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Dimensions of Europeanisation: impact of Serbo-Russian relations on the course of the EU integration of Serbia

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Abstract

This paper analyses fluid dimension of Europeanisation and examines how relations between Serbia and Russia impacted the course of the EU integration of Serbia. Empirical analysis is based not only on an extensive desk but also 7 interviews with policy experts and institutional representatives conducted during fieldwork in Belgrade and Brussels. The paper addresses constructivist perspective on Serbo-Russian mythologised and instrumentalised friendship used for political purposes and relations with the EU. At the same time, it takes into consideration the geopolitical context and consequences of the war in Ukraine for Serbian foreign policy. The text examines to what extent Russia has been treated as a condition in the Serbian EU integration framework and concentrates on EU's sanctions against Russia, alignment with EU's foreign policy and pressure towards Serbia to impose sanctions targeting Russia.

Key words: sanctions pressuring, Serbia, Russia, EU, Europeanisation, EU integration, CFSP

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Introduction

This article aims to investigate the process of the EU integration of Serbia analysed through the past and present of relations between Serbia and Russia. The main objective of this text is to evaluate to what extent the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) of the EU is prone to a fluid geopolitical context, which consequently affects the dynamics of the EU integration and enlargement. Seen from the empirical perspective, this article attempts to explain the radical change when it comes to the perception of Russia as a factor defining the EU accession conditionality formulated by the EU towards Serbia. To demonstrate this "radical" change one can use a simple juxtaposition of the European Commission's reports on Serbia. While the 2021 Report on Serbia mentions Russia for 12 times for rather informative purposes presenting trade statistics or characteristics of Serbian foreign policy (European Commission 2021), the 2022 Report addresses Russia for 57 times, usually as a condition, for instance, to reduce energy dependence or to comply with sanctions against Russia (European Commission 2022).

Knowing that relations between Serbia and Russia represent a complex construct of instrumentalised and mythologised identities, this text will analyse mutual political motivations for the Serbo-Russian partnership while considering the relations of Belgrade and Moscow with the EU. For the theoretical component of this analysis, the concept of Europeanisation will be examined, particularly with focus on contextual fluidity. The empirical analysis is based not only on the extensive desk research of available publications and reports but also on 22 interviews conducted between March and June 2023 in Belgrade and Brussels with representatives of NGOs, academia, Serbian government and the EU institutions.

For the sake of clarity, the empirical part of the paper will be divided into five parts. The first one would analyse the reasons why Russia and Serbia need each other to realise their own national interests. The creation of these mutual needs would be reflected in the fluidity of the political positioning of Moscow and Belgrade towards the EU and balancing between partnership and rivalry. Secondly, the limitations that Serbia has in balancing Russia against the EU would be presented in detail with reference to its own interests. Thirdly, these limitations would be juxtaposed with Russian interests in the Balkans, especially the extent to which Kremlin prioritises the region on its own foreign policy agenda. In order to fully understand this phenomenon the section would focus on the effects of the unsuccessful coup in Montenegro in 2016. The two last sections would test the fluidity of Europeanisation demonstrated by different approaches of the EU towards the Russian role in Serbia in the light of

Crimean and Donbas separatism in 2014 and the fully-fledged invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

Theoretical framework

This text centres upon Europeanisation. The very simple reason for this is ingrained in the nature of Europeanisation denoting a change or a certain form of dynamic transformation, which at the same time is promoted or resisted by various actors engaged in the transformative process. Europeanisation therefore very neatly inscribes itself into the process of the EU integration and enlargement as the practice of making or becoming "European" pushed by certain actors who encounter various challenges. Nonetheless, before entering a theoretical debate on mechanisms of change incorporated in the phenomenon of Europeanisation and what does it have to do with the empirical dilemmas of this paper, one has to answer the question of what is the actual meaning of Europeanisation. The overall consensus of early scholars dealing with Europeanisation is that it is a contested concept addressing such issues as geographical delineation of Europe, institutional development, centralisation of governance and transfer of practices from national to European level or overall unification of standards and decision-making (Olsen 2002). One of the definitions endeavouring to include all of the abovementioned elements insists on Europeanisation that involves "formal and informal rules, procedures, policy paradigms, styles, ways of doing things or shared beliefs and norms" (Radaelli 2003: 4). Further research indicates that the transfer of the abovementioned Europeanisation paradigms is not only addressed top-down from the EU to domestic discourse but also bottom-up from the local level and member states to the central institutional level of the EU (Marshall 2005). In other words, measuring Europeanisation shall treat the EU institutions as both independent and dependent variables since at the same time they might be the actors initiating and promoting transformation as well as serve as the targets of transformative processes coming from below or outside.

One of the crucial aspects that has to be taken into consideration is the way how the "push" for Europeanisation functions in practice. Indeed, the EU managed to create an image of a "benevolent" power (Layne 2010) that established an alternative normative model distinguishing itself from other traditional world powers based on crude power of hegemony and coercion (Manners 2002: 22). Nonetheless, the vision of the EU that assumes Europeanisation as a completely voluntary action of interested actors driven by democratic and bottom-up "civilian power" (Orbie 2006: 123-128) is quite simplistic and idealistic. Analyses of Europeanisation in the context of secessionism and national self-determination (Biermann 2014) and

environmental policy (Ladi 2005) demonstrate that the EU utilises both its "benevolent" image of power and particular position of governments undergoing Europeanisation processes that at certain point of advanced Europeanisation are left without choice other than submitting to demands set by Europeanisation. Hence, the moment when persuasion of Europeanisation turns into coercion is usually indiscernible, however, ongoing changes involving development of Europeanisation are irreversible and governments reach the point of no return. This assumption is particularly important in the empirical context of this paper since coercive Europeanisation is even stronger when it touches upon strategic interests of the EU and stumbles upon resistance of the actor undergoing protracted and advanced phase of Europeanisation. Hence, first incentives for Europeanisation might come from below and outside since the EU does not force anyone to express the pro-European orientation. The decision to Europeanise comes as a joint initiative of governments, elites and societies convinced by the "European pathway" to be the best choice for their political and economic development. Therefore, Europeanisation might be inscribed into rational choice concept since remaining outside European bloc as either independent states or allied with alternative blocs dooms the governments to political and economic isolation, increases vulnerability to security threats and magnifies consequences of regional and global crises. Knowing that persuasion turns into coercion along advanced Europeanisation and conditionality, one might pose the question to what extent coercive is also the initial period of persuasive Europeanisation since "non-European pathways" bring more risks and less prospects for political and economic benefits.

Another distinction of Europeanisation processes involves horizontal and vertical dimensions where the horizontal one assumes spatial or geographical enlargement of policy-making whereas the vertical one focuses on the extent or depth discussing which domestic aspects of policy-making might be inscribed into Europeanisation process (Koopmans, Erbe, and Meyer 2010). The combination of both dimensions encourages many researchers to measure the scope or efficiency of Europeanisation expressed with shallow and deep Europeanisation concepts (Jordan 2003). There is a number of studies exploring Europeanisation from a dynamic perspective touching upon such concrete examples of policy making as media discourses reacting towards austerity measures (Bee and Chrona 2020), urban policies and spatial planning (Carpenter et al. 2020) or organisation of football market competition (Brand, Niemann, and Spitaler 2013).

Taking into consideration the vertical and horizontal dimensions of Europeanisation, the incorporation of the topic of this paper into theo-

retical lenses of Europeanisation is quite obvious. The alignment of Serbia with sanctions directed against Russia and the EU's CFSP explores not only the horizontal dimension of spatial outreach of the CFSP alignment pressure that can be studied comparatively with other EU candidate states but also the vertical one measuring the percentage of alignment with the CFSP to fulfil conditionality criteria. One might argue that one of the greatest challenges entailed with Europeanisation stems from its horizontal and vertical inequality. Nonetheless, knowing that Europeanisation is a process that is predefined with incompleteness, horizontal and vertical inequalities are rather inevitable otherwise Europeanisation would not serve as a process but a completed political project. The crucial aspect of the incompleteness of Europeanisation indicates that the overall process is fluid and, following the outcomes of various researchers, very sensitive to the changing context (Leontitsis and Ladi 2018). Hence, it is not only globalisation that impacts the horizontal and vertical dimensions of Europeanisation (Tsarouhas and Ladi 2013) but also the emergence of various unexpected and unprecedented crises. Referring to the introductory chapter of this paper assuming Europe to experience a domino of various crises exposing the EU's stability to internal and external threats, the more crises there are the more fluid Europeanisation might get. Since the dynamics of Europeanisation and its horizontal and vertical fluidity were already analysed with reference to the Eurozone crisis (Raimundo, Stavridis, and Tsardanidis 2021) or the refugee crisis (Crepaz 2022), this paper would serve as a theoretical continuation of studies on the fluidity factor that defines the extent of Europeanisation influenced by the Russian attack against Ukraine in 2022. Analysis of conditionality directed towards Serbia from the vertical and horizontal dimensions of Europeanisation makes it a very useful tool to picture the overall context as well as to comprehend the behaviour of the Serbian government and ways how the EU's conditions are addressed.

Speaking of the horizontal dimension, the war in Ukraine affects different states in various ways due to varying geopolitical proximity to Russia and Russian security threats, dependency on Russian resources or historical relations with Russia in the past. When it comes to vertical elements, the EU addresses various coercive policies in terms of the CFSP that might entail different levels of demands, the strictness of monitoring or intervention into domestic policies and national states' competences. One has to take into consideration that the case study of Serbia is additionally determined by the policy of enlargement and integration conditionality leveraged by external threats, which make horizontal and vertical dimensions of Europeanisation even more complex. Radaelli comes up with four different results of alignment with Europeanisation addressing

horizontal and vertical contextual specificity. These include transformation, namely, deep Europeanisation entailing implementation of formal policies and informal practices; absorption denoting only partial incorporation of formal policies; inertia involving suspension of the Europeanisation process and retrenchment suggesting backsliding or de-Europeanisation (Radaelli 2000).

The major problem of vertical dimension of Europeanisation is entailed with the assumption of elites reflecting the interest of the whole state and society. Indeed, Radaelli's distinction between transformation and absorption indicates that implementation of informal practices would transcend regulative level of state administration to reach norms and interactions between individuals. In other words, Europeanisation in the scenario of transformation does not only assume top-down practices coerced by the state system to society but also the bottom-up thrust to accommodate normative Europeanisation recognised and applied by citizens between each other and towards state administration. To portray this phenomenon with a particular example, fighting corruption as process of Europeanisation does not only involve state administration that reforms regulations preventing officials and individuals from corrupting each other on formal level. These are also the individuals who are expected to control administration, sometimes against their short-term personal benefits, to prevent corruption in order to impact long-term political culture also on informal level.

Elites serving as the major actor in Europeanisation process is a fact, the question that remains regards the role of society and social actors in Europeanisation especially when interests of elites and society split into diverging directions. Therefore, is the transformative phase of Europeanisation even possible assuming that it cannot occur without engagement of elites or rather the stage of Europeanised informal practices serves as the point of utopian pursuit that cannot be ever realised? Moreover, is it possible to fully harmonise interests of society and elites knowing that both represent heterogeneous and dynamic environments? All of the abovementioned doubts suggest that socially-driven Europeanisation is impossible and requires participation of elites, which dooms the depth of Europeanisation to subjective interpretation by decision-makers determined by their interests.

Empirical analysis

Russian needs for Serbia and Serbian needs for Russia

The fluidity of international relations is even more surprising if the current perception of the Serbo-Russian partnership would be reflected with relations between Moscow and Belgrade in the years 1991-1999. There is a lot of

evidence to claim that back then Russia remained to a considerable extent on the same side as the West when it comes to constraining and challenging Serbian nationalism in gradually decomposing Yugoslav federation (Paes 2009). It is important to notice that the initial aim of Yeltsin's foreign policy between 1991 and 2000 was to build a functional partnership with the West. Therefore, Russia supported a series of embargoes and sanctions against Yugoslavia chiefly targeting the interests of Serbs. Even though the first sanction (Resolution 713) on the prohibition of guns exports to Yugoslavia in 1991 affected everyone and harmed militias outside the Yugoslav army (Paige 2019), subsequent resolutions targeted interests of Belgrade. These include Resolution 757 from 1992 banning the export and import of commodities between Yugoslavia and third states (Headley 2003: 211), voting in favour of establishing the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) in 1993 (Deriglazova and Smolenchuk 2021: 204) associated in Serbia with anti-Serb partiality (Saxon 2005), voting in favour of Resolution 1160 in 1998 reintroducing ban on arms that was further buttressed by 1199 Resolution calling for establishment of "international monitoring" in Kosovo (Latawski and Smith 2018: 94). Russia acted against Serbian interests also by its actions in favour of Croats. According to Nikola Lunić, Russia was responsible for transporting weapons and other military equipment to Croats in 1992-1997 organising around 160 flights that violated the UN embargo (Lunić 2019). Moreover, Russia managed to recognise Croatian independence before the US (Bowker 1998) and only one year after the Oluja Operation Moscow awarded Franjo Tuđman with Zhukov orders (Bandić and Aralica 2015). Taken into consideration the current mythologisation of Serbo-Russian friendship one clearly sees how malleable international relations tend to be and how much can change during mere thirty years of history.

In the wake of the first considerable engagement of the West in 1999 in the post-communist vacuum that emerged after 1989 and 1991, the Russian approach towards Southeast Europe remained rather indifferent. This indifference prevailed even though European Council announced the upcoming enlargement of the EU approaching Russian borders (Archick 2005), NATO expanded its territory with Poland, Czech Republic and Hungary (Dannreuther 1999), finally, NATO intervened militarily against Yugoslavia despite the absence of the UN Security Council approval (Alexander 1999). Even though Russian passive approach prevailed on the official level, this was highly criticised by numerous nationalist fractions in Moscow fearing Russia to lose its international power position. This was manifested with sporadic conflicts with the West to appease domestic radical sentiments as with the incident when Russian armed forces occupied the airport in Pristina in 1999 after being excluded from peacekeeping

mission led by NATO (Brovkin 1999). Nonetheless, according to interviewed Maxim Samorukov, Russia initially did not seek any confrontation with the West over Southeast Europe and treated Serbia primarily as the "friendly window to reach and connect with Western markets". Another interviewee, Vuk Vuksanović, added that the best evidence proving low interest of Moscow in the region in security terms was the withdrawal of its own peacekeeping troops from Kosovo including 650 servicemen in 2003 (Lyoshin 2005: 191) and withdrawal of a brigade from the Bosnian town of Ugljevik in the same year (Bechev 2017).

In contrast to 1999, 2008 Western ambitions to continue its efforts involving the EU and NATO expansion towards Russian borderlands encountered a high level of resistance. Referring to Yeltsin's soft position on Russian foreign policy in 90', one has to remember that Putin's relations with the West after the declaration of the war on terrorism and the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 became increasingly hostile (Light 2008). Vuksanović mentioned about three different reasons why Moscow decided to react differently in 2008 than in 1999. Indeed, utilising Serbia as the means of effecting resistance leverage against the West seems logical taken into consideration a priori cultural, religious and historical affinity between Russian and Serbian nations (Ilieva 2005), however, it was the particular geopolitical position of Belgrade in 2008 evoked by a declaration of independence by Pristina that attracted Russian attention. Firstly, upholding the policy of non-recognition of Kosovo, thus maintaining frozen conflict with possible implications to other areas populated by Serbs in the Balkans, served as a destabilisation leverage countering possible NATO expansion in the region. This is especially crucial in light of the announcements at the 2008 NATO summit in Bucharest welcoming future expansion to Ukraine and Georgia (Bounds and Hendrickson 2009). Samorukov added that preventing further NATO expansion in the Balkans after membership invitations for Croatia and Albania were issued was key to avert the domino effect. Kremlin believed that at the time when all Western Balkan states would be granted with NATO memberships, NATO's focus could be consequently redirected to Ukraine and Georgia posing immediate threats to Russian security. Hence, it was believed that as long as some Western Balkans states would remain outside NATO camp due to the persistent security threat embodied in destabilised Kosovo, NATO's ambitions in Ukraine and Georgia would be put on hold. Secondly, Moscow believed that by strengthening the partnership with Serbia it can retaliate against the West for being ignored in the decade of Yugoslav disintegration since decisive military interventions determining statehood fates of Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1995 and Kosovo in 1999 were both conducted by NATO excluding Russia from security consulting and decision-making. Moscow

counted additionally on the favourable discourse being still present in Serbia. In other words, the Serbian "1990s complex" of being doomed to international isolation and deprived of any external support (Đukanović and Živojinović 2011: 300) was a fertile ground for Russia to generate associative syndrome of international community pariah whose common point was the sense of being disregarded by the West. Thirdly, Moscow utilised the disputable from the international law perspective status of Kosovo to relativise own sponsored separatisms in Georgia, Moldova and later Ukraine as well as to prevent similar scenarios in its own separatist republics in Northern Caucasus (Baev 1999). The combination of these three factors serves until today as the background explaining Russian interests in Serbia.

For the final note of this section, Vuksanović mentioned in an interview as well about two reasons for Serbian interest in having Russia on its own agenda of foreign policy. It is important to emphasize that "Russia is not appreciated in Serbia for being Russia in itself but rather for acting as the antithesis of the West". Indeed, shared identity myths based on historical ties and orthodoxy justify foreign policy of Belgrade towards Moscow. First of all, Russia is needed for Belgrade to strengthen its own position in negotiations with the West regarding the normalisation of the Kosovar status. In other words, the Russian stance on Kosovo is crucial to protect Serbian interests at the UN level whereas "Serbian position towards the West is definitely stronger when having Russia behind own back". Reinforcing Serbian power position towards the West is essential in order to get as favourable as possible deal on Kosovo normalisation minimising concessions Serbia would have to approve. Secondly, Russia is an important partner in helping Serbia to realise the policy of balancing between great world powers, defined in 2009 by Boris Tadić as the "policy of four pillars"[1] (Kapetanovic 2020: 35) or as mentioned by one of the interviewees, Dragan Živojinović, "aspiration of becoming second geopolitical Singapore". Indeed, foreign policy ambitions in Belgrade assume a certain form of neo-Titoism (Economides and Ker-Lindsay 2015: 11), namely, perceiving the international community as multipolar requiring a diversified network of friendly relations incorporates the role of other partners, especially China (Duško 2019), Turkey (Rašidagić and Hesova 2020) or Arab states (Bartlett et al. 2017). Živojinović added that the key concept of multi-vector Serbian foreign policy is the guarantee of Serbian sovereignty and independence as long as world powers would be adequately balanced between each other placing Serbian security in the position of advantageous equilibrium. It is essential that none of the power pillars would get a supe-

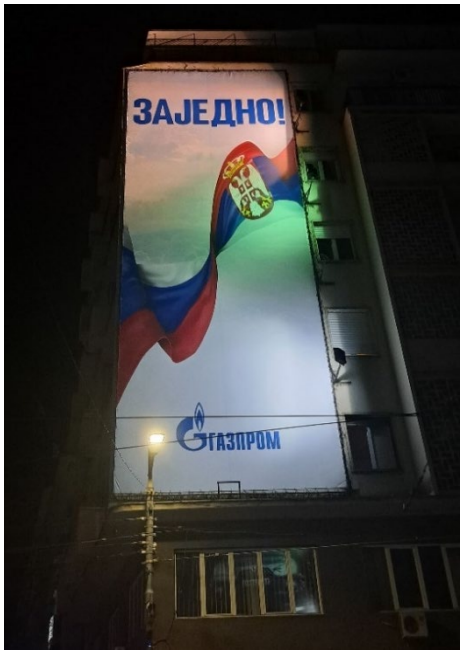
1 Policy of balancing between the EU, the US, Russia and China

rior position against the other which would denote a threat to security equilibrium and sovereignty. Hence, yielding to the EU sanctions pressuring would be an act against Serbian foreign policy doctrine perceived as both harming relations with an essential pillar partner and recognising the superiority of one of the power pillars against the others. In conclusion, overlapping interests and mutual need for each other in Russian and Serbian foreign policy agendas as well as the essence of multipolar Serbian foreign policy doctrine serve as the arguments explaining the reluctance of Serbia to align with the CFSP and impose sanctions.

Limitations of playing Russian card against the West

This section would analyse the ways how Serbia generated the balancing power of Russia against the West and where it drew limitations in reference to its own interests and security. Coming back to the interview conducted with Vuksanović, balancing potential has been generated in three strategic areas whereas the process of its formation took several years, numerous concessions and a lot of political endeavours. Firstly, Serbia maintains its gas import policy based on cooperation or rather a complete dependency on purchases from Russia. According to the Energy Balance report published annually by the Ministry of Mining and Energy, Serbian domestic gas production covers solely 10% of demands whereas 90% has to be imported (Ministry of Mining and Energy 2022). According to The Observatory of Economic Complexity (OEC) data, between 2006 and 2021 the share of gas imports from Russia remained at a level between 80% and 90% (OEC 2023). Moreover, in 2008 51% of stakes of state company Naftna Industrija Srbije (NIS) were sold to Gazprom taking control over the gas infrastructure in Serbia (Ehrstedt and Vahtra 2008: 13). The transaction sparked many controversies as it was sold for EUR 400 million despite Deloitte's estimations of the value assumed at EUR 2.2 billion (Damnjanovic 2018: 202-222). Even though it was stated officially that NIS immediately required a foreign investor to deal with local mismanagement, Vuksanović claims that the transaction served as the price for cementing Russian support in terms of Kosovo making all energy and economics-related issues to have secondary relevance.

Image 1 Gazprom poster promoting Serbo-Russian friendship in Belgrade March 2023



Secondly, Russian support for Serbian interests at the international level was not only expressed with Russian UN veto powers but also diplomatic support and expert consultancy Serbia received in the field of international law issues undermining the legality of Kosovar secession and recognition. Interviewee Ivana Radić working in the governmental Office for Kosovo and Metohija in the years 2007-2008 claimed that "Russian diplomats provided surprisingly comprehensive support surpassing knowledge and skills of local Serbian diplomats that was greatly appreciated by our negotiation bodies". Hence, creating an impression of Russian efforts supporting Serbian national interests that contradicted with majoritarian approach represented by Western statesmen who recognised independent Kosovo after 2008 served as additional means strengthening Russian balancing power.

Thirdly, the balancing potential of Russia was also generated by Russian soft power, namely, creating a popular identity myth of Serbo-Russian historical brotherhood. Belgrade utilised the rising role of tabloids in generating this "eternal friendship" between the two nations. According to Vuksanović, the process of discourse formation oscillated between "Russophilia" and "Russomania". The government however had to under-

take a lot of diplomatic actions in order to provide some tangible material for tabloids. Therefore, Putin was invited to visit Belgrade in 2011 to be awarded with Orthodox orders (Keranović 2011) as well as to attend a friendly football match between Crvena Zvezda and Zenit St. Petersburg where the fans chanted "Putin, you Serb, Serbia is with you" (Bechev 2017). Diplomatic gestures were to be replicated and repeated for months in state and state-controlled media outlets so that the positive image of Russia would be deeply embedded into Serbian society.

Nonetheless, it is essential to distinguish between Serbia generating Russian balancing potential to be played against the West and Serbia becoming a strategic Russian ally in the Balkans as often portrayed in political discourses. Whereas the latter assumes genuine partnership based on shared national interests gradually turning into mutual dependency, the former is based on the prioritisation of Serbian national interest utilising the EU and Russian balancing potentials only for its own benefit. Even though the previous section pointed out some evidence proving mutual needs for Serbo-Russian cooperation, Belgrade utilises them differently than a classical strategic alliance would assume. Hence, there are at least three limitations to previously analysed Russian balancing power that delineate an argument to claim that Belgrade needs Moscow for its own benefits so that it can send false signals to the West.

Firstly, it is interesting to notice that the myth of Serbo-Russian friendship does not translate into the promotion of Russian culture. As Vuksanović mentions, "even most radical Serbian Russophiles challenged with the choice of place of residence would still prefer Paris or London over Moscow. Serbian society including its most conservative and nationalist part is influenced by Western culture and lifestyle. The myth of Serbo-Russian friendship simply cannot undermine Western cultural domination downgrading potential of Russian soft power". Indeed, empirical confirmation of this statement would require a separate research of Serbian radical nationalism, however, what can be extracted from the currently existing literature is the fact that Serbian and Russian radicals are mutually attracted due to external factors of racist and homophobic violence rather than interest in Serbian or Russian culture (Dević 2019). Samorukov emphasizes that this is clearly visible in social relations between Serbs and Russian "IT expats" fleeing mobilisation. Indeed, Russians are received warmly and social tensions generated by skyrocketing rent prices in Belgrade are not directed against Russians but corrupted market irregularities strengthened by the arrival of "some rich people". Nonetheless, overall cultural distance and preference to use English in contacts between Serbs and Russians prove that the Serbo-Russian friendship rather relates to some imagined concept of Russia chiefly represented by preoccupa-

tions with Kosovo and not genuine passion for Russian culture. This reveals the weakness of Russian soft power and portrays significant limitation to balancing potential.

Secondly, Serbian foreign policy clearly shows that Belgrade did not become Kremlin's proxy in the region. Belgrade cautiously ensured Kosovo, gas policy and soft power leverages not to spill over to other areas of governance so that excessive pressure of Moscow in Serbia would be prevented. This is demonstrated by Belgrade refusing to align with Russian foreign policy when it comes to supporting separatisms and acting in the interests of Russian allies, for instance, Syria. Vuksanović pointed out that Serbian statesmen admitting the excessive influence of Russia turning Belgrade into Moscow's proxy would denote "political suicide for any regional ruling elites in the Balkans", which serves as another limitation to balancing power.

Thirdly, Serbia manages to create a false perception of the significance of economic and military cooperation with Russia downgrading the role of the EU and the West. According to the information gathered by the National Bank of Serbia for the years 2010-2021, the EU represents 63.6% of foreign direct investments (FDIs) in Serbia whereas Russia participates solely in 7.5% of the Serbian FDI total share (National Bank of Serbia 2023). In spite of the reality, a public opinion poll conducted by Demostat shows that solely 36% of Serbs perceive the EU as the biggest foreign investor in Serbia whereas 19% claim Russia to invest the most (Petronijević Terzić 2022). Demostat data are even more interesting when it comes to the perception of the biggest aid donor. Despite the lack of statistics measuring actual direct aid of Russia, 26% of Serbs associate Russia as the biggest aid donor keeping the EU role at the low level of 35%, although EUR 3.6 billion were donated by the EU to Serbia between 2001 and 2018 (Gočanin and Ćosić 2022). According to Szpala, the fact that Russia is not mentioned in official statistics on aid donors suggests that Russian aid to Serbia is extremely insignificant to the extent the official value is kept as a secret (Szpala 2014). Moreover, what is definitely known is the fact of Putin's promise to donate Serbia with EUR 1 billion in 2011, which was never realised (B92 2011). Perceptions of public opinion support the argument of this section also in the statistics demonstrating Serbian exports and imports as the EU covers 57% of Serbian imports and 64% of exports whereas Russia stands for solely 5% of imports and 4% of exports (Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia 2023). In the same way, Serbia attempts to create the impression of significant Russian military cooperation with such joint exercises as Slavic Shield (Barros 2021: 3) or Slavic Brotherhood (Pentegova 2020: 62). Despite the extreme unpopularity of NATO in Serbian society (Vuletić 2018), Belgrade concluded the Individual

Partnership Action Plan (IPAP) with NATO in 2015 (Morelli 2018) and ratified in the same year the Agreement on the Status of Forces (SOFA) being the highest form of cooperation with NATO (Dragović 2018). Moreover, Serbia participates and recently restored its contingents in peacekeeping missions in Somalia (Tanjug 2023) and Central African Republic (Ministry of Defence Republic of Serbia 2023) being organised by the EU military service. Additionally, Belgrade announced to purchase 12 Rafale fighter jets from France (Vasovic 2022) thus acknowledging an alternative to MIG-29 previously received from Belarusian and Russian donations (Lukač 2022). Discrepancies between discourses and actual state of art portray the extent of balancing power limitations and serve as evidence for Serbia being in need of augmenting the perception of Russian influences in the region to manipulate the EU for the sake of its own interests and negotiating position. Hence, the crucial role of Russia in conducting the policy of balancing against the West explains why Serbia refused to impose sanctions against Russia and align with the CFSP.

Russian interests in the Balkans

This section would analyse the extent to which Russia prioritises the area of Southeast Europe on its own agenda of foreign policy. According to Samorukov, Russia reached a turning point in own strategy regarding challenging the West in the Balkans in 2016 after the unsuccessful attempt of a coup in Montenegro that only led to a strengthening position of pro-Western politics led by Milo Đukanović underpinned by the country joining NATO structures. The context of the attempted coup is extremely unclear and some evidence suggests that the coup was staged by local elites instrumentalising Russia to create a logical impression of a foreign interference. One of such indicators refers to Bratislav Dikić who after being sentenced for an attempted coup in 2019 was released within two years consequently receiving an official position in Serbian state forestry (Insajder 2023). Regardless of conjectures on who actually staged the coup, what matters is the result of the event representing an image-related geopolitical failure of Russia in the region. As a consequence, all relevant figures promoting Russian interests and the need to focus on the Balkans started to lose their position among Kremlin elites. This coincided with Vladimir Yakunin losing the post of Russian state railways head earlier lobbying for Russian investments into the Serbian railway system (Nelaeva and Semenov 2016: 64); Konstantin Malofeev funding Carigrad TV and other Orthodoxy-based propaganda outlets and activities to lose influence in Kremlin after 2016 (Conley et al. 2016); Leonid Reshetnikov being active mostly in Bulgaria to share the same fate as Malofeev after unsuccessful coup (Galeotti 2018). Additionally, following information received from

Samorukov, a key Kremlin representative in Serbia, Alexander Babakov, the responsible figure for logistics and technical support regarding Russian diplomacy to Serbia (Akcali et al. 2015), "completely lost focus to promote Russian counterbalancing in Serbia after his key investments in Ukraine were put under threat after 2022".

The landscape of political lobbying clearly tells that Kremlin is neither interested nor has relevant actors and capacities to promote and prioritise the geopolitical significance of the Balkans in challenging the West. At the same time, the evidence of relevant figures losing importance in Kremlin serves as the hypothesis posing Serbian foreign policy in a relatively convenient position opening more manipulative space for Belgrade in relations with the EU. In this light, the argument presented in the previous section explaining the reluctance of Serbia to impose sanctions against Russia and fully align with the CFSP is even more convincing. In other words, balancing potential by gas, Kosovo and soft power constrained leverages preventing Moscow to turn Serbia into its own proxy coinciding with a low significance of Balkans within the Kremlin foreign policy agenda further confirms the argument Belgrade being in need of "imagined" Russia to receive benefits from the West. Serbia believes that maintaining Russian leverages creates the image of threatened regional stability making Serbia in need of both increased attention from the West expressed with political and economic support and increased tolerance for domestic irregularities involving corruption and democratic backsliding. The abovementioned findings confirm also the hypothesis on Serbia benefiting from the dichotomy between "disoriented West" and Russian "opportunist" deprived of means to pressure Belgrade in more decisive way (Bechev, 2017: 249). In order to preserve this advantageous position of the Serbian government, Belgrade strives to avoid impairing relations with Moscow and thus opposes the imposition of sanctions.

The EU's attitude towards Serbo-Russian relations in 2014

In the last two sections of this chapter, the malleability of the EU-Russian relations reflecting on Serbian foreign policy will be analysed in reference to the intensification of security threats in Ukraine in 2014 and 2022. Interestingly enough, the EU remained quite indifferent after 2014 when Serbia declared itself neutral regarding the conflict between Kyiv and Moscow. There are three key contextual aspects that explain such attitude of the EU towards Serbia. Firstly, the escalation of violence in Ukraine over Crimean and Donbas separatism came gradually and unexpectedly. It took some time until "little green men" instigating violence against Ukrainian state forces were recognised as directly connected to Kremlin (Reeves and

Wallace 2015). Nonetheless, the West perceived Ukraine and Russia as parties to the conflict seeking mediation and conflict resolution acknowledging mutual claims on territorial sovereignty and minority protection (Härtel, Pisarenko, and Umland 2021). Additionally, security concerns were delegated to the OSCE mandate fostering diplomatic solutions, therefore reducing the impression of the EU directly engaging in a proxy conflict against Russia (Sims 2019). Secondly, the West was not ready for the escalation of confrontation against Russia due to economic and energy dependency as well as the domination of the German Ostpolitik approach on the EU agenda believing that trade with Kremlin might lead to political liberalisation of Russia (Forsberg 2016: 21-22). Thirdly, Juncker's declaration excluding the perspective of any EU enlargements during his 2014-2019 tenure at the European Commission was interpreted as Brussels not being ready for integration processes in Western Balkans and not having a political interest in the full integration of Serbia into the EU due to prioritisation of internal crises (Petrovic and Tzifakis 2021). Taken all contextual aspects into consideration, the EU did not pressure Serbia to behave differently towards Russia, thus Serbian neutrality towards the war in Ukraine was not part of the Europeanisation processes.

The EU's reaction to Serbo-Russian relations in 2022

The final section of the chapter analyses reasons why the EU decided to change its approach towards Serbian neutrality and pressure Belgrade to impose sanctions against Russia inscribing foreign policy claims into the integration and conditionality agenda. First of all, contrasting the set of contextual aspects from the previous section, one clearly notices that the 24th February 2022 escalation was interpreted by the EU as an unequivocal assault against international law completely undermining values delineating order and stability of the international community (Kortunov 2022). Hence, the OSCE mission lost any sense of diplomatic mediation turning the framework of relations between the EU and Russia into a clear confrontation. "The picture previously being comprised of various shades of grey now doubtlessly turned into black and white", the metaphor used by Ivana Radić to describe the shift occurring between 2014 and 2022 denotes polarisation in perception of Russia by other states. This suggests that the EU does not have any space for relativizing Russian behaviour and to take into consideration Moscow claims on protection of Russian minority or any other misconduct apparently committed by Kyiv. Black and white distinction redefines not only the EU approach towards Russia from an internal perspective countering any attempts of Russian disinformation and reducing dependency on Moscow of EU member states but also exter-

nally in the sense of pressuring own partners to align with the new foreign policy stance. Secondly, as noticed by Miloš Petrović in an interview, the EU decided to enter an economic confrontation against Russia, risking its own capacities and resources, which put a decisive end to German Ostpolitik. The scale of war atrocities committed by Moscow legitimises all costs of this confrontation, including unprecedented since many years inflation, economic challenges intertwining with post-Covid hardships and the emergence of new social tensions. Thirdly, the effects of the black and white chessboard redefine challenging presence of Russia in other relevant to the EU areas, especially Western Balkans. Despite the lack of a clear strategy and membership promise, the European perspective reinvigorating integration pace received renewed relevance depicting the EU interests to involve alignment of stability and security targets. In other words, prioritising the determination of Western Balkan states into black and white dichotomy endeavours to take them out of the multipolar limbo generated by Juncker's limited interest in enlargement so that Western Balkans can clearly array on the same side as the EU against Russia.

The question that emerges is the following, namely, why Serbia refused to align with the CFSP even though Serbian foreign policy comprising of various shades of grey does not correspond anymore to the new "black and white" reality? Contextual aspects reformulating the framework of relations between the EU and Russia, decisiveness to engage in confrontation risking own capacities and attempts to overcome "enlargement fatigue" in the Western Balkans based on new stability and security concerns make the EU pressure on Serbia to align with the CFSP quite obvious. The sources of Serbian defiance not to impose sanctions find explanation in the essence of these two last sections, namely, the fluid Europeanisation that hinges on shifting framework of the EU-Russian relations. In other words, noticing the change in contextual aspects between 2014 and 2022, Belgrade believes that the EU's foreign policy towards Russia, especially taken into consideration the limitations of the EU's capacities and the threat of new internal tensions, is a temporary situation that will not last forever and gradually would return to the format known before 2022.

As interviewed Pavle Nedić observed, the decision of the Serbian government to resist the most demanding wave of sanctions pressuring in March 2022 was treated as a matter of experiment testing limits and effects of non-alignment with the CFSP. Belgrade indeed mastered the tactics of "time buying", especially during the period of negotiations and implementation of the Brussels Agreement on Kosovo. Another dimension that has to be added to Nedić's opinion is the fact of the EU being a hardly unified actor in context of balancing collective security against individual economic interests. Referring to theoretical aspect of horizontal Europe-

anisation, it is clear that various EU member states perceive Russian threat differently affecting their solidarity and willingness to join "self-harming" economic sanctions. The main understanding of this indicates difficulty to reach a consensus on the EU level in strategic matters of balancing solidarity against interests. Hence, "time buying" strategy is one of the instruments utilised by Belgrade being aware of challenges addressing decision-making in the EU and the fact that any conditionality stick directed against Belgrade would require a lot of time and effort to reach a consensus that acknowledges all possible consequences for Western Balkans. Interviewee Engjellushe Morina supports the hypothesis of the "time buying" strategy not only in the context of the belief of future normalisation of the EU-Russia relations but also the upcoming elections in the US and Serbian assumption that a possible victory of Donald Trump would shift global relations to Belgrade's favour. This is another aspect showing that Serbia expects not only populist ruptures undermining unity within the EU camp but also in the broader context of the entire "Western geopolitical sphere" supposed to reduce anti-Russian sentiments addressing domestic hardships of gas supplies or inflation. Assuming fluidity of Europeanisation depending on the geopolitical context, Serbia decided to resist the pressure in order to subsequently seek some temporary compromises, which explains decision why the immediate and complete CFSP alignment was refused.

Conclusion

This paper analysed four reasons why Serbia has not imposed sanctions against Russia and has not aligned with the CFSP after 24th February 2022. Firstly, the analysis demonstrates that Belgrade's reluctance to comply with EU sanctions against Russia is defined by the Serbian foreign policy agenda of neo-Titoist and multipolar doctrine that assumes fostering of friendly relations with global and regional powers involving the role of Russia as the key counterbalancing pillar. Imposition of sanctions against Russia would be perceived as succumbing to the pressure of the EU, thus acting against the doctrine of four pillars based on sovereignty and independence guarantee provided that world powers would be adequately balanced between each other preventing one of the pillars from getting excessive superiority. Secondly, Russia is needed for Serbia due to counterbalancing mechanism against the West when it comes to strengthening Serbian position in negotiations on Kosovo and other foreign policy-relevant issues. This aspect is only stronger as Moscow utilises the need for its own interests challenging the West through destabilising potential of the Kosovo leverage. Thirdly, Serbia invested a lot especially in the years 2008-2012 in generating Russian balancing potential through the simultaneous effort in preventing

the scenario to become a Russian proxy. Knowing that Russia is not that interested in directly challenging the West in the Balkans after the unsuccessful coup in Montenegro in 2016 with external dependency leverages being quite limited, Belgrade has a lot of manipulative space to elevate the impression of Kremlin influences in Serbia for the sake of Western political and economic support. Fourthly, contextual shifts of frameworks of the EU-Russian relations between 2014 and 2022 demonstrate that Europeanisation and the CFSP are quite dynamic and fluid concepts prompting Belgrade to assume that the EU-Russian tensions might subside with time causing sanctions pressuring to gradually disappear from conditionality and the EU integration agenda. Complete contrast in relations between the EU and Russia before and after 2022 is evident that automatically translates into different prioritisation of alignment with the CFSP in terms of the EU integration. Serbia is aware of problematic unity and solidarity within the EU, risks of emergence of new populist actors relativizing Russian threats on the Western geopolitical stage as well as complexity of decision-making entailing security and stability threats. This explains "time buying" strategy and effort to seek temporary consensus on partial alignment with EU positions such as political statements on the UN level, humanitarian aid or even alleged military support.

List of interviewees used in the text

Dragan Živojinović, Faculty of Political Science in Belgrade, Belgrade, 22nd March 2023, not recorded

Engjellushe Morina, European Council on Foreign Relations, Brussels, 2nd June 2023, not recorded

Ivana Radić, Faculty of Political Science in Belgrade, Belgrade, 13th March 2023, not recorded

Maxim Samorukov, Carnegie, Belgrade, 28th March 2023, not recorded

Miloš Petrović, Institute of International Politics and Economics in Belgrade,

Pavle Nedić, Institute of International Politics and Economics in Belgrade, Belgrade, 21st March 2023, not recorded

Vuk Vuksanović, Belgrade Centre for Security Policy, Belgrade, 15th March 2023, not recorded

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