

POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN THE BALKANS: THE CASE OF SERBIA*

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Abstract

The article discusses the developments of the domestic political stage of Serbia during 2000-2016, analyzing the way in which these impacted the Serbian foreign policy. The article argues that the pro-european versus nationalists cleavage, which was specific to the 1990s and 2000s decreased in relevance after the reforms undertaken during the presidential terms of Boris Tadic and the adoption of a pragmatic and deliberately ambiguous by all Serbian political forces. The article identifies three crucial periods in Serbian domestic politics: 2000-2004: - the period of instability after the fall of Slobodan Milosevic, 2004-2012: the presidential terms of Boris Tadic, 2012-2016: ex-nationalists come back to power - The presidential term of Tomislav Nikolic. The article concludes that the political positioning of the main Serbian parties tend to converge, while Serbia is pursuing two major foreign policy objectives which seem to be mutually exclusive: keeping Kosovo as part of Serbia and joining the European Union.

Keywords: Serbia, domestic politics, Kosovo, European Union.

Introduction

The current article analyzes the relationship between Serbia's domestic politics between 2000 and 2016 and its foreign policy. The article argues that Serbia has overcome the period of ethnic nationalism as a meaningful political force and adopted a pragmatic internal and external policy, both concerning its relationship with the European Union and with the Russian Federation. This development is presented across 16 years, showing how the nationalists' loss of power and the long rule of pro-Europeans (2004-12) radically changed the main political forces on the Serbian state. Thus, the cleavage between nationalists and pro-Europeans which predominated in Serbia between 1990 and 2000 became less and less relevant, as former nationalists discovered the advantages of the pro-European position, while the pro-Europeans realized, while in power, that while the Kosovo issue still

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exists, one can draw advantages from a realistic relationship with Russia. All these developments took place on the background of deeply personalized politics and consolidating democratic institutions.

Serbia's internal politics between 2000 (the removal from power of Slobodan Milosevic) up to 2016, as well as its influence on the country's foreign policy can be understood only if one comprehends two characteristics of Serbia. Firstly, Serbia was part, during the period that is studied, of two federal states, which were made of the same component units, but were differently organized. During 1992-2003, Serbia, made up, together with Montenegro, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (or "small Yugoslavia", which emerged after the secession of Slovenia, Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina). This was a federal union, where Belgrade represented the main driving force and had been built to serve the dominant personality of the time: Slobodan Milosevic. Between 2003 and 2006, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) was **transformed into a much looser confederation, called Serbia and Montenegro** (Nations Online, n.d.). This was also dissolved in 2006, as the two states became independent (BBC News, 2006) (the first constitution of independent Serbia was promulgated then). Until 2006, a different federal level with separate institutions existed, which also played a part in Serbian political events, as some of these centered on struggles for federal-level institutions.

The second aspect that needs to be considered is the organization of the government of Serbia. This is a semi-presidential republic, having a president similar to that in Romania. According to the 2006 Serbian constitution, the president of Serbia is in charge of representation, sanctioning laws, appointing ambassadors, nominating people for positions, granting amnesty and medals. Similarly to Romania, the president of Serbia has the right to nominate a candidate for being prime-minister, after consulting with Parliamentary parties (a candidate which needs to be voted by the Parliamentary majority) and to return, one time, a law to Parliament for re-examination. It is also important to mention that the term of office of the President of Serbia is five years while that of the National Assembly (the Serbian Parliament) is four (Serbian Constitution, 2006).

The third aspect that has to be mentioned is the high **degree of personalization** of Serbian politics. Unlike consolidated democracies, where stable rules and procedures clearly limit the extent to which persons can act, Serbian politics is exactly the opposite. Rules are created according to the needs of persons. This can be observed through the volatility of political parties: these appear and disappear according to the popularity of a leader, while politicians leave a party and form another, leading to the disappearance of some parties at the end of an electoral cycle. Moreover, one can find it hard to identify a regular pattern of action (ex. regular elections, stable political parties which permanently confront each other in elections, institutions that survive for long periods of time – making predictability impossible).

Furthermore, the constant use of early elections, both for the presidency and for Parliament also proves a high degree of personalization.

The fourth dimension of Serbian politics is **the national problem**, which is generated by the ambiguous status of the province of Kosovo and by the different opinions that Serb politicians have on this problem. After the 1999 conflict, the province of Kosovo (primordially inhabited by Albanians) became a United Nations protectorate, while in 2008, it proclaimed its independence from Serbia (BBC News, 2008). This was recognized by only a part of the EU member states and categorically rejected by Serbia, Russia and China. This influences the different positions of Serb politicians to the Kosovo situation (from arguing in favour of accepting independence to desiring military intervention in order to recover the province) (Ramet, 2011), the Serbian policy towards the Serbian minority in northern Kosovo and the relations between Serbia and the EU or Russia.

Serbia's ambitions of joining the EU is also confronted by the lack of a coherent policy of the Union towards Kosovo (as only a small part of the member states recognize the province's independent status), as the main UE states demand, informally, that Serbia recognize the independence of Kosovo. On the other hand, Serbia finds in Russia a partner to cooperate on concrete aspect. Russia provides Serbia with the required economic help, in exchange for economic and political cooperation. Analyzing the 2000-2016 period, one cannot speak of a Serbian drift towards Russia, but of a **deliberately ambiguous (which avoided concrete proposals and offered only general desiderata)** (Clark, 2012), **adopted by all political parties, which alternated between accepting the conditions of the EU and a pro-Russian policy (Petrovic, n.d.)**. This ambiguous policy aims at three desiderata which are impossible to attain at the same time: keeping Kosovo in Serbia, joining the EU and maintaining good relations with Russia. Selecting feasible desiderate depends on Serbia's internal clarification.

According to the internal development, the political history of post-Milosevic Serbia can be divided into three different periods:

2000-2004: - the period of instability after the fall of Slobodan Milosevic;

2004-2012: the presidential terms of Boris Tadic;

2012-2016: ex-nationalists come back to power. The presidential term of Tomislav Nikolic.

The loss of power by Slobodan Milosevic and the succeeding instability

The fall of Slobodan Milosevic occurred after the "bulldozer revolution" of 5th October 2000. The events took place in the context of Milosevic running for the presidency of Yugoslavia (he had been the president of Serbia between 1991 and 1996 and then the president of the FRY between 1997 and 2000). Aiming to hold on to power, Slobodan Milosevic engineered a

vote in the Yugoslav Federal Assembly, which amended the constitution regarding the way the federal president was elected (previously, the federal president used to be elected through the vote of the Parliament- after the amendments, the president would be selected through a popular vote). The changes were carried through with the violation of all norms of parliamentary procedure (OSCE, 2000).

Although the presidential term of Milosevic was not expiring, he summoned early presidential and parliamentary elections, under the new Constitution, on the 24th of September 2000. These elections were described by the OSCE as “deeply flawed” (OSCE, 2000) (in favor of Milosevic), but still resulted in a first-round victory by the opposition’s (the Democratic Serbia Alliance) candidate, Vojislav Koštunica. When the Serbian Constitutional Court rejected this result and requested the organization of second round, massive street protests emerged (which involved a protester, the driver of a truck, which was later confused for a bulldozer – later resulting in the moniker “the bulldozer revolution”, driving his vehicle through the main gate of Serbian State Television) (Balkan Insight, 2010). Protests including tens of thousands of participants led to the Constitutional Court accepting the result and to the resignation of Slobodan Milosevic.

Serbian politics traversed a period of extreme instability between 2000 and 2004, resulting in the inability to formulate concrete and coherent policies on any front. Thus, the wide coalition of parties and associations grouped under the name the Democratic Serbia Alliance (made up of two main parties – the Democratic party led by Zoran Đinđić and the Democratic Party of Serbia led by Vojislav Koštunica) won both the presidential elections of September 2000 and the parliamentary ones in December 2000 (obtaining a majority of about 64%) (OSCE, 2001), leading to the appointment of Đinđić as Serbian prime-minister. However, the component parties prove incapable of governing together, leading to the full disintegration of the alliance in less than three years.

At the end of 2000, the Yugoslavian political landscape showed Vojislav Kostunica as the federal president (represented the Democratic Serbia Alliance), while at the level of the Serbian republic, the parliamentary majority is held by the same alliance. However, the president of Serbia remains Milan Milutinovic, a Milosevic associate, who had obtained this position after Milosevic had become the president of the RFY in 1997. Milutinovic served his term until 2002, but underwent political marginalization. Upon the expiry of his term, he surrendered to the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and was tried for war crimes, but acquitted in 2009 (BBC News, 2009).

The most important political events of the 2000-2004 periods are the disintegration of the Democratic Serbia Alliance due to the differences between Koštunica and Đinđić on the extradition of Slobodan Milosevic to the

Hague, in order to be tried by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia. The first, a moderate nationalist objected to this step, and withdrew his party from the governing coalition (BBC News, 2001) when PM Đinđić took this decision in secret (the decision was announced to the public only after having been carried out under a strong pressure from Western countries and without having a clear legal provision) (BBC News, 2001). The Democratic Party of Serbia's exit from the governing coalition led to a parliamentary conflict between the two parties, as Đinđić argued that the Democratic Serbia MEPs were elected with an imperative mandate and were forced to remain under the umbrella of the Democratic Serbia Alliance, under the penalty of losing their seat (Cvijic, 2008).

Furthermore, during 2002-2004, no less than three presidential elections for the position of president of Serbia take place (2002 September and December, 2003 December), all of them failing due to specific demands introduced by the electoral law. The position was temporarily filled after the expiry of Milan Milutinovic's term and his surrender to the ICCY. Thus, the electoral laws inherited from the Milosevic regime demanded an attendance of no less than 50% in both rounds. After the failure of the September 2002 elections, this is removed for the second round of voting, but kept for the first, leading to the annulment of the next two rounds of elections. The attendance threshold is removed completely only for the presidential elections of June 2004 (Cvijic, 2008).

A second crucial event during this period is the assassination of Zoran Đinđić on the 12th of March 2003 in central Belgrade. He was assassinated by a group which included former members of Milosevic's secret police and people involved in the Serbian criminal networks. The murder was ordered by Milorad Ulemek, a former head of a special police unit during Milosevic and carried out by his deputy, Zvezdan Jovanovic. These were supported by ten other persons (The Telegraph, 2007). The murder of Đinđić was planned by nationalists fearing extradition and by members of organized crime, tempted by his anti-crime offensive.

At the end of 2003, Serbia carried out parliamentary elections. The Radical party of Serbia, led by Tomislav Nikolic (a Serbian nationalist) obtained most of the parliamentary seats, but the government is formed by Vojislav Koštunica and by his Serbian Democratic Party (in March 2003, the RFY became Serbia-Montenegro and Kostunica, the RFY president since 2003 was replaced by Svetozar Marovic). This government was composed of several parties (in addition to the DPS, other smaller parties were coopted: the G-17 plus movement, the Movement for the Renewal of Serbia and the Movement for a New Serbia). Even in this situation, Koštunica's cabinet remained a

minority one and required the support of the Serbian Socialist Party, Milosevic's former party.

The presidential terms of Boris Tadic

Between 2004 and 2012, a series of crucial events radically changed the Serbian political landscape, such the 2006 dissolution of the Federation with Montenegro, the adoption of a new Constitution in the same year (the first Constitution of independent Serbia), the Kosovo declaration of independence in 2008, the furthering of the peace process in 2008 and the war in Georgia.

Boris Tadic was elected president of Serbia in June 2004 (Balkan Insight, 2012) (defeating Tomislav Nikolic, the candidate of the Serbian Radical Party), in the first successful presidential election after the loss of power by Slobodan Milosevic. Tadic was Zoran Đinđić's successor at the leadership of the Democratic Party, and he won the 2004 elections promising that he will continue the democratization, Europeanization and modernization of Serbia, which his predecessor had begun. Tadic was seen as a pro-Western politician, and was supported directly by the European Union in his 2008 reelection campaign (the European Union postponed the signing of a political agreement with Serbia, which included the liberalization of visas, commerce and the participation of Serbia in educational programs until the second round of Serbian presidential elections, which also pitted Tadic and Nikolic. The delay aimed to indicate a strong European support for Tadic (Cvijic, 2008). He was reelected president in 2008 (the first elections for the presidency of Serbia as a separate state, which were taking place under the new Constitution), defeating, once again, Tomislav Nikolic (Balkan Insight, 2012).

Concerning the government of Serbia, this was led between 2003 and 2008 by Vojislav Koštunica, who led two separate cabinets. The first Kostunica cabinet lasted until the 2007 Parliamentary elections, which although, once again won by Nikolic's Serbian Radical Party, led to the creation of a new coalition between Tadic's Democratic Party and Koštunica's Democratic Party of Serbia, having the latter as Prime-Minister. The first Kostunica government collapses in 2008, after the proclamation of Kosovar independence, which led to a powerful rupture in the leading coalition in Serbia. Tadic's reelection, as well as the desire of his party to sign the EU Association Agreement (considering that several EU states recognized the independence of Kosovo) led to Koštunica's resignation. The latter, a moderate nationalist, believed that given the situation, any agreement with the EU represented a betrayal of Serbia's interests. This led to early parliamentary elections, which resulted in collaboration between Koštunica's Serbian Democratic Party and Nikolic's Radical Party, which was deeply opposed to any agreement with the EU. On the other hand, while rejecting Kosovo's independence, Tadic argued that

Serbia's best policy is to first join the EU and then argue for its case from the inside (BBC News, 2008).

The 2008 parliamentary elections were won by the "European Serbia" Alliance, which was dominated by Tadic's Democratic Party. The appointment of Mirko Cvetković as an independent prime minister to lead a Democratic-party dominated cabinet, allied with the Serbian Socialist Party of Ivica Dačić, led a period of political calm (2008-12), when Tadic's pro-European direction predominated (Ramet, 2011). Serbia's cooperation with the ICTY intensified, as the Serb government transferred Radovan Karadzic and Ratko Mladic, the leaders of the Bosnian Serbs during the Bosnian war (BBC News, 2012).

Serbia's main problem between 2008 and 2012 was to find equilibrium between the ambition of becoming a EU member state and keeping its territory intact. Although Tadic was a strong pro-European, he refused to recognize Kosovo's independence and ambiguously balanced between Russia and the EU, also attempting to find support from EU politicians that do hold the same position on Kosovo, including the former Romanian president, Traian Băsescu. Although Tadic's Serbia took advantage of Russian support in the issue of Kosovo (Vladimir Putin states that supporting Kosovo's independence is immoral and illegal) (People's Daily Online, 2008), it undertook only economic collaboration with Russia (Serbia participated in the failed South Stream project), and refused to recognize the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia (Petrovic, n.d).

The most important event after 2008 was the beginning of the economic crisis, which strongly affected Serbia and determined the government to undertake measures aimed at macroeconomic stabilization. At the beginning of the economic crisis, Serbia found itself having weak economy due to having had unsustainable growth between 2000 and 2008. Thus, Serbia suffered a massive economic downturn during the wars which led to the collapse of Yugoslavia, which was later followed by a visible but unsustainable growth in the post-Milosevic period. Serbia's two main weaknesses were the fact that economic growth was based primordially on consumption and the exposure of the banking system to foreign investments, thus generating strong dependence on the capital flows from Western banks (Bartlett and Prica, 2012; World Bank, 2012). According to studies, this pattern was repeated across several countries, as the reforms demanded by the EU, IMF, European Central Bank led to the differential integration of the region's economies in the Western capital flows. The degree of an economy's integration with Western capital flows influenced the intensity of the shock felt. States closer to the EU (such as Romania and Bulgaria, which were already members) were more affected by the shock than those less integrated (such as those only starting convergence reforms, as Serbia) (Bartlett and Prica, 2012). The most important conduits for transmitting the Western economic shock was the pull-out of Western banking capital from the local subsidiaries, which led to significant contraction of credit and the

consumption. This was coupled with decreased demand from Western markets, leading to lower exports. On the other hand, the shock was diminished by the fact that Serbian banks were exposed relatively little to risky credits, as borrowing was expensive, unlike in the United States or Western Europe.

The main economic indicators of Serbia for 2008-2014¹:

Year	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
GDP increase (%)	5.4	-3.1	0.6	1.4	-1	2.6	-1.8
Evolution of Foreign Direct Investment (% of the year before)	-12.69	-35.4	-30.7	101.4	-56.08	66.5	
Unemployment rate (% of population)	18.1	13.6	16.6	19.2	23	23.9	
Rate of exports (% of GDP)	29.1	26.8	32.9	34	36.9	41.2	44.3
Industrial production (% of previous year)	4.4	-5.3	0.1	3.8	2.4	4.2	-7.1

As can be observed from the analysis of the main economic indicators, Serbia's economy contracted significantly in 2009, leading to the increase of the rate of unemployment. A decrease of GDP, Foreign Direct Investment and industrial production can be observed, leading to a decrease of the standard of living. Over 2009-14, one can observe that indicators began an upward trend, without reaching their previous levels (such as economic increases of 5%)(World Bank, 2012). The unemployment rate continued to be a problem, coupled with the large number of people employed in the informal economy.

The Serbian government and the Serbian Central Bank aimed to maintain investor confidence in the Serbian economy, to keep as much cash in the local banks, to stimulate SMEs which produced goods for export, to better spend the state budget and to better collect taxes (Serbia Against the Economic Crisis, 2009; Calhoun, 2010). The government signed a stand-by agreement with the IMF worth 402.5 million Euros (thus granting the Serbian state a space to keep the trust of foreign investors and to maintain macroeconomic stability), increased the upper limit for state guaranteed deposits to 50 000 Euros, eliminated tax penalties for late payments and accepted delays on taxes due, in exchange for paying previous debts, offered capital for export activities and financial support for certification of products on external markets, supported producers to find new export markets in

¹ Data compiled from the website of the World Bank, data.worldbank.org, Bartlett, Prica „The Variable Impact of the Global Economic Crisis in South East Europe”,

countries where the impact of the crisis was more limited, limited the increase of salaries and of personnel expenses in the state sector, instituted procedures to recover debts owed to the state by bankrupt firms, limited the compensations to managers of state companies and the expenses of these companies and stopped employment in the state sector (Government of the Republic of Serbia, 2008).

The measures adopted by the Serbian government immediately after the crisis led to a fluctuating evolution of the economic indicators, followed by economic recovery. On the other hand, an analysis of the social protection measures adopted in the post-crisis period showed the elimination of the last remnants of social support which the Serbian government possesses. The economic increase in the years 2010-14 was based on recovering foreign investment and the development of a new export-based economy. Moreover, with the exception of 2014, the industrial production increased significantly. The latest visit by the IMF, aimed at evaluating the state of implementation of the stand-by agreement, led to positive comments on the decrease of budgetary deficit, the decrease of the unemployment rate to 17.9% in the second trimester of 2015 and general macroeconomic stabilization. The IMF delegation requested the continuation of the process of restructuring the energy, gas and infrastructure sector (B92, 2015). However, throughout the crisis, unemployment benefits decreased: both the number of beneficiaries and the average sum offered. Alternatively, the government opted for measures to increase employment such as the "first chance" program (aiming to employ young people in firms, having their salaries paid by the state for 6-12 months) (European Commission, 2011) and the funding of public works. Social security for the poorest remained low, while child allowances (as had been reformed in 2002, to make them more means-tested) were not changed. To reduce the budgetary deficit, the Serbian state reduces social security contributions, in a situation in which a greater number of people were exposed to poverty risk.

Post-Tadic Serbia: the rise of power of Tomislav Nikolic's former nationalists

Convinced of his own popularity and aiming to help his party, Boris Tadic resigned as president of Serbia in April 2012 (BBC News, 2012), aiming to organize parliamentary and early presidential elections together. Tadic faced Nikolić for the third time in 2012.

Tomislav Nikolić started his career as a politician in the Serbian Radical party, which espoused ultranationalist views. The Serbian Radical Party was led by Vojislav Šešelj and collaborated closely with the Serbian Socialist Party of Slobodan Milosevic during the latter's reign. After Šešelj's extradition to Hague to stand trial for war crimes, the leadership of the Serbian Radical Party was taken over by Tomislav Nikolić, who ran as the

party's candidate in 2004 and 2008. Considering the disintegration of the anti-Milosevic coalition and the struggles between the Democratic Party led by Đinđić/Tadić and Koštunica's Democratic Party of Serbia, the corruption of these parties and the decrease of the living standard, the Serbian Radical Party consistently won the plurality of the mandates in the Serbian National Assembly (2003, 2007), yet had its access to government barred by the coalition of the other parties (Cvijic, 2008).

A conflict between Šešelj (in his Hague detention) and Nikolić led to the resignation of the latter from the Serbian Radical Party and the establishment in 2008 (after the loss of presidential elections) of the Serbian Progressive Party. This took up moderately pro-European views (preferring to collaborate with conservative-nationalist parties in the EU, such as the Freedom Party in Austria), but also signed a collaboration pact with Vladimir Putin's United Russia Party. Nikolić contested the 2012 presidential and parliamentary elections as leader of the Serbian progressive party (SNS).

What was expected to be a new Tadić victory turned into a surprise defeat, as Nikolić won the majority in the 2012 presidential elections (BBC News, 2012). Moreover, the Serbian Progressive Party, together with its allies, under the name "Let's make Serbia work" won parliamentary elections and formed a coalition government with the Serbian Socialist party. Upon assuming the presidency, Nikolić resigned as head of the SNS and was replaced by Aleksandar Vučić (former minister of communications during the Milosevic period, a position he employed to forbid the broadcast of Western TV stations). During 2012-2014, the government of Serbia was led by Ivica Dačić, head of the Serbian Socialist Party (seconded by the President of the Serbian Progressive Party, Aleksandar Vučić as first-deputy-prime-minister and Minister for the Struggle against Organized Crime and Corruption) (Freedom House, 2013).

Unhappy with a junior role in the government and taking advantage of a wave of popularity, the Serbian Progressive Party initiated early parliamentary elections in April 2014. These represented the first opportunity where a party single-handedly obtained the absolute majority of mandates in the Serbian Parliament. The victory of the Serbian Progressive Party led to a new coalition government (although the formation of a coalition was not necessary) between it and the Serbian Socialist Party. Vučić and Dačić changed places in the government (the first was now prime-minister while the second became vice-prime-minister and Minister of foreign Affairs) (National Democratic Institute, 2014).

Although the Serbian Progressive Party was believed to be supported by Russia (opposing Tadić's pro-Europeans) and fears existed of a potential reversal of Serbia's European road, this did not happen. Alternatively, the policy of deliberate ambiguity regarding the EU, Kosovo and Russia continued. The Dačić government signed the Bruxelles agreement with the Kosovo

authorities, accepting to withdraw the funding of northern Kosovo's mainly Serb municipalities, in exchange for offering larger powers to these municipalities by the Pristina authorities (Freedom House, 2014). Serbia vehemently denied that this would represent any form of recognition of the independence of Kosovo. This allowed Serbia to continue its EU accession negotiations. Moreover, the preparation for this agreement, led to the first direct contacts between Serbia and Kosovo after the 2008 declaration of independence. These contacts occurred both at the level of prime-ministers (Ivica Dačić and Hashim Thaci) and of presidents (Nikolić agreed to talk directly with the Kosovar president Atifete Jahjaga) (Balkan Insight, 2013).

Concerning relations with Russia, Tomislav Nikolić refused to recognize the annexation of Crimea by Russia, and stated that he recognized the UN agreed borders of Ukraine. At the same time, Tomislav Nikolić accepted that his country's policy goals are to not upset Russia, which protects Serbia at the UN, but also to continue the process of joining the EU (Mitrovic, 2014). On the other hand, the Serbian president deepened the financial and energy cooperation with Russia, given that a large part of the gas distribution networks had been sold to Russia during Tadic's term (Kremlin News, 2013). Before the Crimean crisis, Nikolić stated that "We want Serbia to be a supporter of Russia in the EU" (Abrahamyan, 2015). A large part of the Serbian transport infrastructure has been modernized and is owned by Russia. Moreover, a humanitarian Russian-Serbian center operates in Nis, which is suspected to be a Russian military base. Another indication of Serbia's ambiguous policies is its having signed an agreement with NATO (A Individual Partnership Action Plan) in January 2015 (Serbian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, n.d.). This showed its desire to develop long-term, stable relationships with the Alliance, without becoming a member. However, Serbia also organized common military exercises with Russia in November 2014. When asked about these exercises, the Serbian Minister of Defense stated that they do not represent any special event, as "thousands of exercises take place all the time" (Radio Europa Liberă, 2014).

April 2016 occasioned a new round of early elections called by Vučić, which led to a resounding victory by SNS (48,25% of the vote, 138 of the 250 seats in the National Assembly). Smaller parties obtained far fewer votes (Serbian Socialists, 31, Serbian Radical Party 23, Democratic Party 17) (B92, 2016a). This led Vucic to aim for a single-party government, stating that his will not form a coalition with the Serbian Socialist party, which is poised to "stab him in the back" (B92, 2016b). Despite this statement, the government formed in August 2016 included the Serbian Socialist Party, with Ivica Dacic as first-deputy-prim-minister. On the occasion of his appointment, Vucic reaffirmed Serbia's European path (B92, 2016c).

Conclusions

To conclude, one can say that the Serbian foreign policy did not vary significantly after the transfer of power between “pro-European” Tadic and the “nationalist” Nikolic, but continued the deliberate ambiguity (one has to mention that, in his statement when receiving Tomislav Nikolić in the Kremlin in 2012, Putin addressed the Russian-Serbian economic cooperation and asked Nikolić to send greeting to Boris Tadic, seen by Russia as a “partner”)(Kremlin News, 2012; The Telegraph, 2012). Any failure in its relations with the EU determines Serbia to “run to the arms of Russia”, but any success in its attempt to join the EU requires painful concessions on the issue of Kosovo. Serbia maintains relations with Russia in order to put pressure on the EU and to weaken its positions on Kosovo. On the other hand, the Ukrainian crisis can force Serbia to renounce its ambiguous policy, as Russia’s actions determine a clearing of the European situation.

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