



The issue of serbian national identity in the context of European Union enlargement

Problematika srbskej národnej identity v kontexte rozširovania Európskej únie

Aleksandra VARGA-KOCSICSKA¹

¹ National University of Public Service, Doctoral School of Public Administration Sciences

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Abstract:

The concept of identity has become a key analytical concept in the social sciences in recent decades. Both in scientific accounts and in everyday use, the concept of identity has traditionally been seen as possessed by individuals and thus, groups of individuals. However, this view has been severely criticized by the identity section of the social sciences, where these individuals view different social roles as their own when discussing identity and examining relationships with others. This is especially true after the break-up of Yugoslavia, also for the Serbian state, which has been “self-seeking” for nearly 30 years. This is also true when we examine Serbian national identity from the perspective of European Union integration and also in terms of the sustainable security and geopolitical situation in the Western Balkans.

Keywords: Serbia, identity, European Unio, Western Balkans, enlargement.

Abstrakt:

Koncept identity sa stal v posledných desaťročiach kľúčovým analytickým konceptom v spoločenských vedách. Ako vo vedeckých účtoch, tak aj v každodennom používaní sa koncept identity tradične považuje za vlastnený jednotlivcami, a teda skupinami jednotlivcov. Tento názor bol však ostro kritizovaný časťou sociálnych vied o identite, kde títo jedinci pri diskusiách o identite a skúmaní vzťahov s ostatnými vidia rôzne sociálne roly ako svoje vlastné. Platí to najmä po rozpade Juhoslávie, a to aj pre srbský štát, ktorý „hľadá sám seba“ už takmer 30 rokov. To platí aj vtedy, keď skúmame srbskú národnú identitu z hľadiska integrácie Európskej únie, ako aj z hľadiska udržateľnej bezpečnosti a geopolitickej situácie na západnom Balkáne.

Kľúčové slová: Srbsko, identita, Európska únia, západný Balkán, rozšírenie



Introduction

Identity is an empty word or conceptual construct whose content can be filled with a variety of specific definitions, depending on what we want to achieve, prove, or legitimize, on an individual or collective level. Because of formal vanity and substantive arbitrariness, we see it as harmful rather than helpful because it encourages various social groups to reconsider unnecessarily what they already know empirically and ideologically and symbolically prompts them to argue for it. Identity is thus a distinctly differentiated and so contradictory concept that, based on the thesis of self-emancipation, has an excessive impact on social balance and the modernization of security, or at least the expression of social, economic, political, and cultural rights. Identity is, in fact, a concept of manipulation that anyone can access in the absence of ultimate (“deep”) arguments to manifest, prove, and defend their own interests or their own imaginary interests. The thesis of the critical importance of identity can, from time to time, extend to and cover all social and cultural actors and forms of action whose sole purpose is to talk about them, regardless of what they represent. Identity is, in a sense, an appropriate discursive refuge for new, canonizing reconstructions or revisions of history, the disintegration of the social present, and the shaping of the social future. In short, identity strategies and fragmentations more or less disrupt (may disrupt) the established structure or image of society.

1. Heading

Efforts to create a new image for Serbia after the fall of the Milošević regime in 2000 are fundamentally linked to the negotiations on Serbian “Europeanness” and the traditional national values promoted since the 1980s. The symbolic practices through which the post-2000 Serbian national identity was negotiated and maintained are of a conciliatory nature. As Stef Jansen warns, “In the post-Yugoslav context, contrary to what can be expected intuitively, reconciliation has, in fact, long been an important priority for the nationalist elite. Its focus was on the national level. These efforts were often aimed at breaking the bonds between citizens associated with opposition ideologies in World War II, and were in fact in line with national homogenization programs, which can be understood as an attempt at antagonism by preventing discreet closure...”[1].

The aim of post-2000 Serbia is to make efforts, following the events of the 1990s, on the one hand to “warm up” Serbia with Europe and on the other hand to “reconcile” the Serbian political elite and different sections of the population. The discourses that have developed in EU-centric contemporary Europe and the values they promote play a significant role in these processes.[2]

2. Serbia after 2000

The dissolution of the Yugoslav alliance coincided with the fall of the socialist system in Eastern Europe. In Serbia, the regime change was followed for more than a decade by the nationalist political rule of Slobodan Milošević. Milošević’s extreme nationalism, at the same time sought to protect the Serbian people and save the idea of a great Yugoslavia. Milošević made it impossible for the new political elite, following the “democratic change” of 2000, to use socialist symbols and sought to maintain a

newly created Serbian identity with strong nationalist features. This may be one of the reasons why the socialist Yugoslav heritage is heavily marginalized, its traces almost completely erased from public spaces, despite Serbia being seen (and perceived in itself) as Yugoslavia's successor in various political and social fields. In the years after 2000, the Serbian state made serious efforts to create new state symbols, iconographies and identity markers. "A state without symbols is like a man without clothes. There is no country in the world that has no symbols. It is embarrassing to the Serbian people that two centuries of Serbian statehood were celebrated with the anthem "Hey, Slavs" (original: Hej Sloveni)" said Radoš Ljušić in 2004[8]. "Hej Sloveni" as a national anthem was not appropriate for at least three reasons. In other words, it was not suitable for everyone in Serbia, for another reason: it was a Yugoslav, not specifically a Serbian anthem; closely related to the socialist period; and this was the anthem used in Serbia during Milosevic's time. Therefore, after 2000, there was a strong anxiety about the introduction of a new set of national symbols, which included a new anthem, national holidays, a new flag and a new coat of arms. The 19th century, the period of the Serbian struggle for independence from Ottoman rule, in which the foundations of the "modern Serbian state" were laid, provided a wealth of material for new symbols of Serbian statehood. This period, often referred to as the "golden age of Serbian democracy,"[5] therefore, became an important resource in the building of the post-socialist, post-Milošević, Serbian nation. This aspiration depends both on the negotiations on Europeanness and modernization in Serbian society and on the prevailing European Union discourses with which Serbia and other Western Balkan countries approach the EU accession process. These dialogues are combined with other constitutive discourses and groups of values and are often debated in, most importantly, reflections on the (Orthodox ecclesiastical) tradition as the basis of Serbian identity. The authors of these discourses, who value tradition, see socialism as a period when tradition was marginalized and banned in the public sphere, or at best cautiously transformed by the elites of the time in a "new, modern" way[6]. On the other hand, Serbia's European integration and "modernization" are also seen in this process as detrimental to the (newly discovered) traditional essence of Serbian identity.

Radoš Ljušić, a member of the National Holidays Committee previously appointed by the Serbian government, explained the reasons why the 19th-century heritage was taken as the basis for a new post-2000 Serbian national identity. He emphasizes both the desire of the Serbian political elite to conform to European values (and "reconcile" with "Europe") and to avoid the symbolism of the 20th century. The latter is considered a problematic and controversial part of Serbian history and thus does not contribute to international reconciliation: century events were chosen. The events of the 20th century were also inappropriate as they were too contemporary and thus acceptable to one part of the population and not to another. That's why we ruled out the Middle Ages and the 20th century and had to find something from the 19th century."[7]

2.1. Reconciliation with Europe

The idea of the head of the committee on national holidays, as emphasized by Senka Kovač (then Commission staff member, statement in 2003), was to "choose a national holiday that will be acceptable in a united Europe[8]. February 15th has been

designated as the day of the statehood of the Republic of Serbia, as this date is linked to two historical events in the 19th century - the day when the first Serbian uprising against the Ottomans began in 1804 in Orašac (Serbia) and the day when the first Serbian constitution was adopted in 1835 in the town of Kragujevac (Serbia). This event can be widely considered, among other things, as the beginning of the birth of a modern, European Serbian state. "The Constitution of 1835 incorporated the laws of the most advanced European states, while some parts refer to the Declaration of Human and Civil Rights, which is the legacy of the French Civil Revolution," wrote a journalist for the Political daily in 2010[9]. In Serbian public discourse, this modernist and European character of 19th-century Serbia is often associated with the post-2000 Serbian state. "This is where the history of the modern Serbian state began (Orašac) because our ancestors, like us, wanted this state to be based on human rights, equality, and the protection of private property,"[10] said former Prime Minister Zoran Đinđić, at the ceremony at that time. In 2003, the Speaker of the Serbian Parliament, Nataša Mičić, stressed that at the time of the adoption of the constitution 168 years ago, the then Serbian elite was trying to integrate Serbia into the European developments at the time. He added that one of the most important tasks of the current elite is to adopt a new constitution that has the same significance as that of 1835. Vojislav Koštunica, then president of the federal state, said that "on this day almost two centuries ago, our ancestors began the path of liberation and Europeanness"[11]. On the same occasion, in 2009, former Serbian Prime Minister Mirko Cvetković said: "Serbia today, as well as in 1804, when modern statehood was built, must choose the right path and face, ways to accelerate development and move closer to developed countries." [12] The dominant narrative on modernization and the European nature of Serbia is seen more as European values and less problematic in an image in which Serbia wants to present itself in Europe[13]. According to Radoš Ljušić, "we have chosen a date that refers not only to the history of national war, but also to statehood and constitutional history"[14]. The adoption of 15 February as the day of statehood offers an opportunity for reconciliation at the national level: in addition to the two historical moments, it coincides with the Orthodox celebration of Sretenje[15]. And finally, from December 12, 2006, the day of Serbian statehood was united with another important national holiday - the Day of the Serbian Army - to remember the Serbian troops from the first Serbian uprising of 1804, which allowed the formation of the modern Serbian state. Ana Hofman emphasized: "In this way, the commemoration of National Day brings together three important events from the national past, proving the crucial role of the Constitution and the army in the nation-building. In addition, Sretenje, as a religious holiday, emphasizes the symbiotic relationship between religion and the nation, preserving the historical connection between identity and religious affiliation. Therefore, this triple, the constitutional-army-church, to the main pillars of the modern Serbian state "[16]. Involving these two 19th-century events already means reconciling two opposing concepts of Serbian statehood and national identity. The event of 1804 is a symbol that represents the heroic nature of the Serbian people and their love for freedom, and is part of a wider discourse of resistance to the five-century-old Turkish yoke. "The central figure of the symbols is the leader of the 1804 uprising, Karađorđe, the founder of the famous Karađorđević dynasty. The adoption of the constitution in 1835, in turn, symbolizes the civic-oriented, modern and parliamentary organization of the Serbian state, respecting power sharing and human rights. At the heart of the discourses is Miloš Obrenović, who emphasizes that Karađorđe and Miloš Obrenović

serve as metaphors for two (opposing) types of political behavior: one warrior, revolutionary, and the other statesman and diplomat[17].

The ambiguous nature of the day of the new Serbian statehood and the fact that it contains two conflicting political symbols and ideologies raise some problems with the organization of the celebration in the early 2000s. The first ceremony in 2002 in Radoš Ljušić gave the impression that “the government was afraid to commemorate the revolutionary aspect of Statehood Day (referring to the uprising of 1804), so it held only a small ceremony in Orašac and then in Kragujevac. moved where the central ceremony was held ”[18].

In recent years, the coexistence of the two narratives and values has proved less problematic: the militant, liberating / revolutionary aspect of Serbian national identity has become especially relevant since 2006, when the National Day was merged with the Serbian Army Day. All this despite their insistence on a symbolism that is not considered appropriate in Europe. The Kosovo conflict, as in the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina a few years earlier, was defined in the context of the “eternal conflict” between Christianity and Islam[19]. The 2008 celebration of Statehood Day was held in Orašac, just two days before Kosovo’s declaration of independence. In his speech, the then Serbian prime minister, Vojislav Koštunica, drew a parallel with the struggle against medieval Turks between the battle of Kosovo in 1389, the first Serbian uprising in 1084 and the current situation. He also stressed that in Kosovo, Serbia is much more protective of its independence. Thus the "antemurale Christianitatis" was applied[20] discourse were applied, which already played an important role in the negotiation of relations between Serbia and Kosovo during the Milosevic regime. Antemurale is a metaphor used in different parts of Europe and in different historical periods; According to Marija Todorova: before America became the new antemurale Christianitatis in the wake of 9/11, it was one of the most important European markers that changed from one European region or nation to another at different times: Spain, France, Italy, Hungary, Austria, Germany, Poland , Romania, Croatia, Greece, Serbia, Bulgaria, Russia, the Balkans, Central Europe, etc.[21].

Europe is a stable point of reference in the political needs of Serbia's jurisdiction over Kosovo, both in pre-2000 and post-2000 discourses. Milica Bakić-Hayden[22] points out in a report in Duga magazine that the issue of Kosovo is within a broader European framework: “The truth about Kosovo and Metohija has not changed over time, as Muslim fundamentalism, constantly knocking on the door of Kosovo and Metohija, tries to break To Europe. It is hard to believe that Europe does not recognize this. Even Europeans who do not love Serbia know very well that this old Balkan state is the last obstacle to continued Islamic attacks and aggression.”[23] In 2009, Serbian President Boris Tadic stated that he was “ convinced that that Kosovo has no future in the European Union as an independent state, but as part of Serbia, the part of our country for which Serbia is responsible[24]. Tadic believed that "Serbia now has perhaps an even greater responsibility than ever to make Kosovo a European region." [25].

2.2. Reconciliation between Nations: Giving Up the Socialist Heritage

Another aspect of international reconciliation that can be observed in the post-2000 period in Serbia has to do with attitudes towards the recent socialist past of

Serbian society. In official discourses, they lay a new foundation for Serbian national identity by creating new symbols, rituals and practices to achieve national reconciliation. Socialist symbols and holidays are excluded from this identity because of their contradictions and ideological weight. Among Serbian national and other holidays, a law passed on 11 July 2001 abolished the citizenship day established by Slobodan Milošević on 28 March, when Serbia “regained its integrity” by abolishing the autonomy of the provinces of Vojvodina and Kosovo. The same law abolished the Socialist Serbian National Day on July 7, which celebrates the day of the uprising against the fascist occupation, with the remark that “there are more significant days in our history that are different and less ideologically burdened”[26].

The exclusion of socialist and Yugoslav heritage, considered inappropriate and “unrepresentative” for modern Serbian national identity, paves the way for direct continuity between pre-World War II Serbia and the post-2000 state. The departure from the Yugoslav and socialist past, as well as the exclusion of the socialist heritage from narratives that maintain a national identity, will be a common feature of modern-day Serbia with post-socialist Europe. The violent disintegration of the Alliance of Yugoslavia made these processes even more intense in the successor state of the former Yugoslavia. These processes are closely related to historical revisionism and the reinterpretation of the events and role of World War II, as in post-socialist societies the events of World War II cannot be separated from the decades of subsequent socialism. Both the rejection of the socialist legacy and the revisionist reinterpretation of the history of World War II contributed significantly to the strengthening of Eastern European nationalism. As Dubravka Stojanović pointed out, anti-communist and past reviews as a tool of nationalism were used in Serbia both before and after 2000. It can also be argued that these processes accelerated after 2000. In Serbian political discourses, Milošević’s regime is seen as socialism, and as a result, in 2000, “democratic change” was discussed as a victory over “social opposition” over socialism, and this opposition was the legitimate carrier of the national idea. According to Stojanović, “political parties forming a new government in Serbia can stand as real fighters in the national cause, which was a new ideological trap for the Serbian people. The new elite kept people closed, in a nationalist interpretation of the present, past and future ”[27].

Historical revisionism and the neglect of the socialist past are fundamentally linked to nationalist ideology and “inter-ethnic reconciliation” in former Yugoslav societies. However, it would be misleading to fail to relate to discourses and values that emerge in a broader context, within the framework set by the European Union. The common negative attitude of the Serbian political elite and the EU towards socialism leads to a paradoxical situation in Serbia, where the rejection of the socialist heritage has resulted in the marginalization of anti-fascism as a value despite the fact that anti-fascism is a “common European identity”[28]. Serbia was the only European state that did not delegate a delegation on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz. Also, on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the victory day in Moscow in 2005, Serbia did not send a high-level delegation, unlike other states[29].

3. Serbian identity

Ethnic identity is generally seen as multi-layered, complex, where its most important components include cultural patterns, social institutions, and social actors that shape the group's beliefs and feelings. Identity, however, influences the social behavior and actions of an ethnic community, as well as its economic and political decisions, as well as its relationships with others. The expression national self-consciousness has a similar meaning, with the difference that it refers not only to the cultural and historical heritage of a nation that makes itself equal and different from others, but also to its critical self-esteem. The question of modern national identity touches all those that enable the nation to preserve itself and remain in the conditions of modernity of the present and the future, regardless of what causes change from outside and inside. This means that, in a sense, every nation, as long as it really exists, is always faithful to its traditions ("equal to itself"), but needs to change according to the circumstances it encounters — either through its own actions or the influence of others. Traditional identity suggests that one should remain "as we have always been" for as long as possible. Modern identity requires reasonable "self-preservation," but by actively adapting to new circumstances and constantly changing its own characteristics — modernization in its own way. With regard to the Serbs, it can be said that the search for a modern national identity today provides a reasonable answer to the existential challenges of the time when the twentieth century. The cycle of events in the 19th century Serbian historical spiral was closed by tragic religious, national and ideological stigmas and bloody conflicts. It should be seen as a real challenge when it is critically reflected in Yugoslavia, at a time of chaotic conflict events, that some ideals are destroyed and others emerge. These may be newly emerging values, old (only slightly transformed and already seen) creations, but they may also be really whole new elements. Therefore, the sociological consideration of national identity in such (non) circumstances is not only cognitive in nature, but also takes on the characteristics of a very responsible public action that either introduces a reasonable solution into social reality or deepens and prolongs existing chaos.

Serbia's narratives and its 19th-century modernist momentum should also be interpreted as a manifestation of the nostalgia for an idealized past characterized by modernity and prosperity, as opposed to a present that lacks these characteristics. "We were the first to have a state, the first to have a constitution, the first to have a democracy, and now we have to get those things back. We achieved these great achievements in the 19th century, but then we fell behind," said historian Predrag Marković, speaking on State Day B92 television "Dvougao" on February 7, 2010, "When Serbia was part of Europe" [30]. Such a discourse does not always refer to the 19th century, as it can also refer to earlier or later periods as a frame of reference, including the socialist. In the case of Serbia, however, the legacy of the 19th century, closely linked to the idea of a nation-state, represents a past that carries the promise of a national consensus on common fundamental values. To what extent can the past really be useful in Serbia's future policy, given that its use facilitates the processes of historical revisionism? The rejection of 20th century traditions and strong nationalism, an issue that goes far beyond the Serbian context and modern identity, therefore form the basis of concerns about the future.

3.1. Serbian constitutional identity

Political identity is defined on the basis of political orientation, ie affiliation with political groups (parties and movements) and political culture[31]. In terms of political orientations, we distinguish several types: conservative, traditional, and liberal, that is, democratic. Political parties form identities related to right, middle and left parties. Serbian national identity versus European identity. On the right are moderately conservative, national, supranational, and religious parties. There are liberal-democratic parties at the center. On the left are the Social Liberal, Social Democratic, Socialist and Communist parties. In other words, when political identity is to be defined by party membership, this identity revolves around three ideological and political orientations: national, socialist, and liberal. National and social orientations are collectivists, that is, they give a collectivist spirit and collectivist ideologies emerge. National orientation reduces political identity to political identification. It is unit-based and requires a high degree of homogenization and identification. In other words, especially in the case of ultranational parties, the political identity under the influence of identification disappears completely. Social orientation is also collectivist and relies on one of the universal values - equality. Equality often has a devastating effect on both personal and political identity. Aristotle has always warned - that equality is equal in nature, nothing more than the commission of great injustice. Equality in this orientation does not arise in terms of equal opportunities and equality, but in full equalization, so the members of the orientation are so identified that their personal and political identities are completely lost. Nationalist and social orientations influenced the formation and development of authoritarian personality, that is, authoritarian political culture. These two orientations continue to dominate Serbia's political arena. The moment they declare democracy and democratic processes in a declarative way, they turn them into populism and populist political processes. The liberal idea is individualistic, and through individualism it fears the political identity of liberals. Liberal orientation is based on the value of freedom, that is, freedom, the free individual, and a free society are the strategic orientations of members of political identity. Within the liberal orientation, personal and political identity are the most preserved for the time being. Identification within this orientation takes place to such an extent that it does not jeopardize either personal or political identity. Identification has a more symbolic and activist dimension. In our political circumstances, from the formation of modern Serbian statehood in 1804 to the present day, the liberal orientation of the political scene is the least present at the time, and when it succeeded in persuading itself, it was quickly questioned. Prolonged collectivist and partisan patterns were a major obstacle to liberal orientation.

Experience shows that when we talk about Serbian personal and political identity, politicians are more inclined to adapt, based on the influence of external circumstances, i.e. heteronomy, thus losing autonomy and with it personal and political identity. This is why politicians are generally reluctant to act responsibly and hold personal responsibility to collective responsibility. In this way, they hide their underdeveloped personal and political identities. Even their identities are often incredible, full of fear of political survival, and fundamentally unstable.

Concerns about Serbia's constitutional identity also occur in some form in other Eastern European countries. In the case of Serbia, this problem is reflected in the unresolved status of Kosovo and Metohija. As is well known, the preamble to the

Constitution states that "Kosovo and Metohija provinces are an integral part of the territory of Serbia" and that "Serbia has significant autonomy in the sovereign state"[32]. This status is confirmed by the normative part of the constitution, Article 182 (2), which states that the fundamental autonomy of the southern province is "governed by a separate law adopted in accordance with a procedure designed to amend the constitution". The decisive factor in determining Serbia's constitutional identity is whether or not the state's sovereignty extends to the territory of that province. Not only does the institutionalized model of the province's "basic autonomy" dramatically influence the country's state structure, but the share of the Albanian population in Kosovo and Metohija also significantly changes the statistical relationship between the majority nation and national minorities. However, the example of Kosovo shows that the heuristic applicability of the social contract argument used by Michael Rosenfeld is limited[33]. The classic argument is based on the assumption that the question of with whom to enter into a treaty has already been resolved, that is, that an unconstitutional identity already exists that facilitates the constitution of the political community. This also means that the issue of territorial expansion of the political community has already been done or resolved. In other words, the hypothetical area clearly defines who everyone falls into the "we" category, and everyone within such a defined collectivity is the primary actor[34]. In reality, there are often problems with the issue of territory because it is also inextricably linked to the problem of unconstitutional identity. Thus, when Serbia adopted the 2006 constitution by referendum, Kosovo Albanian voters were not included in the number of voters from which an absolute majority is required to ratify the constitution. In this way, the Serbian state sought to treat Kosovo as a reference area and did not treat the Kosovo Albanian population as part of constitutional unity. At the same time, it can be stated that the unresolved Kosovo issue raises the fact that, in parallel with the Serbian constitutional identity, there is also a Kosovo constitutional identity[35].

It is obvious that Serbian political identity must be based on the values of constitutional patriotism. It can be substantiated that the normative and at the same time fairer solution to the various liberal models of political integration, if, special attention is paid to questioning the sensitivity of constitutional patriotism to the political requirements for the recognition of specific identities. Such models include the liberal system of procedures, liberal nationalism, and the liberal multicultural system. In his concise study of the reconstruction of the modern state and nation in the Balkans, Milan Podunavac renews the thesis of the general relationship between the nation-state and constitutional democracy[36]. This normative motif serves as a starting point for discussing the political identity of multicultural communities. In terms of the formation of modern European states, the construction of political identity, according to Podunavac, is part of a deeper process in the transformation of premodern types of power into a modern political system[37].

If we make a historical overview of the dynamics of the construction of Serbia's political identity, we notice the obstacles in the process of state formation and nation-building that István Bibó calls the "political hysteria" of the indigenous traits of Eastern Europe[38]. Unsurprisingly, the recent liberal-national strategy for shaping political identity merely reproduces an initial lack of statehood and an excess of existential fear for the survival of the (national) community. According to Nenad Dimitrijević, relations between the Serbian majority and national minorities are

fundamentally flawed, ideologically and incorrectly institutionalized, which together result in undemocratic practices and political instability[39]. It is therefore surprising that Will Kymlicka easily finds that the Western model of addressing the identity needs of ethnocultural minorities is comparable to Eastern European conditions[40]. The current constitutional moment in Serbia confirms this - more than bold - conclusion.

The 2006 constitution and related identity symbols show that Serbia has failed to “outgrow” the form of an ethno-privatized state. It is true that members of national minorities are guaranteed a wide range of individual and collective rights, but the fact that they are introduced into political identity and, more importantly, the way they are justified, indicates that there is legal asymmetry in treating members of the same political community. In a situation where the constitutional text defines Serbia first as the state of the Serbian people and then only as citizens, and key state signals glorify the specific identity of the majority nation, it is impossible to avoid the impression that the highest act does not value all citizens morally. as equals. For the reasons set out earlier, it is not sufficient to justify the wording in question by the fact that there are similar solutions in countries with a long liberal-democratic tradition.

4. Serbia’s way through Europeanization

The idea of further enlargement of the European Union, in terms of the current state of affairs of the Member States and their populations (as a result of the economic situation, globalization, the events and challenges of Brexit and COVID-19), does not give rise to over-optimism. In the light of these, it would be worth examining the European Union’s supranational role, redefining it and possibly producing a new scenario. It is clear that even in the event of further enlargement in the near future, it may be worthwhile to carry out an organizational restructuring.

Serbia (still part of Yugoslavia) has considered economic and political rapprochement with the European Union as one of its top priorities since the 1970s, in preparation for a possible future membership of the EU[41]. However, there are many possible paths to Brussels, but each clearly requires a strong political commitment from the Serbian government and the Serbian elite to the EU. Clearly identifying the necessary structural changes and reforms as key preconditions for achieving the fastest possible outcome. However, as the European Union is not only an institutional organization but also a community of values, the question remains whether the norms and values that have historically developed in Serbia could potentially conflict with the EU’s direct and indirect expectations, needs and values. This has inadvertently forced Serbia to take a longer path to EU integration. As of now, Serbia has 18 open negotiation chapters with the EU, of which 2 have been closed[42].

During the Serbian accession process, it was overshadowed by the fact that the leading EU member states, despite a positive recommendation from the Commission, did not decide to start accession negotiations with Northern Macedonia and Albania in October 2019. France was the most active against the start of negotiations, whose statement was supported by other member states. Across Europe, several “think tanks” (including Evropski pokret Srbija[43]) have indicated that accession processes need to be modified as the current model of negotiations lacks clear political leadership. In addition, the process is becoming too administrative and fragmented, and it is doubtful

whether this current direction will ultimately lead to Serbia (including optimists 2025) having EU membership in the near future, including the Western Balkan countries.

Following its October decision, in November France published an informal document proposing a change in methodology. In response, nine EU Member States also published their informal documents in December. In order to rationalize the debate, the Commission has proposed a summary of the changes and the publication of its formal proposal for a recast of the accession negotiations. In light of this, in February 2020, Olivér Várhelyi, EC Commissioner for Neighborhood and Enlargement, made a statement ahead of the EU-Western Balkans Summit in Zagreb in May 2020: "Enlargement of the European Union in the Western Balkans is one of the Commission's top priorities. we propose concrete steps to improve the accession process. In addition to strengthening and improving the process, the goal remains accession and full EU membership.[45]" Accordingly, contrary to earlier news in October 2019[46], the European Commission's February 2020 proposal seeks to act as effectively as possible to sustain the EU accession process, thereby strengthening its credibility, justifying its political leadership and making the process as dynamic and predictable as possible.

In the light of the ongoing events, the President of the Republic of Serbia, Aleksandar Vučić, has repeatedly stated that he is pleased that events have accelerated somewhat and that Serbia may have a future in the EU. However, he continues to advocate that Pristina cannot blackmail Serbia with the Kosovo issue. Serbia aims to engage in dialogue with the negotiating parties with the utmost confidence and faith in the outcome of the discourse[47].

Given the recent events, the question arises as to why it is so difficult for Serbia to become part of the EU and the concept of Europe. The issue is rooted mainly in economic reasons and the events of the 1990s, which pushed the country back into development for decades. So what explains Serbia's current difficult Europeanization? First, in the past, "internal demand" for Europeanization in Serbia has been low on several fronts. Given that the EU has identified cooperation between Serbia and the International Court of Justice in The Hague as one of the basic conditions for dialogue with Serbia, it is worth mentioning that this form of international justice has been widely opposed by Serbian society. That is, the Serbian public was largely unwilling to believe that the Serbs had committed war crimes and accused other nations and ethnic groups of starting wars. They did not trust the international community and the mandated international judicial institutions[48]. There are several reasons why the Serbian public was so opposed to the idea of international justice. First, during that period, Milošević's policies were supported by a large majority of Serbian voters, especially during his first ten years in power (1987-1996). Opinion polls conducted by recognized independent agencies consistently believed that Milošević pursued the most reliable and popular policy during the war[49]. But more importantly, the Serbian elite is also opposed to cooperation with the EU and possible EU membership. Opinion polls consistently show the overwhelming aspirations of the Serbian people to join the EU, but at the same time they have serious substantive reservations about the union[50]. However, the political elite is much less enthusiastic about Europe. It continues to be argued that Europe, and thus the European Union, played a role in the break-up of Yugoslavia and the outbreak of the ensuing civil war[51]. In addition, a more nationalist sector of the Serbian elite, instead of joining Europe, would have

been much more supportive of a closer partnership with Putin's Russia. These competing elite preferences are perhaps best illustrated by an event in Belgrade in November 2007: the pro-European, reformist wing of the government handed out leaflets informing the public of all the benefits of EU membership, while a few meters away, Vojislav Koštunica led the DSS (Demokratska stranka Srbije) informed the gathered citizens about the reasons why Serbia should choose the "third way" of neutrality and strongly reject NATO membership[52]. Unlike other transition states, where the media and civil society played a critical role in the normative transformation, especially in the areas of democratization and human rights, Serbian civil society was too weak to achieve real results. From a political point of view, civil society activities could not become official politics because they did not have any political power. The parties, and government officials, though, were not interested enough in meeting the demands of civil society. At the same time, it also emerged that those who supported civic initiatives did not have the power to bring about change through the legislative process.

Serbian political experience has shown domestic resistance to Europeanization in several places at once. There is also a lot of resistance from the institutional system, and conservatives and their political coalitions, representatives of the old regime, the media and the general public have also played a role in this. However, all of these factors can be said to have a strong national identity-shaping effect on modern Serbian society.

Conclusion

For Serbs, European integration is full of "Balkan destiny": "a small country that is alone. This is exactly the state that is described in Isidora Sekulić's *The Balkan Essays*: "We have no gold; we don't have a big industry with which to compete with anyone; There is no mysticism and great ambiguity; What remains is the concentration of spirit and mind, as well as moral discipline; Our old Kosovo metaphysics; What we need to focus on is our being, our language, our morals, and our God. Because that is all that remains after wars, victories and defeats." [53] (author 's own translation). The historical experience of the Balkan peoples burdened by conflict and war does not seem to encourage the project of creating Balkan integrations, but rather to steer individual countries primarily towards other regional integrations and make them more receptive to the globalist offer of so-called Western society. In recent years, Serbian society has clearly stated its intention to join European society, but the accession process depends on the many demands placed on Serbia and the successful adaptation of the existing social organization to European standards, which in itself presupposes the ability to bring about change. Over the last hundred years, Serbian society has shown a potential opportunity for the development of many sectors. By showing that it goes a long way and far from the initial traditional agrarian and then socialist society. With the creation of a young civil society, initially with orthodox influence, it slowly transitioned to the democratic bourgeois bloc, then in 2000 a significant change took place, and the country made a serious effort to support the model of neoliberal capitalism.

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Author:

¹**Aleksandra VARGA-KOCSICSKA** – PhD Student, 1083 Orczy tér, Budapest, Hungary, e-mail: kocsicska.aleksandra@gmail.com