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CAUSES OF DECLINE IN SUPPORT FOR JOINING THE EUROPEAN UNION IN SERBIA

SOCIO-POLITICAL ANALYSIS

ABSTRACT In this article, the author analyzes the support for joining the European Union in Serbia, trying to determine the key causes that influenced the decrease in support for European integration in Serbian society. The main causes of the decline in support for joining the European Union are the long duration of Serbia's European integration process, insufficient cooperation with the Hague Tribunal, different understanding of the status of Kosovo and Metohija, and cultural factors, which are additionally emphasized by the current conflict between Russia and Ukraine. Serbia applied for membership in the European Union in December 2009, and received candidate status in March 2012. However, only two of the 35 chapters have been closed so far, so it is clear that Serbia has not advanced far on the path of European integration. This was also contributed to by the stagnation in the admission of new members. After the accession of 10 countries in 2004 and the admission of Romania and Bulgaria in 2007, in the last 16 years only Croatia has become a member. The reason the decline in support for European integration occurred is mainly due to the weakening of the soft power of the European Union and the reduction of its internal cohesion. In public opinion polls which were conducted during the last few years, one of the reasons for the decline in support for the European Union is the prevailing attitude of Serbian citizens that in the process of accession to the European Union it will be necessary for Serbia to recognize Kosovo and Metohija as an independent state. According to the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia, Kosovo and Metohija are an integral part of Serbia. However, 22 members of the European Union recognize Kosovo as an

independent state. Even within the European Union there is no agreement regarding the status of Kosovo and Metohija, due to the fact that five member states (Greece, Cyprus, Spain, Romania and Slovakia) consider Kosovo and Metohija to be an integral part of Serbia. The current military conflict between Russia and Ukraine has opened up a whole range of international and domestic policy issues in many countries. In Serbia, the Russophile ideology is present among the majority of the population as part of the tradition. This is why the pressures of the United States of America and the European Union for Serbia to introduce sanctions against Russia also affect the decline in support for European integration. Supporters of Russia in the military conflict with Ukraine emphasize the cultural reasons for support, which are manifested through the common Slavic origin, the Orthodox faith and the historical closeness of the Serbian and Russian people.

Keywords: Serbia, European Union, Kosovo and Metohija, Eurointegration, Sanctions against Russia

1. INTRODUCTORY NOTES

After the victory of Vojislav Koštunica over Slobodan Milošević in the elections for the president of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia on September 24, 2000, the citizens of Serbia expressed the majority's determination to join the European Union. Although there was no referendum, which would have clearly confirmed the desire and will of the citizens, public opinion polls show that after 2000, the majority was of the opinion that Serbia should join the European Union. Thus, in November 2009, 73% of Serbian citizens were in favor of joining the Union. In January of the following year, support for European integration dropped to 63%. However, in August 2011, Serbian residents were mostly against the accession to the European Union, i.e. only 46% of respondents thought the opposite. Following this, there has never been more than 60% of citizens willing to join the Union. The percentage was lowest in December 2012 when only 41% of those surveyed wanted Serbia to access the EU, and in December 2022, which saw only a 2% increase.[1] Another survey from December 2022 shows a higher percentage of those opposing Serbia's accession to the European Union (47.8%) and a lower percentage of those supporting it (36.7%), while a small percentage of citizens do not have an opinion on it at all (15.5%).[2]

[1] *Evropska integracija građana Srbije*, Ministarstvo za evropske integracije, Beograd 2022, at https://www.mei.gov.rs/upload/documents/nacionalna_dokumenta/istrazivanja_javnog_mnjenja/javno_mnjenje_dec_22.pdf.

[2] L. Gedošević, "S kim biste radije na kafu: Milicom Zavetnicom, ili Marinikom Tepić? Hit istraživanje! Evo šta građani misle o poskupljenima, EU i Kosovu, ali su i poredili političare sa osobinama životinja," *Blic*, 16 January 2023, at https://www.blic.rs/vesti/politika/s-kim-biste-radije-na-kafu-milicom-zavetnicom-ili-marinikom-tepic-hit-istrazivanje/cvxz91x, 2 XII 2023.

The effort that should be put into joining the European Union includes greater or lesser interest of citizens, political subjects, businesses, associations of citizens and other social, political, economic and cultural subjects in order to approach harmonization with the rules and standards valid in the European Union states. However, the process of European integration in Serbia is not consistent, due to the fact that on the one hand, it is characterized by selectivity in accepting the rules on which the European Union rests, and, on the other, by a conscious refusal to accept the fulfillment of certain conditions which are necessary for European integration. The reasons for this are historical, ideological-political, cultural and legal in nature.

The main thesis of the research is that in Serbia the support for the accession of this country to the European Union is decreasing, which was caused by various socio-political factors occurring within Serbia, the actions of the European Union, as well as international circumstances. The hypothesis on which this research relies is that the manner of cooperation with The Hague Tribunal, the different view of the status of Kosovo and Metohija, the long duration of the European integration process, and the current military conflict between Russia and Ukraine have influenced the reduction of support for European integration in Serbia.

In this research, the methods of analysis, synthesis, induction, deduction, generalization, as well as the case study method will be used. The monographs, scientific articles and studies by other researchers, as well as the Constitution, laws and other legal acts will be analyzed. During the previous twenty years, numerous public opinion surveys were conducted regarding the attitude of the citizens of Serbia towards the European Union, the issue of the relationship towards Kosovo and Metohija, but also other current socio-political events, the results of which will be used in this paper.

In addition to research questions on how the way of cooperation with The Hague Tribunal, the different views on the status of Kosovo and Metohija and the long duration of the process of European integration influenced the attitude of the citizens of Serbia towards the European Union, in this research the question whether the weakening of the power of the European Union and the reduction of its internal cohesion is the reason for the decline in support for European integration, will be raised. Since the creation of the European Union, countries have sought to join it, and for the first time in 2020, a country withdrew from the European Union. The fact that the country that left the Union, Great Britain, was one of the countries that formed the European Coal and Steel Community, and a forerunner of the European Union, gave additional weight to that return process. The decline of cohesion within EU member states is also influenced by the existence of anti-Brussels structures in almost all member states. The decisions of the Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán are also collapsing cohesion.

During the accession of the Balkan countries to the European Union, a whole series of open issues appeared between the neighboring countries, whereby the countries that have already become members can make the path of European integration more difficult for the candidate countries. While there has been a border dispute between Croatia and Slovenia in the Gulf of Piran, which served Slovenia to block Croatia's European integration process, Montenegro and Croatia established a temporary, but not

yet permanent solution to the status of the Prevlaka peninsula. Since the collapse of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 1991, there has been a conflict between the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Greece regarding the name of the country. The dispute was resolved in 2018 with the signing of the Prespa Agreement, by which FYR Macedonia changed its name to the Republic of North Macedonia, and Greece accepted that the official language of its northern neighbor should be Macedonian, and the citizenship Macedonian/North Macedonian.[3] However, despite the end of the thirty-year dispute with Greece, Bulgaria still represents an obstacle in the European integration of North Macedonia. The dispute between the two countries is related to historical and cultural heritage.

Serbia has border disputes with Croatia regarding the Danube border, and with Bosnia and Herzegovina regarding hydroelectric power plants on the Drina River and 12 kilometers of the Belgrade-Bar railway crossing the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina. In addition to border disputes, there are also disagreements with neighboring countries and peoples which have deeper historical and cultural background. The historical memory of the crimes committed by the Croatian Ustasha against Serbian civilians in the territory of the Independent State of Croatia during the Second World War, as well as the civil wars that were fought in the territory of today's Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, left behind a whole series of unresolved issues. In addition to the issue of missing persons, what also burdens Serb-Croat and Serb-Bosniak relations is the issue of refugees. In 1996, there were about 538,000 refugees in Serbia, but with the integration and the departure of those refugees to some other countries in 2001, that number decreased to 377,000, and in 2004, about 104,000 refugees were registered in Serbia.[4] Refugees left a significant number of properties in the countries they came from, and property in the former Yugoslav republics was illegally confiscated from numerous Serbian companies, and the companies from the constituent republics created by the breakup of the former federal Yugoslavia were also denied property rights in Serbia.

On the other hand, Serbia's relations with Hungary are at their historically highest level, and the bilateral relations with the other two neighbors, members of the European Union, Bulgaria and Romania, are relatively good. Romania considers Kosovo and Metohija an integral part of Serbia, but the issue that burdens relations between Serbia and Romania to a lesser extent is the status of the Vlach minority in Negotinska Krajina, whom Romania considers ethnic Romanians.

However, unresolved relations with neighboring countries that are members of the European Union represent, or have represented in the past, an obstacle in the progress of European integration of almost all countries in the Balkans. In a public opinion survey conducted by the Ministry of European Integration in December 2022, as many as 28% of respondents believe that the policy of constant conditioning and blackmail

[3] The Prespa Agreement, Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Prespes 2018, at https://www.mfa.gr/images/docs/eidikathemata/agreement.pdf, 2 XII 2023.

[4] *Podaci sa popisa 1996, 2001, 2004/5 godine i trenutni broj izbeglica*, Komesarijat za izbeglice i migracije Republike Srbije, Beograd 2022, at https://kirs.gov.rs/media/uploads/a%20statistika%202022.pdf, 2 IX 2023.

applied by the European Union towards Serbia slows down/complicates Serbia's entry into the European Union to the greatest extent, but 12% of respondents believe that the mentality in Serbia and unwillingness to change is the cause of the slowdown. Serbian citizens rate the current situation within the European Union as the third cause that slows down or complicates the accession of Serbia to the European Union (with 11%).[5]

2. HISTORY OF POLITICAL RELATIONS BETWEEN THE EU AND SERBIA

The history of the relations between the EU and Serbia can be traced back to the founding of the European Coal and Steel Organization, as the forerunner of the European Union. The former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia had a long political and economic cooperation with the states, which are the founders of the Union. In the 1950s and 1960s, Yugoslavia signed bilateral trade agreements with the countries of Western Europe, especially in the period from 1958 to 1968. At the end of 1967, Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the European Economic Community signed the Declaration on Relations, which became the legal framework for economic cooperation, and a permanent Yugoslav mission was established in Brussels. The Declaration on the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia's regulatory relationship with the EEC was signed in 1976, and a three-year trade agreement entered into force the following year. The comprehensive agreement on economic and trade cooperation between the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the European Economic Community was adopted in 1980.[6]

However, while during the period of the collapse of the Socialist Bloc, the majority of countries, which until then were 'behind the iron curtain', began the process of European integration, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, which consisted of Serbia and Montenegro, was under the sanctions of the United Nations. Thus, at the very beginning of European integration, Serbia was late compared to other former socialist countries.

The process of stabilization and association for the countries of the Western Balkans was initiated in 1999, without the participation of Yugoslavia. The first official participation of FRY at a meeting organized by the European Union was at the Summit in Zagreb in 2000, and the following year the first meeting of the 'Consultative Working Group' was held, which was supposed to prepare a feasibility study for FRY. In 2004, the European Union adopted the 'dual track' approach, which provided that Montenegro and Serbia would separately negotiate the trade part of the Stabilization and Association Agreement, and that the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro[7]

[5] *Evropska integracija građana...*, 2 IX 2023

[6] J. Bazić, "Relations of Serbia and European Union: Socio-Historical Determinants and the Contemporary Political Issues," *Politeja*, no. 3 (2019), p. 305.

[7] The Federal Republic of Yugoslavia existed from April 27, 1992 to February 4, 2003, and the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro was established on February 4, 2003 and lasted until May 21, 2006.

would jointly negotiate the political part of the SAA. Although negotiations between the European Union and Serbia and Montenegro on the conclusion of the Stabilization and Association Agreement began in 2005, they were not conducted for the next two years due to insufficient cooperation with the Hague Tribunal.[8]

The Stabilization and Association Agreement between the European Union and Serbia was signed in 2008, and in 2009 the European Union made a decision to start implementing the Transitional Trade Agreement. The ratification of the Stabilization and Association Agreement with Serbia began in 2010, and the transitional trade agreement came into force in the same year. While the European Parliament ratified the Stabilization and Association Agreement between the European Union and Serbia in 2011, the ratification of the SAA in the member states was completed two years later.[9]

The first intergovernmental conference between Serbia and the European Union was held in Brussels in 2014, marking the beginning of accession negotiations at the political level. The following year, two of the 35 negotiation chapters were opened (chapter 32, on financial supervision and chapter 35, on the normalization of relations between Belgrade and Pristina), and in 2016, the chapters on justice and fundamental rights (number 23) and chapter 24 (justice, freedom and security) were opened. In the same year, at the fourth intergovernmental conference in Brussels, a decision was made to open negotiation chapters number 5 (public procurement) and 25 (science and research), and in 2017, at the fifth, sixth and seventh intergovernmental conferences, decisions were made to open six chapters – number 20 (entrepreneurship and industrial policy), 26 (education and culture), 7 (intellectual property law), 29 (customs union), 6 (company law) and 30 (economic relations with foreign countries). The following year, chapters 13 (fisheries), 33 (financial and budgetary issues), 17 (economic and monetary policy) and 18 (statistics) were opened.[10]

At the Tenth Intergovernmental Conference in Brussels, held in 2019, it was decided that chapter 9, which refers to financial services, should be opened. At the end of the same year, chapter 4, free movement of capital, was opened as well. In Luxembourg, at the Twelfth Intergovernmental Conference, in 2021, it was decided that cluster 1, Basics, should be opened. The conference in Luxembourg represents a turning point in the accession negotiations, as it is the first that has been held since the Council approved the revised enlargement methodology, which is now also applied to Serbia's accession process. At the end of the same year, at the thirteenth International Conference, held in Brussels, the decision to open cluster 4, Green Agenda and infrastructural connection was adopted.[11]

The aforementioned negotiation chapters were set up with the aim to align the system of the candidate country with the requirements and standards of the European

[8] *Istorijat odnosa Srbije i EU*, Ministarstvo za evropske integracije, at https://www.mei.gov.rs/srp/srbija-i-eu/istorijat-odnosa-srbije-i-eu/.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Ibid.

Union. Although they are declaratively of the same degree of importance, certain chapters have a special place due to their importance in the overall relations with the European Union. In this regard, chapter 31, Common Foreign, Security and Defense Policy, which is classified as political, is particularly noteworthy.

From a logical point of view, this chapter implies the application of the so-called 'double track', which constitutes the legal and institutional harmonization of the candidate country and the European Union in the field of institutional adjustment with the European Union within the framework of the common foreign and security policy, the adoption of foreign policy positions based on the values around which a common foreign policy and security approach to the European Union is created, progressive harmonization with the regulations and measures of the European Union, before and during the negotiations in this chapter, including full harmonization before joining the European Union, understanding the European Union's strategic choice towards multilateralism as the basis of its foreign policy approach,[12] adjusting the state's institutional framework for more active support and participation in military and civil operations of the European Union, as well as a balanced and friendly relationship with other countries in the region.[13]

Thus, Serbia entered the process of European integration immediately after the change of government in 2000. However, for more than twenty years it has not succeeded in becoming a member, and it is still not possible to determine the year of accession. Although the 'planned' accession of Serbia to the European Union was the common denominator of most political parties, they were unable to respond to numerous scandals, some of which refer to the misuse of European funds in the so-called transition period.[14] Hence, the European Union singled out 24 disputed privatizations in

[12] *In the aforementioned context, it should be noted that in accordance with the development of the Stabilization and Association Process, i.e. the establishment of a negotiating framework between the administration in Brussels and individual countries of the Western Balkans, it is necessary to harmonize the state's foreign policy with the Common Foreign and Security Policy of the European Union (CFSP). Special attention is paid to this in the membership negotiations. That is the reason why, immediately after signing the Stabilization and Association Agreement with the European Union, the countries that are future candidates for membership must gradually harmonize their own foreign policy with the CSDP, and in this sense, their scope is periodically evaluated. The aforementioned thematic chapter in the negotiations (number 31 – 'Foreign, security and defense policy') of the candidate country applying to become a member state of the European Union implies coordinated foreign policy action with the Brussels administration towards so-called third countries and international organizations, but also following the mainstream of the Union's legal regulations in this area, as well as her specific activities*. See more: D. Djukanović, "Usaglašavanje država Zapadnog Balkana sa Zajedničkom spoljnom i bezbednosnom politikom Evropske unije – između normativnog, deklarativnog i stvarnog," *Godišnjak Fakulteta političkih nauka*, no. 12 (2014), p. 11.

[13] I. Novaković, J. Bogosavljević, *Srbija i pregovori u poglavlju 31: Zajednička spoljna, bezbednosna i odbrambena politika*, Beograd 2018, p. 5.

[14] *According to economists, the transition period in Serbia is characterized by a decline in all important economic and social parameters, an increase in inequality in society and a redistribution of social wealth in the hands of the minority in the conditions of political democratization of society*. See more: B. Drašković, "Kraj privatizacije i posledice po razvoj," in Id. (ed.), *Kraj privatizacije, posledice po ekonomski razvoj i nezaposlenost u Srbiji*, Beograd 2010, p. 23.

Serbia that originate from the time of 'democratic parties' in power in Serbia, i.e. from the period between 2000 and 2012.[15]

Serbia applied for membership in the European Union in December 2009, and received candidate status in March 2012. However, only two of the 35 chapters have been closed so far, so it is clear that Serbia has not advanced far on the path of European integration. The stagnation in the reception of new members certainly contributed to this. After the accession of 10 countries in 2004 and the admission of Romania and Bulgaria in 2007, in the last 16 years only Croatia has been admitted to the EU.

3. COOPERATION WITH THE HAGUE TRIBUNAL AS A (PRE-) CONDITION GIVEN BY EUROPEAN UNION

Cooperation with the Hague Tribunal assumed a legal framework with the adoption of the Law on Cooperation with the Hague Tribunal from 2002.[16] However, insufficient cooperation with the Hague Court for a long time burdened the relations of the FRY, the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro, and Serbia with the European Union. The absence of appropriate cooperation was primarily reflected in the failure to extradite those accused of war crimes. Among them, former president of Republika Srpska Radovan Karadžić, general Ratko Mladić and president of the Serbian autonomous region of Krajina (in today's Croatia) Goran Hadžić, stood out.

This is the reason the issue of cooperation with the Hague Tribunal caused double resistance in Serbia. The first line of resistance consisted of parts of the state civil and military apparatus and political figures. They openly joined the opponents of any form of cooperation with this court. Their attitude was reduced to the negation of everything that could link the wanted persons with the crimes charged against them in the indictments. The second line of resistance consisted of public opinion, which for the most part openly opposed cooperation with the Hague Tribunal, at the same time challenging its legitimacy and the legality of its work and judgments. In Serbia, those accused of war crimes before the Hague Tribunal are often viewed as war heroes, the length of court proceedings is emphasized, and the verdicts are judged by the public as legally unfounded and non-objective.

Opponents of the Hague Tribunal emphasize the illegality of its establishment. This is argued by the fact that the Security Council, and not the General Assembly

[15] Although the Republic of Serbia ratified all the most important international instruments in the field of fighting corruption and formed state bodies, such as the Coordination Body for the application of the Action Plan for implementation of National Strategy for fight against corruption, the Agency for the Fight against Corruption and the Council for the Fight against Corruption, the problem not resolved as intended. That is why corruption is still present in all its manifested forms; D. Dimovski, J. Stanojević, "Pravno-ekonomski uslovi učlanjenja zemlje u Evropsku uniju – primer Republike Srbije," *Zbornik radova Pravnog fakulteta u Novom Sadu*, vol. 53, no. 1 (2019), p. 182.

[16] *Zakon o saradnji Srbije i Crne Gore sa Međunarodnim tribunalom za krivično gonjenje lica odgovornih za teška kršenja međunarodnog humanitarnog prava počinjena na teritoriji bivše Jugoslavije od 1991. godine*, Službeni list SRJ, br. 18/2002 i Službeni list SCG, br. 16/2003.

of the United Nations, established this court. According to their opinion, The International Court of Justice, which has its seat in The Hague, is a purely political body in which only the most powerful member states of the United Nations participate in its work.[17] While they point out that the public-secret nature of the work and activities of the Hague Prosecutor's Office, in terms of the existence of a large number of secret indictments, undermines trust and seriously calls into question the objective action of the Hague Tribunal, selective justice is the central argument of the opponents of the Hague Tribunal in Serbia. Its justification stems from the fact that the national composition of convicted persons, especially those with long-term prison terms, is disproportionate and to the detriment of convicts of Serbian nationality. The fact that Serbs were sentenced to 1,038 years in prison, Croats to 249 years, Bosniaks to 42, Albanians to 13, while only one person from today's North Macedonia was sentenced to 12 years in prison, contributed to the understanding of the non-objectivity of the Hague Tribunal.[18] The unreasonably long duration of detention, which takes on the dimensions of punishing the accused persons, further strengthened the position of the majority of Serbian citizens against the Hague Tribunal.

The aforementioned conclusions show that the Serbian scientific, professional and lay public has lost confidence in the proceedings of the Hague Tribunal. If we mention that for a whole decade, the central condition of Serbia's entry into the European Union was 'unconditional cooperation with the Hague Tribunal', then the consequence of the European Union's demand for unconditional cooperation with the Hague Tribunal was a decline in the amount of trust the citizens of Serbia have in the European Union. In a word, if Serbia's European future is called into question in this way, then it is unrealistically (pre)conditioned.

Nationally oriented political entities used this conditioning of Serbia to redirect public opinion in their own direction. Some of them openly tied the achievement of their program goals to Serbia's (non)entry into the European Union. In such a political climate, embedded with the constellation of existing forces and relations in society, Serbia's anti-European direction of movement continued to advance. It is supported by the understanding that international criminal law represents a 'negation' or, at the very least, a limitation of the sovereignty of each state.

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[17] *The principle nemo plus iuris ad alium transfere potest quam ipse habet – which originates from the legal tradition of Rome - according to which a principal cannot empower his agent to exercise more rights than the principal himself possesses, in the light of the activities of the Security Council and the creation of the Hague Tribunal, gets its full, negativistically accented, confirmation. Not only that, as already noted, the Security Council did not have a mandate based on the letter and spirit of Chapter VII of the UN Charter regarding the constitution of the International Tribunal (giving it the role of its subsidiary body), but it exceeded the limits which a normative document of the World Organization entrusted it programmatically and to a certain extent and degree*. See more: F. Jagica, *Međunarodno-pravni aspekti jugoslovenske krize: doktorska disertacija*, Beograd 2016, p. 251.

[18] "Bilans nepravde Haskog Tribunala: Srbi osudjeni vise 1000 godina zatvora, Hrvati i Albanci dobili tri puta manje," *Novosti*, 8 June 2021, at https://www.novosti.rs/c/vesti/politika/1005045/bilans-nepravde-haskog-tribunala-srbi-osudjeni-vise-1-000-godina-zatvora-hrvati-albanci-dobili-tri-puta-manje, 1 XII 2023.

4. RESOLVING THE KOSOVO-METOHIJA CRISIS AS A CONDITION FOR SERBIA JOINING THE EUROPEAN UNION

Declining support for the European Union is also influenced by the prevailing attitude of Serbian citizens that in the process of joining the European Union it will be necessary for Serbia to recognize Kosovo and Metohija as an independent state. According to the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia, Kosovo and Metohija are an integral part of Serbia. *The Serbian constitutionalist left no illusions about the status of Kosovo. Taking into consideration the aforementioned, it will be difficult, I think, given the 'problematic nature' of recognizing Kosovo's independence, to ever refute such unequivocal arguments of the Republic of Serbia, based on the Serbian tradition and supported by the constitutional principle of territorial integrity*.[19] Although 22 members of the European Union recognize the independence of Kosovo, even within the European Union there is no agreement regarding the status of Kosovo and Metohija, because five member states (Greece, Cyprus, Spain, Romania and Slovakia) consider Kosovo and Metohija an integral part of Serbia.

The Kosovo-Metohija crisis, or the 'Kosovo problem' in the nomenclature of most Western European countries, has been burdening Serbia's progress towards the European Union for decades. This problem is considered a key obstacle that can be overcome, according to European Union officials, by unconditional recognition and full normalization of relations between Belgrade and Pristina. At the same time, this 'problem' is rooted in the negotiation chapters that Serbia must open and close on its European path. More precisely, chapter 35 (on the normalization of relations between Belgrade and Pristina) includes the mechanism of *monitoring all agreements (existing and future) that are the result of the dialogue on the normalization of relations between Belgrade and Pristina. This chapter has the same status in the negotiation process as the rule of law chapters, has transitional criteria, and the possibility of using the balance clause applies to it. If it is judged that there is no progress in the implementation of the agreement, the mechanism of stopping negotiations in other chapters can be triggered. An additional problem is that there are no legal rules in this chapter, so it is not clear on which criteria the assessment of sufficient progress in fulfilling the obligations from this chapter should be based*.[20]

In public opinion surveys, citizens of Serbia were often asked whether they think that the independence of Kosovo and Metohija should be recognized if this is a condition for membership in the European Union. Thus, in 2011, when asked whether in such a dilemma they would prefer to accept the independence of Kosovo or membership in the European Union, 47 percent of respondents opted for Kosovo, while only 24 percent would choose the European Union. In this survey, 29 percent of the 1,800

[19] E. Bujwid-Kurek, *Serbia w nowej przestrzeni ustrojowej. Dzieje, ustrój, konstytucja*, Kraków 2012, p. 104.

[20] T. Miščević, "Savremeni odnosi Srbije i Evropske unije," in J. Minić (ed.), *Izazovi spoljne politike Srbije*, Beograd 2015, p. 19.

respondents were undecided.[21] Such results show the strong attachment of Serbian citizens to Kosovo and Metohija.

The government back then managed to improve Serbia's relations with Western European countries and the European Union. Thus, in March 2012 the European Council granted Serbia the status of a candidate country.[22] The victory of Tomislav Nikolić in the presidential elections in May 2012 and the winning of the largest number of parliamentary mandates of the Serbian Progressive Party, under his leadership, led to significant changes in the political life of Serbia. Ivica Dačić, the leader of the Socialist Party of Serbia, became the new Prime Minister, and Aleksandar Vučić, who will soon become the most influential politician in Serbia, became the first Deputy Prime Minister. The conduct of the Brussels negotiations and the signing of the agreement between Belgrade and Pristina in 2013, under the auspices of the European Union, provided a new input in the direction of achieving more lasting peace and reducing intolerance between Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo and Metohija. A significant achievement of the Serbian negotiating team is the agreed formation of the Union of Serbian Municipalities, which grants self-governing powers to areas where the majority Serb population lives. Although there was some resistance in Serbia to the signing of the Brussels Agreements, the State of Serbia has begun fulfilling the agreed obligations. However, to this day, Pristina has not fulfilled the provisions of the Brussels Agreements, in the part related to the formation of the Union of Serbian Municipalities.[23]

Since the Brussels Agreement was created as a result of a compromise between two 'irreconcilable parties', under the strong patronage of Germany, there were certain expectations that it would immediately begin its full implementation. However, 'certain expectations' turn into a decade of uncertainty for Serbia, which has fulfilled its obligations, and Pristina still does not want to fulfill its main obligation. Not only was there a lack of will to fulfill the Brussels Agreement in its entirety, but there is also the determination of the Pristina authorities to explicitly reject the formation of the Union of Serbian Municipalities, as their central obligation. In addition, the Brussels Agreement raises the issue of the status of the northern part of Kosovo and Metohija. Due to the incomplete integration into the Kosovo order, which is foreseen in the implementation plan, and the holding of local Kosovo elections in the north of Kosovo in 2013, the employees of the Ministry of Interior of Serbia received a notification about the integration. When it comes to Serbia, this was a major step forward in the implementation

[21] M. Teodorović, "Kosovo ili EU – dilema ili mit," *Slobodna Evropa*, 4 January 2011, at https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/kosovo_ili_eu_dilema_ili_mit/2266904.html, 2 XII 2023.

[22] E. Bujwid-Kurek, "EU Aspirations of the Republic of Serbia – an Overview," *Przegląd Europejski*, no. 2 (2016), p. 21.

[23] Based on the Brussels Agreement, which has the status of an international legal act, the Union of Serbian Municipalities should be part of the legal system of the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government in Pristina. Their status solution cannot be based on domicile legal acts because they are of lower legal force compared to international legal norms. See more about it: I. Simić, "Zajednica srpskih opština kao srednji nivo upravne vlasti na Kosovu i Metohiji u skladu sa Briselskim sporazumom," *Megatrend revija*, no. 3 (2017), p. 40.

of the Brussels Agreement, which, until today, remained unanswered by the Pristina authorities. [24]

Pristina's non-fulfillment of its obligations from the Brussels Agreement and the soft reaction of the European Union, in which there is obviously no room for the application of equally expressed pressure on both signatory parties, additionally made the issue of Serbia's entry into the European Union more complex. Although at first the Brussels Agreement was considered a great success, it turned out that instead of a bilaterally binding international act, it became a binding legal act only when Serbia is concerned. This state of affairs leads to the polarization of the political scene in Serbia, which is divided into liberal and extreme currents.

Supporters of the liberal trend believe that it is necessary to take bigger steps forward in the direction of European integration. They believe that a permanent political solution for Kosovo and Metohija must be achieved, which would put a historical end to the mutual conflicts. In its ultimate scope, a political solution would include the recognition of Serbia-Kosovo as an independent state.

Supporters of the extreme current have not moved far from their initial positions regarding the status of Kosovo and Metohija, considering this territory an integral part of the state of Serbia. Since they are not ready for political compromises, they base their views on historical facts, which clash with the official views of the majority of European Union members. If the majority of citizens decide to join the European Union, the accession must take place according to non-selective rules and procedures.

There is no doubt that the outcome in which Serbia recognizes the independence of Kosovo and Metohija is most suitable for the European Union. If this would be the case, the two internationally recognized states would continue on the path of accepting the European norms that should be fulfilled in order to achieve the membership.[25] Such a constellation of international relations, in which the European Union plays an important role, the initially expressed polarization of political subjects in Serbia, would largely evolve in the direction of finding mutually acceptable solutions. This means willingness to make concessions and abandon the policy of open negation of everything coming from the West. Of course, these are the expectations of European Union officials.

In public opinion polls in Serbia, one can observe different views of citizens on the issue of Kosovo and Metohija. Two key determinants stand out in them: 1) the majority of citizens are of the opinion that Kosovo and Metohija are an inalienable part of Serbia and the Serbian national being; 2) citizens have different attitudes towards 'how' and 'how far' they should go in defense of Serbian state sovereignty in Kosovo and Metohija. Almost half of Serbian citizens (48.8%) say that Pristina initiates instability in the entire region and blame their authorities for the further escalation of the conflict in Kosovo and Metohija (see Table 3).

[24] D. Radovanović, F. Obradović, "Od ideje do prakse – Briselski sporazum i kosovsko-metohijska svakodnevica," *Baština*, no. 52 (2020), p. 356.

[25] N. Mladenović, "Srpska kosovska politika: Model igre i mešovite strategije," *Godišnjak Fakulteta političkih nauka*, no. 12 (2014), p. 45.

Nevertheless, public opinion in Serbia shows oscillating trends in relation to various aspects of the so-called Kosovo crisis. The initial rejection of any form of status negotiation gave way to attitudes based on the factual state of affairs, understanding the difficult situation of the Serbian population in the north of Kosovo and Metohija, and especially in the enclaves south of the Ibar River, but also the impossibility of the state of Serbia directly providing protection to the endangered part of its population.

In the aforementioned circumstances, opportunities are created for the action of nationalist-oriented parts of Serbian society. They deliberately position their role by creating resistance to everything that comes from the 'outside', thus trying to win over a significant part of the electorate. Therefore, it is not surprising that the polarization of Serbian society is moving in favor of extremist currents.[26] After the elections for the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia in June 2020, the right-wing political parties (New) Democratic Party of Serbia, Movement for the Restoration of the Kingdom of Serbia, Zavetnici and Dveri became parliamentary.

5. THE CURRENT MILITARY CONFLICT BETWEEN RUSSIA AND UKRAINE

As already mentioned, there are three great powers involved in the competition over the Balkans: 1) the US, as the leader of the political West; 2) the Russian Federation, as a traditional player in the region; and 3) the People's Republic of China, a new player both globally and regionally.[27] The fourth power that has foreign policy influence in the Balkans is the European Union. The relationship between Serbia and the European Union is bearing a huge burden due to the crisis in Ukraine. The current military conflict between Russia and Ukraine has opened up a whole range of international and domestic policy issues in many countries. The pre-war and war crisis in Ukraine deepened old and opened new issues concerning Russia's relationship with the military alliance NATO, the Council of Europe and the European Union. Shortly after the outbreak of the conflict, the political and economic relations of the European Union member states with Russia worsened. The United States of America and Western European countries, including the former socialist states, are unifying their positions on the Ukrainian crisis and actively supporting Ukraine. Several packages of economic sanctions against

[26] *Citizens of Serbia are less concerned with the present, which is unenviable, and the future, which is completely uncertain, and most of all, they are obsessed with the past, which is largely invented, beautified and glorified. They are fed up with the projections of reality that are directed and distributed to them by the ruling class. Fictional traditions are very convenient for manipulation, especially in politics and business. They are there to make incredible things believable, and conspiracy theories serve as a vehicle for launching irrational explanations*. See more: N. Božilović, "Antinomije kulture savremenog srpskog društva – predmoderni mentalitet vs. postmoderni identitet," *Sinteze* - časopis *za pedagoške nauke, književnost i kulturu*, iss. 17 (2020), p. 71.

[27] I. Zarić, Ž. Budimir, "The Great Powers' Geopolitical Competition over the Balkans – the Influence of the Ukrainian Crisis," *The Review of International Affairs*, vol. 73, no. 1186 (2022), p. 83.

Russia have been introduced, and the member states of the NATO pact are sending humanitarian aid and military weapons to Ukraine.

Serbia expressed a special attitude towards the Russian-Ukrainian crisis. In the United Nations, it condemned the violation of Ukraine's territorial integrity, but did not impose sanctions on Russia. *Brussels, following the objectives of transatlantic elites, puts pressure on the Balkan countries not to cooperate with Russia and to impose sanctions*.[28] However, although the open pressures of high officials of the European Union are constantly growing, Serbia has not joined the member states of the European Union in its policy towards Russia.

While the European Union believes that Serbia, as a country that is in the accession phase, must harmonize its foreign policy with the European Union, in Serbia the majority of the population is inclined towards Russia as part of their tradition. That is why the pressures of the United States of America and the European Union for Serbia to introduce sanctions against Russia also affect the reduction of support for European integration. Supporters of Russia in the military conflict with Ukraine emphasize the cultural reasons for support, which are manifested through the common Slavic origin, the Orthodox faith and the historical closeness of the Serbian and Russian people. According to a poll given in March 2022, 42% of respondents in Serbia believed that Russia's aggression against Ukraine was not justified, 35% thought it was, while around 23% did not answer the question. In the same survey, three quarters of respondents, i.e. 76%, said that Serbia should not join the European Union and impose sanctions on Russia, while 13 percent were in favor of imposing sanctions. [29]

Therefore, public opinion in Serbia openly sympathizes with Russia, as a conflicting party in the Ukrainian crisis. Every day there are television shows in which pro-Russian public figures in Serbia take part, and protests in support of Russia are also organized. The final epilogue of this is reflected in the strengthening of right-wing parties, organizations and individuals who further encourage Serbia's withdrawal from becoming a member of European Union.

CONCLUSION

The historical course of Serbia towards membership in the European Union records different stages and phases. It starts from taking the initial political and legal steps, which boil down to the unreserved fulfillment of various (pre)conditions. At the beginning, the conditions set were the same as for other candidate countries. However, over time, the European Union's relationship with Serbia became burdened by daily political events.

[28] S. Janković, "Geopolitics of the Balkans: 2019–2021," *The Review of International Affairs*, vol. 72, no. 1182 (2021), p. 14.

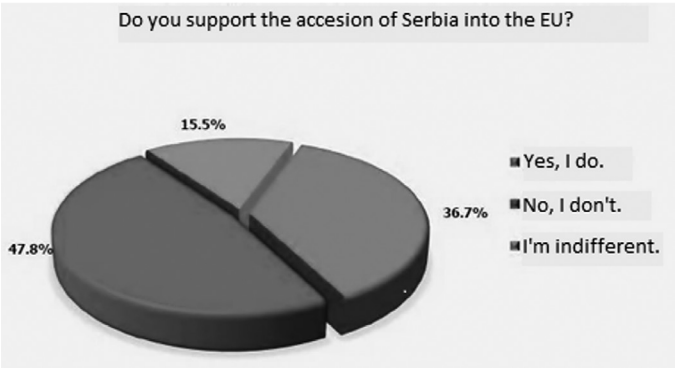
[29] *Stavovi građana Srbije prema Rusiji: istraživanje javnog mnjenja*, Institut za evropske studije, Beograd mart 2022, at https://iea.rs/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Stav-gradjana-Srbije-prema-Rusiji-2022.pdf, 2 IX 2023.

The formulation of the negotiation chapters, which Serbia, as a country applying to become a member state of the European Union should fulfill, was a function of its legal and institutional adaptation. This process is called 'harmonization' in the European nomenclature, but the majority of Serbian residents believe that in this process much more is *de facto* demanded of Serbia compared to other countries that have already become members of the European Union.

Public opinion polls conducted in Serbia have shown that the aforementioned conclusions are correct. Citizens' support for membership in the European Union is drastically decreasing. Using this mood of the citizens, right-wing political parties and movements have found fertile ground for marketing their ideas. Ultimately, this state of affairs in Serbian society is caused primarily by external influences. The fact is that current state leadership is making extraordinary efforts to reach a comprehensive and mutually sustainable agreement with the representatives of the Pristina authorities. A positive solution to this problem would once again restore citizens' trust in the good intentions of the European Union and make the process of becoming a member possible in the near future.

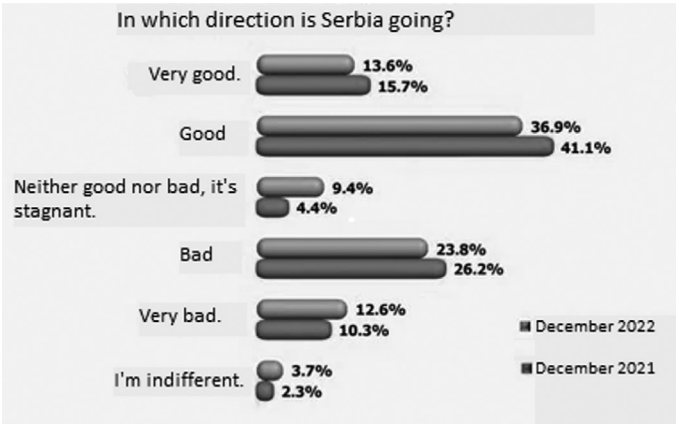
ENCLOSURE

Table 1



Source: Blic, https://www.blic.rs/vesti/politika/s-kim-biste-radije-na-kafu-milicom-zavetnicom-ili-marinikom-tepic-hit-istrazivanje/cvxz91x

Table 2



Source: Blic, https://www.blic.rs/vesti/politika/s-kim-biste-radije-na-kafu-milicom-zavetnicom-ili-marinikom-tepic-hit-istrazivanje/cvxz91x

Table 3



Source: Blic, https://www.blic.rs/vesti/politika/s-kim-biste-radije-na-kafu-milicom-zavetnicom-ili-marinikom-tepic-hit-istrazivanje/cvxz91x.

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