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NATIONAL INTERESTS OF THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA AND ACCESSION NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE EUROPEAN UNION

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Abstract: *The Republic of Serbia has been an autonomous and independent state since 2006, created in the breakup of the former SFR Yugoslavia. In its foreign policy orientation, Serbia was originally oriented towards Euro-Atlantic integration (NATO and EU). Since 2007, Serbia has proclaimed military neutrality (NON-NATO), and has maintained its strategic commitment to EU membership.*

The European Union was formed in 1992 by 12 European countries. The EU enlargement process is determined by regulations, which are constantly changing. Serbia's accession negotiations with the EU began on January 21, 2014, and after 10 years it is difficult to determine whether they are closer to the end or the beginning.

By the regulations and established procedures for the admission of countries to the EU, additional conditions are constantly being imposed on Serbia, which make its path towards the Union uncertain. The conditions that the EU sets for Serbia are partly in contradiction with the national interests and goals of our country.

This paper analyzes the path of the Republic of Serbia towards the European Union. The goal of the paper is to determine the conditions that Serbia needs to fulfill in order to complete negotiations on admission to the EU. The basic hypothesis from which the work started is as follows: in the accession negotiations with the Republic of Serbia, the European Union sets conditions that are partly compatible, and partly contrary to the national interests of Serbia.

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INTRODUCTION

The beginning of the disintegration of the former SFR Yugoslavia (1991/1992) coincides with the formation of the European Union (EU). In the disintegration of the SFRY, which is not yet complete, six independent and autonomous states were created, which were the former Yugoslav republics. However, after the NATO aggression against the SR Yugoslavia, in 1999, the UN protectorate over the Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija was introduced on the territory of the Republic of Serbia. The provisional authorities in Kosovo and Metohija unilaterally proclaimed an independent Kosovo in 2008. The leading EU countries before its formation, primarily Germany and Great Britain, supported the disintegration of the SFRY. Also, most of the EU member states recognized independent Kosovo. Thus, out of the current 27 member states of the Union, five of them (Spain, Slovakia, Romania, Greece and Cyprus) did not recognize independent Kosovo.

The Republic of Serbia, after disassociation with Montenegro (2006), opted for membership in the Euro-Atlantic integrations (NATO and EU). However, in 2007, the National Assembly proclaimed Serbia's military neutrality (not NATO), so only European integration remained. Accession negotiations between Serbia and the EU began in 2014, but even after 10 years there is no sign of their completion.

In accordance with the above, the basic question was asked in the research: Why are the accession negotiations between Serbia and the EU taking so long?

In search of an answer to the above question, the national interests of the Republic of Serbia, on the one hand, and the EU accession process, on the other hand, were subjected to analysis.

The research primarily used EU documents (regulations) that regulate the admission of states to the Union, as well as official documents of the Republic of Serbia, which set out its national interests and goals.

The primary methods used in the research were: content analysis and complete induction. Full induction refers to the analysis of all regulations that directly and indirectly regulate Serbia's accession to the EU, as well as all European Commission reports on Serbia's progress towards the Union.

1. ADMISSION OF COUNTRIES TO THE EUROPEAN UNION

Three European integrations that were established by the Treaty of Rome in 1957 are considered the forerunners of today's EU (*The Treaty of Rome, 1957*). Those three integrations are: European Coal and Steel Community; European Atomic Energy Community

and European Economic Community. Those communities were formed by six European countries: France, West Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg and Italy. Until the formal creation of the EU (1992), six more European countries were admitted to the European Economic Community: the United Kingdom, Denmark, Ireland, Greece, Spain and Portugal. Thus, the EU was formed by 12 European countries (*Forca, Krstić, Stanković, 2023*).

Taking advantage of the situation created after the Cold War, after its formation, the EU embarks on its first enlargement under that name. Thus, in 1995, Austria, Finland and Sweden were admitted and the “EU 15” was created. For the enlargement of the EU in 1993, certain criteria were established, which due to the place of their establishment (Copenhagen) are called “Copenhagen Criteria”: 1) Stability of institutions that guarantee democracy, rule of law, respect for human rights and protection of minorities; 2) A functional market economy, as well as the ability to cope with the pressures of competition in the single market of the Union and 3) The ability to assume the rights and obligations arising from EU membership and community law; adherence to the goals of the political, economic and monetary union (*Ateljević, V., 2016:23*). Two years later, faced with the need for consistent and effective application of European regulations and standards, as well as effective coordination in meeting the criteria from Copenhagen, the EU at the summit in Madrid establishes another so-called administrative criterion (*European Council, 1995*).

After the admission of Austria, Finland and Sweden, and taking into account the disintegration processes after the Cold War, it was the turn of several groups of countries, all of which, except for Malta and Cyprus, are from the “socialist camp”. The first group consisted of the former members of the Warsaw Pact: Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria and Albania, as well as neutral Malta and Cyprus. The second group consisted of the newly formed states in the European part of the USSR, primarily the Baltic states (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania). The third group consisted of the states created on the territory of the former SFR Yugoslavia. All the mentioned countries were strategically determined for Euro-Atlantic integration, ie NATO and the EU. In this sense, except for Malta and Cyprus, all the mentioned countries that have joined the EU so far, first became NATO members.

The European Union acted in different ways when it came to the admission of countries after 1995. As many analysts note, the new reception became much more complex and primarily had a political dimension. The solution was tried in the so-called “European agreements”, which were signed with the CEE states, Romania and Bulgaria, because Malta and Cyprus signed the association agreements until 1996.

After all EU member states agreed to start accession negotiations with the CEE states, the European Council made such a decision at the meeting in Luxembourg in 1997. Thus, in 1997, negotiations began with Estonia, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovenia, and in 1999 with Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia and Malta, and “under certain conditions” with Bulgaria and Romania. Namely, the European Commission took the position that Romania and Bulgaria must make more efforts in the field of rule of law, protection of human and minority rights, and in the fight against corruption.

Agreements with eight CEE states, Malta and Cyprus were signed on April 13, 2003 in Athens. In accordance with the current regulations, referendums were held in those countries, which ended with the victory of the EU membership option. Thus, on May 1, 2004, the “bang” of EU enlargement took place, when the 10 mentioned countries were admitted, and the “EU 25” was created. Romania and Bulgaria signed the accession agreement in 2005, and were admitted to the EU on January 1, 2007. This is how “EU 27” was born.

After the “enlargement burst”, only Croatia was admitted to the EU in 2013 (“EU 28”), when “enlargement fatigue” arose. The Commissioner for Enlargement at the time, Johannes Hahn, described the resulting situation as follows: “We have already gone one step further with Croatia, and now, with the candidates, we are going an additional step further.” It is also necessary to have economic maturity. It’s a response to sprawl fatigue. Currently, the population in the EU feels that each new member represents a financial burden. In the future, it must be clear that accession brings benefits to all parties” (*Forca, 2021*).

Using Article 50 of the Treaty of Lisbon, the exit of a state from the EU took place for the first time. This was done by the United Kingdom, which voted „NO-EU“ in the 2016 referendum, and the disengagement was completed in 2020. The Union remained at 27 member states.

1.1. The case of the Western Balkans

The Western Balkans is a geopolitical coin that was launched by the EU at the end of the last century, trying to demarcate the Ural region of conflict and instability. So, first of all, under that coin, new states were created on the territory of the former SFRY, without Slovenia, plus Albania. Therefore, Croatia was originally included in the Western Balkans. After Croatia was admitted to the EU (2013), its place, according to the Union’s point of view, was occupied by the territory of Kosovo, and the acronym was given the name WB6 or WB 5+1.

The “Stabilization and Association Process” - PSP was introduced for the countries of the Western Balkans (SE/E Europe). “PSP represents an elaborated and innovated version of the so-called “regional approach” defined by the European Union after the conclusion of the Dayton/Paris Agreement (end of 1995 and beginning of 1996) towards the countries of the former Yugoslavia and Albania. These were countries that until then had not managed to conclude agreements on association (association) with the EU - “European agreements”, so they could not even be included in the negotiations for joining the Union (*Forca, Krstić, Stanković, 2023*).

The PSP ended with the conclusion of the Stabilization and Association Agreement - SAA. That agreement, in principle (example: Serbia) contained the following areas: general principles; political dialogue; regional cooperation; free movement of goods; movement of workers, establishment of companies, provision of services, capital; harmonization

and application of laws; justice and internal affairs; cooperation policies in various fields, financial cooperation; general and institutional provisions (*Lopandić, D., 2007:61*).

Discussions on the path of the Western Balkans to the EU began in Zagreb in 2000, and essentially at the summit in Thessaloniki in 2003. In the “Thessalonica Agenda” document, further steps to bring the Western Balkans closer to the Union were determined, which included:

- “European partnership” - a mechanism for monitoring and encouraging reforms in the Central Bank in the context of accepting the “acquis” of the EU, i.e. future integration into the EU,
- application of support mechanisms for the harmonization of the legal systems of the WB countries with the EU, which were previously valid for the countries of Central Europe,
- supervision and submission of reports and recommendations of the European Commission on the further direction of harmonization in the WB countries in the form of periodic (annual) reports on the situation in the WB countries,
- “political” and “economic” dialogue,
- gradual inclusion of WB countries in internal, community cooperation programs (about twenty programs, such as Copernicus, Erasmus, Socrates, NT Cooperation Framework Program and others), as well as in some specialized agencies (*Lopandić, D., 2007:41*).

In principle, additional conditions were introduced for the countries of the Western Balkans, in addition to those established by the Copenhagen Criteria and the criteria for the countries admitted in 2004, 2007 and 2013. Namely, the EU’s policy in the WB region was largely connected with issues of security, as well as political and economic stabilization after the Yugoslav conflicts, then the encouragement of “state-building” and state institutions, issues of political conditioning (cooperation with the Hague Tribunal, etc.), incentives for regional cooperation and reconciliation (*Lopandić, D., 2007:44*).

Table 1. The process of association and cooperation of the ZB

EVENT	Albania	Bosnia & Herzegovina	Macedonia	SERBIA	Montenegro
Beginning of SAA negotiations	31.1.2003.	25.11.2005.	5.4.2000.	10.10.2005	10.10.2005.
Initialed agreement	28.2.2006	4.12.2007.	24.11.2000	7.11.2007	15.3.2007
Signed agreement	12.06.2006	16.6.2008	9.4.2001	29.4.2008	15.10.2007
Ratified by					
Signatory state	9.11.2006.	26.2.2009	27.4.2001	22.9.2008	13.11.2007
EU	26.2.2009	21.4.2015	25.2.2004	19.1.2011	29.3.2010.
Came into power	1.4.2009	1.6.2015.	1.4.2004	1.9.2013.	1.5.2010

(Source: Ivana Pešić, 2024:36)

Due to numerous internal and external problems of the EU, and after the accession of Croatia, the Western Balkans “remained under the radar” of the Union when it comes to

enlargement. In this sense, new criteria are constantly being established, as well as specific conditions for the states of the region on the way to the EU. In this sense, the following are characteristic: 1) Berlin Process, 2) EU Strategy for the Western Balkans 2018 and 3) New Model for the Western Balkans 2020.

The Berlin process was created at the initiative of German Chancellor Angela Merkel in 2014, so that after the accession of Croatia, the Western Balkan countries would not lose hope on the European path. The idea was that the projects within the Berlin Process would improve the three dimensions of connection in the Western Balkans: economic, social and political. However, during the annual summits within the Berlin Process, other current issues came up, such as the migrant crisis and others, but there were no results.

In 2018, the European Commission published the Strategy for the Western Balkans - *A Credible Enlargement Perspective for and Enhanced EU Engagement with the Western Balkans* (European Commission, 2018). The strategy (Table 2) was announced as a significant advance on the region's path to the Union, it was even predicted that Montenegro and Serbia could join the EU by 2025.

Table 2. EU strategy for WB

UNIT	NAME OF UNIT	KEY STRATEGY DEFINITIONS
I	Credible enlargement perspective - credible efforts and reforms in the Western Balkans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - no country meets the admission requirements - the rule of law - competitiveness of the economy - provision of support - bilateral disputes - application of EU rules and standards - the next steps on the path of the countries of WB to the EU (illustration of the example of Montenegro and Serbia)
II	Credible perspective of enlargement - credible support of the EU	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - increased support for the rule of law - strengthening engagement in the field of security and migration - support for socio-economic development - increasing connectivity - launch of the Digital Agenda for the Western Balkans - support for reconciliation and good neighborly relations
III	Preparing the EU to welcome new members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - institutional issues - securing financial resources for successful accession - communications (strategic)
IV	Conclusions	<p>The six main initiatives that will comprise the Action Plan for the implementation of the strategy, (listed in the previous sections):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The rule of law Security and migration Socioeconomic development Transport and energy connection Digital agenda Reconciliation and good neighborly relations

(Source: Ivana Pešić, 2024:38)

However, the aforementioned strategy was abandoned very quickly, so that the European Commission already in 2020 published a New model for the region - *Enhancing*

the accession process - A credible EU perspective for the Western Balkans (European Commission, 2020). Instead of the previous 35 chapters for negotiations, the so-called clusters (Table 3), and in addition to the progress of the states, the principle of punishment, i.e. returning to previous positions, if the EU conditions are not met, was established.

Table 3.. Clusters of the new model

1. The basics	23 - Judiciary and fundamental rights 24 - Justice, freedom and security Economic criteria Functioning of democratic institutions Public administration reform 5 - Public procurement 18 - Statistics 32 - Financial control
2. Internal market	1 - Free movement of goods 2 - Freedom of movement of workers 3 - Right of establishment and freedom to provide services 4 - Free movement of capital 6 - Law of commercial companies 7 - Law on Intellectual Property 8 - Competition policy 9 - Financial services 28 - Consumer and health protection
3. Competitiveness and inclusive growth	10 - Information society and media 16 - Tax 17 - Economic and monetary policy 19 - Social policy and employment 20 - Entrepreneurial and industrial policy 25 - Science and research 26 - Education and culture 29 - Customs Union
4. Green agenda and sustainable connectivity	14 - Transport policy 15 - Energy 21 - Trans-European networks 27 - Environment and climate change
5. Resources, agriculture and cohesion	11 - Agriculture and rural development 12 - Food safety, veterinary and phytosanitary policy 13 - Fishing 22 - Regional policy and coordination of structural instruments 33 - Financial and budgetary provisions
6. External relations	30 - External relations 31 - Foreign, security and defense policy

(Forca Božidar, 2020)

All candidate countries continued their journey towards the EU in accordance with the new model. However, the Corona virus pandemic (2020-2021), as well as the beginning of the war in Ukraine (2022), as well as some other reasons, influenced the fact that the countries of the region did not significantly move towards EU membership. Namely, after Russia's aggression against Ukraine, on February 24, 2022. year, and under pressure

from the US, the EU introduced a “shortcut path” for Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova to its membership. This fact affected the resentment of the Western Balkan countries, so that certain concessions were made towards Albania, North Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Albania and North Macedonia started the long-awaited accession negotiations, and Bosnia and Herzegovina received candidate status. In this sense, the status of the countries of the Western Balkans on the way to the Union is shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Status of countries on the way to the EU

COUNTRY	STATUS
Albania	Open negotiations in 2022
Bosnia & Herzegovina	Candidate from 2023
North Macedonia	Open negotiations in 2022
SERBIA	Negotiations from 2014
Montenegro	Negotiations from 2012

(Source: Ivana Pešić, 2024:40)

Due to the fact that the Republic of Serbia does not recognize the independence of Kosovo, the previous table does not show data for Kosovo and Metohija (or Kosovo, as the West calls it). However, the fact is that the EU is conducting negotiations with Kosovo on an equal footing with other countries. Thus, Kosovo and the EU signed the Stabilization and Association Agreement in 2016, and in 2023, Kosovo received visa liberalization.

2. SERBIA ON THE WAY TO THE EUROPEAN UNION

The Republic of Serbia has been an independent and independent state since 2006, after the separation from Montenegro. In 2006, the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia was adopted, and Article 1 states: “The Republic of Serbia is a state of the Serbian people and all citizens who live in it, based on the rule of law and social justice, the principles of civil democracy, human and minority rights and freedoms and belonging to European principles and values”. (*Ustav Republike Srbije, 2006: Član 1*).

In foreign policy orientation, Serbia was oriented towards Euro-Atlantic integrations, that is, towards NATO and the EU. However, in 2007, the National Assembly adopted the Resolution, in which point 6 proclaims military neutrality, or non-NATO. Thus, since 2007, Serbia has been strategically committed to EU membership.

Although the activities of EU membership negotiations began during the time of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro, their intensity increased after Serbia became an independent and independent state. Key activities on Serbia’s path to the EU are shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Serbia on the way to the EU

	ACTIVITY	DATE
1.	The “Framework Agreement” was signed with the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia	November 2000
2.	The Federal Republic of Yugoslavia included in the Stabilization and Association process	November 2000
3.	The EU has decided that Serbia and Montenegro will negotiate separately only in the trade area, while the DZ SCG will remain united in the political area.	December 2004
4.	After the dissolution of the SC SMN (2006), the Stabilization and Association Agreement with the Republic of Serbia was initiated	November 2007
5.	The Stabilization and Association Agreement with the Republic of Serbia was signed	April 2008
6.	Visa liberalization has been introduced for all countries of the Western Balkans	November 2009
7.	The Republic of Serbia submitted an application for EU membership	29. December 2009
8.	The Stabilization and Association Agreement with the Republic of Serbia entered into force	1. September 2013
9.	Accession negotiations between Serbia and the EU have begun	21. January 2014
10.	First two chapters open (32 and 35)	14. December 2015
11.	Open Chapters 23 and 24 (crucial in negotiations)	18. June 2016
12.	Chapters 5 and 25 open	13. December 2016
13.	Chapters 20 and 26 open	27. February 2017
14.	Chapters 7 and 9 open	20. June 2017
15.	Chapters 6 and 30 open	11. December 2017
16.	Chapters 13 and 33 open	25. June 2018
17.	Chapters 17 and 18 open	10. December 2018
18.	Chapters 5 and 25 open	26. June 2019
19.	Chapters 4 open	10. December 2019
20.	35 negotiation chapters replaced by 6 clusters (New model). Although not conditioned to it, Serbia agreed to the New Model of Accession Negotiation	February 2020
21.	CLUSTER 1 is open	22. June 2021
22.	CLUSTER 4 is open	14. December 2021

(Source: Ivana Pešić, 2024:42)

Therefore, the negotiations between Serbia and the EU practically stopped in 2021. Therefore, it is an opportunity to write about Serbia as a “special case” among the Western Balkan countries.

2.1. Serbia as a special case

Although the EU and Western countries treat the region of the Western Balkans as “special”, i.e. neuralgic, Serbia is a case in itself in that area. We will give a little more information about that position of Serbia, without going too far into history.

At the beginning of the disintegration of the SFR Yugoslavia (1991), Germany and Great Britain, as members of the EC, because the EU had not yet been formed, supported

the secession of Slovenia and Croatia and were the first countries to recognize them as independent states. The formed EU (1992) continued to support the disintegration of the SFRY, but fell under the influence of the USA and NATO.

The Dayton Peace Agreement of 1995, concluded in the American federal state of Ohio, marked the end of the war, primarily in Bosnia and Herzegovina, but also in Croatia. However, the breakup of the SFR Yugoslavia was not over. Riots and armed rebellion in Kosovo and Metohija followed. With the intention of punishing Serbia for all the processes since 1991, the USA and NATO, under the pretext of preventing a humanitarian disaster, on March 24, 1999, carried out an aggression against FR Yugoslavia. It is the first time in history that NATO intervenes outside the North Atlantic area, without the mandate of the UN Security Council, contrary to the provisions of Article 5 of the Treaty on the Formation of the Alliance, but also contrary to the constitutions of the member states. (*Forca, 2021*).

Exactly 13 of the Alliance's 19 members took part in NATO's aggression against FR Yugoslavia. The following did not participate in the aggression: 1) Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary, which were admitted to NATO two weeks before the aggression, 2) Luxembourg, because it does not have an army and air defense, 3) Iceland, because it does not have its own armed forces and 4) Greece, for political reasons. Of the 13 NATO members that attacked FR Yugoslavia, nine of them were also EU members.

After the NATO aggression on the FRY, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution no. 1244, by which the UN mission - UNMIK was established in Kosovo and the coalition multinational forces - KFOR were deployed. In addition to the UN mission, Western countries, led by the USA and leading EU countries, openly supported Kosovo's move towards an independent state. Thus, in 2008, the temporary authorities in Kosovo and Metohija proclaimed independent Kosovo. That independence was recognized by a large number of countries in the world, including 22 EU member states. Independent Kosovo was not recognized by: Spain, Slovakia, Romania, Greece and Cyprus.

Logically, Serbia did not recognize independent Kosovo and through the UN General Assembly sent a question to the International Court of Justice in The Hague: "Is the decision of the temporary authorities in Kosovo to proclaim independence against international law?" In 2010, the International Court of Justice made a negative decision, meaning that the act of the temporary authorities in Kosovo and Metohija is not against international law (*Forca, 2021*). By the resolution of the General Assembly of the UN, the issue of Kosovo and Metohija was transferred to the competence of the EU, which is the "second defeat" of Serbian politics at that time (*Ibid*).

2.2. Serbia's national interests and the path to the EU

Since 2012, there has been a change of government in Serbia in elections. The victory was won by the Serbian Progressive Party and its coalition partners. In this sense, the negotiations between Belgrade and Pristina were initiated in Brussels, under the monitoring of the EU, and in 2014, Serbia started accession negotiations. The period of 10

years is particularly significant in relation to the comparison of the national interests of the Republic of Serbia and the negotiation process with the EU.

For the first time in official documents, Serbia defined national security and national interests in the 2019 National Security Strategy. National security is defined as follows: “The national security of the Republic of Serbia is the objective state of protection of its national values and interests from all forms of threats, and the subjective sense of security of the citizens of the Republic of Serbia” (*Strategija nacionalne bezbednosti, 2019:1*). Therefore, the focus of national security is national values, interests and goals. The relationship to national values, interests and goals was also defined for the first time in the mentioned strategy from 2019 (Table 6).

Table 6. National values, interests and goals of the Republic of Serbia

NATIONAL VALUES	NACIONAL INTERESTS	GOALS
freedom, independence, peace, security, democracy, rule of law, social justice, human and minority rights and freedoms, equality and equality of citizens, tolerance, transparency, solidarity, patriotism and a healthy environment	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Preservation of sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity; 2. Preservation of internal stability and security; 3. Preserving the existence and protection of the Serbian people wherever they live, as well as national minorities and their cultural, religious and historical identity; 4. Preservation of peace and stability in the region and the world; 5. European integration and membership in the European Union; 6. Economic development and overall prosperity i 7. Preservation of the environment and resources of the Republic of Serbia. 	33 goals, that is, each national interest is operationalized into 3 to 6 goals

(Source: Forca Božidar, 2023)

The path of the Republic of Serbia towards the European Union is partly in opposition to established national interests, and partly compatible with them. We will prove this through: 1) The negotiations between Belgrade and Pristina and 2) The European Commission’s report on Serbia’s progress towards the EU.

2.2.1. Negotiations between Belgrade and Pristina

Negotiations between Belgrade and Pristina under EU monitoring have been taking place since 2011. In those negotiations, certain agreements were signed or verbally adopted, which should contribute to a legally binding agreement on the normalization of relations. At the same time, it remained unclear when it appears and what the provision on “legally binding agreement on the normalization of relations” means. According to

some sources, that provision was established by German Chancellor Angela Merkel back in 2012 (Pešić, I., 2024:46).

What “truly binding agreement” means is first glimpsed in the Agreement on the First Principles of Normalization of Relations”, signed in Brussels in 2013, known as the “Brussels Agreement” (Vlada Srbije, 2013). That agreement consists of 15 points. The first 6 points of the Brussels Agreement refer to the formation of the Union of Serbian Municipalities (USM) in Kosovo, while the other points refer to the reform of the police, the judicial system and elections, as well as energy and telecommunications. Also, and what caused the biggest controversy in the domestic public of Serbia, is the clause (item 14) that the “parties” will not block or encourage others to block the other party’s progress on its way to the EU. Namely, the word “side” in part of the Serbian public was interpreted in such a way that it refers to two countries, i.e. that Serbia, by signing the Brussels Agreement, practically recognized the independence of Kosovo (Pešić, I., 2024:45).

The second signed agreement is the Agreement on the Community of Serbian Municipalities, signed in Brussels in 2015. In this agreement, the character of the future USM is specified in 22 points. There were very different opinions and attitudes about the 2015 Agreement on the USM. While part of the public in Serbia expressed satisfaction and even euphoria (“we won with 5:0”) with what was achieved, Albanian experts from Kosovo considered that such an agreement was impossible, because there is no such provision in the Constitution of Kosovo, i.e. that it establishes “third level of government” (between republican and local). Therefore, the key problem was the question of the jurisdiction of the USM, which Albanian politicians in Kosovo said could have the level of a “non-governmental organization” and would not allow the “creation of the Republika Srpska” in Kosovo. (Pešić, I., 2024: 47).

In the period of very unsuccessful negotiations regarding the normalization of relations between Belgrade and Pristina, until 2022, a German-French “paper” appears “suddenly”, which after some time becomes the official EU proposal for the normalization of relations between Belgrade and Pristina. The fact is that this proposal received strong support from the USA, which may also indicate where it (really) came from.

This agreement refers to the “negotiating parties”, which many analysts refer to as the negotiating states. Particularly indicative for Serbian analysts is Article 4 of the Agreement, which explicitly states (Pešić, I., 2024):

Article 4

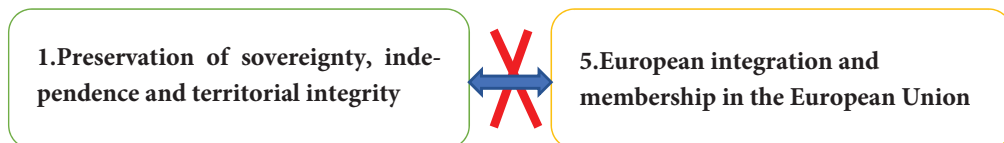
„The parties will proceed on the assumption that neither can represent the other in the international sphere, nor act on its behalf.

Serbia will not oppose Kosovo’s membership in any international organization“.

The High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep Borel, publicly pointed out that the negotiators (Vučić and Kurti) agreed on all the provisions of the Agreement and that it is being implemented. The President of Serbia Vučić himself

has repeatedly emphasized that strong pressure is being exerted on Serbia to recognize an independent Kosovo. In addition, President Vučić has repeatedly emphasized that Serbia will never recognize Kosovo's independence or consent to its membership in the UN. However, Western politicians claim that Serbia is not asked to recognize Kosovo *de iure*, but *de facto*.

If we now compare the stated national interests of the Republic of Serbia and the EU accession process, we see that the two interests are in complete disproportion:



2.1.2. Reports of the European Commission on Serbia's progress

In the previous text, we stated that every year the European Commission prepares a document called the "Progress Report", which refers to every country in the Western Balkans (including Kosovo). Although those reports have been compiled since 2005, in this paper they are taken from 2019. The reason for this is the fact that Serbia only established its national interests in 2019. On the other hand, if we look at the clusters and negotiation chapters in the accession negotiations, on the one hand, and the national interests of Serbia, on the other hand, then we can see a direct match in the following areas: 1) Rule of law, rights of national minorities; 2) Foreign policy and security; 3) Economy and 4) Environment.

The European Commission's assessment of Serbia's progress in the reports from 2019 to 2023 is given in the following text.

1) The rule of law and the rights of national minorities

In the indicated period, the position of the EC is that Serbia has a **certain level of preparedness** and that it has **limited progress**, which in 2020 is characterized as very limited. Key activities that the EU requires Serbia to do: to adopt a Strategy for the fight against corruption, which has not been in place for many years; to reduce the influence of politics on the judiciary; to promote media freedom; to start the implementation of the strategy for the fight against discrimination and gender equality; Serbia must comply with the "visa white and black list of Šegen" (*EU in Serbia, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023*).

2) Foreign policy and security

In the indicated period, the position of the EC is that Serbia was certainly prepared for 2019, 2020 and 2021 with **limited progress**, while in 2022 it **regressed**, and in 2023 there **was no progress**. The degree of compliance with the EU was 53 to 64%. The key reason for Serbia's decline and stagnation is the fact that our country did not impose

sanctions on Russia after the start of the war in Ukraine in 2022. The key requirement for the Republic of Serbia is to comply with the EU's foreign and security policy and to impose sanctions on Russia. (*EU in Serbia, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023*).

3) Economy

Serbia is at a good level of preparedness and has achieved some progress in developing a functional market economy. After a strong recovery in 2021 from the drop caused by covid-19, the Serbian economy slowed down significantly in 2022 under the influence of the economic consequences of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, especially in terms of rising inflation through rising energy and food prices. Consumer price inflation rose in 2022 and continued to rise in early 2023, prompting the central bank to steadily tighten its policy. Progress has also been made in adopting new fiscal rules. The stability of the banking sector has been preserved, and credit growth has slowed significantly. High inflation helped to improve the budget balance in 2022, despite significant capital transfers to state-owned energy companies and further ad hoc support measures. The main structural reforms of public administration and management of state-owned enterprises continued to progress slowly. The state retains a strong role in the economy; the private sector is underdeveloped and constrained by weaknesses in the rule of law, especially corruption and inefficiency of the judiciary, and the implementation of the rules of fair market competition. (*EU in Serbia, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023*).

4) Environment

This chapter in the negotiations between the EU and the Republic of Serbia, and according to the reports of the European Commission, was generally evaluated as: **a certain (certain) level of preparedness and limited progress**. It is a chapter whose implementation requires extremely large financial resources, which Serbia does not have, and EU donations and investments are limited. In this sense, Serbia is required to: implement the Paris Agreement on climate change; invest more administration and finance in this area; engages more clearly and firmly in the green transition project; it works more to remove wilder landfills. (*EU in Serbia, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023*).

Therefore, according to EC reports, certain activities are required from Serbia that would improve the situation in the domain of rights and rights of national minorities, the economy and the environment. Those positions of the EC are completely in line with the part of the national interests of the Republic of Serbia, established in the National Security Strategy, 2019.

However, in addition to the above-mentioned condition for Serbia to recognize an independent Kosovo, EC reports also state a request for Serbia to impose sanctions on Russia. Serbia opposes the introduction of sanctions against Russia, because that country, along with China and a large number of other countries, did not recognize the independence of Kosovo. Russia is a permanent member of the UN Security Council, and without its consent, Kosovo cannot become a member of that organization. In this sense, Russia protects the national interests of the Republic of Serbia.

CONSLUSION

The disintegration of the former SFR Yugoslavia is part of the disintegration and integration processes at the end of the Cold War. The key disintegration processes, apart from the dissolution of the SFRY, were the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact and the dissolution of the USSR. On the other hand, the key integration processes are the unification of Germany, the formation of the European Union and the survival and expansion of NATO.

The Republic of Serbia went through a difficult path in the disintegration of the SFRY, which did not end exactly on its territory. After the NATO aggression against the FRY in 1999, a UN protectorate was introduced on part of the territory of the Republic of Serbia - Kosovo and Metohija. In 2008, the temporary authorities in Kosovo and Metohija proclaimed independent Kosovo. Western countries led by the USA and the majority of EU member states have recognized independent Kosovo and are doing everything to make Serbia do the same. The EU has a special role in this, which monitors the negotiations between Belgrade and Pristina on the normalization of relations and puts pressure on Serbia to recognize an independent Kosovo.

The Republic of Serbia is strategically oriented towards membership in the EU, with which it started accession negotiations in 2014. In 2019, the Republic of Serbia identified seven national interests, including European integration and EU membership. Considering the behavior of the European Union towards the Republic of Serbia, it is evident that membership in the Union is in direct opposition to the first established national interest - the protection of sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity. On the other hand, the conditions imposed by the EU on Serbia in the accession negotiations, especially in the domain of the rule of law, rights of national minorities, economy and environmental protection, are in accordance with established national interests.

In accordance with the above, the research hypothesis was proven. Whether Serbia will change its national interests, or whether the EU will change its attitude towards Kosovo, remains to be seen.

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