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A. Vučić with Sem Fabrizi, Head of EU Delegation to the Republic of Serbia

Photo: [instagram.com/buducnostsrbijeav](https://www.instagram.com/buducnostsrbijeav)

SERBIA: TURNING AWAY FROM THE EU

For several years now, Serbia has been on a path of regression, while its democratic potential gradually vanishes. In their recent reports, international organizations that assess the level of democracy, such as Freedom House, point out that Serbia no longer belongs to democratic states. The collapse of institutions, as well as the constant campaign against all critical and opposition voices, are more and more vividly unveiling authoritarianism, which could easily turn into dictatorship. During the nine years in power, the Serbian Progressive Party shattered political

life, devalued pluralism, and abolished dialogue within the society. The media has been reduced to tabloid content and reality shows, blurring the line between right and wrong. By relativizing everything, this government has destroyed the system of values, which has barely started to gain momentum over the preceding ten years, by developing a legal framework, more or less in line with European values and standards, as well as by creating independent regulatory bodies that have started to gain respect within the society for their transparency.

The ruling party is not faced by an opposition able to control it, at least to some extent. This has opened the space for corruption in all spheres of political, economic, and social life. Numerous scandals (Krušik, Jovanjica, alleged wiretapping of the President, clash with Veljko Belivuk's group, etc.) show the depth of criminalization of the society, which leaves little room for reforms and normalization of political life.

All this would not be possible, to such an extent, if the opposition did not demonstrate its inability to offer an alternative program, as well as its unwillingness to get organized and confront the growing willfulness of the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS). While the political opposition has been trying to find a new "trademark personality" for some time, it has failed.

The consequences of the long-term destruction of the media and institutions, as well as continuous campaigns against civil society organizations, professional media, and individuals who are perceived as opponents of the President, orchestrated and directed from the most influential positions in the country, manifested themselves most drastically during the pandemic.

As a key Balkan country, unable to make a clean slate and take a step forward in reforms, Serbia holds the entire region hostage to its aspirations, presently in the form of the "Serbian world", especially in relation to BiH and Montenegro.

The process of European integration has been stalled, although relations between Serbia and the European Union (EU) are maintained by both sides, based on Serbia's desire to preserve the economic and financial support of the EU, and the attempt of the EU to keep Serbia on the European course. The long-standing tolerance that the West has been showing towards Serbia is no longer sustainable, due to the rapid collapse of democratic values, pressure on the

media, increasingly aggressive behavior towards the region, as well as the inability to initiate the necessary reforms.

The annual progress report of the European Commission for Serbia (October 2020) on negotiations with the European Union, states that Serbia has made progress in economic and fiscal issues, moderate progress in the fight against corruption and public administration reform, but that, on the other hand, there has been no progress in the electoral process and judicial reform. It also states that Serbia has still not fully harmonized its foreign policy with the European policy, and that it is engaged in various forms of cooperation, including military, with countries that are considered by the EU as disputable.¹

President Aleksandar Vučić reacted harshly to some of the allegations in the European Commission's report, and rejected the criticisms related to the excessive use of police force during the protests in July (2020) in Belgrade, but also those related to cooperation and purchase of military equipment from countries such as Russia and China, stating that Serbia and him, as its president, act in the best interest of the citizens, protecting their lives and the interests of the country.² According to him, all these remarks only show how a sovereign and independent country behaves, a country that is on the European path, but one which values its own interests and reserves the right to make its own decisions on important issues.³

The report of the EP Standing Rapporteur for Serbia, Vladimir Bilčík, was even more concrete and critical. The report condemns and seeks sanctions for public attacks and hate speech

1 <https://www.blic.rs/vesti/politika/detaljni-izvestaja-eu-zbog-koga-je-vucic-burno-reagovao-packe-zbog-izbora-protesta-i-zx2nc4v>

2 Same.

3 Same.

from the parliamentary rostrum, aimed at Tanja Fajon, Chair of the EP Delegation for relations with Serbia, and other MEPs, as well as political opponents, independent media, and journalists. It considers these acts to be “a violation of democratic practices and basic democratic values”, calling on political actors to continue the inter-party dialogue on electoral conditions.⁴

This report was also met with disapproval and rejection in the ruling circles, and the Minister of the Interior, Aleksandar Vulin, stated that “if the EU deputies could not or did not want to send vaccines to Serbia, then they did not have to send amendments either”⁵

While the aforementioned reports are meant to serve as a guideline for the Government of Serbia, pointing in which direction to aim the reform efforts, criticism of these reports additionally shows that Serbia is not interested in substantial adjustment to European norms, interpreting all these EU moves as additional pressure. Such open rejection is also a consequence of a change in the international setting.

Tightening of relations on the US-Russia-China axis, intensifies geostrategic competition in the Western Balkans as well. Diverse interests have a detrimental effect on the situation in the region, and the lack of both human potential and leadership in each of the WB countries, further deteriorates the already modest reform results.

The announcement of the new American administration that it will be completing the “unfinished business” in the Balkans together with the EU (primarily in Bosnia and Kosovo), was met with great dissatisfaction in Serbia, with the assessment that Serbia is targeted again. In that

4 <https://rs.n1info.com/vesti/odbor-evropskog-parlamenta-usvojio-bilcikov-izvestaj/>.
5 https://www.b92.net/info/vesti/index.php?yyyy=2021&mm=02&dd=21&nav_category=11&nav_id=1815591.

context, both President Vučić, as well as numerous other political analysts, emphasized that Serbia presents a problem for the West because it has “grown stronger, it is not a NATO member, and does not fully follow the policy of the West, and the West does not want such a state to have a dominant position in the region.”⁶ On the other hand, Russia and China, as they pointed out, “are helping Serbia to become a regional leader, which is not what Western powers and several regional dwarfs want”.⁷

Relying on the support of Russia and China, Belgrade perceives the increasingly explicit conditions posed by the West as “empty threats, given that the world has significantly changed.” It is pointed out that any strong pressure, “pushes Serbia more strongly towards China and Russia”.⁸ It is also emphasized that China and Russia are not “malignant influences” in the region, as the West claims, and that such is rather “the influence of Western neo-colonial powers that need subservient regimes, not partners”.⁹

Such an interpretation of international circumstances, as well as the fact that Serbia was the only country in the region to procure vaccines, managing to vaccinate a significant part of its population, also resulted in a “vaccine offensive”. It was initiated, on the one hand, with the aim of demonstrating the solidarity of Serbia and the incompetence of other regional leaders (in which it was successful), but also to send a message that the Balkan countries should solve their problems by themselves, without the international community.

With this initiative, conceived in a diplomatically careful manner, Vučić presented himself

6 Dragomir Anđelković, “Zašto Srbija ne sme da strči”, *Politika*, March 13, 2021.

7 Same.

8 Dragomir Anđelković, “Zapad jačanje Srbije shvata kao provokaciju”, *Politika*, March 20, 2021.

9 Same.

as a politician who believes in the strength and power of the Balkan peoples when they are united. At the same time, he emphasized that “this does not entail any form of common state or the like, but when we act together, when we step forward together – then we can achieve everything. To take care of each other, too. I will be happy that these vaccines are used by Bosniaks, Serbs, and Croats, without any difference, and we will help, if that is what we call it, in the future as well. I will also be free to ask Bosnia and Herzegovina for help in some other matters when we need it. That’s how friends and neighbors should talk to each other”.¹⁰

Sarajevo daily *Avaz* stated in its comment that “this move by Vučić is a direct slap in the face and humiliation of incompetent politicians in BiH, but also a praiseworthy act and gesture of the Serbian president, who will, in this manner, at least somewhat mitigate the damage resulting from our country’s catastrophic incompetence”.¹¹

President Vučić also donated vaccines to Montenegro ahead of the local elections in Nikšić, as well as, before that, to Northern Macedonia. With this initiative, President Vučić is trying to relativize the pressure of the West and oppose the announced solutions for BiH and Kosovo.

In regard to this, he stated: “I cannot accept the idea of abolishing Republika Srpska, not only because it is a constitutional obligation of Serbia, but because those who want to abolish RS are acting against the will of the Serbian people, as well as against stability and peace in the Balkans”.¹²

10 https://www.rtv.rs/sr_lat/koronavirus/vucic-kada-zajednicki-delujemo-i-istupamo-mozemo-sve_1213754.html.

11 <https://www.kurir.rs/vesti/politika/3635433/hvala-vucicu-nasi-politicari-su-nesposobni-ovako-u-bih-reaguju-pred-dolazak-predsednika-srbije-u-sarajevo>.

12 <https://www.tvmost.info/post/vucic-sa-bih-najbolji-odnosi-ali-ne-prihvataj-ukidanje-republike-srpske>.

The increasingly radical and insulting statements made by Milorad Dodik, a member of the Presidency of BiH, concerning the new High Representative and the announcements of the US engagement in BiH, can also be considered indicative. Almost daily, Dodik gives statements such as: “These monsters, the high representatives, many among them ordinary jerks, are trying to hide behind some great power, while, at the same time, violating international law. We just want our rights; our rights are written in the Constitution of BiH. We want to respect that Constitution, not the decadent will of the high representatives and various imbeciles who have ruled our society for the last 20 years”.¹³

The Belgrade-Pristina dialogue is not yet on the horizon, although the EU Special Representative Miroslav Lajčák pays regular visits to the region and gives encouraging statements. It remains in the interest of Serbia to maintain a frozen conflict in Kosovo, with the support of Moscow, which thus secures its role as the protector of Serbia’s interests in the UN. During the last meeting with Lajčák, Vučić stated: “We believe that a compromise agreement means – no one gets everything, and everyone gets enough. Regardless of the statements that come from Priština, and which are not encouraging, we must be responsible and committed”.¹⁴ Such a formulation indicates that Belgrade has not given up on territorial division.

According to Stefan Surlić, from the Faculty of Political Sciences, “there are no magical documents that will solve decades-long problems on the ground in Kosovo, and offer an answer to the West’s double standards, according to which Albanians are allowed to have two and a half states, while Serbia is to renounce a part of its

13 <https://www.nedeljnik.rs/visoki-predstavnici-su-biliskretni-devastiran-je-dejtonski-sporazum-bez-kojers-nece-biti-deo-bih-dodik-o-mogucim-planovima-zakreiranje-novog-sporazuma/>.

14 <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/31130894.html>.

territory”.¹⁵ Surlić concludes that the only option Serbia is left with is to strengthen partnerships with countries that stand firmly on the position of defending the international legal order and do not want to recognize the self-declaration of Kosovo independence.¹⁶

It is indicative that some international analysts, such as Timothy Less, who was among the first to advocate the recomposition of the Balkans, question Biden’s promises in the face of reality on the ground. He doubts that the Biden administration will succeed in its intentions. The United States can try to solve the problem of BiH, in the hope that they will be able to reshape the perception of Serbs about the Kosovo problem. At the moment, everything remains for the future. However, what remains clear is that the feeling of *déjà vu*, currently being experienced in the Balkans, will not last forever. When the Biden administration eventually faces the political reality in the region and moves away from an unfeasible policy, then a solution to the Kosovo problem could also come into play.¹⁷

THE SERBIAN WORLD

Even after numerous defeats, Serbia has not closed the Serbian question. In that sense, Serbia stands out as a country that is not ready to accept the new reality in the region, i.e., to recognize the existence of new states, and treat them as equal partners. This is reflected in the country’s daily attitude towards its neighbors, which are not accepted as independent states, and to whose territories it still has pretensions. This primarily refers to Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Kosovo, but also Macedonia. Instead of normalizing relations, Belgrade, with

¹⁵ <https://informer.rs/vesti/politika/591807/srbija-kim-albanci-zapad-drzave-ucene>.

¹⁶ Same.

¹⁷ Timothy Less, Danas, March 24, 2021.

its policy of “protecting the Serbian people” and preventing their integration into their home countries, essentially encourages tensions, using hate speech and demonization of all neighboring nations. That is the main reason why the country is turning away from the EU, namely, giving priority to the unity of the nation over democratization and development, which would reduce the chances for the realization of the “Serbian World”.

As a key Balkan country, Serbia is trying to make the most of the political and economic context, which it considers favorable. In that sense, Belgrade shows self-confidence and believes that it can make progress in diversifying relations with both Russia and China.

To understand Serbia’s behavior, one should take into account how it perceives its geostrategic interests. Which option is currently in power is irrelevant, because they differ only in their methods, while their essence remains the same. The current government has completely exposed this strategy, and, in a way, opened the eyes of everyone, both the neighbors and the West.

RELATION TOWARDS NEIGHBORS

Serbia’s geopolitical interest in **Bosnia and Herzegovina** is the preservation of the Republika Srpska (RS) and its annexation to Serbia. RS is considered the only Serbian victory from the 1990s, and is therefore treated as a foreign policy priority, which was also stated in the national security strategy that Aleksandar Vulin presented in the Serbian Parliament. RS is geopolitically important for Serbia in establishing a connection with the Adriatic, as well as exerting geopolitical pressure on Montenegro (which was more than obvious during the last two months), preventing the neo-Ottoman project, occupying the other bank of the Drina, and moving the

“civilization border” to the west, thus increasing Serbian influence.¹⁸ Achieving these goals by other means, in peacetime, entails accepting the Dayton Agreement as the optimal solution in the given circumstances.

In the geopolitical considerations of Serbia, **Montenegro** is perceived as an “internal issue” and is given “immeasurable geopolitical significance”. Montenegro has never been accepted as an independent state and is treated only as a territory, i.e., as another Serbian country. Montenegrin sentiment and language are disputed, and Montenegrin identity is perceived as hybrid. Accordingly, the position of the Serbian people is being strengthened, while the Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC) already has the status of a state within a state. Serbia’s interest is for Montenegro to be led by a “state political leader” who will respect Serbian geopolitical interests.¹⁹ That is why Milo Đukanović is perceived as the main obstacle to the realization of Serbian interests. The ultimate goal of Serbia is to return Montenegro to the framework of the Serbian state, because that is the only way for Serbia and Montenegro to gain geostrategic significance. It is pointed out that only the full defeat of Đukanović’s project represents the most important among the necessary preconditions for the return of Montenegro to where it has always been, to its Serbian world.²⁰

Last year’s elections in Montenegro, with the support of the Serbian Orthodox Church, Belgrade, and Russia (from the background), established a new pro-Serbian and pro-Russian government. Although Milo Đukanović’s Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS) remained the single most relevant party, an atmosphere is being created that it is necessary that DPS leaves the stage, and especially its president, who

has the greatest merit not only for restoring Montenegro’s independence, but also for the country’s NATO membership and EU orientation. Serbian media are persistently criminalizing Montenegro’s sovereignty, while the new Montenegrin government is working speedily on making the country’s sovereignty devoid of substance.

Serbian strategists have always treated the **Macedonian issue** as a central geopolitical issue in the Balkans. Milorad Ekmečić has repeatedly emphasized, “whoever controls the Vardar Valley is the hegemon of the Balkans”. Strategically speaking, Macedonia always goes hand in hand with Kosovo, which largely explains the NATO intervention, because it was considered that Milošević’s policy endangered the security of the entire southern wing of NATO. Belgrade has been involved in the events taking place in Macedonia since its independence. The Skopje authorities were especially resented for their recognition of Kosovo, while Nikola Gruevski, who also flirted with Moscow, was supported during the internal turmoil. Belgrade has always counted on Macedonian-Albanian relations to be an example of “latent conflict”. However, precisely because of the fragility of Macedonia and its strategic importance, the Western international community cut short the conflicts in due time, brought about the “Ohrid Agreement”, and subsequently opened the possibility for quick inclusion of Macedonia in NATO.

Although the Serbian state was expelled from **Kosovo** in 1999, Serbia still perceives Kosovo as an important geopolitical space. It is believed that the Albanians are not a nation-building people, and that Kosovo is a mafia state that would not be sustainable without an external factor, above all, NATO and the United States. Belgrade is aware that Kosovo Albanians are an important ally of the West and that the population is dynamic and oriented towards Euro-Atlantic integration, which essentially diminishes Serbian

18 Dušan Proroković, *Geopolitika Srbije*, Službeni glasnik, Belgrade 2018, p.781-798.

19 Same, p.738-763.

20 Nikola Vrzić, “Srpski svet”, Pečat, March 19, 2021.

influence. That is why Belgrade tried to separate the Serbs from the Albanians, that is, to divide Kosovo, but did not succeed, although, at one point, it had the support of Hashim Thaçi and, more importantly, Edi Rama. Serbian strategists believe that “Kosovo has become an extremely important and geographically predisposed central geopolitical position after the intervention”, which is why Serbia must “continuously address the issue of Kosovo through direct interference in the political processes in Kosovo”. The Serbian list (*Srpska lista*) is therefore an important instrument in the realization of Serbia’s aspirations towards Kosovo.²¹

The current dynamics in the region, and particularly the synchronization of events in Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina, clearly indicate that an attempt is underway to create a new reality (calling out a referendum in RS and permanent interference in Montenegro’s internal affairs) that would destabilize the entire region. Serbia follows a policy in the region identical to the one followed by Russia in its immediate vicinity (Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova). Russia’s behavior in the Balkans aims to compromise the EU and NATO, by destabilizing the entire region through Serbia.

FACING THE PAST: A TRANSGENERATIONAL PROCESS

Even after more than two decades, the processes of facing the past and of regional reconciliation, are still at the very beginning, despite the facts that have been revealed and confirmed, not only before various international courts, but also in each of the newly formed successor states of Yugoslavia. Apart from the fact that facing the past is a complex and decades-long process, one of the main obstacles in interregional

relations is the interpretation of the wars waged on the territory of the former Yugoslavia. Without an objective perception of the Yugoslav and international context, as well as the role of the Serbian elite in generating the war, it is unlikely that qualitative changes will take place any time soon.

The international community also contributed to this situation to a great extent, by reducing the whole problem, when it comes to facing the past, to criminal responsibility. The International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) has played an outstanding role in disclosing facts, not only within the verdicts, but also by compiling an astonishing database of documents, testimonies, documentaries, and the like. The ICTY did not have a mechanism in place to force countries in the region to consider its legacy seriously. This enabled Belgrade to impose its interpretation, according to which “Serbia did not take part in the war”, as the official one. The Serbian elite has not only accepted such an interpretation, but has also contributed to it, with numerous books and public appearances. This, in particular, refers to the country’s academic elite.

Furthermore, all newly established states in the region are undergoing important transformation processes. Their consolidation has not been completed. The transition was more or less unsuccessful, while the transformation of societies towards the adoption of new values practically hasn’t even started. At the same time, the creation of new national identities, which have internal and external components, is underway. Unfortunately, everything suggests that these processes will only intensify tensions in the region, due to the fact components and stereotypes, that increase misunderstandings, are integrated into these identities.

Most of the activities took place within the concept of transitional justice, with the goal of

²¹ Same, p. 867-869.

building sustainable peace and helping the democratization of newly established states. Transitional justice efforts in the former Yugoslavia initially focused on prosecuting the perpetrators of war crimes. In the meantime, other truth-establishing mechanisms have been launched, such as fact-finding centers, the Regional Commission for Establishing the Truth (RECOM), and many other initiatives.

Although facing the past is a transgenerational process, it can be stated that the region is showing regression in every respect, which is also true when it comes to facing the past. There is not the slightest readiness to approach the facts objectively, and to reach a common understanding of the recent past, especially the brutal disintegration of Yugoslavia. Regional elites have focused exclusively on creating narratives about their own sacrifice, which leaves no space for any responsibility. The war has been continued by a “culture of remembrance”, and the creation of narratives that deepen the antagonisms even further.

Dominant Serbian elites (political, religious, military, academic, and cultural) are systematically engaged in reshaping the past, in line with the goals that have not been abandoned. Thus, Miro Lompar, a university professor, very influential in promoting the new narrative, believes that: “In order to embark on a winding, uncertain, thorny path of recovery, after a severe historical defeat in the 20th century, we need to find a productive response to Western historical challenges. In that answer, the Serbian standpoint should be central, as a set of decisions that imply strict national egoism, from which Serbian cultural policy should be derived, as the broadest basis of national self-consciousness”.²²

22 <https://www.intermagazin.rs/milo-lompar-formula-duha-samoporicanja-glasi-sve-sto-je-srpsko-treba-vesti-na-srbijansko-da-bi-sve-sto-nije-srbijansko-vremenom-prestalo-da-bude-srpsko/>.

REVISION OF HISTORY

In addition to the overall confusion, that is deliberately being created regarding the facts about the recent past, a revision of the entire 20th century history is underway. This, in turn, creates additional chaos, especially in the minds of youth. Perceiving history only from the position of a victim precludes a serious dialogue about the past. Moreover, trauma is emphasized, and the desire for revenge is nurtured, which permanently maintains tensions in the region. The number of victims, which keep being increased, play a significant role in this manipulation. The focus is especially on the Second World War.

Jasenovac was, and remains, the concentration camp for which the number of victims was most often increased. Serbian propagandists operate with the number of 700,000 Serbs, Jews and Roma, killed in the camp. Although the precise numbers are known, this number remained a symbol of the suffering of Serbs. There are several studies offering an objective overview of the Second World War victims. Two independent demographers (one Serb and the other Croat) counted between 70,000 and 83,000: Vladimir Žerjavić in “Opsesije i megalomanija oko Jasenovca i Bleiburga. Gubitak stanovništva Jugoslavije u drugom svjetskom ratu”, Zagreb, Globus, 1992 and Bogoljub Kočović in “Žrtve Drugog svjetskog rata”, Sarajevo, Svijetlost, 1990.

Jasenovac was a key topic in the preparation of the war in Croatia in 1991, and has now become relevant, once again, in the justification of the 1990s war, which is treated by Serbian media as a revenge. Every attempt to make a clean slate of the 1990s, ends with Second World War casualties. A new initiative has even been launched to collect data on the victims of the Second World War. At the request of the Society for the erection of the Serbian memorial, the Holy Synod of Bishops called on the bishops to collect, through their clergy, data on the Serbs who died in the

wars. The idea, as it is pointed out, is to use the church books, in those places where they were returned, after being appropriated by the state following the Second World War.²³

The aim of constantly returning to the Second World War is the relativization of the responsibility for the war of the 1990s, as well as proving, by making a balance of victims for the entire 20th century, that Serbs were the greatest victims of both Yugoslavias. Furthermore, there are also manipulations with anti-fascism. The rehabilitation of the Chetniks, among other things, served the purpose of promoting the anti-fascist movement "from the right". This movement is widely accepted in Serbia. When it comes to the region and Europe, the thesis is promoted that Serbs were the majority in the partisan, i.e., anti-fascist movement. However, in Serbia itself, this movement remains on the margins, and has no resonance in public space, even though some groups and individuals systematically advocate for its (re)affirmation, as a value inseparable from European integration.

REHABILITATION OF WAR CRIMINALS

After their release from prison, individuals convicted of war crimes, such as Vojislav Šešelj, Vladimir Lazarević, Veselin Šljivančanin, and Nikola Šainović, received massive media promotion, as well as daily opportunity to interpret the wars of the 1990s. These interpretations essentially come down to the same claims that started the war, and are now being promoted as the official narrative, more or less accepted by the general public.

23 Politika, SPC prikuplja podatke o srpskim žrtvama u 20. veku", July 26, 2016.

Vojislav Šešelj is on television programs almost every day, interpreting the situation in the country, and saying all those things the government cannot, or will not say. He became, so to speak, the alter ego of President Vučić and his party.

In the current debate on the past, the role of Slobodan Milošević is relativized, while the responsibility is shifted to others (Croatia, Slovenia, Bosniaks, and the West).

The current government is doing everything to "normalize" Slobodan Milošević. There is only praise for his policy, as the one that saved Serbia from the war. The verdict against Radovan Karadžić serves as proof that Slobodan Milošević was not the instigator of the war in Bosnia. Namely, the verdict is quoted in the part which states that the Court found no evidence that Milošević agreed with the plan to create an ethnically pure Serb territory in Bosnia. For Ministers Ivica Dačić and Aleksandar Vulin, who themselves were part of the Milošević regime in the 1990s, that was sufficient to proclaim that Milošević was not guilty, that is, that he was acquitted of all guilt for war crimes, and that it has been shown that his policies were appropriate.²⁴

Although some of the crimes are admitted, the debate comes down to complaints that the number of indictees before The Hague tribunal is unfair, that is, that the number of Serbs who were held accountable before that court is disproportionately high. Debates are being held, and supposedly scientific books written, with the aim of discrediting the Court as biased (against Serbs). All the Court's oversights (and there were some) are listed, but everything comes down to technical details, without going into the substance of the conflict on the territory of Yugoslavia.

24 <http://www.blic.rs/vesti/politika/kako-je-slobodan-milosevic-ponovo-podelio-srbiju/7r5kmjh>.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Serbia's ambitious perception of its own importance does not take into account the interests of others in the region, and in particular, the interests of some external actors. Serbia is increasingly relying on Russia and China, whose interests are not identical to its own.

In the currently sharp confrontation between the West and the East, Serbia, although emphasizing its neutrality, essentially sided with Russia and China. The main reason for such a stand is the lack of will for reform and for accepting democratic values, but also a refusal to abandon the envisaged territorial aspirations.

Having all this in mind, the ambitions of the West to encourage the normalization of relations and make the perception of the past in the region more objective, do not resonate much in Serbia.

The question also arises whether there exists a consensus of political elites, that is, do people who are in power want, or believe, that it is necessary to carry out radical transformations of our societies. Also, is it possible to implement the processes of radical transformation of a society in any setting, putting it in the historical perspective and context of that specific society? Is there any reflection on how, and to what extent, it may be possible to consider a transitional justice program, that is, methods that exist, or do not yet exist – methods that would be effective in these societies?

By rehabilitating the radical movements from the Second World War and their leaders, Serbia identified itself with the defeated party in the Second World War, and legitimized their policies of genocide against non-Serbs, thus practically giving up anti-fascism. With this approach, Serbia also demonstrated a clear attitude towards the wars and crimes from the 1990s, which were inspired by the Chetnik ideology from the Second World War. Thus, Serbia sent a strong message to the region, and to the democratic Europe, that it is not giving up on the policy of confrontation with its neighbors, or on claims to other people's territories.

When it comes to the general public, the most important reason for the failure to understand is not related that much to a lack of information or knowledge. It is rather an issue of interpretation, emotions, experiences, and preconceptions – preconceptions that what is right and what is wrong, just and unjust, true and untrue, is all well known.

The biggest problem is the youth, growing up with interpretations that permanently alienate them from European and civilizational values. At the same time, during the pandemic, a growing strength of organizations and movements, which conceal their extreme right-wing agendas behind the "fight for freedom" slogan, can be noticed. They attract a large part of youth, influencing their attitudes and determinations.

If the US, EU, and NATO do not eventually renew their promised engagement in the Balkans, both Serbia and other regional leaders will continue with their policies, thus permanently destabilizing the Balkans, while all efforts to overcome the region's past, and embark on the path of Europeanization, will fail.