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PUTIN'S ORCHESTRA



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„Today Serbia realized... that it was stunned by the liberal promises and competition in tears for Zoran Đinđić, a puppet of the West, a man who ruined the legendary Serbian Army and special services, who sold out the Serbian resistance and sent Serbian heroes to the Hague Tribunal for abstract economic aid, and who, in the end, deservedly got himself shot for it.”

Konstantin Syomin, journalist of the Russian state television, the day after Kosovo declared independence, when fire was set to Western embassies in Belgrade in February 2008

1. Results of early parliamentary election – After Vučić, Vučić

Serbia has, after [early parliamentary elections](#) in the spring of 2014, received a new-old Government, headed by Prime Minister Aleksandar Vučić of the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS). The entry of the Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS), headed by Ivica Dačić into the new Government is considered as a direct consequence of Russian influence. Namely, in this way, Russia does not have to invest additional effort and time to change the players through which it articulates its significant political and financial interests in Serbia. However, SPS has lost a lot with the loss of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, which is now led by the SNS. This is not only related to the ability to influence the political-judicial-commercial developments through the uncontrolled parts of the Ministry of Interior and other parts of the security system which are now under the authority of the SNS, but also about the fact that the Serbian public has an uncritical affection for the Armed Forces and the Police, which brings a lot of votes to those who are at their forefront. For the first time in Serbia, the

ruling coalition includes a political party, the Alliance of Vojvodina Hungarians (SVM), which at least formally advocates for Serbia's entry into NATO.

Based on this, one could hope that at least the process of criminalization of the rare individuals who also publicly advocate this policy will be slowed down, which was, until recently, the trend. Unfortunately, the way in which the heads of state, followed by the pro-government media, which is the majority, marked the 15th anniversary of the start of NATO bombing of Yugoslavia, paints a completely different picture – that the policy of strengthening cooperation with NATO and the actual policy of EU integration will be jeopardized due to the pressure from Russia.

For the time being, Aleksandar Vučić demonstrates a lack of will or power to confront this. Both options are contrary to speculation that he is secretly sending signals that, in the long term, he is in favor of Serbia's NATO membership. There are growing indications that he also has an ambivalent relationship towards Serbia's European integrations, primarily because of his lack of a visible response, in any

way, to the growing Russian pressure directed against them.

Both the previous and future Prime Minister of Serbia have, in the period following elections but before formation of a new Government, travelled to Moscow, which pro-Government media [reported on quite inarticulately](#).

Based on the above, based on Vučić's style of government while he was Deputy Prime Minister and his first days as Prime Minister, but also based on the general state of mind in Serbia, one can assume that the process of [Putinization of Serbia](#) will continue rapidly, now with the growing pressure and barren effect of pro-Putin factors in the state and society – Putin's Orchestra¹. The nearly complete electoral and organizational collapse of political parties, former bearers of any democratization and Europeanization of Serbia, the technocratization and confusion of the progressive part of the civil society, as well as the still ambivalent relationship of the political West, and primarily the EU, towards the [actual situation in Serbia](#).

Given everything that was mentioned above, it is not surprising that in Serbia, although a state formally preparing for the start of accession negotiation with the EU, the main characteristics of Putinization have a growing

¹ A great contribution to victory over Nazism in the Second World War came from the many intelligence officers of the Red Army who operated in Germany, Italy, Switzerland, Japan, Hungary, and the rest of occupied Europe and Asia. A group of anti-Nazis in Germany and Switzerland, organized in rings of the "Red Orchestra (Rote Kapelle) is considered to be the carrier of the idea of creating a unique, anti-Nazi National Front in the heart of the Third Reich. Unfortunately, the group was discovered and executed by the German authorities in the first 14 months of the war. Otherwise, among the Abwehr officers it was customary to call the refer to the illegal radio operator as the "pianist" or the "musician". Whenever the military intelligence service would conclude that several such radio receivers belongs to the same secret organization, the extensive network would be referred to as an "orchestra" or "capella", while the adjective "red" highlighted that it is a political, anti-Fascist, or more precisely, a Communist organization – hence the title "Red Orchestra". There is a school of thought that considers members of the Red Orchestra were merely brutal operatives of the technical apparatus of the Comitern, which had its own branch in Serbia as well, formed by Mustafa Golubović.

foothold. Their main implementer is Aleksandar Vučić himself – the lead violin of Putin's Orchestra in Serbia, whether the EU, the USA and primarily Germany wanted to hear this or not. Under the term Putinization we consider the following: party instead of democratic control of the security system: a clientelistic and unreformed judiciary, controlled media, an arbitrary relationship towards tycoons, tolerance and encouragement of endangering secular principles of the state system by one, pro-Government religious organization that is also the main arbiter of social dynamics: a poor human rights record and creation of a cult of personality; the rendering of separation of powers as senseless: the weakening of institutions; the criminalization of political and economic competitors; the re-writing of history; populism and fatalism.

2. The state of the security system was once again neglected in the election campaign and in the Prime Minister's keynote address

In the period between the formation of the previous Government and the early parliamentary elections, Serbia was shook by several serious scandals caused by the poor state of the security system due to: leaks of information, lack of norms, party abuse and a disturbed balance of blackmail that is a result of a dependent judiciary. The recent floods in Serbia have laid bare the very bad state in the field of civil protection as well, an important part of the security system. Even the heads of state themselves [recognized](#) previously that the situation in the sector is poor. One is struck, above all, by: the poorly defined responsibilities of relevant stakeholders and command hierarchy; unclear procedures of communication of local authorities with the relevant agencies and the state level; lack of a systemic approach to protection of critical infrastructure and tolerance of widespread illegal construction.

In spite of all of this, the election campaign, as in all previous election campaigns in Serbia since the beginning of democratic

consolidation, failed to mention the poor state of the security system, despite having certain crisis situation as an opportunity for giving [promises that were later forgotten](#). There were no election promises of improving the state in the areas in which it is needed: democratic oversight and normative framework of horizontal communication and a vertical chain of subordination of certain parts of the system. The issue of the material-technical equipment of the system was also not considered in more depth. It all comes down to confusing the society with announcement and cancellation of procurement of equipment that is inconsistent with the actual security risks of Serbia. The lack of strategic planning in this field is also caused by the rash manner in which the policy of military neutrality was adopted, primarily because of Kosovo. It dominates the entire security sector and significantly affects the impossibility of its reform, which the Center for Euro-Atlantic Studies already wrote about in detail in its report [For a More Dynamic Reform of the Security Sector in Serbia](#). This policy is now strengthened by the bare pressure of Putin's Orchestra in light of the increasingly intensive activities of Moscow in the region and in Serbia. Emphasis on the policy of military neutrality was obvious already in the first statements of the Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of Defense. The hierarchy of security challenges and risks in Serbia is political rather than pragmatic – Kosovo is still the greatest security risk. This weakens the possibility of adequate response, as well as the possibility for a strategic partnership with NATO, the only geographically-close system of collective defense, which would also help in streamlining costs in the security system.

The Commissioner for Information of Public Importance and Personal Data Protection Rodoljub Šabić and Ombudsman Saša Janković [pointed out](#) to the many normative shortcomings, primarily those regarding constitutional freedoms in the field of protection of privacy of citizens and the practice which violates these, as early as in 2012. One of the recommended fourteen measures for overcoming this situation was adoption of a

new Law on the Security Intelligence Agency (BIA). The Center for Euro-Atlantic Studies has elaborated these recommendations and published an Action Plan for their adoption in its report [Extreme Makeover](#). . Alongside the mentioned fourteen measures, it was pointed out that it is necessary to adopt a law on security vetting, which is a constitutional obligation of the state which has not yet been fulfilled. It is also necessary to review the results of implementation of the Law on Data Secrecy (including adoption of the necessary bylaws, declassification of old documents, conduction of investigations, issuance of security certificates...) and adopt serious amendments of this Law or adopt a new one, as the existing Law does not deal with declassification of old documents of conduction of investigations. There also exist problems with other specific regulation dealing with archives or judicial proceedings, as indicated by representatives of the Office of the Council on National Security and Classified Information Protection (National Security Authority – NSA).

The state in the security system did not earn a place even in the several hours-long keynote address of the new Prime Minister. The Serbian Progressive Party, as an absolute election winner, simply continued with party overtaking of control over the security system. Even the Western international community failed to mention this issue as important, focusing solely on continuation of implementation of the First Agreement on the principles governing the normalization of relations between Serbia and Kosovo (Brussels Agreement) and consolidation of the extremely difficult economic situation.

3. Brief reminder why the issue of security system reform in Serbia must be a perennial priority but is not

Let us recall the main circumstances from recent Serbian history due to which reform of the security system must be a permanent priority, but is not. In Serbia, as well as in the international community, it seems that the beginning of dismantling of the murderous Milošević regime implemented through non-

violent methods of struggle has been forgotten. This strategy implies very challenging compromises with representatives of the previous regime, not only those who violated their citizens' human rights by operating in the system, but also the creators and implementers of war crimes in the region and in Kosovo, followed by political assassinations, primarily from the security system. Additionally, non-violent methods of dismantling non-democratic regimes also involve legal continuity which prevents radical personnel changes of the compromised staff, which was also the case in Serbia.

The process of genuine democratization of Serbia was from the very beginning delayed by the fact that the new regime of Prime Minister Đinđić had authority only at the national level, while at the federal level, due to the circumstances around Montenegro's participation in elections and nature of the policy of Vojslav Koštunica. This led to the formation of a nucleus headed by [General Aca Tomić](#), which could not be described as ever being committed to genuine democratization of Serbia. The same has already then, intensely maintained special relations with Russia, despite the alleged support for European integrations. Such a constellation of factors required years of focusing on continuation of dismantling the Milošević regime in the security system which Serbia, due to a number of objective and subjective reasons, [never had](#). All of this has distracted political attention and resources for security system reform.

4. Review of the new-old appointment in the security system

Judging by the profile of people who came to head important parts of the security system and foreign affairs following early parliamentary elections in 2014, substantial reforms in this field, on which the potential of our deviation from the ever growing pressure of Putin to stop not only cooperation with NATO, but Serbia's EU integrations as well depends on, will still not be realized.

4.1. Ministry of Defense

Instead of Nebojša Rodić, considered to have been fond of more intensive cooperation with Russia and who replaced Aleksandar Vučić at this position, the new Minister of Defense, who also comes from the SNS ranks, is [Bratislav Gašić](#). Serbia has therefore changed three ministers in the period of less than two years. Gašić is considered as a man who will, in the Ministry, without much question, implement the plans of the new Prime Minister. Gašić is, among other, known in the Serbian public as the person who publicly called upon the former Minister of Foreign Affairs, the controversial Vuk Jeremić, also encouraged by Putin's Orchestra, to join the SNS team.

Gašić's first statements were discouraging, especially those related to the fact that Kosovo is still considered at the [greatest security risk](#), as well as those about the possibility of re-introduction of regular military service. Let us remind that in the midst of the election campaign, the Chief of Staff of the Serbian Armed Forces Ljubiša Diković, seriously compromised by the role of his units in the conflicts in Kosovo, disturbed the public with his statement that he is receiving increasing requests for the re-introduction of regular military service. The Ministry of Defense was forced to react with an official denial.

Gašić has, in his first addresses, assessed that not much has been done in the Serbian Armed Forces in the period between 2000 and 2012 (when Aleksandar Vučić comes to head the MoD), and that it seems that the Ministers of Defense were [„more concerned with self-promotion than the job that they were supposed to do"](#), despite the undoubted reform steps that were taken in the MoD during this period, from standardization to raising the level of operability with NATO, professionalization of the Armed Forces and creation of conditions for participation of our Armed Forces in UN and EU peacekeeping and peace building missions.

The expert public assumes that the trend of allegedly successful political cooperation of the Ministry of Defense with the Ministry of

Defense of Russia, with which it has almost no technical cooperation on one hand, and successful technical cooperation with NATO, with which it has no political cooperation on the other, will continue. Yet another change of the Minister of Defense is likely to affect the pace of harmonization of the Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP) with NATO that Serbia has been working on over the past two year already, as it is assumed that the new Minister may want to first go through the extensive document of approximately sixty pages. The trend of slowing down the pace of Serbia's cooperation with NATO can also be expected due to the NATO focus shifting towards Ukraine, preparations for the summit in Wales, as well as increased activities in Montenegro, which is trying to secure an invitation for membership. This too can have implications for the pace of harmonizing the IPAP in NATO itself. Having in mind the unusually harsh rhetoric and inaccuracies intentionally promoted in the public, even by the President and [Prime Minister](#) of Serbia, as well as the Russian Ambassador to Serbia, which accompanied the marking of the 15th anniversary of NATO bombing of Yugoslavia and the crisis in Ukraine, one can assume that, under growing Russian pressure, cooperation will be slowed down even further.

It is also worrying that no one from the expert and wider public reacted to the mentioned inaccuracies. The Atlantic Council of Serbia failed to react on any occasion. Among the few prominent public advocates of Serbia's membership in NATO, the majority has an ambivalent position on the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia. Putin's Orchestra has carried out a [new wave of criminalization](#) of the few in Serbia who consider that there were legitimate geopolitical and regional circumstances that led to the bombing, which was not condemned by the Serbian public.

The Western international community continues with the trend of having the level of cooperation with NATO in Serbia reliant upon the preparedness of members of the Serbian Armed Forces to train and cooperate, instead of having this dependent on a political decision of

the state leadership brought on the basis of a rational evaluation of security and defense risks, needs and abilities of Serbia. Alliance and Member State officials too, if possible in any way, avoid the topic of the bombing, in the best case mentioning the "set of circumstances" that led to it. The statement of NATO Secretary-General Fogh Rasmussen, that it (the bombing) [prevented genocide in Kosovo](#), was met with cynicism and ridicule by the majority in Serbia.

The new Directors of the Military Intelligence (VOA) and Military Security (VBA) Agencies have not been appointed yet. The former VBA Director, Svetko Kovač, was dismissed without explanation back in January 2014. The new Secretary of State at the MoD is [Zoran Đorđević](#), and the new Assistant Ministers are: Miroslav Jovanović, [Miloš Janković](#), [Jasminka Todorov](#) and [Srbislav Cvejić](#).

4.2. Security Intelligence Agency (BIA)

Aleksandar Đorđević, who replaced the previous Minister of Defense in this position, remained to head BIA. From 1998 until 2001 Đorđević worked at a law firm of Veljko Guberina, one of the main actors in the return of radical nationalism at the scene in Serbia in the nineties. In 1990 with the introduction of a multi-party system in Serbia, Guberina came to the forefront of the People's Radical Party (NRS), which restored its work in the country at the time. Tomislav Nikolić, now officially the lead violin of Putin's Orchestra in Serbia was also a member of the NRS, later joining Vojislav Šešelj's Radicals.

It should not be forgotten that the daily newspapers Danas and the internet portal Peščanik have, already in 2011, tried to open, unfortunately unsuccessfully, the [topic of the role of Russian personnel](#) - the so-called Red Orchestra – in the security system of Serbia, primarily the Serbian Armed Forces.

4.3. Ministry of Foreign Affairs

The new Minister of Foreign Affairs is the former Prime Minister Ivica Dačić. Dačić has,

unfortunately, in the first days of the new function, [compared Kosovo and Crimea](#), pointing out to the “double standards of the West”, completely overlooking a series of UN SC resolutions pointing out to the crimes in Kosovo, negotiations at Rambouillet, opinion of the Permanent Court of Justice, negotiations on the new status of Kosovo, and a series of other events that make it impossible, although Putin and his Orchestra in Serbia do, to compare Crimea and Kosovo.

4.3.1. The Brussels Agreement

Formation of the new Government coincided with the first anniversary of the signing of the Brussels Agreement and the escalation of the crisis in Ukraine.

Implementation of the Agreement was somehow objectively delayed by elections in Serbia and the announced forthcoming elections in Kosovo. However, the Constitutional Court in Serbia assessed as unconstitutional previously agreed provisions related to recognition of diplomas, cadastres and registry books over the past couple of months, which will undoubtedly have long-term implications for the possibility of normalization of relation. The Constitutional Court of Serbia will also review the issue related to integrated border management.. Furthermore, the issue of freedom of movement is still unresolved. The Serbian public reacted predominantly negatively to the possibility of transforming the Kosovo security forces into Armed Forces. Serbian leaders in Kosovo, who were given legitimacy through obtaining support in recent elections, even announced the formation of alternative forces. One gets the impression that, if substantial normalization of relations between Belgrade and Prishtina is sought, the approach to negotiations must change, by starting with from topics and challenges. The current approach, in which the Prime Ministers and EU representatives, with the support of the USA, decide on the details, is evidently limited in scope.

4.3.2. Serbia and the crisis in Ukraine

Serbia demonstrated its political indecisiveness around Ukraine, conditioned by economic and political dependency on Russia and the issue of Kosovo, already during the mandate of the so-called technical Government, by linking the impossible – giving support to territorial integrity of Ukraine and simultaneously highlighting eternal friendship towards Russia, without reference to what Russia is currently doing in Ukraine. The EU itself contributed to the wrong perception of Serbian politicians now established in the wider society as well, that Serbia can remain non-aligned on this matter until its eventual, formal membership in the EU. It is not good if the current political elites do not understand the challenges and dilemmas that the EU and its Member States are faced with regarding Ukraine, and how deep the crisis in relations with Russia is. It is even worse if they do understand, but still refuse to at least have a clearer political position on developments in Ukraine. It is not only about the Copenhagen criteria and their interpretation, or parts of Chapter 31 – Common Foreign, Security and Deference Policy, which Serbia is yet to negotiate on with the EU, or the Agreement on Stabilization and Association, that also mentions obligations of both parties on harmonizing foreign policy. Public opinion in Member States, without whose support any further expansion of the EU will be more difficult, could question whether Serbia would was a sympathetic partner in difficult times, and thus seriously affect a final decision on membership.

It is interesting, but also dangerous, that the majority of political analysts in the country, those supporting Serbia’s European integrations, play to the beat of Putin’s Orchestra, making [parallels between Crimea and Kosovo](#).

The grotesque analogy Kosovo-Crimea, first used and presented by Putin himself, is especially dangerous for the Western Balkans because the logic, methodology and arguments used in defense of the Russian annexation of Crimea can arguably be used to “justify”

requests for referendums and possible secession of northern Kosovo, Sandžak, Republic of Srpska, western Macedonia...

4.3.4. Serbia and NATO aspirations of Montenegro

Since Aleksandar Vučić's coming into power in Serbia in 2012, Serbia and Montenegro improved their relations, previously jeopardized, among other, by actions of Tadić's emissary [Mlađan Đorđević](#). Unlike Serbia, Montenegro acted strategically since the beginning of the crisis in Ukraine, harmonizing its policies with the policies of the Western international community, increasing in this way its admission to NATO this year. In this way, Montenegro has also shown the voters in the EU that it is becoming a partner in solidarity and that it is harmonizing its policies with the policies of the EU prior to concluding negotiation on Chapter 31 – Common Foreign, Security and Defense Policy. The increased pressure of Moscow on Montenegro, at moments [not only inappropriate, but totally bizarre](#), was, because of this decision, evident even before the escalation of the conflict in Ukraine, reaching a level of open threats. It is supported by Putin's Orchestra within Montenegro as well, which was, during the previous year, getting louder, as in Serbia, primarily through the money streamlined to certain media and organizations. Those familiar with the situation in Montenegro claim that changes in editorial policies of the daily *Vijesti* and weekly *Monitor*, coincided with the beginning of the influx of Russian assets. Therefore, just like in Serbia, the actions of openly pro-Putin organizations are strengthened through the editorial policy of the mainstream media. Official Belgrade was, as in many other situations, publicly silent regarding this trend, which in Serbia culminated in the demonization of a legitimate decision of Montenegro and its democratically elected leadership, by officials of the Serbian Orthodox Church.

The reasons for such behavior should be sought in the fact that Montenegro's NATO

membership would put an end to the obviously still existent hopes in some circles in Serbia, Montenegro and Russia, that its independence is of temporary nature. It would also contribute to regional stability, which is obviously not in Russia's interest. However, above all, although not a necessary precondition for EU membership, Montenegro's NATO membership would, having in mind the strengthened Russian anti-European action in the region, probably reduce the mentioned pressure and thus create conditions for a smooth continuation of the already challenging European integrations of Montenegro. This should be given serious thought by the pro-EU option in Montenegro itself, if it has not yet formed its position of Montenegro's NATO membership.

4.3.5. Serbia and NATO aspirations of BH

Resolving the issue of immovable defense property at the national level is a requirement for Bosnia and Herzegovina to commence using its NATO Membership Action Plan (MEP) in full capacity. However, leaders from the Republic of Srpska (RS) refused all solutions offered so far by conditioning the registration of immovable defense property with resolving the issue of all state property. In short, the Republic of Srpska is suggesting to have the state property of Bosnia and Herzegovina divided on entity or local levels of government, which would leave the country virtually asset less. In this way, the key policy objective of the leaders from the Republic of Srpska is tacitly achieved: to prevent continuation of the process of integration of Bosnia and Herzegovina into NATO.

Informally, they explain this with their reluctance to support membership of Bosnia and Herzegovina in NATO as long as Serbia does not change its attitude towards possible membership. It is indicative that this is contrary to their position of support of BH's NATO membership over the previous years. This shift is considered as a direct consequence of outstanding efforts of the President of the Republic of Srpska, Milorad Dodik, who advocates secession. On the occasion of the Russian annexation of Crimea, Dodik recently

stated: „Russia’s actions are solely directed towards creating a neutral environment for political decisions and dialogue within Ukraine. This has my support”, becoming thus the lead violin of Putin’s Orchestra in BH. Absurdly, instead of the impression of Aleksandar Vučić distancing himself from Dodik due to the radicalization of his views becoming clearer now, exactly the opposite is happening – a new degree of convergence. This is best seen in the way in which Vučić related to the floods in BH.

As in the case of Montenegro, NATO membership of BH would likely frustrate those working on the disintegration of BH. Aside from BH, they are obviously also present both in Serbia and in Russia. NATO membership of BH would contribute to long-term stabilization in the region as well, which is again not in the interest of Moscow and Putin’s Orchestra.

4.4. Ministry of Interior (MUP)

For the six years which he spent at the forefront of the Ministry of Interior, Ivica Dačić did not implement a single reform, personnel-wise or organizational, primarily due to the very stable balance of blackmail with which compromised actors sustain each other in public life, often also in freedom from criminal liability. The best example of the existence of a balance of blackmail is the subsistence of the Police Director Milorad Veljović at this function. It is estimated that during his six-year tenure in MUP, Dačić employed around 4,000 party activists, even though OSCE assessments show Serbia does not need more than 30,000 to 35,000 members in the Ministry of Interior.

The new Minister of Interior is [Nebojša Stefanović](#), of the SNS, who previously served as the President of the National Assembly. Stefanović is also seen as an unquestionable implementer of Vučić’s wishes and policies, both in the party as well as in the Ministry of which he is now formally in charge. The selection of State Secretaries is still underway. Assistants to the Minister are: [Predrag Marić](#), [Željko Kojić](#) and [Slobodan Nedeljković](#).

4.5. Parliamentary Committees for the control of security services, defense and internal affairs

The [Security Services Control Committee](#), into which new members are already elected, has not yet elected its President. In the previous term, this function was performed by Jadranka Joksimović (SNS), and the Committee mainly dealt with defining detailed procedures for its own functioning. It remains to be seen whether good democratic practice of having one of the two Committees controlling the security system led by a representative of the opposition will be respected.

The publicly unfamiliar [Marija Obradović](#) from SNS has been appointed to the forefront of the [Defense and Internal Affairs Committee](#). She replaced Dušan Bajatović from SPS. The Committee did not meet regarding the recent catastrophic floods in Serbia.

4.6. Energy, infrastructure and mining Ministries

Aleksandar Antić from SPS was appointed to head the Ministry of Energy and Mining, having no experience in this field. In the previous term this Ministry was led by SNS cadre, energy by Zorana Mihajlović, often targeted by Russian diplomats and the Gazprom leadership, and mining by Milan Bačević, close to the President of Serbia Tomislav Nikolić. Bačević was also considered as the first man of SNS for liaison with the United Russia party. Mihajlović is the new Minister of the new Ministry of Construction, Transport and Infrastructure, while Bačević, who failed to save his ministerial position, will probably get a comforting place in diplomacy. Dušan Bajatović, SPS, remains at the forefront of Srbijagas for now. The removal of Mihajlović from the Ministry of Energy and the subsistence of Bajatović are considered a direct consequence of demands from Moscow. In this way, another, perhaps crucial, Ministry in Serbia is given to the party already known to play in Putin’s Orchestra – SPS.

Here, the continuity of action of Putin’s Orchestra in certain state bodies in Serbia

should also be noted, primarily in the sectors of security and energy. Sources of the Danas daily in the security circles during the Government of Zoran Đinđić and the mission “Sabljā” claimed already in 2012, that appointing the Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS) party official Radomir Naumov as President of the Board of the Electric Power Industry of Serbia, and then, in 2004, as the Minister of Energy, was “inspired” by interest relations with Russia. In this capacity, he signed dozens of contracts with Russian firms. DSS-cadre continued to lead energy policies during the Governments of Vojislav Koštunica: after Naumov it was Aleksandar Popović, at the time when the greatest privatization in democratic Serbia began – NIS. Naumov, however, continued to be active institutionally, but as a Minister of Religion. He will later be present in various privatization committees.

Despite the fact that many consider Russia as Serbia’s best friend, DSS, who openly campaigned to stop EU integration and strengthen institutional relations with Russia, failed to exceed the threshold. Experts believe that the reason for this is that the Serbian public, despite the rhetoric on the importance of EU integrations, recognized Vučić’s SNS as the main stronghold of unbreakable cooperation with Russia, even at the cost of EU integrations. SNS essentially did nothing to dissuade them of that. In the city Government, SNS introduced DSS, and Siniša Mali was appointed as the Mayor of Belgrade. Mali is also considered as an unquestionable implementer of Vučić’s plans. In his resume there are spots indicating a good understanding of Russian companies in the region.

4.7. European integrations

Jadranka Joksimović, President of the Security Services Control Committee in the previous term was appointed as the Minister without portfolio in charge of EU Integrations. Expert circles consider that this architecture of state bodies: Minister without portfolio, Serbian European Integration Office and the Chief Negotiator, will be quite complicated for

functional coordination of all stakeholders.

5. The dynamic of internal relations in SNS

Within SNS itself, there was obviously a lot of tension over Vučić’s decision to bring non-party figures into the Government, who were not actively involved in the election campaign. Before the new cabinet was announced, there were many speculations whether the SNS President of the Board, Radomir Nikolić, Tomislav Nikolić’s son, will take on one of the leading positions in the Government. Radomir was, by the way, employed for a time in a branch office of Srbijagas.

The complex inner dynamic in SNS will be one of the main parameters, alongside Putin’s Orchestra on one hand, and the will and power of the EU to keep Serbia on its current course of slow convergence on the other, that will affect whether Serbia will move towards the political West or the political East in due course. Aleksandar Vučić, who is increasingly showing his true political *face of an idea-less autocrat* prone to micromanagement, inflates his rating in the wider public primarily through *mainstream* media. Despite his passive-aggressive manner of addressing journalists from almost all media, based on the number of positive articles and frequency of appearance in these, only Putin can pose as competition. The Ombudsman Saša Janković excellently speaks about self-censorship and the general state of the Serbian media in his *Annual Report*. One gets the impression that both the new and the old members of the Government are willing to endure Vučić’s humiliating manner of speaking and acting.

6. Putin’s Orchestra and the Western international community

Let us also have a look at the main characteristics of the other two parameters that will decide on the fate of the value-political course of Serbia - the strengths of Putin’s Orchestra and the policies of the Western international community.

6.1. Putin's Orchestra

Putin's Orchestra in Serbia has grown and became more tuned already in mid-last year, following a [visit of Nikolai Patrushev](#), Secretary of the Security Council of the Russian Federation. Since that period, a large number of newly-formed organizations that almost entirely deal only with activities promoting Putin's propaganda in Serbia appeared. Some previously established media portals with a clear Putin propaganda strengthened their presence in the public sphere as well, intensively reporting on the activities of the mentioned organizations. They form the core of Putin's Orchestra outside of state institutions. For their views and attitudes they usually do not have formal public support of the national leadership, but without the invisible hand of the Government their increasing media and public presence would be impossible. The main state amplifier of this part of Putin's Orchestra is the University of Belgrade, which is of particular concern. In the media sphere, these are the dailies: *Večernje Novosti*, *Kurir*, *Politika*, *Informer*, as well as the majority of political TV *talkshows*.

The unacceptable activities of the mentioned organizations, such as the making of lists of „[Serb-haters](#)” face an ambivalent reaction of the authorities. They (the authorities) never explicitly condemn such actions, and in the best case scenario give statements such as “we condemn any kind of violence”, which actually [equates the actions of human rights activists with abusers from right-wing organizations](#).

One of the most recognizable modus operandi of the mentioned organizations, besides arbitrary criminalization of the pro-Western option in Serbia, is the non-hesitation to contaminate the public with inaccuracies or assessments completely taken out of context. Unfortunately, the openly pro-Western option too is small, quiet and inert to react to all the inaccuracies. It is also questionable whether there is any media space for it. The mentioned fifteenth anniversary of the NATO bombing is, alongside the already mass occurrence of overdimensioning the extent of economic

cooperation and potential for it with Russia, a good example. During those days, many scientific papers were published, mostly financed by Russian assets, [analyzing the effects of depleted uranium](#), but not a single one considers the possibility that the accident at Chernobyl could have also affected some of the mentioned findings.

Part of the public that was loudly against the wars in the former Yugoslavia, for example, anti-nationalist and pro-human rights oriented, has now become anti-globalist, often with confusing views on Putin and Ukraine. Translations of papers on Ukraine of the great Timothy Snyder on the [Peščanik](#) portal are praiseworthy. Unfortunately, mainstream media in Serbia, unquestionably under the control of the Government, do not provide space for such an argued analysis of developments in Ukraine. And because of this, as well as because of the complete disintegration of the opposition, the rhetoric of the Putin's Orchestra falls onto very fertile ground. In the majority of Serbian media, Putin is an absolute hero of unquestionable action.

The field for the erosion of public support for European integrations, a primary objective of Putin's Orchestra in Serbia, is very successfully prepared by the Serbian Orthodox Church (SPC) as well. With the acceptance of the Brussels Agreement it has gained a large space in the creation of daily politics. It increasingly relies and calls for cooperation with the Russian Orthodox Church, from which it has up to now significantly differed in its position on social freedoms. The SPC honored Leonid Reshetnikov, Director of the increasingly influential Russian Institute for Strategic Research in Serbia (RISI) Reshetnikov is a promoter of organic unity of the state and religion and is an advocate of the Huntington rhetoric of a creation of a special Russian civilization as a counter-balance to the West. He is one of the main conductors of Putin's Orchestra who does not hesitate to even brutally attack the legitimate leadership of Montenegro when it does something that is not according to Moscow's will. And the SPC gave its support to its priest Afmilohije Radović, who placed an actual orthodox curse against the

Montenegrin leadership for their decision to join the economic sanctions against Russia.

Resistance of the state to such Russian creating of a new situation in the field, with the support of Putin's Orchestra within Serbia itself, is too weak. It leaves space for doubt whether the alleged commitment to European integrations, primarily of SNS, was simply an excuse for coming into power, which will disappear at the same time when public support to EU integrations does, as it did not at all stand up against its organized erosion. This was best seen during the parallel visit of the EU Enlargement Commissioner Stefan Füle and High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy, Catherine Ashton, on the one hand, and the Russian Duma Speaker Sergei Naryshkin, on the other. Naryshkin, who self-invited himself to Serbia, probably at the suggestion of Putin himself in order to test Serbia's loyalty, is on the list of Russian officials targeted by EU and USA sanctions because of the annexation of Crimea and Russian operations in eastern Ukraine. Despite of this, he was [received by the President of Serbia Tomislav Nikolić](#), the Serbian Parliament and the University of Belgrade. Almost none of the media, nor any official in Serbia, announced to the public the fact that Naryshkin is under sanctions. At the same time, his Bulgarian colleague wisely came up with another obligation and denied Naryshkin hospitality, despite the fact that Bulgaria is no less dependent on the import of Russian energy resources than Serbia.

6.2 The current policy of the Western international community in Serbia and the region

The question of how seriously the Western international community considers the already visible results of activities of Putin's Orchestra in Serbia, as well as what measures can be taken to silence it, remains open. This also, without doubt, depends on the will of Serbian officials to be helped in this, primarily through support in EU integrations. If they care about the idea of modernizing Serbia and its membership in the EU, they would have to demonstrate this more

clearly already, even at the cost of antagonizing the Kremlin. The previous silence and confusing messages of EU and Member State officials should not be, as they are now, understood as long-term support and understanding for the Serbian policy of sitting on two chairs.

Following the elections in 2012, when the reformed representatives of the Milošević regime came into power led by own interests and priorities, and a part of them even formally supported the normalization of relations between Serbia and Kosovo, the Western international community decided to once again strip down the criteria that a Candidate State needs to fulfill in order to start negotiations with the EU. This decision itself was not without merit, but it seems that the methodology of its implementation was flawed. The new Government, led by the trio Vučić, Nikolić, Dačić, was declared as reformist and pro-European, before they made any specific actions. This demoralized the previous actors of any such democratization of Serbia and gave the new Government a green light to overpay the process of normalization of relations with Kosovo both at the internal and foreign policy plan, increasingly showing its true authoritarian face.

One gets the impression that the Western international community has finally returned to a somewhat more realistic course of public disclosure of their assessments of events in Serbia. Over the past year, since the signing of the Brussels Agreement, and even before it, while it was preparing the field, it was evidently ready to value the positive trends in this field much more than the negative in others. The return of the EU to public disclosure of positions is good for Serbia, especially given the fact that after the elections it became clear that the inner critical voice on the actions of the current Government, except for economic measures, almost disappeared.

Sonja Biserko, President of the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia, recently stated a series of strong arguments on why the EU should, despite the negative trends in Serbia, speed up and simplify the process of accession. However, Serbia and others need to do much

more in order to coax the EU, taught by the bad experience of such an approach in the case of Bulgaria and Romania, to take such a decision. It seems that the public in Serbia does not understand the severity of challenges that the EU and its Member States are faced with, from articulating common measures towards the Kremlin, the situation in Ukraine, redefining of their security and defense policies, to negotiation on the Trade and Investment Partnership with the USA (TTIP). This is also followed by the very uncertain European Parliament elections and elections for new leaders of the European Commission. There is a chance that, due to the lack of interest of large political parties, anti-EU powers of the extreme right and left come out as victorious, [also giving legitimacy to Putin](#), which will bring new challenges for the EU and potentially discourage it from enlargement towards the Balkans.

7. Where now?

In such circumstances, Serbian officials need to do everything they can in order to help the EU help Serbia. It is not only the matter of [significant systemic financial support](#) and help for rehabilitation of recent flood damage, but also the help from social floods that threatens us. There is great danger that, under the pressure of Putin's Orchestra, its own dilemmas, challenges and misconceptions, Serbia gives up on democracy. It is, by the way, not only about merely counting votes or anarchy in which everyone can say what they want, as it is often vulgarized in Serbia.

Recently, the American non-governmental organization National Institute for Democracy (NDI) and the Belgrade Center for Free Elections and Democracy highlighted this danger. The main findings of their latest [research](#) show that the attitude of Serbian citizens towards democracy as a political system is increasingly dependent on their socio-economic status and that today, there is only 30 percent of those who consider democracy as better than any other form of government. It seems that Putinization, as a model of governance, also has significant support in Serbia, which is even more

dangerous than the support that Aleksandar Vučić, the lead violin of Putin's Orchestra in Serbia has.

If this trend continues, in parallel with the loud trumpeting of Putin's Orchestra on the economic-political-social domination of Russia growing by the day – despite facts showing that the economic situation is worsening, and support for the annexation of Crimea given only by few rogue and failing states, or intimidated satellites – it will be increasingly difficult to argue in Serbia, [why are rich countries democratic](#), as the Harvard Professor Ricardo Hausmann does. Once the trend of illusions overcomes the trend of factual decision-making, and one of them is that all countries that have undergone the process of EU integration are, despite the economic crisis, still among the richest countries in the world even if they do not have natural resources – as excellently noted by Gerald Knaus of the European Stability Initiative in his paper [Why they look West - Ukraine, poverty and the EU](#) – society usually falls into a prolonged decline, which Serbia should certainly remember.

