



Policy Recommendations
of the Joint Workshop of the PFP-Consortium Study Group
“Regional Stability in South East Europe”
and the
Belgrade Centre for Civil-Military Relations

“Serbia – Stepping into Calmer or Rougher Waters?
Internal Processes, Regional Implications”¹

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Evaluation of the political situation in Serbia

The May 2008 elections in Serbia showed that the majority of the voters opted for European integration. However, difficulties in forming the government in the period after the elections proved that Serbian society is still highly divided. The polarization between pro-Europeans and traditionalists became so intense that it provided a coalition potential to Milošević’s Socialist Party of Serbia that even they did not expect. After an exhausting period of negotiations the Socialists decided to join the pro-European bloc, for the time-being.

A result of the electoral loss was the dissolution of the Serbian Radical Party, the leading traditionalist force in Serbia. The Radicals, who always came close to power but never close enough, finally started to show first signs of defeat. They were not only defeated in the elections, they were defeated in depth. The leading members left the party and formed a new

¹ This paper sums up the policy recommendations from the study group meeting on the latest developments in Serbia and its regional implications, held in Belgrade, Serbia, 11-14 September 2008.

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one. This was definitely a strong blow to the Radicals and the real impact of this separation will be seen at the next elections. Neither of the two parties will be able to gather such support as they did in the past.

In view of the changes in Serbian politics it can be said with great confidence that a renunciation of EU integration is impossible in Serbia today. Although it has seemed that Serbia is closer to Russia than to the EU and that it tries to balance between these two powers, the policy of keeping one leg in the West and one in the East will not be tenable in the long term.

Consensus to join the EU seems to exist among the political elite in Serbia, but with NATO accession it is quite the opposite. Although the Serbian government has approved a security agreement for the interchange of information with NATO, the majority citizens are reluctant to join NATO.

Southern Serbia is a flashpoint. The tensions in southern Serbia between the Albanian majority and the Serbian security apparatus could escalate if the situation in northern Kosovo goes in the direction of secession. Another possible crisis area is Sandžak. The ongoing conflict between the Bosniaks has shown some violent forms. The reasons for the conflict can not be easily determined as well as the role of the Serbian government in it.

Regional implications

Since the stability, security and prosperity of Serbia impacts the entire region, all the countries of the Western Balkans closely follow the political situation in Serbia and its implications.

Political developments in Serbia greatly influence the political scene in Bosnia and Herzegovina, especially the Republika Srpska. This influence can mostly be seen in the debate concerning constitutional changes. Presently there is no political agreement on the alteration of the Constitution [Note: a preliminary agreement on several key issues was concluded among three major parties in Nov. 2008.]. The relations between these two countries are also burdened by the ongoing cooperation with the ICTY. The proclamation of Kosovo independence created tensions in Republika Srpska, and although the situation is

presently calm, it could still be a source of conflict. Bosnian troops take part in mine disposal operations in southern Iraq, benefiting Bosnian defense and foreign policy.

The relations between Serbia and Croatia are normalizing. The Croatian public is very interested in what is happening in Serbia. Besides the well known problem with the Serbian minority, Croatian recognition of Kosovo delayed the full normalization of relations. On the other hand, economic cooperation is getting stronger and the Croatian government formally supports Serbia's accession to the EU and NATO. The biggest worry for Croatia today is the problem with the Lisbon Treaty and its possible repercussions on Croatian accession to the EU. Croatia, officially first in line for joining, is worried about a possible delay of EU enlargement.

Relations between Montenegro and Serbia are unique because they were in the same country longer than with any other former Yugoslav countries and they separated peacefully. The stronger part of the Montenegrin opposition consists of pro-Serbian parties. Therefore the expected recognition of Kosovo will be the most difficult moment for relations between Serbia and Montenegro.

One of the strongest implications of the Kosovo independence was felt in Macedonia. Along with the name dispute with Greece, the expected recognition of Kosovo is one of the main sources of tension in Macedonian political life. Macedonian progress depends on how fast it can join NATO and the EU. Delays in the accession, especially to NATO, increase the probability of a crisis between the ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians. There remains no solution for the name dispute which is the only obstacle to Macedonian accession to NATO. Both parties in the dispute are firmly abiding by their positions. It is noteworthy that the majority of Macedonian citizens are against changing the name of the country regardless of the impact on Macedonia's joining NATO. Another possible point of crisis is the dispute between the Albanian political parties in Macedonia. This dispute already created violent conflicts during the last elections.

The relations between Serbia and Albania are on a low intensity level. Albania officially considers Kosovo a new reality in the Balkans and a new state. The Albanian factor in the region has fundamental importance. Therefore, Albania's and Croatia's accession to NATO

will become a stability factor in the Western Balkans. However, Albania is still not a completely stable country and its economy especially needs larger scale development.

Role of Euro-Atlantic Institutions

Since 2001 NATO has had other priorities, but the Balkans are still on the agenda. NATO's primary focus in the region is Kosovo and the Alliance is pleased with developments there. NATO cooperation with Serbian armed forces was very good until NATO took a role in training the future Kosovo armed forces. After that Serbian military limited its cooperation with NATO to the minimum. The biggest challenges for NATO in Kosovo include its relationship to the EULEX mission, the dissolution of the Kosovo Protection Corps and creation of the Kosovo Security Force, and providing security for all citizens. From the NATO standpoint, all countries are in the Partnership for Peace and there is significant progress in their defense reform. Albania and Croatia will join the Alliance at the next summit, but Macedonia remains a challenge, especially because of its name dispute with Greece, a member country of NATO.

The EU presidency takes the whole region into consideration, not individual countries. During the French presidency the Kosovo issue will dominate the region. It's the strong belief of the EU presidency that dialogue should be promoted between the United Nations Mission in Kosovo and the Serbian government. One of the main goals of the presidency is to strongly support the EULEX mission, as well as political and economic development in Kosovo. Although the failure of the Lisbon Treaty and the recognition of Kosovo complicate internal relations within the EU, Serbia is encouraged to pursue its European rapprochement. Therefore, the European Commission will present the enlargement package in November 2008.

Recommendations to the EU

- The EU should hasten the integration process and give candidate status to all the countries of the Western Balkans as soon as possible so that they can move to technical issues.
- The failure of the Lisbon Treaty should not be allowed to endanger the integration process of the Western Balkans countries.

- There should be a targeted relaxation of the visa regime with all the countries of the Western Balkans.
- Measures should be taken to enhance trilateral confidence building, especially between the Serbs, Croats and Bosniaks in Bosnia and Herzegovina.
- The EULEX mission should be deployed in the territory of Kosovo as a whole and its deployment should be balanced with dialogue between the Serbs and the Albanians.
- The EU should help with the Macedonian name dispute since this dispute is a matter for the Common Foreign and Security Policy of the EU.
- The EU should encourage more regional cooperation between the countries of the Western Balkans through its policy of conditionality.

Recommendations to NATO

- NATO should keep its military presence in the Western Balkans region until all the countries of the region become members of the Alliance.
- NATO should enhance regional cooperation through the instruments of Partnership for Peace.
- NATO should create viable Membership Action Plans for all the countries of the Western Balkans region.