

It is cheaper to join NATO

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Public often discusses for and against NATO membership. Even high state officials often opt for membership by using loose arguments. One of these arguments (which are more harmful than useful) is that the membership in NATO is a condition for the EU membership. On the other hand, the opponents of Serbia's joining the North Atlantic Treaty are also bringing arguments more based on emotions and imagination rather than on objective analysis and understanding of this topic. For example, some say that the Serbian soldiers would have to give up their lives for the foreign imperial interest thus against the will of the citizens of Serbia. When we have a debate of such a strategically importance closely connected to the security of the state and its citizens, it should become more mature and based on stronger arguments from both sides.

In the following text, we shall present some of the arguments, and then try to test their strength in the light of the present political situation in Serbia.

ARGUMENTS FOR

Serbia would become a part of a system of collective defense, which should increase the security of the state. For example, if Serbia would be attacked, it would be treated as the attack on all member states of NATO. Furthermore, if some other member state of NATO would be attacked it would mean an attack to Serbia as well.

Serbia would join the most powerful military alliance on the planet thus get allies among the most influential countries of the world, most of all the USA. For the security of the small countries such as Serbia, it is extremely important to have "big" friends they can count on. With a symbolic contribution to the operations of NATO, Serbia could strengthen its political credibility, image and position in Washington, Brussels and other European capitals.

Serbia would send a signal to all of the potential investors that its territory is safe for investing. This would upgrade the credit rating of Serbia thus it would accelerate the economic prosperity of the country (when Romania joined NATO, the foreign direct investments increased for 141%).

All of the CEE and SEE post communist countries joined NATO, among which are Hungary, Bulgaria, Romania etc. Macedonia, Albania and Croatia are in the Membership Action Plan, what is the final step before the admission, while Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina, members of the Partnership for Peace, are unambiguously oriented towards the full membership. If Serbia remains out of NATO, it would be surrounded by its member state from all sides.

Serbia would join the community of Western societies which share common liberal-democratic values. Thus Serbia would strengthen the democratic direction of its inner affairs, hence define its currently ambivalent external strategic identity.

The levers of foreign and security policy would be strengthened. The decisions brought by NATO are affecting both regional European and global security, whether Serbia is a member or not. Regardless how

low possibility to influence on forming policies and on direction of decision making would be, still it is better option than not having any influence at all.

Joining NATO would increase both domestic and foreign pressures on the Army of Serbia to modernize, professionalize and specialize. A reformed army would be able to reduce armed forces and to increase their value in both defense purposes, as well as in peace-support operations far away from its territory.

The reform of the security sector and organization of the army in accordance with the NATO standards demand significant funds. However, being out of the NATO costs even more. The calculation is simple: when the country is in the system of collective defense, it can professionalize and specialize its army. While when you guarantee security of your country on your own, it is absolutely necessary to develop much wider scope of military capabilities. Since we still do not have precise economic calculation, we can look at this year's research of the Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Croatia. According to this document, possible membership in the NATO would cost Croatia three billions dollar less than remaining out of the Alliance. There is no reason to assume that the calculation for Serbia would be much different.

ARGUMENTS AGAINST

By joining NATO, Serbia would acknowledge the legitimacy of the military intervention against the FRY in 1999, and all eventual decisions related to the final status of Kosovo which maybe against its interests.

Theoretically speaking, Serbia could join the EU and in the same time remain out of the NATO, as it happened in the cases of Ireland, Austria, Finland, Sweden, Malta and Cyprus. A sole membership in the EU is a good guaranty of security. The EU has its autonomous common security and defense policy and its own military forces, though not so well developed at this moment. Furthermore, a fact that some country is a member of the EU restrains in a satisfactory level third countries from idea of attack, regardless of the fact if that country is a NATO member or not.

Joining NATO Serbia would damage the strategic interests of the Russian Federation, its traditional although unreliable ally, which is firmly opposed to NATO enlargement. Also, realization of political (Kosovo) and economic (energy supply) interest which depend on Russian Federation support would be endangered.

Although the membership in NATO decreases the chances for conventional and symmetric attack on Serbia by some state, theoretically it increases its exposure to the risks of new transnational and asymmetrical threats such as international Islamic fundamentalists' terrorism.

Accession to NATO forces specialization and investment in certain types of armed forces on expense on the other ones. That is creating high inequality within the army thus producing inner tensions deriving from such inequality.

If we try to compare the strength of arguments based mostly on the experience of the other countries, it is evident that the calculation opts for Serbia's membership in NATO. Being out of NATO is too expensive and bears potentially devastating risks for a small country with such geographic and political position that Serbia has. However, there is a need of being careful, since both entrance and staying out of the Alliance are producing large amount of potential outcomes. In other words there a different ways of being or not a NATO member. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization is a heterogeneous alliance of different member states: from countries like Iceland which do not have any army, through countries like France with a limited involvement, or small countries which take more than they give, to the states with the armed forces capable of projecting power throughout the world.

On the other hand, the European countries which are not members of the NATO are varying from formally neutral states which share common liberal democratic values (Sweden, Finland, Austria, Switzerland, Ireland) and from time to time participate in ad hoc peacekeeping operations of NATO framework, through non member states which are out of the NATO due to the territorial disputes (Cyprus) to the states which do not want to access into the Alliance because of loyalty towards the Russian Federation.

In which way Serbia would design its potential engagement within NATO or potential staying out of the Alliance is certainly dependant on political elites and their capabilities of projecting wise and long-lasting strategy based on the means that are at our disposal. Unfortunately, the heads of our states are still not united, and without a clear strategy. Therefore, what remains is to make our judgments based on the foreign experiences which are leading us to the conclusion that Serbia would mistake if it itself closes the doors to the NATO.

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