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## **SERBIA AND THE EUROPEAN UNION AT THE BEGINNING OF THE TWENTY FIRST CENTURY (IN THE LIGHT OF THE SERBIAN MEDIA)**

After the wars in the former Yugoslavia ended in 1995, all the countries of the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia chose to adopt a pro-Western orientation, which meant that they decided to join the European Union. At present (the end of 2008) Slovenia has managed to join the EU, and Croatia along with Macedonia have become official candidates since 2004 and 2005 respectively. Also Montenegro and Bosnia-Herzegovina want to join the EU. What is more, all the countries bordering Serbia are already members of the European Union (Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria) or have expressed their willingness to join the community in the future (Albania). In such a situation, one can argue that Serbian politics is determined by the other countries in the region, for were Serbia to abandon the road towards the EU it would find itself isolated, which would lead to difficulties when it came to political and economic development, and might also cause problems with Serbia's relations with foreign countries on all levels of social life.

On 24 September 2000 the presidential election took place in the Federal Republic of Serbia which was won by the leader of the Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS – Demokratska stranka Srbije) Vojislav Kostunica. The former opposition were now in power; they had striven to democratize the country and wanted Serbia to adopt a pro-Western political orientation in the 1990s.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> It is a fact that after 2000 Serbia took a dramatic turn in its foreign policies, which was taking the pro-Western direction and promoting of an image of the people that democratized the country. A Serbian sociologist Olivera Milosavljević severely judged the stance of the present state leaders, stating that when it comes to a political profile then 'Serbia was ruled and is being ruled by nationalists.' It is worth mentioning that at the same time Milo Djukanović was the leader of Montenegro since the early 1990s. He was a great protégé of Milosević and his political ally until 1996 when he became his adversary and an advocate of creating of independent Montenegro.

In this context, one can ask the question, whether and why there arose any dilemmas concerning the future of a country which is neither big enough nor strong enough, and which does not possess a highly developed economy, to be able to realize its own politics irrespective of the unification tendencies in Europe. A significant role was played by the political events that took place on the territory of the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s. It is the Serbs that were considered to be responsible for the outbreak of the wars that accompanied the break-up of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, and it is they who have been mainly accused of committing atrocities during these wars.

Another reason for the dilemmas that might have accompanied the adoption of the pro-Western orientation is the fact that the Federal Republic of Serbia<sup>2</sup> was in the first half of the 1990s a country that was completely isolated politically and economically, which brought the country to economic ruin; the bombing of Serbia's infrastructure, industrial plants and apartment buildings in 1999 during the Kosovo war only served to exacerbate its existing economic problems.

The political turn that occurred after 2000 resulted in excessive optimism, which led to the widespread belief that integration with the EU would happen in the not distant future. When analyzing the themes of the press at that time, when they discussed the subject of the process of integration, one can see that this is really the case. On the basis of the Serbian dailies ('Blic,' 'Danas') and weeklies ('Vreme,' 'NIN') one can see that the public opinion remained hopeful for a relatively long time that Serbia would swiftly join European structures. That short period of time was to be connected with the exceptional position of Serbia, and the fact that the nation forced Slobodan Milosević to leave, and chose the democratic road, along which the Serbian state moved very quickly in 2000, and this was guaranteed by the new authorities.

For the first few months that passed after the events of October 2000, one could observe in the press something that might be described as 'looking for a new face of Serbia.' The question was raised, 'are we a part of the world?' which could be viewed as proof that the Serbs were aware of the fact that they were no longer an isolated nation at both the political and social levels.

During the first year their attention focused upon the economic issues and a crisis which was the legacy of the 1990s and the bombing by NATO in 1999, and also on the new financial scandals that were revealed after the change of government. At the same time, it seemed obvious to the Serbs that because they made so many positive changes in their country they could count on being quickly embraced by the international community.

In the spring 2001, one could find in the pages of a weekly 'Vreme' statements that were suffused with enthusiasm and hope when it came to those matters connected with the future of Serbia (at that time a part of FRY), 'after the great October

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<sup>2</sup> FRY – the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, created 27 April 1992, out of the republics: Serbia and Montenegro.

transformations Yugoslavia quickly returned to the world arena. The first propositions of Yugoslavian diplomacy gave rise to applause and great expectations.<sup>3</sup>

When it came to foreign policy, Serbia's first priority was to build closer relationships with its nearest neighbours; its second priority was the region; relations with the European Union were relegated to third place.<sup>4</sup>

In reality, however, the media paid the most attention to relations with Western structures and the attitude of the Serbian government; and the intensity of talks and meetings with representatives of the EU showed that it was unquestionably a high priority for the country's foreign policy. The fact that the Serbs had chosen a political course that was destined to lead to the country's quick integration into the European Union was suggested, among others, by the optimistic cover of the New Year edition of the journal 'Vreme' on 27 December 2001. This depicted the Serbian government riding on a sleigh from a ski jump, beyond which there was a blue landing area – the symbol of the EU, on which there were painted twelve yellow stars.

Apart from the great enthusiasm of 2001 and 2002, the Serbs did not forget some problematic issues, which to a large extent influenced (and still influence) the policies of the West towards Serbia. These issues are still the source of divergent attitudes between the Serbs and Western Europe. These have led to the emergence of Serbian dilemmas and questions: whether the price of integration with the West was not too high.

It is characteristic that although the Serbs were convinced that their only road for solving the country's economic and political problems lies in strengthening of relations with Western Europe (which would ultimately mean joining the EU), they were not able to forget about the past, even the period before 5 October 2000, which was perceived as being unjust to the nation.<sup>5</sup>

An example of such attitude was an article written by Stojan Cerović entitled: 'Of necessity to Europe' which appeared in the weekly 'Vreme' on 6 December 2001, and in which the author dealt with the problem of the fight against terrorism. This topic was inspired by the attack on 11 September 2001, on the World Trade Center in New York City. The author of the text returned to the Kosovo problem and the fight with

<sup>3</sup> 'Intervju, Goran Svilanović, ministar inostranih poslova SRJ: Ne može se svima ugoditi', *Vreme*, 30 August 2001, at <<http://www.vreme.com/cms/view.php?id=295874>>.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> As an example one can present the still actual question of Kosovo – the unjust and unlawful bombing (there is no doubt about that) of Serbia and Montenegro by NATO in the spring 1999. Even at the turn of 2001 and 2002 the memory of the events was still fresh in the Serbian politics. The attitude of Serbs towards these events have not changed although Slobodan Milosević lost power. N.L. Stefanović, 'Intervju, Milan Milutinović, predsednik Srbije: Peti oktobar se morao desiti', *Vreme*, 4 October 2001, at <<http://www.vreme.com/cms/view.php?id=298431>>. Kosovo which is officially a Serbian province, was at that time, by virtue of the decision of the resolution 1244, under the administration of the UN. On its territory there were stationed international stabilization forces KFOR. Although, by virtue of resolution 1244 and the assumptions that after the Kosovo war in 1999, the region will constitute an integral part of Serbia, the attitude of the international community during last nine years connected with the problem of Kosovo evolved towards granting Kosovo independence. Kosovo Albanians declared independence in February 2008, with the approval of the US and the majority of the European states.

the Albanian UÇK<sup>6</sup> trying to demonstrate to foreign countries, especially the United States, that the Serbian authorities had for a long time tried to make others realize the magnitude of the threat posed by Islamic terrorism and that, 'Serbia had that problem for a very long time but the West did not want to understand it.'<sup>7</sup>

Another problem that appeared before exploratory talks had even began, which were to examine the possibility of opening direct negotiations about joining the European Union, was the issue of Serbia's attitude towards war criminals from the period of the Yugoslav wars between 1991-95, and also the country's relations with Bosnia and Herzegovina. The situation was made a little bit easier by the apprehension of the former president of the Bosniak Serbs, Radovan Karadžić, in the summer of 2008. But the Hague's second most wanted alleged war criminal, Ratko Mladić (the former general YNA and Bosniak Serbian Army) has not been caught.<sup>8</sup>

In the press one could find rather bitter opinions of the Serbs concerning the Hague Tribunal where one could read that 'all the roads that lead Serbia to the world, run through Mrs. del Ponte'<sup>9</sup> – who was the main prosecutor – which could be inter-

<sup>6</sup> UÇK – Kosovo Liberation Army – Albanian paramilitary organization, operating on the territory of Kosovo and Metohija since the 1980s when it was named Movement for Albanian Yugoslav Republic; the name UÇK functions since 1992. It intensified its growth in the 1990s which was caused by the abolition of Kosovo's autonomy 1989 and the introduction of the Serbian army and martial law in the first half of the 1990s. It began to fight in 1997. See I. Stawowy-Kawka, 'Kosovo – problemy narodowe', *Prace Komisji Środkowoeuropejskiej PAU*, Vol. 10 (2002), pp. 49-50.

<sup>7</sup> In Serbia people's attitudes towards the independence of Kosovo were and are mixed. One gets an impression, however, that a large part of society recognizes the independence of Kosovo. The Serbian authorities do not recognize that independence, and even in the fall of 2008 there appeared some projects of the partition of the Kosovo region so that its northern part would remain within the Serbian borders. Nevertheless, talks about Serbia joining the EU are still continued. It is possible that the reasons behind such a position were connected with the willingness to speed up the integration process with the EU and 'freeing oneself from Kosovo' and the big national problems occurring there could only speed up the integration process. S. Cerović, 'Konačno u Evropi', *Vreme*, 6 December 2001, at <<http://www.vreme.com/cms/view.php?id=303271>>.

<sup>8</sup> The problem is complicated because of the fact that it is Serbia that is required to apprehend Mladić, even though there have been for the last twelve years international forces on the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina (UNPREDEP and UNCRO transformed from United Nations Protection Force UNPROFOR after 1995). Also engaged there were in the years 1996-2004 NATO forces SFOR (Stabilization Forces) that were replaced on 2 December 2004, by EUFOR (European Union Force in Bosnia and Herzegovina) – these are the forces that are stationed there as a peace mission directed by the European Union in Bosnia and Herzegovina (6270 soldiers). One of the tasks of EUFOR is assisting the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia and looking for the war criminals. In spite of the large number of the forces stationed in a relatively small area, the international forces were not able to catch Mladić, although it is a common knowledge that he is in constant movement and travels in the Balkans. Bosnia and Herzegovina is a separate country so the legitimacy of the demands directed at the Serbian Republic can be doubtful, the more so that Serbian politicians and soldiers from the former Federal Republic of Yugoslavia that were entangled in the Yugoslav conflicts of the years 1991-1995 were or still are in the Hague (the most spectacular example might be Slobodan Milošević who died in March 2006, or Vojislav Seselj who of his own free will gave himself up in 2003 being convinced that he fought for a just cause).

<sup>9</sup> S. Cerović, 'Konačno u Evropi'.

preted as meaning that in spite of the collaboration with the Hague and the change of the political system in 2000, the more satisfied Mrs. del Ponte was with their collaboration, the more positive the evaluation of the Serbs; but usually she was not satisfied, which was enough to block the talks between Serbia and the EU in 2006. She believed that the Serbs did not collaborate with MTK closely enough.<sup>10</sup>

Another dilemma that the Serbs faced was the question about the possibility of reconciling their own patriotism, love of culture and their strong attachment to national identity, which was one of the elements that had led to the outbreak of the wars between the nations of SFRY, and which had been fought with determination. A similar question also bedevilled other countries before joining the EU – Poland included – however, it is worthwhile to pay attention to that issue in the context of the Balkan reality, in which the attachment to the national and cultural tradition is exceptionally strong and emotional, and has become more intense as a result of events at the end of the twentieth century.

In an article published in February 2002 entitled, 'What Europe proposes to Serbia and Montenegro' it mainly discussed diplomatic relations: Serbia and Montenegro, and the position of Europe was completely in accordance with the solutions that the Serbs and Montenegrins proposed within the boundaries of the future federation (or confederation as in February 2002, the future shape of FRY was not yet determined). One might deduce that the main intention of the author was to assure the readers that the European Union would not impose on the state its own political solutions, and that it would respect its own resolutions. It could have been connected with the potential fears of the Serbs about the necessity of adopting the community rules and renouncing of sovereignty.<sup>11</sup>

Since 2002 one can notice in the Serbian press a gradual diminishing of the previous enthusiasm for EU membership, and the press has instead concentrated more on the facts and the demands which the European Union started to formulate for the FRY. One could find in the press articles about the financial aid that was given to Serbia and Montenegro<sup>12</sup> and also about further plans for aid on the condition, however, that FRY respected the agreements that had already been signed. This situation would not only be beneficial for the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, but it would also lead to the possibility of taking the first step towards candidate and then full membership in the EU. However, an important element was the adaptation to the European perspective towards the Balkans and the introduction of stability into the region.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>10</sup> See. I. Cvetković, 'Srbija Mladićev talac', *Blic*, 4 May 2006, at <[http://www.blic.co.yu/stara\\_arhiva/arhiva/2006-05-04/strane/tema.htm](http://www.blic.co.yu/stara_arhiva/arhiva/2006-05-04/strane/tema.htm)>.

<sup>11</sup> V. Didanović, 'Šta Evropa nudi Srbiji i Crnoj Gori', *Vreme*, 21 February 2002, at <<http://www.vreme.com/cms/view.php?id=308375>>.

<sup>12</sup> This aid amounted to 460 million euro for Serbia and 100 million euro for Montenegro. For the period of the next two years the aid was supposed to be 240 million euro for Serbia and 45 million euro for Montenegro.

<sup>13</sup> V. Stanković, 'Samit u Barseloni: Diktat demokratije', *Vreme*, 21 March 2002, at <<http://www.vreme.com/cms/view.php?id=310249>>.

One could also find the following much more sober opinions: 'the European Union expects that the functioning mechanisms, philosophy and logic of unification of the Union itself and the inclusion of the territory of the western Balkans in European structures will be carried by political leaders from Podgorica to Belgrade.'<sup>14</sup>

Also in 2002 general articles were being gradually replaced by texts which presented the facts that were related to the steps being taken towards the process of integration. One could also notice that the centre of gravity had moved from expectations of what the Union would do for FRY, to what the Union expected of FRY: 'we expect that the Yugoslav authorities will continue working on what they started, which means that Yugoslavia will have to adapt to the new conditions of life in Europe. It will mean, that the society will understand that former nationalistic myths have no influence and the "Yugoslavs" will better take care of their interests if they have in their perspective the integration with the Union.'<sup>15</sup>

In the middle of 2002, one could gain the impression that the representatives of the EU used words which might serve to somewhat dampen the enthusiasm of the Serbs and to mobilize them to take more energetic action. 'When it comes to the issue of integration then the whole process is something that takes place in stages. Of course, the process has started already. It should take around fifteen years to complete the whole integration process. One should not forget that Spain and Portugal took the same road – because of the complexity of the problem. Fifteen years is a long time, but partial participation might start much earlier.'<sup>16</sup> Also one could find more often in the press the remarks that the issue of integration depended upon 'the political will' of Belgrade and Podgorica to fulfil EU recommendations.<sup>17</sup> It is worth mentioning that from 2002 Serbia and Montenegro started to be perceived as two separate countries. In February of that year there appeared in the pages of 'Vreme' an article that had a revealing title: 'Mapa Solanine Jugoslavije,' in which there was an analysis of the process of succeeding stages of change and development of both Yugoslav republics. It was in that article that Serbia and Montenegro, although they were in one common state, were treated separately, which might be considered a harbinger of things to come, when in 2006 the common state was dissolved.<sup>18</sup>

In September 2002, there appeared in the pages of 'Vreme' an article of Stojan Cerović entitled 'Two Serbias' who in blunt words described the situation in the

<sup>14</sup> 'Eksperti Evropske unije juče u Briselu sa pregovaračima iz SRJ, Srbije i Crne Gore Referendum nepoželjan', at <[http://www.blic.co.yu/stara\\_arhiva/arhiva/2002-02-05/naslovna.htm](http://www.blic.co.yu/stara_arhiva/arhiva/2002-02-05/naslovna.htm)>.

<sup>15</sup> M. Marjanović, 'Očistite se od prošlosti', *Blic*, 11 April 2002, at <[http://www.blic.co.yu/stara\\_arhiva/arhiva/2002-04-11/strane/intervju.htm](http://www.blic.co.yu/stara_arhiva/arhiva/2002-04-11/strane/intervju.htm)>.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> 'Evropska unija radi na brzom rešenju za ustavnu povelju buduće zajednice Srbije i Crne Gore Zajedničko tržište odmah', *Blic*, 16 September 2002, at <[http://www.blic.co.yu/stara\\_arhiva/arhiva/2002-09-16/strane/politika.htm](http://www.blic.co.yu/stara_arhiva/arhiva/2002-09-16/strane/politika.htm)>.

<sup>18</sup> D. Grujić, 'Mapa Solanine Jugoslavije', *Vreme*, 28 February 2002, at <<http://www.vreme.com/cms/view.php?id=308809>>.

country, 'The fact that the government and prime minister are not popular, is the result of the stupidity of the nation which does not grasp the necessity of reforms and does not agree to pay the price of transformation.'<sup>19</sup>

Also another columnist, Zivorad Kovacević, harshly evaluated the attitude of Serbia and Montenegro concerning the realization of the efforts to join the EU. In his article, which had a revealing title, 'Yugoslavia is a closed topic,' he wrote directly, basing his words on the speech of the foreign minister, that the situation of Serbia and Montenegro in the international arena was worse than it had been the previous year. And so as politicians directed their words towards the citizens, appealing for more effort in the endeavour to join the EU, Kovacević wrote that instead of counting on the activity of European politicians and the submission of requests to the Union, 'we need clear and tough agreement on the part of the main actors operating in society – political elites, syndicates, private organizations and citizens – as to the necessity of change if we really want to join Europe.'<sup>20</sup>

The journalist pointed out the necessity of fulfilling the duties concerning international co-operation, especially collaboration with the International Tribunal at the Hague and also stressed that, 'the train to Brussels goes through Sarajevo, Zagreb, Skopje and Tirana'<sup>21</sup>. He also criticized the attitude of the authorities, not only Serbia's but also those of the whole region. He pointed to the necessity of regional co-operation, which should be a natural matter among neighbours, but in the case of the former Yugoslav republics it had not developed satisfactorily, which was the result of the traumatic events of the 1990s. It is also possible that this reluctance was strengthened by the fears that after the break-up of Yugoslavia, closer collaboration would be necessary and the countries would become entangled in mutual dependencies. In the case of the former Yugoslav nations this was and still is a delicate issue.

Summing up his text Kovacević wrote, 'Instead of losing precious time, we should speed up and carry out this work on all fronts in accordance with the conditions, without exceptions. For now, we need to build up with our neighbours a common plan, to go out and meet the European Union halfway, we need to take a bigger initiative in the region and to get a clearer timetable for the process of candidacy for membership of the Union of the countries in the region'<sup>22</sup>.

<sup>19</sup> It is probable that this dampening of the enthusiasm was connected with the effects of the transformation of the system which Serbian society began to feel. The shift from socialist economy to free-market economy brought in Serbia, as in other post-Communist countries, some negative effects: the pauperization of the society, its visible stratification and lowering of a standard of living. Just like in other societies of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe these processes were greeted with various attitudes of the citizens, and the activities of politicians were very often not understood. S. Cerović, 'Dve Srbije', *Vreme*, 19 September 2002, at <<http://www.vreme.com/cms/view.php?id=322310>>.

<sup>20</sup> Ž. Kovačević, 'Jugoslavija je završena priča', *Danas*, 13 December 2002, at <<http://www.danas.co.yu/arhiva/20021213.htm>>.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> It is worth pointing out that Kovacević apart from those appeals referred directly to the sources of that lack of co-operation writing, 'It is important to build up an atmosphere of trust and

At the beginning of 2003 in an interview for a weekly 'NIN,' the Serbian Prime Minister Zoran Dindić said, 'we have to, for our own sake, fulfil European standards and only then will we see what is better for us, to join the EU or to remain outside. It is very important for us to solve our national status, because it is essential for us to know where our borders are. Without that we cannot do anything.'<sup>23</sup>

In the talks that were carried out with foreign envoys, the Serbs tried to bring back hope for a quick acceptance of the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro (SCG) by the European Union. Chris Patten in an interview for a daily 'Blic' maintained that no dates were yet closed and the road to a fully-fledged membership may be shortened in extraordinary circumstances when a country carried out the reforms that were necessary for full integration.<sup>24</sup>

At the beginning of July 2003 there appeared more specific conditions which the SCG would have to fulfil if it wanted to become a member of EU structures, 'these were in the military and economic spheres, the question of the media and the fight against organized crime.'<sup>25</sup> When it came to the issue of organized crime, the topic was raised during a special meeting which took place a little bit earlier – in the spring of 2003 in Greece. It was pointed out there that the main trail connected with the illegal trade in women and narcotics from Afghanistan to Western Europe leads through the countries situated in the western part of the Balkan Peninsula. It was emphasized how important that problem was.<sup>26</sup>

On the other hand, Jan Willem Blankert, a *chargé d'affaires* of the EU embassy in Belgrade did not leave any doubts when he said: 'do not believe any fairy tales that your country is going to set a world record in becoming a new member of the EU,

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awareness of the common fate. There are strong enemies of this trust namely: stereotypes, prejudices nationalistic myths, arrests, ethnic and other intolerance, xenophobia, and also economic crisis and social poverty. A particularly important source of the lack of trust are insincere attitudes towards the issues connected with the war criminals.' Ž. Kovačević, 'Jugoslavija je završena...'

<sup>23</sup> It is probable that the prime minister assumed already at that time the possibility of the separation of Kosovo or at least the speeding up of the finishing of that problem. The solving of the Kosovo issue seemed to be naturally connected with the position of Serbia on the road to the structures of the EU. When in 2003 there appeared in the pages of the press in some places articles that Serbia might join the Union together with 'the third wave' right after the countries joining the EU in 2004 and 2007, one could expect an equally quick solving of the topic of the status of the province. D. Bujošević, 'Nadomak cilja. Srbija, godinu dana posle', *NIN*, 11 March 2004, at <<http://www.nin.co.yu/pages/article.php?id=15227>>.

<sup>24</sup> D. Baret (ambasador Evropske komisije u Srbiji i Crnoj Gori, za *Blic* poručio), 'Bez lažnih nada', *Blic*, 26 June 2003, at <[http://www.blic.co.yu/stara\\_arhiva/arhiva/2003-06-26/strane/politika.htm](http://www.blic.co.yu/stara_arhiva/arhiva/2003-06-26/strane/politika.htm)>; M. Milosavljević, 'Usud Evrope', *NIN*, 19 February 2004, at <<http://www.nin.co.yu/pages/article.php?id=14963>>.

<sup>25</sup> M. Ivanović, 'Gabrijel Keler: U EU preko uspostavljanja moralnog kodeksa za ekonomsku praksu, transparentnosti aukcija, pravila konkurencije EU ne postavlja zamke na putu ka njoj', *Blic*, 1 July 2003, at <[http://www.blic.co.yu/stara\\_arhiva/arhiva/2003-07-01/strane/politika.htm](http://www.blic.co.yu/stara_arhiva/arhiva/2003-07-01/strane/politika.htm)>.

<sup>26</sup> 'Kriminal koči ulazak u EU', *Blic*, 1 March 2003, at <[http://www.blic.co.yu/stara\\_arhiva/arhiva/2003-03-01/strane/svet.htm](http://www.blic.co.yu/stara_arhiva/arhiva/2003-03-01/strane/svet.htm)>.



even in 2007. (...) The integration process itself needs to go through five phases. Serbia and Montenegro are at the beginning of the road.<sup>27</sup>

The Union also argued that too few people in Serbia, relative to the whole population, occupied themselves with the integration problematic. Slovenia was put forward as an example because it had one thousand people working on the problem. The EU demanded twenty thousand people from Serbia, but, according to professor Dimitrijević, there were only 70.<sup>28</sup>

In 2004 statements were made saying that, 'the situation connected with European integration does not look too well and that Serbia is placed among such countries as Bosnia and Herzegovina and Albania when it comes to membership. Croatia, Macedonia and Turkey have overtaken Serbia in the process of European integration. The European Union sent clear signals, informing the Serbs that it is not pleased with the progress of the reforms, and that Serbia should do much more than just to start getting along.'<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, the ministers of the European Union appealed to the Serbs to intensify the transformation as 'the EU encouraged all democratic political forces to co-operate together to speed up political and economic changes, and also to fulfil all their international obligations, including full collaboration with the International Tribunal at the Hague and other problems that were connected to the functioning of the state, which was in the interests of Serbia and Montenegro.'<sup>30</sup>

Chris Patten also called a spade a spade when he said: 'three and a half years after overthrowing the regime of Slobodan Milosević, Serbia has taken a very small step on the road to Europe.'<sup>31</sup> Additionally, some messages were sent from the office of the

<sup>27</sup> 'Koliko smo blizu Evropi? Srbiji za Evropu treba 20.000 propisa', *Blic*, 19 August 2003, at <[http://www.blic.co.yu/stara\\_arhiva/arhiva/2003-08-19/strane/tema.htm](http://www.blic.co.yu/stara_arhiva/arhiva/2003-08-19/strane/tema.htm)>. Also some pragmatic Serbian politicians started to approach that topic more realistically. A member of the Parliament Ana S. Trbović said, 'When it comes to dates [acceptance of Serbia into the EU – M.K.-W.] then one too often juggles the dates. They depend most of all on the political circumstances. It means that if we sign the next year an agreement then we could become a nominal candidate in 2005, but this is according to the most optimistic scenario according to which we would become a member of the EU in 2010. However, whether it is 2010 or 2015 – it depends on us, on adopting the relevant reforms and adapting the national economy to the tough competition on the European market.' At <[http://www.blic.co.yu/stara\\_arhiva/arhiva/2003-02-13/strane/politika.htm](http://www.blic.co.yu/stara_arhiva/arhiva/2003-02-13/strane/politika.htm)>.

<sup>28</sup> 'Koliko smo blizu...'; Z.M. Cvijić, 'Prijem novih članica u EU samo je zastao', *Danas*, 7-9 April 2007, p. 4; I. Cvetković, 'Poslanike SCG čeka vrlo ozbiljno učenje', *Blic*, 8 August 2003, at <[http://www.blic.co.yu/stara\\_arhiva/arhiva/2003-08-08/strane/politika.htm#1](http://www.blic.co.yu/stara_arhiva/arhiva/2003-08-08/strane/politika.htm#1)>.

<sup>29</sup> I. Cvetković, D. Vukelić, 'Srbije nema na mapi Evrope', *Blic*, 30 April 2004, at <[http://www.blic.co.yu/stara\\_arhiva/arhiva/2004-04-30/strane/tema.htm](http://www.blic.co.yu/stara_arhiva/arhiva/2004-04-30/strane/tema.htm)>.

<sup>30</sup> 'EU: Evropska budućnost Srbije', *Blic*, 13 July 2007, at <[http://www.blic.co.yu/stara\\_arhiva/arhiva/2004-07-13/strane/politika.htm#3](http://www.blic.co.yu/stara_arhiva/arhiva/2004-07-13/strane/politika.htm#3)>; I. Cvetković, 'EU pomaže u hapšenju Mladića', *Blic*, 17 June 2006, at <[http://www.blic.co.yu/stara\\_arhiva/arhiva/2006-06-17/strane/politika.htm](http://www.blic.co.yu/stara_arhiva/arhiva/2006-06-17/strane/politika.htm)>; 'Nema Mladića, nema pregovora', *Blic*, 7 July 2007, at <[http://www.blic.co.yu/stara\\_arhiva/arhiva/2006-07-07/strane/politika.htm](http://www.blic.co.yu/stara_arhiva/arhiva/2006-07-07/strane/politika.htm)>; 'Pomoć Srbiji, uz reforme i saradnju s Haškim sudom', *Danas*, 24 February 2004, at <<http://www.danas.co.yu/20040224/frontpage1.html>>; 'Očekujem da nova vlada nastavi započete reforme', *Danas*, 25 February 2004, at <<http://www.danas.co.yu/20040225/evropa1.html>>.

<sup>31</sup> I. Cvetković, D. Vukelić, 'Srbije nema na mapi...'

European Commission in Belgrade stating that the main problem for Serbia on the road to integration remained 'a lack of political will.'<sup>32</sup> That opinion was shared by the Serbian President Boris Tadić who stated that all the steps necessary for integration depended on the internal politics of Serbia.<sup>33</sup>

A friendlier tone was adopted by a British member of the European Parliament, Douglas Alexander, who said that the whole European Union should help the Balkan countries solve the problems that were the remnants of the wars of the 1990s. As a high priority and the topic of continuing talks, he presented the issue of Kosovo and the stabilization in multi-ethnic countries: Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Macedonia.<sup>34</sup>

The Kosovo problem was made more urgent in the spring of 2004 after the pogroms carried out by the Albanians against the Serbs. In the pages of the Serbian press one could find texts that expressed growing impatience at the lack of solutions and propositions from Europe despite the on-going talks in Vienna. The Ambassador of Serbia and Montenegro in Cyprus stated in an interview for the weekly 'NIN' that as the idea of a multi-ethnic state had failed, one should start looking for other variants. He presented Cyprus as an example (its actual partition) and the possibility of an analogous situation in Kosovo.<sup>35</sup>

In the last issue of the weekly 'NIN' of 30 December 2004, there was a summation of the political and economic situation of Serbia, but the stress was put on failures and not on the potential successes of the government, and it was pointed out that the team of Vojislav Kostunica did not fulfil their promises. In the article they were enumerated as: the lack of a new constitution, which was supposed to be passed in three months; the lack of a national status for Serbia and Montenegro; the lack of democratic institutions and a state based upon the rule of law; the lack of an explanation for the scandals and infamous murders; the failure to reduce inflation to single digits; the growth in the budget deficit of about 50%; allowing foreign investment without the promised revision of privatization and the introduction of a new bout of privatization; the retention of high taxes; the growth of unemployment; and the lack of an office of ombudsman.<sup>36</sup>

The articles published in 2005 contained little of the enthusiasm of a couple of years before, but they were not as dramatic as when the timetable for possible

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> L. Begenišić, 'Boris Tadić sa liderima Evropske unije. EU nas čeka', *Blic*, 22 June 2004, at <[http://www.blic.co.yu/stara\\_arhiva/arhiva/2004-06-22/strane/politika.htm](http://www.blic.co.yu/stara_arhiva/arhiva/2004-06-22/strane/politika.htm)>, see also B. Bačević, 'Povući tužbu protiv NATO-a', *NIN*, 22 July 2004, at <<http://www.nin.co.yu/pages/article.php?id=16975>>.

<sup>34</sup> D. Alexander, 'Budućnost zapadnog Balkana', *Blic*, 15 September 2005, at <[http://www.blic.co.yu/stara\\_arhiva/arhiva/2005-09-15/strane/politika.htm](http://www.blic.co.yu/stara_arhiva/arhiva/2005-09-15/strane/politika.htm)>; see also N. Savić, 'Zmija laburista. Ko i kako "edukuje" političare na Kosovu?', *NIN* 4 March 2004, at <<http://www.nin.co.yu/pages/article.php?id=15149>>.

<sup>35</sup> S. Bogdanović, 'Dosledno multietnički', *NIN*, 1 April 2004, at <<http://www.nin.co.yu/pages/article.php?id=15449>>; M. Milosavljević, 'Da li je Kosovo roba?', *NIN*, 10 August 2006, at <<http://www.nin.co.yu/pages/article.php?id=25594>>; see also 'EU ulaže 100 miliona evra u sprovođenje standarda', *Danas*, 25 February 2004, at <<http://www.danas.co.yu/20040225/hronika1.html#0>>.

<sup>36</sup> D. Bujošević, 'A gde vam je ustav?', *NIN*, 30 December 2004, at <<http://www.nin.co.yu/pages/article.php?id=19037>>.

Serbian integration with the EU was drastically pushed back in time. Instead, they adopted a pragmatic and objective tone. Even the official start of the talks about the stabilization and association of the EU with Serbia and Montenegro was not information which would be published on the front pages of newspapers. It was the daily 'Danas' that paid that event the most attention, publishing a few articles on that topic and quoting extensive statements of Serbian and foreign politicians. Javier Solana stressed that it was a very important day for Serbia and Montenegro.<sup>37</sup>

Another topic that kept recurring was the country's dealings with the Hague Tribunal, which was viewed as a priority for Serbian politics. Already in the February issue of the daily, 'Danas,' there appeared an article with the suggestive title: 'To the European Union only through the Hague,' in which the author stressed the necessity of co-operation between Croatia, Serbia and Montenegro, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, in order to find a solution to the problem of catching war criminals from the time of the wars in the former Yugoslavia. According to the journalist what was needed was to strengthen the collaboration of all the security forces in order to increase their effectiveness.<sup>38</sup>

In May 2006, the daily 'Blic' published an article entitled 'Interruption and Dismissal.' The EU suspended the association talks with Serbia after the prosecutor Carla del Ponte concluded that Serbia was failing to co-operate fully with the Hague Tribunal. In the article, the journalist warned that, 'if the talks are not resumed in the near future, let us say in a few months, the following situation might arise: Serbia which was a country that was on the road to EU membership will instead become a state that is excluded from its structures.'<sup>39</sup> He put the blame for this situation on the government of Zoran Živković and Miroljub Labus.<sup>40</sup>

According to Tanja Miscević, head of the government office for the accession to the European Union, 'The annual report on the reforms in Serbia showed that there

<sup>37</sup> 'Energetika Srbije u EU', *Blic*, 15 October 2005, at <[http://www.blic.co.yu/stara\\_arhiva/arhiva/2005-10-15/strane/ekonomija.htm](http://www.blic.co.yu/stara_arhiva/arhiva/2005-10-15/strane/ekonomija.htm)>; I. Cvetković, 'Počeli pregovori sa EU', *Blic*, 8 November 2005, at <[http://www.blic.co.yu/stara\\_arhiva/arhiva/2005-11-08/strane/politika.htm#3](http://www.blic.co.yu/stara_arhiva/arhiva/2005-11-08/strane/politika.htm#3)>; I. Radak, T. Stanković, 'Beograd je zaista svet', *Danas*, 24 May 2005, at <<http://www.danas.co.yu/20050524/frontpage1.html>>; I. Radak, 'Ne prodavati delove NIS', *Danas*, 5 August 2005, at <<http://www.danas.co.yu/20050805/ekonomija1.html#0>>.

<sup>38</sup> B. Branković, 'U Evropsku uniju samo preko Haga', *Danas*, 5-6 February 2005, at <<http://www.danas.co.yu/20050205/dogadjajdana1.html#0>>; 'Važan dan za SCG', *Danas*, 11 October 2005, at <<http://www.danas.co.yu/20051011/dogadjajdana1.html>>; 'EU pomaže Srbiji', *Danas*, 21 June 2006, at <<http://www.danas.co.yu/20051011/dogadjajdana1.html>>.

<sup>39</sup> V. Gligorov, 'Prekid i ostavka', *Blic*, 5 May 2006, at <[http://www.blic.co.yu/stara\\_arhiva/arhiva/2006-05-05/strane/drustvo.htm#1](http://www.blic.co.yu/stara_arhiva/arhiva/2006-05-05/strane/drustvo.htm#1)>.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., see also S. Bogdanović, 'Moglo je da ne odemo u Beč', *NIN*, 16 October 2003, at <<http://www.nin.co.yu/pages/article.php?id=13351>>; B. Bačević, 'Zapad će prihvatiti radikale', *NIN*, 19 April 2006, at <<http://www.nin.co.yu/pages/article.php?id=24432>>, see also 'Proširenje EU bez ustava', *Politika*, 4 July 2006, at <[http://www.politika.co.yu/detaljno\\_arhiva.php?id=317&y=2006&m=7&d=4](http://www.politika.co.yu/detaljno_arhiva.php?id=317&y=2006&m=7&d=4)>.

was some progress in a few regions, but it also confirms that in reality we have not done anything.<sup>41</sup> That evaluation showed that Serbia, year after year, was not trying to reform the state in a constructive manner; it could not focus itself to use the aid from the EU, in the way that Croatia was (and still is) doing. Miscević said explicitly that, 'the European Commission was of an opinion that its acceptance of new members depended on them taking a medium or a large step and not to go round in circles.'<sup>42</sup> She added that, 'Brussels clearly stated that the EU would open its door for the new members not earlier than 2010, but Serbia should not be concerned by that, because she is a long way from attaining membership of the EU.'<sup>43</sup>

Apart from pessimistic articles and summaries about the situation in Serbia, there were more optimistic views expressed on the pages of magazines, which stated that the EU was inclined to treat the Serbian state in favourable way. In the middle of November, there was an article on the pages of the daily 'Blic,' about the possibility of the EU co-operating with the new Serbian government (this happened after the disintegration of Serbia and Montenegro into two separate states) provided that the general Ratko Mladić was quickly apprehended. If that condition was fulfilled then the Serbian Republic would have a chance of receiving official candidate status to the EU in 2008. One could argue whether this represented a turning-point when it came to the issue of joining European structures, or whether they were mere slogans in order to increase their electoral support before the coming elections.<sup>44</sup>

In 2006 there appeared in the pages of the weekly 'NIN' several articles with politicians and Serbian specialists dealing with EU matters. One of the questions that was posed was, 'what would be a sign of good will towards Serbia by the EU in the next months?' It answered this question by stating that the European Union was ready to help Serbia solve her problems as a potential member of the Union, but that it should define new conditions of co-operation with the International Criminal Tribunal, change the visa process and provide financial aid. There were also accusations that 'the EU acts irresponsibly as far as the Balkans is concerned. On the one hand, it talks about the necessity of ensuring the quick accession of the Balkan countries to the European structures; on the other, it places obstacles in the path that ensure that this is not possible in the near future.'<sup>45</sup>

In response, Sonia Biserko – the head of the Serbian Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights, said that, 'the Union has demonstrated to a large extent its good will towards Serbia. An agreement has been signed that went far beyond all the standard criteria. This was enough to show that the European Union really wants to help

<sup>41</sup> T. Mišcević, 'Ipak ne tapkamo u mestu', *Blic*, 9 November 2007, at <[http://www.blic.co.yu/stara\\_arhiva/arhiva/2006-11-09/strane/politika.htm#1](http://www.blic.co.yu/stara_arhiva/arhiva/2006-11-09/strane/politika.htm#1)>.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> N.M. Jovanović, I. Cvetković, 'Posle izbora, Mladić ubrzo u Hagu', *Blic*, 15 November 2006, at <[http://www.blic.co.yu/stara\\_arhiva/arhiva/2006-11-15/strane/politika.htm](http://www.blic.co.yu/stara_arhiva/arhiva/2006-11-15/strane/politika.htm)>; D. Bujošević, 'A sad – na radne zadatke', *NIN*, 20 July 2006, at <<http://www.nin.co.yu/pages/article.php?id=25390>>.

<sup>45</sup> D. Bujošević, 'A sad – na radne...'

Serbia (...) But to expect that this is going to be achieved by the Hague Tribunal is not realistic.<sup>46</sup>

The coming to power of the radicals at the beginning of 2007 evoked strong anxiety in the international arena. There were even suspicions that one consequence would be that the whole integration process might be slowed down, or that it might cause the Serbs to withdraw from this process altogether. However, the following months showed that the policy had not been changed, and Vojislav Kostunica still remained, after some desultory protests, the prime minister. Foreign countries, according to Sonia Biserko, stopped paying attention to events on the Serbian political scene, which in spite of some political turbulence does not seem to want to choose an alternative way for the country from the one that had been adopted in 2000. Serbian politicians from the Office of the Government of Serbia who were in favour of a rapprochement with the EU did not lose hope and evinced measured optimism when it came to the issues of talks and changes in the country that were so strongly demanded by the Union.<sup>47</sup>

Reports about the on-going negotiations were, however, ambiguous if not contradictory. In the summer of 2007<sup>48</sup>, the deputy prime minister, Bozidar Delić, stated, after another round of talks, that they were difficult but satisfactory (the subject of the talks was agriculture). But the former minister of agriculture, Goran Zivkov, said that 'everything could have proceeded in a much better way, if the talks had been started at the point where they had been broken.' The problem was caused by the fact that the composition of the delegation, which was composed of experts, had been changed.

The weekly 'Vreme' quoted in a very detailed manner the topic of the negotiations, which concerned the abolition of tariffs on Serbian products, which was con-

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.; 'Koštunica i Del Ponte pred evropskom trojkom', *Danas*, 16 October 2006, at <<http://www.danas.co.yu/20061016/dogadjajdana1.html#0>>.

<sup>47</sup> It was still in January that the foreign affairs minister Vuk Drašković blamed the prime minister Vojislav Koštunica for breaking the association talks with the EU and the fiasco concerning apprehension and arrest of Ratko Mladić. Besides he criticized President Boris Tadić, that in spite of the six years that passed since the removal of Slobodan Milosevic the problem of vetting was not solved. 'Vuk Drašković: Koštunica je kriv za prekid pregovora sa EU', *Danas*, 17 January 2007, at <<http://www.danas.co.yu/20070117/dogadjajdana1.html>>; R. Femić, 'Hag nije jedini uslov za pridruženje EU', *Danas*, 20-21 January 2007, at <<http://www.danas.co.yu/20070120/dogadjajdana1.html>>; D. Bujošević, 'A sad – na radne...'; 'Demokratska Srbija može računati na podršku Evropske unije', *Danas*, 18 January 2007, at <<http://www.danas.co.yu/20070118/frontpage1.html>>; M. Miloradović, 'Dinkić: Za više posla i Srbiju u EU', *Danas*, 18 January 2007, at <<http://www.danas.co.yu/20070118/dogadjajdana1.html>>; 'Plasnik: Došla sam da ohrabrim Beograd da nastavi ka Evropi', *Danas*, 18 January 2007, at <<http://www.danas.co.yu/20070118/frontpage1.html>>.

<sup>48</sup> Besides, 'Vreme' pointed out the difficulties that were not favourable for quick progress of negotiations. The example of that was a so called 'sugar scandal.' The Serbs accused the EU of lack of consistency, which in spite of promises to standardize the tariffs on the products from the Balkans, would apply double standards when it came to some products, among them sugar. According to the Union experts, the prices for the Serbian sugar were too low, so after they were raised there were frauds in which sugar was mixed with some other substances to make its quantity bigger. Z. Majdin, 'Kajgana sa šećerom', *Vreme*, 17 July 2007, at <<http://www.vreme.com/cms/view.php?id=506323>>.

nected with the necessity of adapting the quality of foodstuffs to EU norms. This was supposed to take six years, according to the opinions cited in the weekly. The customs agreements depended also on the position of the Tribunal at the Hague, which in the preceding years had practically become a participant in the negotiations between the Serbs and Europe. What was stressed by the author of the article was that the next stage in the negotiations depended upon 'whether the Hague nods in agreement or not.'<sup>49</sup>

New steps were taken in order to facilitate the apprehension of Radovan Karadžić and especially Ratko Mladić. A special telephone number, 9191, was set up for people to call in order for them to divulge the place of hiding of the former general. A prize of one million euros was put-up in return for such information. Dragoljub Zarković, the author of the text about the phone line, wrote ironically that the Serbs were convinced that the opening of one phone line, which was always busy anyway, would open the door to the wider European Union, or at least would cause Union politicians to believe that a large step had been taken in the hunt for Mladić.<sup>50</sup> In the same text, the author compared Serbian politics towards the Union with the approach that Montenegro had adopted, which first decided to get rid of the burden that was Serbia, and then accelerate its transformation.<sup>51</sup> The effectiveness of that step was to be confirmed by reports from Brussels.

In November 2007, the Ethnographic Faculty of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Knowledge carried out research on students and secondary schools pupils concerning the attitude of the Serbs towards the citizens of Europe (meaning the European Union). The research showed that young Serbs held an ambivalent attitude towards the EU, and at the same time confirmed a fall in the popularity of those organisations and people who were enthusiastic about the EU. So 'Europe was perceived as rich, stable and strong economically; in comparison, Serbia was underdeveloped, poor, not organized and corrupt. On the other hand Europeans made good money, but were concentrated most of all on their work, they were obsessed with their careers, they were cold and distant. The Serbs were lazy, but friendly, joyful, hospitable and capable of enjoying life.'<sup>52</sup>

The issue of the integration of Serbia with the EU was conceived as a conflict of reason and emotions. On the one hand, it was obvious that the road towards integration needed to be continued; on the other hand, there was anxiety about the loss of national and cultural identity – the result was mistrust and a desire to distance themselves from Europe. Moreover, there was a fear of globalization, which was identified with Americanization, and Western Europe was thought to be an ex-

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> D. Žarković, 'Pozovi 9191 i prijavi Ratka Mladića – može li Srbija telefonom ući u Evropu', *Vreme*, 18 October 2007, at <<http://www.vreme.com/cms/view.php?id=516409>>.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> J. Gligorijević, 'Oni rade, mi se radujemo', *Vreme*, 22 November 2007, at <<http://www.vreme.com/cms/view.php?id=535234>>.

ample of this. The article argued that these attitudes were the result of a lack of real knowledge about the transformation which was taking place in the countries of the former Yugoslavia.<sup>53</sup>

The beginning of 2008 witnessed some changes in Serbian politics and also in the politics of the foreign countries towards Serbia. In January, there were presidential elections (won again by Boris Tadić) but there was a serious crisis in the Parliament. It was connected with the inability to solve the situation in Kosovo. This situation was also responsible for the slowing down of co-operation between Serbia and the EU.

On 10 February, the annual international conference on security took place in Munich, where a plan for an EU mission in Kosovo was prepared.<sup>54</sup> The president of Serbia who was a supporter of that plan, stressed at the meeting, that Serbia would take to court any institution and any authorities that recognized the independence of Kosovo; however, he ruled out the possibility that Serbia would intervene militarily in such circumstances.<sup>55</sup>

The EU politicians tried to convince the Serbs that the EULEX project had its merits, promising that they would support their efforts in the strengthening of democracy and the legislature, and that a political dialogue between the EU and Serbia would be supported by economic and political stability. The Serbian state was promised help in the development of international co-operation, and also in the economic sphere, which was supposed to accelerate the creation of the zone of free trade between the EU and Serbia. The EU also proposed the signing of the Agreement of Association and Co-operation. The talks that Javier Solana had with President Tadić in which the above mentioned assurances were made resulted in mixed feelings.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> According to the statistics 10% of those polled perceived Europe in the categories uncritically idealized, and 10% perceived it as an absolute evil. The rest appreciated the high standard of living and a strong position of the EU, but understood that the life there is complex and people work a lot. In conclusion, the Serbs perceived joining of the EU as a necessity because there was a lack of a real and attractive alternative. It is worth pointing out that the survey helped in understanding of another important element namely people stopped being apologetic for the past. J. Gligorijević, 'Oni rade...'

<sup>54</sup> It was a European project of introducing to Kosovo mission EU (EULEX) which would replace current peace missions and military missions. It caused a conflict among the Serbian politicians. The opponents of the project thought that sending of the EU mission goes against the Resolution 1244 of the UN, the Serbian constitution, and integrity of Serbia, which was supposed to be proved by the fact that in the proposal of the agreement 'nowhere was expressed a readiness of the EU and its member states to respect the sovereignty and the territorial integrity of the Serbian Republic within her borders that were defined in the international sphere'. In this case it was the Dayton agreement of 1995 that was the issue, where Serbia was forced to accept an international solution against her will and even that acceptance was to be changed. M. Milošević, 'Križa', *Vreme*, 7 February 2008, at <<http://www.vreme.com/cms/view.php?id=580179>>.

<sup>55</sup> 'Završena 44. međunarodna konferencija o bezbednosti u Minhenu. Oprečni stavovi Ivanova i Solane', *Danas*, 11 February 2008, at <<http://www.danas.co.yu/20080211/dogadjajdana1.html#1>>.

<sup>56</sup> The position of Tadić was perceived by a part of Serbian politicians as too pro-European, which led to a governmental and Parliamentary crisis as a result of signing the agreement with the repre-

On 17 February 2008, the Albanian authorities in Kosovo declared independence and sent letters to 192 countries in an effort to gain the recognition of the sovereign status of their province. In the next few days the media described some of the commotion on the international scene, which was caused by one country after another recognizing the independence of Kosovo, including the majority of the countries of the European Union. This led to a deterioration of the relations with the EU, and the president of Serbia turned to the Security Council of the UN, informing the body that Serbia would never recognize the independence of Kosovo, and 'the countries that recognized the independence of the Serbian province have to accept responsibility for the possible ethnic cleansing perpetrated against the Serbs.'<sup>57</sup>

The media stressed that the recognition of the independence of Kosovo was a dangerous precedent and it could lead to the separation of other territories in the world. Another argument which was made repeatedly was that the Serbs deserved something in return, like, for example, a quick accession to the EU. However, it was doubtful whether Western Europe would want to create such a legal and procedural exception, which would make Serbia an example of a country whose membership of the EU was fast-tracked. (In May 2008, the Pact on the Stabilization and Association of Serbia with the EU was signed.)

This situation deepened the crisis as far as the Serbian authorities were concerned. At the beginning, politicians tried to balance their positions, maintaining their pro-European orientation while simultaneously stressing their disagreement over the independence of Kosovo. Boris Tadić was an example of such political balancing. However, some politicians, Prime Minister Kostunica, for example, began to radicalize their positions.<sup>58</sup>

In March the Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS) proposed holding a national referendum in which the Serbs would answer the question, 'whether they want to join the European Union without Kosovo.'<sup>59</sup> The question was formulated in a rather provocative way and it reflected the heightened emotions on the radical wing of the

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sentatives of the EU concerning the European mission in Kosovo. Some of the more radical Serbian politicians (including Prime Minister Koštunica) accused Tadić that his signature was in actuality the acceptance of the independence of Kosovo and Serbia became in reality the first country that recognized that independence. The conflict between the president and the prime minister caused demonstrations where slogans against the prime minister were chanted, 'Out with Koštunica – out with the new Milošević,' and 'Koštunica save Serbia and kill yourself.' M. Milošević, 'Evropa, Srbija, Kosovo: Beli dim na Andrićevom vencu', *Vreme*, 14 February 2008, at <<http://www.vreme.com/cms/view.php?id=584877>>; idem, 'Križa'.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> 'Neslaganja u vladajućoj koaliciji i zbog stavova prema otplati kosovskog duga. Sukob Koštunice i Dinkića', *Danas*, 1-2 March 2008, at <<http://www.danas.co.yu/20080301/frontpage1.html>>; 'Sednica Glavnog odbora Demokratske stranke. TADIĆ: Ne odustajem od Kosova, niti od evropskih integracija', *Danas*, 3 March 2008, at <<http://www.danas.co.yu/20080303/frontpage1.html>>.

<sup>59</sup> 'Predsednik Skupštine Srbije juče prekinuo sednicu parlamenta, nastavak možda sutra. Radikali traže smenu Dulića, a DSS referendum', *Danas*, 6 March 2008, at <<http://www.danas.co.yu/20080306/frontpage1.html>>.



political scene. The prime minister was convinced that the fury of Serbian society about international decisions concerning Kosovo could significantly influence the politics of the country and to turn Serbia wholly towards Russia.<sup>60</sup>

On the other hand, the pro-European stance of the president caused a deepening of the conflict, which led to the dissolution of the Parliament on 10 March 2008, and the calling of an election for 11 May,<sup>61</sup> which the pro-European parties won.<sup>62</sup>

In spite of the clear victory, Serbian politicians had problems when it came to the establishment of a coalition government; the negotiations were extended over the course of several weeks. At the same time, at the end of May of that year a delegation of Albanians from Kosovo paid a visit to the European Parliament; furthermore, the Albanian press in Kosovo increasingly drew attention to the delayed withdrawal of UNMIK and the introduction of EULEX which would act on behalf of the European Union. The explanation for the lack of a more dynamic approach on the part of the UN was not only the attitude of Serbia, which opposed EULEX, but also Russian opposition. The EU was reluctant to engage in a conflict with Russia over this issue; the Russian government's position towards the change of Kosovo administration was ambiguous, but it had very cordial relations with the Serbs.<sup>63</sup>

In July 2008 Radovan Karadžić was apprehended. He was swiftly handed over to the Hague Tribunal, but it soon became clear that this fact did not have a strong influence on the integration process of Serbia with the EU. From the time that Kosovo declared independence and because of confusion on the Serbian political scene, relations between Serbia and the Union were very cool. President Tadić, who was perceived as being a pro-EU politician nevertheless stressed Serbia's opposition to the independence of Kosovo, and he condemned the breaking of international law by

<sup>60</sup> T. Skrozza, 'Intervju, Boris Tadić, predsednik Srbije', *Zloupotreba Kosova*, 6 March 2008.

<sup>61</sup> Coalition for European Serbia which was supported by President Boris Tadić received the most namely 38.7% of the votes. For its biggest competitor Serbian Radical Party voted 29% of eligible voters. On the third place was a coalition of Democratic Party of Serbia and New Serbia (DSS-NS) with 11.3%. Traditionally the parties of the minorities also entered the Parliament: Hungarian Coalition with four deputies, Bosniak Coalition of Sulejman Ugljanin with two and the Albanian party from the Presev Valley with one deputy. It is worth stressing that Russia and Serbia strengthened their co-operation even more signing in April 2008 an energy agreement concerning the building of a gas pipeline. 'I Vlada usvojila, a predsednik Tadić primio Predlog za raspuštanje Narodne skupštine i raspisivanje vanrednih parlamentarnih izbora', *Danas*, 11 March 2008, at <<http://www.danas.co.yu/20080311/dogadjajdana1.html#0>>; 'Podele unutar tehničke vlade oko ratifikacije rusko-srpskog energetskog sporazuma', *Danas*, 21 April 2008, at <<http://www.danas.co.yu/20080421/dogadjajdana1.html>>.

<sup>62</sup> It is worth pointing out that this choice of the Serbian society did not require of them to renounce Kosovo and come to terms with the facts on the ground. A policy statement of Coalition for European Serbia – Boris Tadić was a widely understood 'protection of Kosovo and Metohia' which did not have to preclude the integration with the EU. The problem was that the victory was not decisive and required to create a coalition which could form a government and the winners and the losers started to build such a coalition right away.

<sup>63</sup> See 'Šefovi diplomatija Evropske unije razmatrali unutrašnjepolitičku situaciju u Srbiji', *Danas*, 27 May 2008, at <<http://www.danas.co.yu/20080527/dogadjajdana1.html>>.

the countries that recognized its independence. Furthermore, there were from time to time suggestions that Kosovo should be partitioned, which according to the Serbs would lead to the ending of the conflict with the Albanians.

In the middle of August 2008, there appeared another problem which was connected with another dispute of a nationalistic character and which influenced the pace of the integration process of Serbia with the European Union. The argument broke out between the Serbs and the Croats about the interpretation of the action 'Tempest' ('Oluja') which took place in August of 1995.<sup>64</sup> That event is treated by the Croats as the final victory of the Croat nation in the war of 1991-1995; the Serbs, on the other hand, view it as a tragedy for the Serbian nation. In the summer of 2008, President Boris Tadić gave an interview on Croat television, in which he said that the Croats should apologize to the Serbs for that event, just as the Serbs apologized to the Croats for their crimes of 1991-1995. These words were condemned by the Croats. The prime minister of Croatia, Ivo Sanader, stated that perhaps one could discuss that topic, but that the day of victory was unquestioned, and that when the Croat nation celebrated it, they did not want to think about the negative aspects of the war. President Stipe Mesic, in his turn, answered that 'the Serbs really do not have any sense of shame.'<sup>65</sup>

After this political confrontation, there was a growing perception, which was talked about in the media, that the EU really did not want to accept Serbia. The weekly newspaper 'NIN,' among others, speculated on this topic, and stated that in the context of the strained relations between Serbia and Croatia, the most contentious issue, from the perspective of both countries' potential membership of the EU, could be the problem of refugees. This could happen if Serbia started to insist that the Union should force Croatia to take back the Serbs on the basis of the law governing refugees, which could slow down the process of Croatia joining the European structures. Until the end of 2008 this issue was frequently discussed within the press, which confirmed the poor state of relations between Serbia and Croatia.<sup>66</sup>

In September 2008 the Serbian press carried reports full of disappointment about the lack of progress in the negotiations with the Union. Whereas representatives of the majority (25) of the Union countries were adopting a warmer attitude, which was leading to a thaw in relations with Serbia, the Netherlands and Belgium continued to block further progress. In the press conference the Dutch foreign affairs minister said explicitly that 'the arrest of Radovan Karadžić was not enough to unblock

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<sup>64</sup> As a result of that event 250 thousand Serbs were expelled from the territory of Croatia. It was carried out by the Croatian Army led by Ante Gotovina, who was recognized as a war criminal by the International Tribunal at the Hague. He was apprehended and handed over to the Tribunal in 2006.

<sup>65</sup> Г. Папић, 'За мир спремни!', *NIN*, 14 August 2008, at <<http://www.nin.co.yu/pages/article.php?id=39629>>.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.; Т. Тагиров, 'Туžбе, genocid i verbalne kamenice', *Vreme*, 20 November 2008, at <<http://www.vreme.com/cms/view.php?id=752625>>.

the agreement.<sup>67</sup> He also added that the arrest of Ratko Mladić might change the situation. In the pages of the article, in which there were the reports from Brussels, there appeared a commentary saying that the Dutch were retaliating for their passive role in the massacre of Srebrenica in 1995.<sup>68</sup> There were also bitter commentaries by the Serbian political opposition (Vojislav Kostunica and Dragan Todorović from the Serbian Radical Party) who maintained that Europe was not exhibiting the will to come to terms with Serbia, and that it would not do so even if Serbia 'had amputated' Kosovo and apprehended Mladić; the optimism of Prime Minister Mirko Cvetković and President Tadić was being replaced by bitterness and depression.<sup>69</sup>

Some people argued that a breakthrough in relations might occur in the middle of October at the EU summit or in December during the meeting of the Security Council<sup>70</sup> of the UN. At the same time it was confirmed that the percentage of people who were enthusiastic about Europe was growing smaller, and that if it came 'to the referendum about Atlantic integration it would not succeed'; and if an early election took place, it would in all likelihood be won by the candidate of the radicals Tomislav Nikolić.<sup>71</sup>

At the time of writing (the end of 2008) Serbia's position remains frozen. The issue of the deployment of EULEX has not been resolved, and from the point of view of the Serbs the problem of the status of Kosovo is still ambiguous. At the end of the year, another conflict erupted between two Balkan countries – Slovenia and Croatia. Slovenia, a member of the EU, blocked EU talks with Croatia, which was perceived to be 'standing with one foot in the Union', on the grounds of the two countries' dispute over the territorial waters of Piransk Bay, which was used by both countries.<sup>72</sup>

This event and the recent dispute between Croatia and Serbia, inspired a discussion in the wider context regarding the integration of other Balkan countries into the EU. It became clear that beyond the issue of long-running disputes from the past and a lack of agreement about the territorial waters, there are other problems that are apparent in the process of continuing integration, such as the border dispute between Croatia and Serbia along the line of the Danube, Bosniak questions, the accession

<sup>67</sup> D. Žarković, 'Opet smo poljubili evropska vrata – Predsednik Srbije sasvim predsednički tvrdi da nećemo skrti s puta. Znaju li ovi na vlasti koji je to put?', *Vreme*, 18 September 2008, at <<http://www.vreme.com/cms/view.php?id=707091>>; D. Anastasijević, 'Holandija na prkosima', *Vreme*, 18 September 2008, at <<http://www.vreme.com/cms/view.php?id=707067>>.

<sup>68</sup> In 1995 the forces of the Bosniak Serbs murdered a few thousand of Muslim men in the region of Srebrenica, which was an enclave of the UN. The Dutch peace forces that were stationed there took a passive part in that event and even helped with separating men and women. See D. Žarković, 'Opet smo poljubili evropska vrata...'

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> D. Anastasijević, 'Holandija na prkosima'.

<sup>71</sup> D. Žarković, 'Šta smo mi Evropi i šta je ona nama – da li je pobjeda na pesmi Evrovizije vrhunski domet trećeg evropskog sveta', *Vreme*, 20 December 2007, at <<http://www.vreme.com/cms/view.php?id=551023>>.

<sup>72</sup> A. Ivanji, 'Evropa i periferija: Alarm u Briselu', *Vreme*, 25 December 2008, at <<http://www.vreme.com/cms/view.php?id=782710>>.

of Kosovo<sup>73</sup> and others which may well create anxiety for EU politicians. This shows that Serbia still has a long way to go to before it reaches the threshold of integration, but the problems which it has to resolve will not only be of its own making.

Translated by Bogdan Zieliński

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

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