the cable, covering some 60 percent of Serbia’s territory, and are far from being as popular as those broadcast by radio or *TV B92*.)

Actonko Co. Ltd., the majority owner of RTV B92, denies that “The Impression of the Week” was banned.¹⁸⁰ Ms. Bečković said that Premier Aleksandar Vučić had given her several phone calls dissatisfied with contents of her shows – the calls she understood as pressure on her.¹⁸¹ “People from B92 wanted me to cancel invitation to Saša Radulović, the then minister of economy and now an opposition leader, who planned to announce his resignation in my show. When the director of B92 saw that I have invited him as a guest she said to me, ‘Please don’t, he (Vučić) went mad, this must not go on air, so cancel Radulović,” she said. According to her, the Premier phoned her after a show and said, “Vučić speaking...Dial my number never again, and I will not yours.”¹⁸²

Media exert Jovanka Matić refers to the tumble of RTV B92, once in the forefront of independent journalism, now a “faceless and unprofitable commercial television.” The case of TV B92, she says, exactly testifies of huge flaw of domestic media scene.¹⁸³ The law provides diversity of sources and programs; therefore, she argues, the management of the B92 must be asked to properly justify cancellation of the show that greatly contributes to democratic public dialogue.¹⁸⁴

The *Radio B92* was a benchmark of independent journalism in the 1990s. Over the past fifteen years this media house has been gradually moving its editorial policy toward commercialization, implying reduction of information programs. Once a radio station with 30 reporters working

179 *Naše novine*, September 29, 2014.

180 *Naše novine*, September 29, 2014.

181 *Danas*, October 29, 2014.

182 *Ibid.*

183 *Danas*, October 3, 2014.

184 *Ibid.*

for news desk, the *Radio B92* now has only four.¹⁸⁵ A group of former B92 journalists and anchors has launched an online petition for the change of the station's name. The petition was initiated by Dušan Mašić, former journalist for *Radio B92* and author of the book "Rocking the Boat in Serbia" („Talasanje Srbije“) on independent media in the 1990s. The petition was launched when the station announced that a reality show would replace the once slot of "The Impression of the Week." Danica Vučenić, author of the once most popular "Forefinger" show, says that the new program scheme has been "trampling down" everything this media house had built for two decades.

Responding to the petition the station's management issued a curt release saying that the *B92* was a private company creating its editorial and business policies in accordance with its business plans and goals. "The *B92* broadcasting company will keep its viewers and general public timely posted on its planned strategy for development," quotes the release.¹⁸⁶

Having taken over the City Hall – by the "model" of reshaping the governance at lower level – the Serb Progressive Party /SNS/ got an upper hand in the Belgrade *TV Studio B*. Once a new leadership was enthroned began changes in the program. The show "Sarapa's Problem" by author Predrag Sarapa – also hosting persons critical of the SNS and the Premier – was immediately taken off the air. According to the author, his show had the highest ratings in 2013 and the former management had given him yet another show to anchor.¹⁸⁷

The Sarapa case played into the hands of Premier Vučić to prove that there is no censorship in Serbia. Namely, in almost no time Sarapa moved to the TV Pink Channel 3 edited by the Premier's wife, Ksenija. It was the Premier himself who had announced this transfer long before it took place, while addressing students of the London School of Economics.

The topic that makes the regime most touchy is the megalomaniac project "Belgrade Waterfront" formally managed by the local self-government. So far the government has been denying the public any information

185 *Naše novine* , September 15, 2014.

186 *Ibid.*

187 *Vreme*, September 18, 2014.

about business and financial arrangements it had made with foreign investors. Expert circles and citizens at large have never been given the opportunity to see and discuss the actual architectural plans for the project, while the very concept of this megalomaniac enterprise has exposed to criticism of experts and part of the public alike. Dražen Pavlica, TV program analyst of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, says that the first five episodes in the “Belgrade Waterfront” had not even a trace of investigative journalism. “Suitable questions were posed and banal remarks made, while the anchorwoman allowed the Mayor to bask in a monologue.”¹⁸⁸

Premier Vučić has assaulted several times the independent journalistic network *BIRN* (Serbia desk) for its stories indicating possible malversation by the government and the administration. What prompted one of his campaigns against the network was its investigative story about the tender for draining the Tamnava mine (published at *BIRN* website and in the *Vreme* weekly on January 8, 2015). He also campaigned against the network in August 2014 for having dug into the agreement between the Serbian government and “Etihad” Co., whereby the latter acquired 49 percent of total shares of the national airways. The *BIRN* has been accused of lying, and the *Vreme* weekly was also targeted for having published the network’s story.¹⁸⁹ The campaign put across a message to other media: cut short about the topic.

When *Vreme* reprinted the story about “Etihad” the Premier told a press conference, aired live by all national TV stations, that the weekly was a mouthpiece of businessman Miroslav Mišković standing trial for misconduct. Journalists’ associations condemned his act and reminded him that the agreement with “Etihad” had been hushed up for long and it had been only stories published in papers that forced the government to publicize it. According to *BIRN*, its reporters had asked the government for five

188 *Danas*, December 3, 2014.

189 “*BIRN*, those are the same people who have lied about Air Serbia, the same people who received moneys from Mr. Davenport and the EU to badmouth the Serbian government. Tell those liars that they have lied again,” the Premier told the press. *Vreme*, January 15, 2015.

months to show them the agreement and when denied wrote the story on the basis of the draft they had.

Having relapsed into the rhetoric of his radical past, the Premier then accused foreign diplomats and their government of paying the media to oust him. Precisely, he accused the EU of paying certain media to campaign against his cabinet.¹⁹⁰

Some officials and institutions close to the Premier called for drastic measures against BIRN, including a trial to the organization. SNS MP Mirko Atagić asked the Prosecution from the parliamentary rostrum why was it the judiciary did nothing to protect the Premier facing, as he put it, “a very dangerous situation.”¹⁹¹

Atagić then said that media assaults at the Premier were threatening his safety, as some individuals, as he put it, were calling for his murder – something unprecedented in the history of human civilization. “Brutal media assaults as such are products of a hookup between mafia, tycoons, criminals and politicians from home and abroad alike,” he told the parliament. His party colleague Vladimir Đukanović called BIRN “a black-mailing, racketeering organization” that “under the mask of investigative journalism work for some secret service going for our public enterprises and national resources.”¹⁹²

Pro-governmental media promptly joined in. Editor-in-chief of *Politika* and President of the Journalists’ Association of Serbia /UNS/ Ljiljana Smajlović put across a clear message in her column headlined “We are not BIRN.”¹⁹³ “BIRN basks in financial fancy of Western governmental and non-governmental donors,” she wrote, adding that it has not earned journalistic credibility and works not in Serbia’s interest. Day in day out the

190 *Politika*, January 13, 2015. (Several months before, while crossing swords with Dunja Mijatović and Paula Tide of the OSCE the Premier said he had undeniable proofs that many of the international community, including ambassadors, were putting pressure on the media to stage campaigns against him and his family. He wanted Dunja Mijatović to apologize for having told untruths.)

191 *Dnevnik*, January 16, 2015.

192 *Blic*, January 12, 2015.

193 *Politika*, January 14, 2015.

pro-governmental media were running stories about the amounts of grants given to BIRN and listing the media obtaining international assistance.

The Premier's and his associates' messages found an echo in social networks. "They were saying that we, working for BIRN, are exactly what the Premier called us – 'liars,' 'mercenaries' and 'lobbyists' against the Serbian government," writes a journalist for the *Vreme* weekly.¹⁹⁴

The Premier's assaults upon the BIRN and other media for having dug into the issues of obvious public interest are diametrically opposite to the spirit of the Law on Information his majority in the parliament adopted in August 2014. The Law provides that the media shall be free to publish information, ideas and views on trends, developments and persons the public is interested in with good reason, regardless of the means all pieces of information have been collected. It also provides that free flow in information in the media and their editorial autonomy shall not be jeopardized, especially by pressure on them. Further on, public servants and policy-makers shall be open to criticism of their work or policy whether or not they these views make them feel hurt as individuals.

The OSCE Representative on the Freedom of Media and EU officials criticized the assaults and battery upon the media on several occasions. EC Spokeswoman for Neighboring Policy and Negotiations Maja Kocijančič said that all grantees could freely opt for their editorial policies and were solely responsible for their publication. Criticism in the media, like BIRN's criticism, ensures accountability of elected governments and the governments, in turn, should respond to such criticism in a constructive and transparent manner, rather than choke it, she said.

Not referring to any particular case Ms. Mijatović said that occasionally the media were unprofessional failing to double check all the information, but underlined that this was not an excuse of a government to put pressure on them. "The media should not praise a government but act responsibly," she concluded.¹⁹⁵

Journalists of the Center for Investigative Journalism /CINS/ digging into the Premier's brother's business also experienced attempts at choking

194 *Vreme*, January 15, 2015.

195 OSCE press conference, March 2015.

investigative journalism. Stojan Dojčinović, the reporter for CINS, said that the Business Register Agency /APR/ wanted him to give his full name when he asked for information about the company suspected to be in the ownership of the Premier's brother. The *Informer* daily then published a story about the CINS reporter's inquiry, publishing his full name and the names of other reporters having made the same queries in the Agency. Commissioner Rodoljub Šabić asked the Agency whether it was the *Informer's* source. He then released that the names had not leaked from the Agency but parts of the *Informer's* story were nothing but speculation.¹⁹⁶ APR Director Zvonko Obradović said that in the past the Agency had insisted on formal requests for inspecting files. Asked why was it that Agency remembered the old practice only when it came to the case of the Premier's brother, he gave a roundabout answer. The rule, argue experts, can easily be misused and jeopardize the safety of reporters going through the register. Such a rule should be annulled, says Commissioner Šabić.¹⁹⁷

The case of well-known journalist Danica Vučenić is also most illustrative of subtle pressure on reporters. She was forced to leave *RTV Vojvodina* because after her interview with Olja Bečković officials of the ruling party have refused to appear as guests in her talk show for months on end. "I understood it as a boycott," she told the *Danas* daily.¹⁹⁸ She had to resign, she said, because she had been prevented from posing questions of public interest while working a public broadcasting service. "I take that I can no longer be a professional interviewer for a public broadcasting service, since it is my duty to pose questions to and demand answers from all the stakeholders in public arena. My understanding of professional journalism clashes with the situation of my talk show," she said.

The *RTV Collegium* released that in almost no time Danica Vučenić had turned the serial "One-on-one" into a cult show that raised many questions about our times and had become a public authority. "She has been awarded many times for her work on that project... Danica Vučenić has greatly contributed to *RTV* reputation and ratings," quotes the release

196 *Ibid.*

197 *Ibid.*

198 *Danas*, March 19, 2015.

adding that the Collegium regrets the end of their cooperation but hoped that she had left journalism only temporarily and would return to it.¹⁹⁹

Media and the legacy of the 1990 wars

Facing the past and the mainstream interpretation of the 1990 war, their causes and consequences, probably best illustrate Serbia's potential for making a clear break with the nationalistic past and strive for regional normalization. Years-long monitoring of the subject matter in the media indicates that no progress has been made since 2000 regardless of the changes in power structures. At the media landscape Serbia's responsibility for the wars and war crimes committed in post-Yugoslav countries are virtually invisible. Marginalization or exclusion of any story whatsoever about Serbia's responsibility and problems deriving from it also mark war interpretation in the media.

The 2014 report of the Humanitarian Law Fund²⁰⁰ /FHP/ concludes that characteristic for the political discourse about war crime trials before domestic courts are two lines of reasoning: nationalistic that perpetuates Milošević's theses about equal responsibility of all parties, a civil war and undeniable Serb victimhood; and, patriotic that introduces the narrative about punishability of all crimes, victims from other ethnic communities and European values. "In their public addresses party officials and those from other institutions such as the Prosecution, Ministry of Justice and even the War Crimes Court have been avoiding to openly question the basics of the nationalistic discourse thus naturalizing its premises and presenting them as something obvious and unquestionable, while establishing nationalism as a predominant cognitive matrix of the society," quotes the report.

Its author Katarina Ristić concludes, "Being by far more open to processing war crimes the new patriotism nevertheless adopts basic theses of the belligerently nationalistic narrative such as the theses about a civil war, equal responsibility of all parties and historical victimhood of the

199 *Blic*, March 18, 2015.

200 Report is available at <http://www.hlc-rdc.org/?p=27668>.

Serb nation.” The report also warns of “the nationalistic rhetoric resumed after the change of the regime in 2012 and insistence of the issue of illicit trade in human organs that has again placed Serb victims and Serb victimhood in the focus of public attention.”

The FHP report on political and institutionalized discourses indicates that war crime trials before domestic courts have contributed to a changed attitude toward the past and in a way crossed the red line when it comes to the crimes of the 1990s. On the other hand, marginalization of the trials of political elites, citizens’ indifference to these proceedings and absence of contextualization of war crimes that would have questioned the mainstream narratives about wars have pacified and normalized war crimes and thus “successfully protected” the society from the knowledge of war atrocities.

Charges against editors and journalists for warmongering pressed by the Independent Journalists’ Association of Serbia /NUNS/ are now at pretrial before the Special War Crimes Courts. In tandem with the War Crimes Prosecution the Center for Transition Processes in 2011 published the book “Words and Misdeeds: War Crime Incitement or Encouragement in Serbian Media in 1001-92.” The media have been campaigning against the Prosecution ever since. One of the pillars of this campaign is the Journalists’ Association of Serbia /UNS/ and its president, editor-in-chief of the *Politika* daily Ljiljana Smajlović.²⁰¹

One of the journalists referred to in the NUNS charge and the above-mentioned book, presently the Serb Progressive Party’s MP, Milovan Drecun, raised in the parliament the question about the legality of Deputy War Crimes Prosecutor Bruno Vekarić, the book’s editor. He argued that Vekarić has been elected illegally, while placing his allegations in the context of Vekarić’s role in the pretrial of the journalists charged for warmongering.

201 In the 1990s UNS assembled journalists engaged in the war propaganda. UNS underwent just cosmetic changes after 2000. It even managed to maintain the biggest portion of the property it was allocated during the socialist era when it was the only organization of the type. The dispute over the premises between the two journalistic organizations goes on. NUNS – formed by journalists refusing to be part of the war propaganda - has been in an unequal position from the very start.

The influential *Politika* daily and majority of other media outlets as well have been relativizing these charges for warmongering. In its stories, *Politika* elaborates Drecun's allegations against the Deputy Prosecutor without any critical distance from his arguments.²⁰²

So *Politika* has been raising the questions about who paid for the book, the amounts received for its publication, fees to contributors, etc. It also carried Drecun's allegations against publication of "top-secret files" in a book – which actually contained excerpts from the stories published in the 1990s and analyzed these excerpts – and against the Prosecutor's "backroom" meetings with foreign diplomats.

At the same time the media practically ignored the threats to Vekarić accompanying the campaign against him.²⁰³ He refused an interview with *Politika* explaining, "As the investigation into the threats to my family and me is still on I have been advised not to go public for the time being." We are witnesses to a paradox: one of leading warmongers of the Milošević era has been turned into a victim, while the Deputy Prosecutor into someone who reveals state secrets, engage in malversation and complains to foreign diplomats. This is the same matrix the regime in the 1990s used to crash the opposition and non-governmental organizations.

202 "Instead of answering the question posed to him Vekarić warned Drecun that he was on the list of suspects in the "Media" case...In a brief interview with *Politika* of November 22, 2014 Vekarić avoided to answer the question about the legality of his election and to confirm whether or not Drecun was on the list of suspects. He just said he was not allowed to speak about the case in process. Many editors and journalists, including Drecun, referred to in the book and NUNS charges have been living on the edge for five years now – are they or are they not suspects of genocide and other serious war crimes." *Politika*, November 30, 2014.

203 The Deputy Prosecutor said he was getting serious threats and "creepy SMS messages." "These are monstrous threats. Up to now we have received some seventy threatening messages but never as monstrous as those...Some maniac could have easily authored them as they refer to my children, family, rape and so on. All this made me really anxious," Vekarić told the *Radio Free Europe*, November 29, 2014.

Commission investigating murders of journalists

The indictment against four former state security officials in the case of the murder of Slavko Ćuruvija (1999) was raised in March 2015, meaning that the trial may open.²⁰⁴ At an earlier stage the Prosecution had decided that Ćuruvija was murdered “for jeopardizing the regime with his contacts with opposition leaders and foreign organizations”²⁰⁵ but never dug into the role the Chief of the State Security.

Veran Matić, the chairman of the Commission for Investigating Killings of Journalist and Media Employees, said that in the case of Milan Pantić, journalist of *Vecernje Novosti*, the Commission has made the biggest progress in its investigation into operations of Jagodina-based brewery and privatization of “Novi Popovac” cement plant

As for the murder of journalist Dada Vujasinović, the Commission decided to order a forensic examination probably to be conducted by the Netherlands National Forensic Institute.

In 2014 the Commission began investigating killings of 16 RTS employees in the 1999 NATO bombardment. Dragoljub Milanović, the RTS former director, had been sentenced to 10-year imprisonment as the most responsible for these killings. Matić says that culprits should be sought both in NATO (ordering the bombardment) and among domestic officials. He confirmed that sufficient evidence has been collected indicating that Serbia’s leadership had been informed in advance about the station’s bombardment.

The General Staff and the Ministry of Defense have been denying to provide documentation that might reveal that RTS technicians had been sacrificed on purpose, while the Prosecution has been denying to consider the evidence of manslaughter submitted to it, says Žanka Stojanović on behalf of the families of the killed.²⁰⁶ Public figures and jour-

204 The indictment is raised against head of the state security department, Radomir Marković, head of the Belgrade state security center, Milan Radonjić, main intelligence inspector, Ratko Romić, and security officer Miroslav Kurak.

205 *Danas*, April 1, 2015.

206 An open letter by Žanka Stojanović, *Peščanik.net*, January 23, 2015.

nalists (including Ljiljana Smajlović, Slobodan Reljić and Nebojša Krstić) have compared the terrorist attack at Charlie Hebdo newsroom with the RTS bombardment. Families of the killed RTS employees were enraged with the comparison.²⁰⁷ “Milošević’s bigwigs, including his generals, had known for days in advance about the plan for bombardment and sacrificed all those people with a grotesque idea of presenting them as victims of a terrorist attack, while spreading terror in Kosovo at the same time,” said Žanka Stojanović.²⁰⁸

Journalists’ safety

For six year now Brankica Stanković, the author of the *Insider* series of investigative journalism, who has raised many a delicate social issue, has been under police protection round the clock. In March 2015 her latest reportage “Reporter” on corruption in sports clubs was taken off air after the first episode. TVB92 and Brankica Stanković agreed to postpone broadcasting it until further notice.

“Safety of its journalists being its biggest concern TVB92 takes that at this point the only rational solution is to postpone the series so as to at least protect in a way reporters for the Insider show...Unfortunately, we have realized that our society is not mature enough to properly face up the topics this newsrooms has been dealing with for years. Aware that our decision will be interpreted in many ways we want to stress out that the Insider newsroom will remain within B92 and the editorial board of the broadcaster they are working for will continue supporting them,” quotes a B92 release.

NUNS released that Brankica Stanković had been a target of a chilling campaign for days while member of sports clubs management boards and football fans had been openly threatening journalists. “The state did not take adequate measures against such violation of media freedoms and journalists’ safety nor did governmental officials manifested in any

207 Domestic reactions were prompted by an article by Noam Chomsky CNN aired on January 20, 2015.

208 *Peščanik.net*, January 23, 2015.

way that threats from sports clubs managements and fan clubs bothered them,” says the release.²⁰⁹

“Our colleagues from B92 have investigated corruption in sports clubs people have been speaking of in muffled tones for decades. The fact that the show is postponed under pressure and threats is a matter of deep concern as it reveals that the government and the public alike are pulling out when faced with people whose involvement in corruption is under investigation,” adds the release.

UNS calls upon the Ministry of the Interior to tell the public the reasons why journalist and editor Brankica Stanković has been protected by the police for six years. Namely, TVB92, prompted by what Nebojša Čović, member of the “Red Star” football club said in a talk show at TV Pink, questioned the rationale of the 24-hour police protection considering “the decision on the protection being made on the ground of risk assessment.”²¹⁰

Reporter for the FoNet News Agency Davor Pašalić was badly beaten up on his doorstep on July 3, 2014. Three youngsters demanded money from him and when he turned them down they assaulted him brutally and called him an Ustashi. “I wouldn’t say there was any specific motive for the assault but wonder nevertheless how come they knew I was a Croat,” said Pašalić after the incident.²¹¹

Judging by Police Minister Nebojša Stefanović’ statements about the incident the investigation into the case is hardly a serious one. Namely, the Minister told a press conference that he regretted that Davor Pašalić recognized not a single out of ten persons lined up for identification although identification of the assaulter was the police’s priority.²¹² However, as it turned out journalist Pašalić had never been called in to police station for identification. Having learned about the Minister’s statement,

209 March 9, 2015.

210 RTVB92, *Beta*, March 9, 2015.

211 *Danas*, July 4, 2014.

212 “All I can say is that the police has lined up more than ten persons for Mr. Pašalić to identify, which he failed to do. I believe we have provided sufficient information about the case and I will surely keep you posted but only once the case is closed,” said Stefanović. *Beta*, February 19, 2015.

Pašalić asked the police to state in writing whether he had been invited to identify his assaulters. What he got in writing quoted that he had never “recognized persons who allegedly attacked him.”

No person who has attacked any journalist has been identified so far including the attempted murder of Dejan Anastasijević, journalist for the *Vreme* weekly and now correspondent from Brussels, in 2007 or beating of Miloš Đorilijevski of the Beta News Agency covering the Serb Radical Party’s protest against the arrest of Radovan Karadžić in July 2008. During the protest several policemen attacked a group of reporters just standing by and duly wearing their press badges. Đorilijevski was repeatedly hit with truncheon on his head, face and body. On his way to Emergency Center he ran into another police cordon: a policeman stepped out and kicked him only to be joined by other officers. The badly beaten journalist has never been informed about possible disciplinary proceedings against police officers who had beaten him black and blue.

Online media

Violations of internet freedom referred to in the 2013 report continued into the second half of 2014.²¹³ According to the Share Foundation challenges the media and citizens have to cope with in the online sphere are bigger and bigger.

The number of Serbia’s local online media and their influence on communities are growing, quotes the Share Foundation. On the other hand, online freedoms are more and more restricted by local self-governments. Online media and their journalists are continually under pressure for the information and views publicized online. This pressure on them takes various forms: insults, threat and charges as of recently.²¹⁴ The targets are mostly individual bloggers. They are not only being threatened and insulted but also victims to identity thefts, denied access to social networks and threatened with criminal charges for staging protests via Twitter.²¹⁵

213 Available at www.helsinki.org.rs.

214 <http://sharedefense.org/>; December 2014.

215 <http://sharedefense.org/>.

According to the Share Foundation, six serious assaults at online media and three cases of pressure on reporters were registered only in June and July 2014. In the same period online media and their journalists were five times exposed to threats in local communities. For instance, journalist for RTV Mladenovac Dragan Nikolić was taken in by the police for having published a story criticizing Belgrade City Manager Goran Vesić at his Facebook account. Websites carry critical articles about the government such as “The Other Side” portal were under attack, the same as the blog section of the Blic online edition running a story “AV Resign!” /the Premier’s initials/.²¹⁶

The authorities have not yet identified the responsible for cyber attacks at the Hour Glass / *Peščanik*/ portal and the website of the Center for Investigative Journalism /CINS/.

In 2014 the OSCE Representative for Freedom of the Media criticized the government for not providing adequate protection to journalists and media freedoms in the online sphere. So far Serbia has not passed a single regulation on the promotion and protection of human rights in the cyber space.

216 *Danas*, August 10, 2014.

Conclusion and recommendations

- Violation of media freedom gained momentum in 2014 and, as a result, public debate on major social, economic and political issues lost momentum. Adoption of the set of media laws cannot be a sole warrant of media freedoms. Only the culture of free expression can guarantee them. The freedom of expression is in the interest of the entire society rather than just of individual media outlets considering their particularistic interests.
- By international standards journalists must be allowed to freely raise questions and dig into issues of social importance. Denial of the right to information violates citizens' fundamental human rights.
- Setting up commissions to decide on public interest will be the biggest challenge of the model of media financing established under the Public Information Law. The state will be financing only media contents that serve public interest – the term the Law defines loosely. Serbia's civil sector should be included in the process of defining the public interest so as to contribute to development of unbiased criteria for financing.
- Self-regulatory mechanisms in the media, including the Press Council, should be empowered.
- Media privatization should be finalized in due time while the process itself should be transparent.
- Physical assaults at journalists still threaten their personal safety additionally jeopardized by non-impunity evident in all the cases so far. Verbal assaults – especially by governmental officials and persons of influence – also threaten journalists' safety and integrity, and undermine media freedoms.

IV – RUSSIA AND SERBIA

HELSINKI BULLETINS

On the Russian Chessboard

Over the past eight years Serbia has been given a major role in Russian President Vladimir Putin's strategy for the Balkans. Observers in the West have growingly focused, therefore, on Russia's economic, diplomatic, security and cultural "offensive" in the Balkans, especially in Serbia, Republika Srpska and Montenegro. Considering the fragility of Balkan states, and their problematic transition and immature political class, Moscow seems to be achieving its goals rather successfully with the helping hand from anti-Western circles.

Serbia's influential pro-Russian bloc, the one opposing the country's membership of EU and eager to see it in the Euro-Asian Union, is rather encouraged by Russia's presence in Serbia. "The Golden Fleece has never been in the West but in the East," they say.²¹⁷

By the "Putin doctrine" the Balkans has been turned into a zone of rivalry between "the Russian world" and the hostile West, the zone in which Russia promotes its interests on the one hand, and stifles the values alternative to its model of authoritarian rule on the other.²¹⁸ The Western Balkan – with Republika Srpska denying Sarajevo, Serbia denying Kosovo's independence, Macedonia thorn by Macedonian-Albanian skirmish and Montenegro with its confronting Montenegrin and Serb blocs – is pretty disposed to Russia's actions.

217 The metaphor is taken from the article "In the Search for the Golden Fleece" by a founding-father of the Third Serbia, Aleksandar Đurđević. „Serbia's systematic molding to EU has been openly promoted as a goal with no alternative, as a religion we should observe obediently and in the long run. The diplomatic precedent that favors EU – the artificial creation of political elites sharing the same interests – can easily marginalize Serbia in the long run and undermine Serb-Russian relationship built on sound foundations for centuries." Danas, July 8, 2014.

218 David Clark and Dr Andrew Foxall, "Russia's Role in the Balkans," June 2014, the Henz Jackson Society.

Russia supports Serbia's neutral position, which, as Georgy Engelgarat of the Russian Institute of Slavic Languages, "gives Serbian politicians more space to maneuver...between big powers, while maintaining their freedom."²¹⁹ Russia is powerful on the account of its energy, given that the "the mother nature will be forcing every regime to cooperate with Russia regardless of all the opposition."²²⁰

Serbia is still ambivalent about a most pressing challenge facing today's Europe: the Ukrainian crisis. In words, Serbia is committed to membership of EU while maintaining "the best possible relationship" with Russia.

The frequency of Russia-Serbia high-level meetings over the past couple of months testifies of the importance Russia attaches to Serbia. The Ukrainian crisis opened a new chapter in Russian diplomacy now trying to protect "national interests" at all costs. The fact that Serbia has obtained accession negotiations and that the entire region has been included in the West's strategy for EU and NATO membership only intensified Russia's efforts towards slowing down or undermining these processes until it settles a score with the West.

Since May 2012 Tomislav Nikolić has paid five visits to Russia. Ivica Dačić, in his capacity as the Premier, visited Moscow in the spring of 2013. The word has it that Dačić and Vučić had been in Moscow before they formed the present cabinet (April 2013) – the information has never been officially confirmed. In November 2013, for the first time after a fourteen-year break, the Russian Minister of Defense paid a visit to Belgrade. It was Sergey Shoygu. Aleksandar Miler, director general of "Gaspromnjet," attended the South Stream ceremony in November 2013. In early 2014 President of Duma Sergey Narishkin paid a visit to Serbia. Growingly frequent are cultural exchanges and scholarly conferences, including the launch of a book by Leonid Reshetnikov, director of the Moscow Institute of Strategic Research and adviser to Kremlin, and a conference on "the orange revolution" in Banjaluka.

219 Geopolitika, July, 2014.

220 Ibid.

To all appearances, Russians provide financial support to some right-wing non-governmental organizations and, probably, certain media outlets. It is common knowledge that Russia has been financing some right-wing organizations and parties in West Europe; analogically, it does the same in Serbia. There are signals that Moscow will enter Serbia's media market: allegedly, Russian companies ("Gaspromnjet") plan to buy a television station. The fact that Željko Mitrović, owner and editor-in-chief of TV Pink, accompanied Premier Vučić during his visit to Moscow plays into the hands of such calculation.

In Serbia, Russia relies on its strong alliance with Serb Progressive Party. Alexander Konuzin, former ambassador to Serbia, actively participated in the party's election campaign in 2012. President Nikolić is known for his love of Russia. Since elected the President he has been meeting with Vladimir Putin quite often. Referring to Serbia's relations with Moscow, Nikolić said, "Serbia is grateful to the Russian Federation for Russia's stance towards Kosovo and Metohija and its commitment to the international law."²²¹

In its campaign in the Balkans Russia posits that EU is disunited and unable to fully articulate its interests in the domains of foreign policy and energy. Hence Russia's relatively easy "deals" with EU member-states. Austria is the latest example.

The South Stream: an irresistible challenge

The South Stream is the topic number one in Serbia-Russia relationship. For Serbian politicians, it is practically the only "successful" deal we shall all profit on. The South Stream is Russia's biggest project in the region. On the other hand, everything about it is still uncertain and subject to media speculation.

Before visiting Moscow for the first time as the Premier, Vučić had launched a genuine diplomatic offensive: he visited Austria, Germany and France, and met with Hungarian Premier Viktor Orban in Belgrade. His busy schedule also included a meeting with Sergey Lavrov, Russian foreign

221 Ibid.

minister. Only a day after his visit to Moscow, he met with the Bundestag delegation led by Andreas Schockenhof, and a few days later with Victoria Nuland, the US assistant secretary of state.

Construction of the South Stream pipeline through Serbia was high on the agenda of Vučić's talks in Moscow.

Sanctions imposed on Russia for the Ukrainian crisis undermined this ambitious project. Namely, EU Energy Council has not yet sanctioned its implementation, and the first country to cancel it on its territory was Bulgaria.

Before saying "yes" to Moscow for the South Stream, Vučić had been to Paris and Berlin. Though official reports on these visit said nothing about discussion of the South Stream, the fact remains that both France and Germany would not cancel their business deals with Moscow.

Last but not least, Hungarian Premier Victor Orban said in Belgrade (July 1) that his country would continue construction works on the South Stream, adding, "If someone wants to prevent the project, he is free to propose an alternative to it."²²²

The South Stream is vital to Serbia: besides unimpeded flow of energy Serbia counts on revival of its construction industry and new jobs. In the present economic situation Serbia itself cannot finance such a huge enterprise (according to some information, Bulgaria has cancelled the project for the lack of financial resources).

The planned South Stream section in Serbia would be financed from Russia's so-called subordinate loan (the pay off would start once the pipeline is functional, the installments paid from the cost of transport) with 4.2 percent rather than 8 percent interest; domestic companies would be engaged in the construction works in the amount of 300-400 million Euro, the construction itself being contracted with the Russian company "Centrogas" during Vučić-Putin meeting (the entire project is worth 3 billion Euro). According to some news stories, Russians have agreed to lower the price of gas for the Serbian market.²²³

222 Politika, July 2, 2014

223 Informer, July 8, 2014.

The fact that a Russian company is the main contractor, however, leads to some embarrassing conclusions. "Large deals are being made with foreign companies that take practically the whole profit, while domestic ones are engaged as sub-contractors and are paid by far less," says Groan Rudi, vice-president of the Construction Chamber of Serbia. Sitka Pistol ova, editor of Energy Observer, is even more critical about the deal. "There is too much mud in the whole project that everything will end up to our detriment. Instead of diversified sources and means of transportation, once again we are having Russian monopoly. I would like the Serbian government to explain why is it that we need the South Stream after all. Is it meant to make Russians wealthier or to benefit Serbia?" she says.²²⁴

Controversies follow other business arrangements as well given that no one knows for sure about the agreements reached. Some claim that Russia agreed to expand the free trade zone to cars, cheese, cigarettes, etc.,²²⁵ while others say, "Putin would never allow duty-free imports of cars and some other products."²²⁶

Aleksandar Vučić asked the Russian side to pay a higher ore tax on NIS exploitation of oil and gas in Vojvodina; judging by everything, he was denied. The majority owner of the domestic oil industry (NIS), the Russian "Gaspromnjet," has been paying only a 3-percent-tax on ore (whereas such a tax is by far higher in Russia). In her capacity as the Minister of Energy, Zorana Mihajlović has warned against such a low ore tax. Some take that she has been moved to the Ministry of Infrastructure and Construction for her overt criticism of the Russian arrangement.

There is no telling about the outcome of the negotiations on Serbia's gas debt. Some speculate that Russians will be compensated with "Petrohemija" and Pancevo Nitrogen Plant, probably the Smederevo Steel Plant as well. On the other hand, Russians are more interested in Serbia's

224 Isto.

225 Prema saznanjima Informera, dozvoliće se uvoz 10.000 „fijata 500L“ (do sada su mogli da se izvezu samo delovi), 8. jul 2014.

226 Blic, 10. jul 2014.

Energy Industry and some other similar businesses, according to reliable sources from Russia.²²⁷

Strategic arrangements between Serbia and Russia

Serbia-Russia declaration on strategic partnership covers “all the areas of cooperation, including politics, trade, economy, culture, science, technology and education.”²²⁸ It also states the two country’s cooperation and coordinated activities at international level: at international forums, and towards strengthening of the role of UN, OSCE, Council of Europe and so on. The two countries, says the declaration, will cooperate in the struggle against terrorism, and exchange information about, among other things, the initiatives and activities “within the Euro-Asian project.”²²⁹

In 2013, Ivica Dačić, the then Premier, signed seven agreements with Russia – on the half-a-billion loan from Russia, on cooperation in railroad traffic, on the development of the Serb-Russian “humanitarian center” in Nis in the period 2013-15, on mutual recognition of diplomas and scientific titles, on Serb military memorials in Russian territory and the other way round, on trade cooperation and on the exchange of statistics on tariffs between the two tariff departments.

Republika Srpska and the Russian strategy

Republika Srpska is high on the agenda of the Russian strategy for the Balkans. Its President Milorad Dodik sees cooperation with Russia as the main pillar of his political survival. If the Council of Ministers of Bosnia-Herzegovina denies supporting the construction of the South Stream pipeline in the territory of Republika Srpska, Republika Srpska will settle

227 „Za rusku stranu bi mogla biti zanimljiva kupovina Elektroprivrede Srbije i još nekih preduzeća iz energetskeg sektora“, izjavio je član ruske Akademije nauka Pavel Kandelj, Blic, 8. jul 2014.

228

http://news.kremlin.ru/ref_notes/1461, 24. May 2013.

229 Ibid.

the issue with Russia unilaterally, he said, adding that his representatives had met with the leadership of “Gasprom” in St. Petersburg.²³⁰

Russia is evidently present in Republika Srpska in the spheres of culture and politics. The conference titled “Colored Revolutions as Instruments of Geopolitical Transformation” held in Banjaluka in April 2014 under the auspices of the Fund for Strategic Culture, assembled experts from Russia, Germany, Venezuela, Ukraine, USA, Serbia, Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina and Republika Srpska. The conference was meant to picture “colored revolutions” as “particularly perfidious forms of foreign domination, implying replacement of democratically elected governments by obedient teams ready to obey all the orders from abroad unquestioningly.” The conference called the “orange revolution” a coup d’état presenting itself as “people’s revolution.” The conference was obviously convened to prevent possible riots in Republika Srpska on the wave of socially motivated demonstrations shaking Tuzla, Sarajevo and some other towns in Bosnia-Herzegovina. This is best testified by the Banjaluka declaration titled “Draft Measures for the Protection of the Republic.”

The declaration emphasizes the necessity for a special police unit of Republika Srpska to safeguard law and order, discussion panels in electronic media by the model of Vladimir Putin’s debates with TV audiences, strengthening political, economic and media ties with Russia as the only big power not after a unitary Bosnia-Herzegovina. It also refers to a law on “non-governmental” organizations in Republika Srpska, claiming that Belgrade-seated organizations such as the Helsinki Committee and the Humanitarian Law Fund were crucial in the logistics for a change of the regime.

Russia is evidently after a *status quo* in Republika Srpska – in this context it is growingly present in the public life of Serbia and Republika Srpska. It spread its influence not only through its own “institutes” in the region but also through some twenty-odd right-wing organizations, especially in Serbia.

230 <http://kontaktradio.com/2014/03/dodik-ako-bih-nece-juzni-tok-rs-i-rusija-mogu-same/>
<http://kontaktradio.com/2014/03/dodik-ako-bih-nece-juzni-tok-rs-i-rusija-mogu-same/>.

Russia would not want to see any riot in Republika Srpska. Nikita Bondarev, historian, takes that conflicts and protests in Muslim-Croat entities will escalate and, once all the conferences and manifestations the West cares for are over, Bosnia-Herzegovina will begin to disintegrate. He expects major developments in late summer or early autumn. In that case, he says, Russia is capable of forming a military unit to be deployed if it decides to stabilize the situation.²³¹

Political topics

The escalation of the Ukrainian crisis revived the interest in OSCE and its current chair. According to some sources, the new model of joint presidency by two countries (to be applied for the first time to future chairs, Switzerland and Serbia) will be so amended in 2015 as to secure Switzerland's "mentorship."

The Ukrainian crisis dominated the talks Vučić had with Medvedev and Putin. This was what Dmitry Medvedev confirmed at a joint press conference; he told the press that he had "a long and open" discussion with Vučić on the situation in Ukraine, and "on what was it that happened there, who was the one to blame and what was it to be done."²³²

Serbia's presidency of OSCE was also on the agenda. In its new capacity as of 2015 Serbia will no longer be in the position to keep its neutrality and ambivalently "support the territorial integrity of Ukraine but not impose sanctions on Russia." Though, generally speaking, OSCE is no longer as important as it used to be, a country that chairs the organization is duty-bound to monitor all the conflict-prevention activities, and to manage a crisis and post-crisis renewal.

This means that a country that chairs OSCE decides on priorities and procedures, which need not be just formal. "Constructive attitude towards lessening of tensions between Russia, Ukraine and the West are for sure on the presidency's priority list," says Nikola Jovanović of the Center for

231 Geopolitika, No. 72, March 2014.

232 Politika, July 8, 2014.

International Cooperation and Sustainable Development.²³³ This could be an opportunity for Serbia to demonstrate “the advantages and the utility of its position” and “qualitatively change the overall perception of it.”²³⁴

At the press conference in Moscow Premier Vučić avoided to directly answer the question about Serbia’s support to Russia in the matter of Ukraine during its presidency of OSCE. All he said was that he had not discussed OSCE with Putin, adding, “Russia sees Serbia as a friendly country, and Russia has in no way warned Serbia, let alone blackmailed it.”²³⁵

Military cooperation with Russia

Russia wants to prevent Montenegro’s, Bosnia’s and Serbia’s membership of NATO at any price, and, therefore, works on its military ties in the Balkans. Russia-Serbia military cooperation is a major aspect of their overall relationship. The visit of Sergey Shoygu, the Russian defense minister, in November 2013 manifested closeness of the two sides.

In Belgrade Shoygu met with Serbia’s highest officials – Premier Ivica Dačić, First Vice-Premier Aleksandar Vučić, Defense Minister Nebojša Rodić and President Tomislav Nikolić. Nikolić bestowed on him the Order of the Serbian Flag of the First Rank. “Serbia and Russia has always been on the same side, and that’s how they will be in the future,” he said on the occasion.²³⁶ Serbia pursues the course of its own, “a clear and committed one,” said the President, and on that course needs the assistance of the entire world, but its path would be thorny were it not for “such Russia as it is today.”²³⁷

Dačić and Shoygu shared the view that “the relations between the two countries are now at their best when compared with past several decades,” and that their respective ministries of defense should further strengthen cooperation in the areas of military industry, training and specialization

233 NIN, July 10, 2014.

234 Ibid.

235 Politika, July 9, 2014.

236 Blic, November 13, 2013.

237 Ibid.

of cadres, and equipment modernization. They also agreed on a joint celebration of the 70th anniversary of liberation of Belgrade in WWII. The two officials “stressed the need for a better economic cooperation” and “Russian investment in the process of privatization of Serbia’s enterprises and economic development.”²³⁸

“Serbia-Russia cooperation in the domain of defense is being developed on new foundations, and it is only a logical follow-up to the two countries’ strategic partnership,” said Minister of Defense Nebojša Rodić.²³⁹ Having signed an agreement on cooperation in the domain of defense, the two ministers said they hoped this would be followed by “another three agreements, especially a major one on military-technical cooperation.”²⁴⁰

Ljubodrag Stojadinović, military commentator, takes that the said agreement is a “political signal” in the first place. “A signal that has to do with NATO’s – and US’ – plan for an anti-missile shield against Russia’s possible threat to the countries of the Western Alliance and NATO allies,” he say, adding that the agreement above all manifests Russia’s grudge for Serbia’s possible movement towards NATO. “It is more about a political symbolism than a pact or some special status for Serbia that is far above its actual military status.”²⁴¹

Andrey Shari, the Russian correspondent for the Radio Free Europe, takes that the agreement indicates not serious military ties between Serbia and Russia. “Only if it explicitly mentions some big investment or large military projects, the document could refrain Serbia from integrating into NATO. But as things stand now this is not the case. So, Serbia has not opted yet between NATO and stronger military cooperation with Russia. And this is the reason why they signed that political document that only theoretically opens the avenues for stronger cooperation.”²⁴²

238 Ibid.

239 Politika, November 13, 2013.

240 Ibid.

241 <http://www.naslovi.net/2013-11-13/slobodna-evropa/da-li-je-srbija-u-snaznom-vojnomo-ruskom-zagrljaju/7746502>.

242 Ibid.

A press release issued after Shoygu-Vučić (first vice-premier at the time) talks quotes, “Russia supports the policy of the Serbian government and Serbia’s territorial integrity.” Serbia respects its constitution, said Vučić, and the parliamentary declaration on military neutrality. “And this stance of mine depends not on whether I articulate it in Brussels, Washington or Moscow.”²⁴³

Western perception of Russia-Serbia relations

At this point Belgrade seems to have found a “go-between” space of its own in EU’s inconsistency – or, the inconsistency of some of its member-states – on the one hand, and Moscow’s laxity, so far at least, on the other. Be it as it may, Moscow is affected by the West’s economic sanctions. It’s hard to tell for how long small countries would remain untouched by this “test of strength” of the big powers. One thing is for sure – for a limited period only. As EU MP Eduard Kukan puts it, Serbia tries to play a delicate role. “That’s like tightrope walking at 200 meters without a protective net below,” he says.²⁴⁴

No doubt that the West is at least reserved about Russian-Serbian closeness. Though Western officials do not say it overtly, experts and analyst do. For instance, Franz Lotar Altman, German expert in EU, holds that Vučić’s visit to Moscow at this point would make sense, from Brussels’s point of view, only if he had “conveyed Serbia’s EU partners’ serious concerns with Russia’s evidently active support to separatists in East Ukraine.”²⁴⁵

Or, as British expert in the Balkans James K. Lindsey puts it, Belgrade officials should find a way to convince “some skeptic EU member-states that Serbia would not be representing Russian interests in EU in the future.”²⁴⁶

243 Večernje Novosti, November 13, 2013.

244 Politika, 19. Jul 2014.

245 Danas, 11. jul 2014.

246 Danas 10. jul 2014.

During his visit to Moscow Aleksandar Vučić stressed that Serbia “aims at integrating into EU,” but also that “it would not undermine the good, the best friendly relations with Russia in the hard times.”²⁴⁷ Serbia’s ambivalence and intensive communication with Moscow only stirred diplomatic interest in it. Namely, shortly after Vučić’s visit to Moscow, several high officials from the West paid visits to Belgrade. Apart from Schopenhof and Victoria Nuland, Stevan Fule turned up all of a sudden. And then, Jose Manuel Baroso, the outgoing president of EC, paid a farewell visit to Serbia.

Diplomatic communication has been intensified also on the account of Serbia’s presidency of OSCE in 2015. Speaking of the Ukrainian crisis, OSCE would be sending its observers among other things. As things stand now, Moscow counts on a OSCE mission “at the field boundary” between pro-Russian separatists and the Ukrainian Army, while most Western countries (EU and US) take that an OSCE mission should be stationed at the Russia-Ukraine border.

Reactions to the Moscow trip

Premier Vučić’s latest visit to Moscow found an echo in Serbia’s pro-Russian media. So, the *Pecat* weekly – usually most critical of the current government and the Premier for the proclaimed course to EU – now benevolently commented on the Premier’s talks in Moscow. According to the weekly, the South Stream project “is the biggest and most important event of the past years or even past decades.” Its editor-in-chief holds that the South Stream agreement “considerably adds to Serbia’s geo-political and geo-strategic position.”²⁴⁸

The weekly is just in dilemma about which effects of the Premier’s visit to Moscow and his meetings with Putin and Medvedev are more precious – “economic or political” and it about “whether we would know how to profit on them or whether they would allow us to.”²⁴⁹

247 Politika, 8. jul 2014.

248 Pečat, July 11, 2014.

249 Ibid.

Some quite novel overtones in the media seemed rather confusing to some analysts. This particularly relates to the euphoria of Vučić's visit to Berlin and talks with Chancellor Angela Merkel. The headlines that usually glorified Russia and President Putin were replaced by neutral ones such as "What Actually Awaits Vučić in Russia?" or "Serbia, Russia and Europe Alike." Moreover, the tabloids usually devoted to Vučić without any reservation, topped by *Kurir* until recently, abandoned their routine all of a sudden. So, for instance, *Kurir* announced Vučić's Moscow tour under the headline "Putin Prepares for Vučić Two Days of Hell!" and subtitled "A Bear Hug." Its tabloid counterpart, *Informer*, ran the headline "An Ultimatum Awaits Vučić in Moscow."²⁵⁰

250 Politika, July 8, 2014.

Conclusions and recommendations

For the first time in its modern history the Balkans is under a single umbrella (EU and NATO), which opens the avenues to peace and stable development, regional cooperation and integration. Also, for the first time, the region is faced with a shared value system: the rule of law, market economy, respect for human rights, tolerance and coexistence;

The Western Balkans (with the exception of Serbia) has declaratively opted for the membership of EU and NATO; EU should, therefore, speed up the region's democratization and economic recovery. Failed transitions and stagnation are the main causes of the region's political wandering.

To harmonize the region's foreign policy EU should firstly harmonize its own. Five EU member-states should recognize Kosovo to start with. Kosovo is the "foundation" of Russia's partnership with Serbia.

Bosnia should be stabilized as soon as possible, which necessitates an innovative approach to its problem. Ethnic principle by which the "Dayton Bosnia" was shaped should be relativized.

Europe needs to develop a comprehensive strategy for energy supply to encompass the Western Balkans as well. Otherwise, unilateral arrangements with Russia cannot be prevented, the more so since some EU member-states have made such deals themselves.

Bearing in mind that Serbia's reform-oriented human resources are scarce, the same as responsible political elites, EU should manifest more solidarity with Serbia than ever before.

EU should invest more creativity in its approach to the Western Balkans; by integrating, say, some industries (energy, infrastructure, economy, etc.) into its frame; further, all social strata, rather than just political parties, should be addressed in order to win over citizens for the European option; in this context, stronger civil societies and professional media could play major roles; EU should be more appreciative of the civil society in this sense, and strengthen its potentials.

HELSINKI BULLETIN NO. 106, OCTOBER 2014.

Red Carpet for Putin

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.²⁵¹

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

251 „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.

ex-Yugoslavia; in positive sense, speaking of economy, traffic, trade, policy, military industry..."²⁵²

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 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.²⁵³

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."²⁵⁴

According to well-informed sources,²⁵⁵ 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

252 *Politika*, October 18, 2014.

253 *Politika*, October 16, 2014.

254 *Ibid.*

255 *Večernje novosti*, 15. oktobar 2014.

construction of the South Stream Pipeline; Moscow fully supports Serbia's territorial integrity and sovereignty (supports Kosovo's partition)²⁵⁶; and, Russia looks forward to 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."²⁵⁷ 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 epopee of sacrifices for the country and the nation, and for salvage of other countries

256 The Head of Russia's Office in Pristina 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 ruling elite behaves irresponsibly when it comes to national interests.

257 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.

and nations...for centuries”²⁵⁸ was not exactly music to 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 2009,²⁵⁹ 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.²⁶⁰ 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.²⁶¹ “No one in Moscow would reschedule the

258 <http://www.novosti.rs/vesti/naslovna/politika/aktuelno.289.html:515042-Nikolic-Srbija-je-bila-na-karti-svakog-osvajaca-ali-nikad-nije-vodila-osvajacke-ratove>.

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

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

261 „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 us now that he comes to mark the jubiliary anniversary of Belgrade’s liberation by the Red Army in the WWII.

May 9 parade,” said Dragan Šutanovac,²⁶² 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*²⁶³ 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.²⁶⁴ Polemicizing with his colleague, Russian Ambassador Alexander Chepurin said Ambassador Kirby had little knowledge of history²⁶⁵ 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.”²⁶⁶

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 would only do justice to the truth.²⁶⁷ 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

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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.

262 *Politika*, October 14, 2014.

263 *NIN*, October 9, 2014.

264 *Vreme*, October 9, 2014.

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

266 *Vreme*, October 9, 2014.

267 *Danas*, October 3, 2014.

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.²⁶⁸

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

268 Danas, October 16, 2014.

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.²⁶⁹ 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 ideologies by turns, attempting to adjust themselves to confusing goals of the Serb policy of the moment."²⁷⁰

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.²⁷¹

269 <http://mondo.rs/a736942/Info/Ex-Yu/Djukanovic-Mikad-slavimo-ne-zovemo-druge.html>.

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

271 *Politika*, October 18, 2014.

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.²⁷²

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.²⁷³ 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.²⁷⁴ “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.²⁷⁵

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

272 Ibid.

273 Ibid.

274 Ibid.

275 <http://pescanik.net/srbija-u-nepriostojnom-polozaju/>.

when these conditions become normal again, technical negotiations on the construction may begin,” she explained.²⁷⁶

Washington also looks askance at the South Stream, especially at “monkey business” accompanying it, as US Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland put it.²⁷⁷ 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.²⁷⁸

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). 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.²⁷⁹ 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

276 Danas, October 8, 2014.

277 Politika, October 6, 2014.

278 Ibid.

279 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.

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 with its Serbian counterparts,” he said on the occasion.²⁸⁰

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.”²⁸¹ 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

280 Blic, October 17, 2014.

281 Danas, October 14, 2014.

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 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.²⁸²

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.”²⁸³

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.”²⁸⁴ Dušan Šiđanski, 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.”²⁸⁵

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.²⁸⁶

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

282 Ibid.

283 Vreme, October 9, 2014.

284 Danas, October 8, 2014.

285 Ibid.

286 „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.

Balkans. If it turns not, “Serbia will be able no longer to sit on two chairs,” he says.²⁸⁷

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 Kocijančič, the spokeswoman for EU diplomacy.²⁸⁸

In the period to come we could expect a stronger pressure from EU to take sides, admitted President Tomislav Nikolić.²⁸⁹

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 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?²⁹⁰ and,

287 „RTV B92, October 2, 2014.

288 Politika, October 15, 2014.

289 Politika, October 16, 2014.

290 „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

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 find an echo in Western capitals. "Does it mean that while ratio tells us to pursue the European course, our heart at the left still directs us towards our pan-Slovene, Eastern Orthodox brothers in the East?" asks commentator Boško Jakšić with good reason.²⁹¹ If so, Serbia's foreign policy is halved, he concludes.²⁹²

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 geostrategic 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

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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.

291 *Politika*, October 8, 2014.

292 *Ibid.*

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.²⁹³

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."²⁹⁴

293 Politika, October 15, 2014.

294 <http://www.novosti.rs/vesti/naslovna/politika/aktuelno.289.html:515007-Vucic-Moj-otac-rusofil-plasi-se-da-ne-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.

HELSINKI BULLETIN NO. 110, DECEMBER 2014.

The South Stream: Serbia in a Cleft Stick

Russia's canceling of the South Stream project was a blow to the Vučić cabinet that had banked on it for profit. The South Stream had been interpreted as Serbia's great chance for energy leadership in the region. In early 2014 Russian Ambassador to Serbia Alexander Chepurin declared that the "new pipeline is a solution to energy resources problem for the vast region of South Europe."²⁹⁵

The project itself had been proclaimed "a business enterprise of the century." However, it has been a matter of controversy from the very beginning: while some claimed Serbia had thus sided with Russia, sold its oil industry /NIS/ for "peanuts" and jeopardized its "energy independence," the others were arguing that South Stream would ensure Serbia's energy demand in the long run by supplying it with "clean and cheap energy."²⁹⁶

Russia's decision to cancel the South Stream – now a definite one – put Serbia in a cleft stick: to opt for Russia or the European Union. This hard news was more than a disappointment to Serbia's officials: they could hardly believe their ears. By trying to convince themselves that "nothing is final yet" – that there are still chances for the project's implementation – the political elites only demonstrate their inability for recognizing realistically today's international relations, especially those along Moscow-Brussels-Washington line.

In parallel with growing tension between the West and Russia grew the pressure from both sides on Serbia to make its choice. The collapse of the South Stream project and the Ukrainian crisis further strengthened this pressure: patience for Serbia's "golden mean" is coming to an end. Johanna Deimel, deputy director of the German Association for the

295 <http://www.geopolitika.rs/index.php/sr/intervju/675-2013-12-29-12-24-04>.

296 <http://www.energoportal.info/>.

Southeast Europe, said that having to choose between Russia and EU Serbia had already “opted for EU” as it “priority.” In the new situation related to the gas pipeline, she said, EU promised Serbia it would not close the doors on it.²⁹⁷

The red alert following the South Stream project from its very inception has never been taken seriously in Serbia. During his October 2014 visit to Serbia Russian President Putin himself told Serbia’s leadership that construction of the pipeline was uncertain.²⁹⁸

The Russian President delivered this “very hard news” – as Premier Vučić²⁹⁹ called it – from the meeting with Turkish President Taip Erdogan in Ankara. That was when the two heads of state announced a new project – a pipeline from Russia to Turkey.

According to some analysts, the South Stream pipeline has been more of a political project than an economic one from the very start. Actually, it was only meant to erase Ukraine from the transport map: all the countries on its course – from Bulgaria through Serbia to Hungary and Austria and Italy – have received their gas supplies from Russia through pipes built in Ukraine.

Moscow accused EU for having to cancel the project. Namely, Brussels had insisted on construction standards adjusted to EU’s, something Russian investors would not accept.

297 <http://www.blic.rs/Vesti/Politika/517446/Rusija-i-Zapad-zahtevaju-da-se-Srbija-opredeli>.

298 When reporters asked him about the South Stream construction, Putin replied “It’s two for love” alluding to EU energy standards that stand in the way of Moscow’s plans; RTS, October 16, 2014.

299 This is what Premier Vučić actually said over telephone conversation with his Russian counterpart Dmitry Medvedev. Danas, December 9, 2014.

Chronology of a delusion

“We’ve waited for long – so, let’s go,” said President Nikolić with much pathos at the ceremony marking the welding of the first (and only) South Stream pipe in the village of Šajkaš last November.³⁰⁰ It seemed then that after too much postponement the realization of that major project for Serbia – planned back in 2008 – would begin at long last. In 2008 the Serbian government decided to sell NIS to the Russians at low cost counting on Russian partners’ promise that the construction of the pipeline would “compensate” the price.

The agreement – everyone is distancing himself from now, although all relevant officials in power and opposition had their fingers in it – was signed in the spring of 2008 when, on the eve of presidential elections, the then president, Boris Tadić, and the then premier, Vojislav Koštunica, paid a visit to Moscow.³⁰¹ Ivica Dačić said on several occasions since that the agreement had been signed as “marketing” for Tadić’s victory in the presidential race.³⁰²

In a parliamentary debate (September 2008) the biggest opposition caucus at the time, that of the Serb Progressive Party, gave a green light to the agreement along with the ruling Democratic Party and the Socialist Party of Serbia.

Actually, only small caucuses – the Liberal Democratic Party /LDP/ and the League of Vojvodina Social Democrats /LSV/ - have been consequently

300 The 2013 Annual Report, Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia.

301 These days the Politika daily reminded its readership of the already forgotten details of the agreement which sound absurd. The paper published the transcript of the parliamentary debate of December 2013. The then minister of urban planning, Velimir Ilić, said on the occasion, “We had presidential elections at the time, the President (Tadić) set himself to Moscow several days before us to prepare the signing, while the Premier (Koštunica) joined us, the ministers. We had not agreed on who would be the one to put his signature under the agreement. I was neutral, between the two blocs, and the government decided as one that I, being neutral, should do it. Then everything turned into a bear garden – no place was designated for Koštunica, they were moving chairs around until Premier Putin asked for an extra chair to be brought in.” Politika, December 6, 2014.

302 Helsinki Bulletin No. 105.

opposing the agreement from the very beginning. Even some officials of the then administration have been strongly criticizing the energy arrangement with Russia from time to time, the more so since this arrangement provided low profit (3 percent) on oil exploitation in Vojvodina.

Serbia the biggest loser

Serbia is the biggest loser of the failed project. It not only spent some 30 million Euros over eight years of preparations of (constantly postponed) construction works on the pipeline, but also lost the planned profit on oil transport; considerable number of workers to be engaged in the construction remained jobless, and the planned dynamism of domestic economy, including foreign investment, went up in a puff of smoke.

As the Russian side insisted on it, the “package agreement,” provides not the so-called protective clause that would have made it possible for Serbia to demand compensation. Last but not least, the concealment of the South Stream strongly affects the country’s energy security as Serbia is almost totally dependent on energy supplies from Russia (oil and gas).

The failed project’s effects on Serb-Russian relations are hard to predict. The incumbent regime that trusted the Russian side unconditionally cannot hide its disappointment. According to some analysts from the West, Serbia will now opt for Europe more resolutely and give up the policy of “sitting on two chairs.” However, Vladimir Gligorov of the Vienna Institute for International Studies, expects not the government to change its Russian policy “relatively soon” considering “the rhetoric used in its favor so far.”³⁰³ Nevertheless, news stories about and commentaries on the policy and actions taken by Russian officials have become by far more reasonable.

Predrag Simić, international law professor, says, “When Russia and the West play football we are the ball they play with.” “The West cannot compensate Serbia for the South Stream, although EU promised to help. In what way other than via Ukraine, I cannot tell.” He also holds that by

canceling the South Stream Russia withdraws from the Balkans to form “an Asian triangle” with Turkey and China.³⁰⁴

Canceling of the South Stream hit hard Premier Vučić, who had to announce that Serbia would have to reconsider its energy policy.³⁰⁵ His cabinet had banked a lot on this project and hence staged a parade in Putin’s honor. The latest developments, therefore, question other Russian promises, including that about not recognizing Kosovo’s independence.

Over telephone conversations with President Tomislav Nikolić and Hungarian Premier Victor Orban, Vladimir Putin spoke about “the prospects of energy cooperation.”³⁰⁶ Vučić discussed the issue with his counterpart Premier Medvedev. Details of these phone calls have not been revealed.

President Nikolić holds that “Russian owes nothing to Serbia for having canceled the South Stream” and that Serbia should not raise the question of compensation.³⁰⁷

Aleksandar Vučić was somewhat more critical about Putin. Domestic analysts say this also indicates that the two are at odds. When he learned that the project had been canceled Vučić said he expected to talk to Putin as soon as possible and “get an answer why was it that we have not been informed about the cancellation of the South Stream.” “I knew nothing about it although I’ve met with Putin three times this year.”³⁰⁸

Despite all, delusions about some large Russian investment in Serbia are still fueled. For instance, the *Naše Novine* daily published a front line banner announcing a two-billion-Euro investment.³⁰⁹ One can even expect more stories about Russian financial potential and interest in investing in Serbia (in agriculture, buying off the Azoth Plant in Pancevo, etc.),

304 <http://www.blic.rs/Vesti/Politika/517446/Rusija-i-Zapad-zahtevaju-da-se-Srbija-opredeli>.

305 <http://www.blic.rs/Vesti/Ekonomija/518054/Gasprom-Nek-sad-Evropa-gradi-gasovod>.

306 <http://www.blic.rs/Vesti/Politika/517454/Vucic-preneo-Medvedevu-Odluka-Rusije-teska-vest-za-Srbiju>.

307 Danas, December 9, 2014.

308 NIN, December 11, 2014.

309 Naše Novine, December 10, 2014.

and especially about the growing exports of Fiat 110L cars – something Vladimir Putin agreed on during his 40-minute meeting with Tomislav Nikolić.

This year the Kragujevac-based Fiat Factory cut down its production. Serbian politicians hope that Putin’s “consent in principle” would turn into a real agreement. Compared with other papers and broadcasters, the *Politika* daily is much more reserved about everything. “So, there is no longer the South Stream worth billions of Euros that would engage our complete construction industry. Instead we got Putin’s consent in principle for another ‘large venture’ – a compensation for a really big business enterprise that would have ensured our energy stability.”³¹⁰

Russian arguments

The latest developments laid bare a new, important geo-political fact. The announced pipeline connecting Russia and Turkey – the Russian and the Turkish heads of state signed a memorandum on this December in Ankara – indicates something more than the two countries’ economic interest.³¹¹

“In the probably most sensitive geopolitical region of today two major players have been promoting their strategic cooperation that cannot but affect a much larger area...Russia has openly stepped in the American corral,” writes the *Politika* daily.³¹² As NATO member-state Turkey has been among America’s most reliable allies in the region. According to Dušan Spasojević, former ambassador to Turkey, the “new chapter” opened in Russia-Turkey relationship “could largely affect the constellation of powers we’ve known so far at the international arena.”³¹³

310 *Politika*, December 10, 2014.

311 After Germany Turkey is the second biggest market for ‘Gasprom.’ In 2013 the company supplied it with 26.7 billion of cubic meters of natural gas via “Blue Stream” and trans-Balkan pipelines. “Blue Stream,” a major trans-Black Sea pipeline, has carried some 16 billion of cubic meters of natural gas from Russia into Turkey since 2003.

312 *Politika*, December 9, 2014.

313 *Politika*, December 8, 2014.

Aleksey Miller, director of “Gasprom,” said that the cancellation of the South Stream project was a step towards a new model of his company’s operation at the European market, emphasizing that Ukraine would be playing a zero role in the transit to Russian oil once the underwater pipeline from Russia to Turkey was constructed. “‘Gasprom’ will be working with final consumers no longer, and EU member-states will have to buy gas at the border,” he said.³¹⁴

EU’s resoluteness certainly made a good excuse to Putin to take “vengeance” against the West. What is more probable, however, is that this costly project had to be cancelled because of Russia’s economic and financial crisis. Western sanctions imposed on it have affected the Russian economy, which also suffered from dramatically falling oil prices in 2014.³¹⁵ The ruble slid by 40 percent – and in one day only, December 1, by 9 percent.³¹⁶ The Russian Central Bank sold \$80 billion at domestic market in 2014 but failed to save the ruble.

Russian high-ranking officials tried to pour balm at Serbia’s loss by announcing other forms of cooperation. Although the energy agreement provides not compensation in the case of the project’s cancellation, Russian Ambassador Alexander Chepurin argues that “some losses can be compensated” as Russia will be trying to protect Serbia’s interests.³¹⁷

314 <http://www.blic.rs/Vesti/Ekonomija/517671/Zemlje-regiona-bez-Juznog-toka-bice-slepo-crevo-u-Evropi>.

315 „Putin meets the end of the year meant to evidence his foreign policy triumph (from the glamorous Olympic Games in Sochi to the establishment of the Euro-Asian Economic Community) trying frenzidly to inasmuch as possible compensate the economic and political damage he had suffered in the case of Ukraine by underestimating the effects of Maidan and wrongly assessing its consequences.” *Politika*, December 9, 2014.

316 TV Prva, December 4, 2014

317 *Ibid.*

Reactions from EU

“EU has nothing against the South Stream but the project must be adjusted to European standards. This applies to every country planning to operate in the territory of EU,” concluded the Brussels meeting of ministers of energy of 28 member-states. Ministers decided as one that the South Stream should be adjusted to rules set down in the third energy package prohibiting gas-distribution cross ownership. The meeting also decided that EU should immediately seek new sources of energy supply, including the construction of the Southern Gas Corridor and trans-Adriatic pipeline from Azerbaijan to Italy, via Turkey.

Considering its endeavor towards Serbia “making its mind” at long last, EU is now ready to include it into the project of interconnector pipeline with Bulgaria as a new source of gas supply. Michael Davenport, head of EU Delegation to Serbia, said EU would support all energy projects meeting international obligations undertaken by the countries involved. In the past ten years, he said, EU assisted Serbia’s energy sector with more than 500 million Euros meant to help the country modernize its electric power production and transmission.³¹⁸

German Chancellor Angela Merkel accused Moscow of trying to make the Western Balkans dependent on it politically and economically, and interfering in domestic affairs of the countries building close relations with EU.³¹⁹

Reactions at the South Stream’s collapse

Serbia’s officials were taken aback at the news from Ankara. At first they tried to sound optimistic saying that nothing was final yet. Ex-president Boris Tadić was as optimistic as Foreign Minister Ivica Dačić and Dušan Bajatović, vice-president of SPS, co-chairman of the South Stream Company and director of “Srbijagas.” In his speech in Brussels Dačić pleaded to

318 <http://www.blic.rs/Vesti/Ekonomija/518054/Gasprom-Nek-sad-Evropa-gradi-gasovod>.

319

<http://www.blic.rs/Vesti/Politika/517446/Rusija-i-Zapad-zahtevaju-da-se-Srbija-opredeli>.

Russia and EU to “reconsider their decisions on the South Stream, because the project benefits both sides.”³²⁰

Goran Knežević, vice-president of the Serb Progressive Party and member of the NIS Management Board, said the chances for continuation of the South Stream project were fifty-fifty.³²¹ Ex-president Boris Tadić – the incumbent regime hold most responsible for signing such a detrimental agreement with Russia – also said he believed “this was not the end of the South Stream.”³²²

Those more skeptical sought a crumb of comfort in the possibility for obtaining compensation from Russia. So Igor Mirović argued that Serbia could demand compensation from the Russian Federation.³²³ The opposition LDP thinks along the same lines.

To all appearances, all this is just a waste of breath: the Russian would acknowledge no compensation. “All damaged parties should turn to the European Union for compensation,” said Ambassador Chepurin cynically. Who is to blame for the “package arrangement” with Russia is the hot topic of Serbia’s political arena.

According to experts, countries of the Southeast Europe will now be just an “appendix” at Europe energy map; and, in the case of the construction of the pipeline from Russia to Turkey, the countries in the region would have to build pipelines of their own to connect with the new gas corridor. Instead of the South Stream, argue expert circles, these countries will have to pay more for gas supplied all the way from Turkey.³²⁴

320 Danas, 3. decembar 2014.

321 Danas, 5 decembar 2014.

322 Danas, 3. decembar 2014.

323 „Rusi moraju da razumeju da je Srbija u projekat ‘Južni tok’ ušli na jedan složeniji način, kroz gasno-naftni aranžman koji traži neku vrstu kompenzacije“, izjavio je Mirović, Danas, 4. decembar 2014.

324 <http://www.blic.rs/Vesti/Ekonomija/517671/Zemlje-regiona-bez-Juznog-toka-bice-slepo-crevo-u-Evropi>.

Russia-Turkey strategic partnership

Many were taken by surprise when the big game about and around the South Stream took another course. Putin-Erdogan agreement on the Russia-Turkey pipeline almost reaching the border with Greece (to be a backbone of the south energy corridor going through Greece to Italy) can only be considered in the context of new power constellation and Russia-Turkey relations in the sensitive Euro-Asian-African triangle the two countries are traditionally interested in.

Though Putin's release on the end of the South Stream project and "a turn" towards Turkey may seem to have come out of the blue, it has been actually prepared for long and not just as a tactical challenge to Europe and US.³²⁵ "Russia has been positioning itself anew vis-à-vis EU so as to have their relationship rearranged," holds analyst Dušan Proroković.³²⁶

No need explaining at length Russia's motives for seizing Turkey or for drawing it away inasmuch as possible from its alliance with US and EU, says Dušan Spasojević, ex-ambassador to Turkey. As for Turkey, he continues, it is not only motivated by energy security. As NATO member-state and "eternal candidate" for the membership of EU, in almost all Middle East crises (from Syria and Egypt to the question of Palestine) Western allies have left Turkey in the lurch.³²⁷

The agreement increases Turkey's dependence on Russia and is not in Turkey's best interest as we have no guarantees that EU would agree to buy Russian gas from Turkey, said Necdet Pamir, director of the Committee for Energy of Turkey's biggest opposition party (Republican People's Party – CHP).³²⁸

325 „It's hard to believe that all it took for Putin and Erdogan was a three-hour meeting to fall into each other's arms about a new gas policy and corridor; they must have been planning it for long, calculating and measuring everything while leaving us in the dark." *Vreme*, December 11, 2014.

326 *Danas*, December 3, 2014.

327 *Politika*, December 8, 2014.

328 http://www.todayzaman.com/business_turkeys-gas-deals-with-russia-raise-concerns-of-dependency_365960.html

However, most media in the West see the failed South Stream project as Putin's defeat. Đorđe Vukadinović, Serbia's outstanding Euro-skeptic, shares this view. He reminds that "the Western Empire struck back" strongly with economic sanctions and falling oil prices when Putin took action in Crimea and Ukraine. On the other hand, he calls Putin-Erdogan agreement "a real small masterpiece of Putin's political tactics and a brilliant example of tables turned."³²⁹

329 Politika, December 8, 2014.

Conclusions

Serbia's political elites know little or not enough about Russia's policies. Yugoslavia's disintegration has largely to be ascribed to Milošević's assumption that Russia would step in. Not even Milošević understood that all Russia was concerned with were its own interests. Serbia's equipoise between the East and the West undermines its interests considering its NATO neighborhood.

Russia's policy mirrors the country's declining power. Its "one-dimensional" economy solely banks on energy sources. Putin is an unpredictable leader and his unpredictability is a threat to peace and stability in Europe. On the other hand, EU entered the conflict with Russian unprepared. But EU is "the side" offering Serbia and, generally, all the Balkan countries, more security and prospects for economic recovery than Russia.

It is dangerous for Serbia to expose its undecidedness in the EU-Russia conflict. Serbia will be under strong pressure while presiding OSCE – yet another arena of rivalry between the two sides. Putin's threats especially jeopardize security of the Baltic countries and Poland, and will be on OCSE agenda as such. Besides, Russia has considerably intensified its "soft power" in the countries undergoing identity crises (such as Serbia). Its "soft power" banks on criticism of neo-liberalism and "precarity."

Serbia must make strategic decisions on its future to avoid Hobson's choice. Serbia can no longer withstand pressures, considering its failed transition and the legacy of the 1990s wars.

Since it has opted for the membership of EU, Serbia must adjust its policy to EU's foreign policy. This is the most rational solution when one takes into account that the country is in dire straits. This far from excludes development of good relations with other players such as Russia, China, US, etc.

Serbia's cabinet should define its energy policy and the strategy for smooth energy supplies. This strategy should be adjusted to the entire region where all the countries are vulnerable when it comes to energy and, therefore, benefit from regional planning and arrangements.

The entire region should seek alternative sources of energy and thus lessen its dependence from Russia on the one hand, and prevent being used by Russia as "a puppet on the string" in its rivalry with the West.