



# THE NEW CENTURY

*liberal responses to global challenges*

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## #PUTINIZATION



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***The power of the west should be in its ability to create a situation in which it screws Gazprom's pipes, at its borders, as a response to russian blackmail and not to just express concern and impose inefficient sanctions; to openly ask Belgrade, Kiev, Sarajevo and Sofia whether they wish to go to the East or the West, to choose putinization as a form of governance or not.***

Preliminary parliamentary elections have been scheduled in Serbia. One of the main features of the campaign is to avoid the topic of Kosovo, foreign and security policy, and regional cooperation, almost entirely. The economy is supposedly the main topic, although no one discusses in which value system it is to be observed, and on what foreign policy course will its fundamentals be based. Even the energetic Saša Radulović cannot come forward on this issue – he should be more direct regarding the West. The Liberal Democratic Party considers some things as self-explanatory and does not emphasize them in the campaign, which is already becoming frustrating and brings into doubt the honesty of their Atlanticism, or to say the least, their knowledge of how important determination on this subject is. Even stranger is that the electorate for this issue is larger than the average result attained by LDP in parliamentary elections. This electorate is, again, left without an option to vote for.

The main tone of the campaign has been imposed, naturally, by the Deputy Prime Minister and President of the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) Aleksandar Vučić. Almost undisturbedly, he not only advocates, but also demonstrates clear Putinization of the

country, which he initiated the very first day of assuming his mandate as Vice President. It is manifested in weak institutions, dependent media, non-transparent flows of money and a complete politicization of the security system, instead of strengthened democratic control over it.

He created an image in the public that those who criticize his “great efforts and sacrifices for Serbia” and the SNS are themselves against reforms, do not think with their own head and are on Miroslav Mišković’s payroll, a tycoon who was held in prison for a couple of months, only to be allowed to leave the country even though a judicial process is still in place. Threats of judicial processions through the media, with saucy details from “sources familiar with the investigation” in high volume selling media that Vučić controls have become one of the main technologies of Aleksandar Vučić’s reign. It now bluntly comes down to confrontation with all types of political opponents, and not on implementation of reforms, as he claims. Unless under the term of reform Vučić refers to the “privatization” and humiliation of the Emergency Situation Sector of the Ministry of Interior, which we have seen in the Feketić Affair, and the establishment of partization of

the entire security system, which we see in wiretapping affairs of Vučić and his party colleague, Serbian President Tomislav Nikolić, especially focused on the unconstructive critique of the work of the Ministry of Interior (MUP) headed by Prime Minister Ivica Dačić, the introduction of the “fast lane” and the bypass of tenders for investors with cash, this time those allegedly coming the United Arab Emirates. Vučić’s rhetoric in the campaign, as well as politics as it seems, regarding relations with Russia, have not moved from having to mention strategic relations with Russia in the same sentence in which the importance of European integration for Serbia is highlighted. And even what he cannot be denied from the start of his mandate, the formal support for the Brussels Agreement and normalization of relations between Serbia and Kosovo, threatens to erode in the middle of the election rhetoric in which clear statements about the West expecting from Serbia to have Serbia and Kosovo as two separate legal entities are avoided, with allowing the deeply compromised Aleksandar Vulin, Minister without portfolio in the Government of Serbia in charge of Kosovo and Metohija, to manage policy towards Kosovo.

Unfortunately for Serbia, neither partization of the security system, nor the ambiguity of the approach towards Kosovo, or the compliance with Russian interests, or misuse of the media are not Vučić’s original invention. He simply, at the price of his own survival in power and formal support for EU integrations, raised the totalitarian level of his predecessors for a notch. A monument to the Azerbaijani dictator Heydar Aliyev, in hope that fast cash and investment will flow in from Azerbaijan, was placed in the Tašmajdan Park in Belgrade in 2011. In the presence of the then Serbian President Boris Tadić and Belgrade Mayor Dragan Đilas, placed today on opposite sides, the monument was unveiled by the then President of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev, Heydar’s son. Hence, the pact of non-aggression between Vučić, who is prepared to give, without a urbanistic plan or tender Belgrade as a whole, and not just one park and political pride, to the UAE and Tadić’s New Democratic Party comes as no surprise. In fact,



Source: Facebook

weren’t Tadić and Jeremić, then Foreign Minister and Tadić’s political creation – the price of Tadić having support in the Democratic Party, provided by Jeremić’s father who is closely related to Russian interests - the ones who formally, so cheaply sold Serbia’s gas industry to the Russians? We had, obviously false, hopes for at least some freedom from the Russians, at least in some aspects of foreign and security policy (at least some money came in the end from Azerbaijan).

In Serbia overwhelmed by pre-election combinatorics, the opportunity that the SNS “shares responsibility” in the new Government with the Democratic Party of Serbia - the only party that has a clear policy in this elections campaign: No to the EU, only intensive institutional, political and economic cooperation with Russia saves Serbia - is rarely taken into consideration. Having also in mind that Serbia is on the brink of bankruptcy, but also the natural fondness these two parties have for conservatism and authoritarianism, as well as the increasingly expressed anti-Westernism - no matter what Vučić, who is not impervious within his party, said - this is a very possible scenario that must be taken into consideration much more seriously than until now. Tadić obviously lacks course and policy so he would easily find his way around. He has already cohabitated with Koštunica.

The South Stream is still erroneously presented in the election campaign as an economic, and not a primarily political, investment project on whose economic incompetence, as well as Putin’s stubbornness on the [non-use of foreign exchange reserves](#) even Russian economists point out to. The obvious alliance of LDP with

SNS in the run up to elections has blunted LDP's blade regarding critique of energy policy. [Comparative analysis](#) of the economies of the South and North Stream, which also has difficulties primarily because of the increasing influx of shale gas from the USA, is either not followed, or is deliberately suppressed in Serbia. The bravest statement that the direct actors of the political campaign in Serbia today can give against Gazprom in Serbia is on the poor management of the Socialist Party of Serbia cadre heading the NIS enterprise in Serbia, Dušan Bajatović, which is only a small part of the mosaic.

The fact that the statistics on both, the scope of [economic cooperation](#) between Serbia and Russia, and on the state of the [Russian economy](#), as well as those on the alleged economic recession of the almost entire West, are in contrast with reality, should worry the public, and not Nenad Popović, DSS Vice President and the most agile in promoting this approach, or anyone else.

One is under the impression that the EU and the USA are, despite the abovementioned, still convinced that whoever wins the elections, Serbia will remain on the course of European integration. Having in mind the developments in Ukraine, Bosnia and Hercegovina, and even Bulgaria, that have one common characteristic with the atmosphere in Serbia – Russian influence, this is a lightly assumed position which the West should review as soon as possible.

Vučić, Nikolić, as well as Dačić or Tadić would not be the first, nor the last externally created newborn Europeans who would, due to an increasingly evident conflict of ideologies and governance styles, or money which they urgently need, thank the West - who aided their climb to power in tired, transitional states on the verge of becoming, or have already become, captured states - and turn to Russia. There they are, Azarov, Yanukovich and Snowden are already there, or are on their way.

Russia has no problem of democratic or consensual practice of decision-making as the West does, no moral dilemmas on the manner of conducting international relations or pressure for respecting the rule of law and

human rights, or the obligation of respecting previously adopted budgets. It operates faster and makes financial and political decisions, as any totalitarian state that is. Hence the greater for playing on small points, despite not offering a viable, strategic vision, including also confrontation with its own problems and dysfunctionalities, like the West does.



*A monument to Soviet soldiers in Sofia painted as heroes of American comic books. Source: Facebook*

Let us briefly review the very concerning development of events in Ukraine that the West and Serbia can both learn from. The competence of the just released former Ukrainian Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko, a controversial businesswoman favoring cults of personality and not necessarily the rule of law and respect for human rights, and her political allies - who were just placed onto important posts in Ukraine - to resist this sort of Russian magnetism is also questionable. The first thing that freed Tymoshenko said on Euromaidan was that she would love to see Yanukovich on trial. Very similar to the promotion of the "national-tabloid" justice emphasized by Vučić. Both Ukraine and Serbia must do better. With rule of law and respect of human rights against those who are corrupted and/or undemocratic.

Of course, the current state of affairs in Serbia, and the same goes for BiH, Ukraine and Bulgaria, can by no means be blamed solely on the "inert" West or the agile Putin's Russia, which obviously skillfully penetrates in the space opened by the West too fast. The West, of course, has its share of responsibility, including the sometimes overly strong reliance on individuals who can realize their current interests such as the normalization of relations between Serbia and Kosovo or the preservice of Ukraine and BiH as a whole, in the face of continuous crisis management of the Western

Balkans and now Ukraine as well, often at the cost of developing independent institutions and democratization processes in these countries which it, otherwise, undoubtedly supports.

The entire region of the Western Balkans should be concerned over the lack of reality of people that many progressive circles look up to, such as the one demonstrated by the Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek, arguing that Edward Snowden and Pussy Riot, Russian girls who rotted in Putin's prisons which did not prevent Snowden from seeking asylum from Moscow, are part of the same global rebellion. Without a more realistic perception of global events, both from the Right and the Left, it will be difficult for the entire region to choose one functional political economic course which is actually available – Euroatlanticism. Unfortunately, neither is the West itself free from drawing quick conclusions on developments in the region, and now in Ukraine, without determining the facts, which demonstrated through tightening progressive circles to give their unreserved support to the Ukrainian protesters, allegedly because they are fascists and ultra-nationalists, a spin systemically spread by official Moscow. However, the pendulum is faster to get back in place in the West than it is here. I warmly recommend an article by Timothy Snyder "[Fascism, Russia, and Ukraine](#)".

The main culprits of the current harsh economic situation in the region, as well as the foreign policy confusion, as it must once be said, are the inert public in these countries. The ones who refuse to face the wheels of globalization, the



*A monument to Soviet soldiers in Sofia painted like the Ukrainian soldier in support of the Ukrainian protests*  
Source: Facebook

consequences their political decisions had on the quality of their lives. The citizens who for more than a decade, in their free environment and through democratic procedures choose the political elites. The ones who do not solve the complicated situations in their countries but use them for remaining in power - and mainly do not risk to fundamentally change them, even at the cost of falling levels of support. The responsibility of political elites, and the citizens whom these are mainly the picture of, is greater in BiH and Serbia than the responsibility of those in Ukraine, who were only offered membership in the Eastern Partnership by the EU, not also the opportunity of full membership, which is a geopolitical blessing that many other developing states do not have. The citizens of Ukraine still do not have a liberalized visa regime with Europe. On the other hand, Russian influence and interest in that country are much greater than in the Western Balkans. The case of Bulgaria which is, due to Russian influence and despite being an EU and NATO member, slipping into political anarchy, caused also by great political apathy as a predominant reaction to the Putinized form of rule, is also cautionary, which is something that is rarely talked about in Serbia at all.

Despite obvious similarities in some aspects, a debate on the real consequences of the crises in the mentioned countries, or the possible solution scenarios that would contribute to the process of democratization and Europeanization in them, is not present in Serbia (the phrase of stabilization is deliberately omitted). The reaction of all Serbian state leaders to the developments in Bosnia and Herzegovina was shameful. No one showed interest in peace and prosperity of Bosnia as a whole, and all of its citizens, or an understanding for the unquestionable moment of explosive social unrest.

According to Serbian officials, developments in BiH are primarily orchestrated from the West with the aim of destabilizing and abolishing the Republic of Srpska and have nothing to do with great unemployment and late salaries, while corruption and dysfunctionality of the state are flourishing. Interestingly, the same thesis has

been promoted by all Russian state media as well. The Serbian state leadership, as well as the opposition - if something like that still exists - mainly remain deafeningly silent on developments in Ukraine. There is no position in the corruptness of the Ukrainian state leadership who, in order to conceal its primary nature and remain on power, recently drastically reduced some basic rights of citizens, limited the activities of civil society, and the moved into a brutal and violent crackdown on protesters, of which a large majority has legitimate requests for the [fight against corruption](#) above all, and only then for democratization of the country, its approximation to the EU and an end to the process of Putinization. The [media](#) controlled by Vučić, or the Russian Embassy in Serbia, often share misinformation on the number and influence of extremist Ukrainian right-wingers on the wave of rebellion against the Yanukovych regime.

This choice of the Serbian state leadership is obviously a policy aligned with Russian politics in the region, despite the fact that Serbia formally started negotiations with the EU. The process of approximation to the EU also means adopting the same views as the EU has, at least in the fields where it has a common position. The key topic of the election campaign should be the model of managing the country, reform of the security system and its foreign policy orientation that is, reaching a final decision on whether Serbia is headed towards the political East or the political West. The opening of negotiations with the EU certainly isn't this, but it does represent a move in the right direction. Just like the foreign policy course, the model of state management in Serbia is still undecided upon.<sup>1</sup> For now, Putinization prevails which is, once more, manifested in weak institutions, dependent media, non-transparent flows of

<sup>1</sup> CEAS, Regarding the inadequate response of the Serbian state authorities to developments in BiH and the fascinating lack of position regarding developments in Ukraine – does Serbia have a coherent foreign policy. Available at: <http://ceas-serbia.org/root/index.php/en/announcements/2147-egarding-the-inadequate-response-of-the-serbian-state-authorities-to-developments-in-bih-and-the-fascinating-lack-of-position-regarding-developments-in-ukraine-does-serbia-have-a-coherent-foreign-policy>

money and a complete politicization of the security system, instead of strengthened democratic control over it. Unfortunately, until now these topics have not been open in the campaign, despite the fact that over the last year and a half, Serbia was shaken by [affair after affair](#), caused precisely by the situation in these fields. It is also discouraging that the so-called opposition politicians fail to understand the seriousness of the moment in which Serbia and the regions, as well as the entire Eastern Europe are in. Their entire campaign is based on unbearable vanity and unsettled accounts.

However, the West too could do better and more in the fight against the growing Putinization in Serbia and other mentioned countries. This primarily refers to Germany. It is good that the German President Joachim Gauck noted the need for Germany to assume greater global responsibility at the recent Security Conference in Munich. Hopefully this refers to a clearer position towards Russia, one that is more often agreed among partners. Gauck's announcement has been very much noticed and welcomed by the USA. It came at a time of a great debate on whether the USA should against enter into one post-great war phases when it licks its own wounds and focuses solely on internal politics. Such a development of events, in parallel with intentions of NATO to focus primarily on itself in the forthcoming period, would certainly not be good news for Ukraine or for the Western Balkans (let's concentrate on these areas). The EU is needed but is not enough to achieve a success story in the Western Balkans and Ukraine, and even Bulgaria, such as the one achieved in the Czech Republic, Republic of Slovakia, Poland, and hopefully also Hungary in the end. The news that the economy of the Višegrad Four together is now the fifteenth world economy by force has, unfortunately, been missed in Serbia.

Joseph Nye is right to [demystify](#) the alleged USA isolationism, saying that the USA should naturally choose its battles and does not always have to intervene militarily; however, the spectrum of peaceful measures that the USA and the West can generally apply and the mistakes that they cannot repeat is still big and

powerful. For it, it is necessary to have the confidence between the USA and Germany rebuilt, severely impaired by the Snowden revelations, which Ivo Daalder point to in his [paper](#). Daalder, perhaps in a slightly arrogant manner, but rightfully highlights: “The reality is more complicated. German society, not least those who for decades lived under the spying eyes of the East German regime, is especially sensitive to government surveillance of individuals. At the same time, technology has evolved so rapidly that it is difficult to comprehend the extent to which legitimate counter-terrorism surveillance now involves gathering large amounts of data, and how crucial such gathering is to preventing terrorist acts. The more we live our lives online the more we are all vulnerable to surveillance—domestic as well as foreign, governmental as well as corporate.”



*Ukrainian priest during protests in Kiev. Source: Facebook*

Germany must show greater understanding and give more importance to the recent negotiations to establish a free trade agreements between the USA and EU, regardless of whether this might, in the short-term, jeopardize the competitiveness of its energy sector. Balancing with Russia is also very often caused by this regard, at a very high stake of democratization of Ukraine, for example, and one gets the impression of BiH and Serbia as well.

As regards the EU, the targeted financial and travel sanctions against official of the Ukrainian regime suspected for excessive use of force, adopted as a measure the other day by Foreign Ministers of EU Member States, make sense only if the West becomes more serious in applying the already existing financial

regulations, as pointed out by Transparency Ukraine. Were these applied until now, Yanukovych and others would not have the riches they do. They do not only trade with Russia, and their finances are most often in tax havens with which the West still lacks the strengths to confront. Opportunism in international relations is normal, but it must be much measured much better and more often. The EU’s decision to ban the export of weapons and police equipment in Ukraine is a mere formality. In Ukraine, unfortunately, there are so much weapons and ammunition that a war can be waged for a long time, even under a theoretically firm embargo, although Syria and Bosnia indicate that something of the kind is impossible to realize. The question of availability of the same, which Bosnia makes us so eerily reminiscent of, is much more important. Hence the hypocritical note of Obama’s recent call to “both sides” to refrain from using it. This call was an insult to those who initiated this wave of discontent primarily with corruption in Ukraine, peacefully demonstrating for days in the freezing cold.

The Western media-political intensification of the logistical problems with which the organizers of the Winter Olympics in Sochi were faced with, went too far and seemed more as a lack of power than a criticism of Russia. The focus was drawn away from what it must remain on – if Russia managed to defend the Olympics from terrorist attack, at what price was this done, from the procession rights of the [those suspected for terrorism in Dagestan](#), the rights of their families and fellow citizens, and further on. Now that the Olympics are over, Russia will intensify its projects of strangling democratic processes in the Western Balkans, Ukraine and even in Bulgaria. The power of the West should be in its ability to create a situation in which it screws Gazprom’s pipes, at it’s borders, as a response to Russian blackmail and not to just express concern and impose inefficient sanctions; to openly ask Belgrade, Kiev, Sarajevo and Sofia whether they wish to go to the East or the West, to choose Putinization as a form of governance or not.