

THE DILEMMAS OF GEOGRAPHICAL ENLARGEMENT FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF AN EU CANDIDATE COUNTRY – THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA*



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Abstract

Starting from the autumn of 2000, Serbia's central foreign policy objective has been membership in the European Union. For a long time, the enthusiasm of politicians (especially those in power) was shared by the majority of citizens. Nevertheless, the constant addition of new conditions (which was not the case with other countries seeking entry), some of which are unacceptable for both the political elite and the citizens of Serbia, and then the open announcements by some of the leading European politicians about the halt of EU enlargement for the foreseeable future, have led to significant decrease in the interest of Serbian citizens in EU membership. EU membership is still the number one foreign policy objective of the Serbian state, but in the absence of a clear, fast and certain European perspective, Serbia is increasingly thinking about finding alternatives. In practice, alternative solutions are being resorted to, even if temporarily. Even though the geographical position of Serbia and the depth of its economic and other relations with the EU and its member states so far make it necessary that each of these alternative solutions imply close relations between Serbia and the EU, but the absence of an unequivocal European perspective

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imposes the need to turn to other global partners, such as China, the USA, Russia or other countries. This positioning is in accordance with the historical experience of Serbia, which is traditionally involved cooperation with both East and West, and a balancing act between the two. In addition, it is possible and probable that this orientation towards other global actors and partners is fully in line with the changes currently taking place in the world and, above all, with the process of globalisation, by which the European Union itself is influenced and to which it will have to adapt.

Keywords: accession, perspective, enthusiasm, disappointment, alternative, balancing, globalization.

1. The uncertainty of the European integration perspective for Serbia

On 1 March 2012, the Republic of Serbia acquired, based on the decision of the European Council, the status of a candidate for membership in the European Union. Despite the progress made in the required reforms and in the negotiation process, which began on 21 January 2014, at this moment, more than eleven years after acquiring candidate status, it is completely uncertain when, if at all, the Republic of Serbia (as well as other countries of the so-called Western Balkans) would become a member of the EU, if at all.

In spite of the fact that official representatives of the EU and its member states, such as Germany, Hungary, etc., have often claimed that there was a need for offering full membership in the EU to the countries of the Western Balkans, including Serbia, as soon as possible (contingent upon fulfilling the required conditions), there is a clearly expressed position, most significantly represented by the President of France, Emmanuel Macron, that the EU should not expand the circle of members, and, moreover, that it does not even have the capacity to do so until the necessary reforms are implemented. A short time after Macron assumed the presidency of France on 14 May 2017, he announced, in a series of programme speeches, his personal engagement and the commitment of France to further strengthen the European Union. Even though the competent European institutions had indicated 2025 as the latest time for Serbia and Montenegro to join the EU, Macron made it clear that there would be no enlargement before the EU reforms were implemented.¹ In his speech at the European Parliament on 17 April 2018, he said: ‘I will only support enlargement

1 Macron is advocating for deep and essential reforms, which might require the amendment of the Basic Treaties of the European Union. See: Macron, 2017; Chastand, 2018; Ouest France, AFP, 2018.

if Europe first experiences deepening and reform’,² explaining that ‘Europe which functions with difficulty with 27 members will not function easier with 30 or 32.’³ Up to this moment, when one of Macron’s presidential mandates has already expired and the second mandate is well underway, the announced EU reforms have not been rolled out, and the French president’s position on stalling the expansion of EU membership until the EU’s restructuring has remained unchanged.⁴

It is also not entirely clear what conditions the Republic of Serbia should fulfil in order to become a member of the EU.

This primarily concerns the issue of recognising the “independence” of Kosovo, one of the two autonomous provinces within the Republic of Serbia, which is currently under temporary international administration based on UNSC Resolution 1244 of 1999, after a declaration of independence by Albanian secessionists on 17 February 2008. In accordance with the system of distribution of competencies between the EU and its member states, it was left to the states to decide whether to recognise the secession of Kosovo or not.⁵ Currently, 22 member states recognise the independence of the southern Serbian province, while 5 do not.⁶ In the last chapter of the accession negotiations between Serbia and the EU – chapter 35, which refers to “other issues” –, paragraph 1 is entitled ‘Normalisation of relations between Serbia and Kosovo’. Even though in the official documents and during the talks Serbia has not been explicitly asked to recognise Kosovo’s independence, it is difficult to imagine, bearing in mind that the vast majority of EU members, including the most influential ones, support Kosovo’s independence, what kind of “normalisation” would be acceptable to the EU other than one that includes at least the indirect recognition of Kosovo as an independent state by Serbia. The fact that, by normalisation, the EU almost explicitly means the recognition of Kosovo as an independent state is confirmed by the ‘EU Proposal – Agreement on the path to normalisation between Kosovo and Serbia’, published on 27 February 2023 (originally a French-German proposal), since every article of the 11-article proposal suggests that, according to the EU’s understanding, the “normalisation” of relations means the establishment of good neighbourly relations between two sovereign states (Article 4, paragraph 2, foresees, for example, that ‘Serbia will not object to Kosovo’s membership in any international organisation’).⁷

The second request of the EU towards Serbia, i.e. its condition for Serbia’s admission to membership also represents a major, practically insurmountable obstacle. It is the EU’s request that Serbia harmonises its foreign policy with the EU’s Common Foreign and Security Policy (referred to in chapter 31 of the accession negotiations)

2 Website of the French Embassy in Sofia. *Available at:* <https://bg.ambafrance.org/Mercredi-18-avril-7477> (Accessed: 30 October 2023).

3 Schoen and François, 2018.

4 Rakić, 2020, pp. 553–582.

5 Council of the European Union, 2008.

6 These are Spain, Romania, Greece, Slovakia and Cyprus.

7 European External Action Service, 2023.

by introducing sanctions against the Russian Federation, which the EU gradually introduced after the annexation of Crimea by Russia in 2014 and intensified after the beginning of the armed intervention of the Russian Federation in Ukraine on 24 February 2022. The European Union considers this alignment of Serbia's foreign policy with the Common Foreign and Security Policy as an urgent priority matter, even though chapter 31 has not yet been opened, and, according to the regular course of things, the full alignment of the candidate country's foreign policy with the CFSP should be realised by the very moment of accession to the EU.⁸ Even though it voted for Resolution A/RES/ES-11/1 of the UN General Assembly of 2 March 2022, which characterised the Russian intervention, which the Russian Federation calls a "special military operation", as "aggression", as well as for the suspension of the Russian membership in the UN Human Rights Council, the Republic of Serbia refuses to join the sanctions, for a number of reasons. Firstly, Serbia wishes to preserve its economic interests, primarily the procurement of energy from Russia under contracted conditions that are significantly more favourable than market conditions.⁹ Secondly, the refusal to join the sanctions is based on the fundamentally negative attitude of the Republic of Serbia, which in the 1990s was itself exposed to economic sanctions, towards any kind of economic sanctions against states, which cause the most damage to the innocent population. Thirdly, the people of Serbia and the people of Russia traditionally maintain close relations. Finally, and probably most importantly, the Russian Federation, as a powerful state and a permanent member of the UNSC, supports the preservation of the territorial integrity of the Republic of Serbia, opposing the independence of Kosovo and its membership in international organisations.

2. The evolution of public opinion in Serbia towards the perspective of EU membership

The prospect of joining the European Union was not considered by the Republic of Serbia, either as a part of the Yugoslav state or as an independent country, until 5 October 2000, the day when the ruling regime was overthrown by a coalition of political parties, who viewed the European path as a priority element of the political programme. Before that, the Republic of Serbia and the FR Yugoslavia had been under EU sanctions,¹⁰ brought independently or as an integral part of the UNSC

8 European Commission, 2022.

9 A similar logic was followed by the Government of Hungary, a member of the EU, which opposed some packages of sanctions against Russia when it came to energy sources and requested (and received) certain exceptions for itself, arguing 'that as a landlocked country very much dependent on energy carrier imports, especially Russian imports, Hungary does not have the alternatives that other EU Member States have.' Csernus, 2023, p. 8.

10 See: Rakić, 2015.

sanctions, and, in 1999, the vast majority of the then 15 EU member states, more precisely those that are also members of NATO, participated in the military intervention of the Atlantic Alliance against the FRY (a number of other countries, which would later become EU members. also participated in the intervention in different ways).

However, the awareness of the need to harmonise the legal system of Serbia and FR Yugoslavia with the Law of the European Union was also present during the last decade of the 20th century, and measures were taken in this regard during the period of the most unfavourable relations between Serbia/Yugoslavia on the one hand and the EU and its member states on the other.¹¹

Announcing the rapid entry, first of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (which, on 4 February 2003, was transformed into the “state union of Serbia and Montenegro”), and then of the Republic of Serbia (after its constitution as a separate state on 5 June 2006) into the European Union was, on the one hand, part of the political marketing of the new authorities, with the aim of gaining the support of the population tired of long-term isolation and exclusion from normal international communication and cooperation, but, on the other hand, also an expression of the sincere conviction of the authorities that they were highly respected in the West. This belief in a swift EU membership went so far that, for example, on 20 July 2003, a group of high-ranking politicians, led by then Deputy Prime Minister of the Republic of Serbia, Čedomir Jovanović, encouraged by the declaration adopted at the EU-Western Balkans Summit held in Thessaloniki on 21 June 2003,¹² organised a performance that consisted of sailing a boat along the Sava and the Danube into Belgrade, to symbolically announce the joining of the country to the EU, with full membership, in 2007 (when the numbers 20 and 07 from the date of this performance are combined, the number 2007 is obtained).¹³

For the more than a decade and a half since then, the bid by high-ranking Serbian state officials to enter the EU with that date has been characterised by a completely unrealistic optimism:

It is theoretically possible for Serbia to join the EU in 2007, Zoran Živković (Prime Minister, B.M.R.), 2003.

Serbia will enter the European Union by 2010, Boris Tadić (President of the Republic, B.M.R.), 2007.

Serbia will win candidacy next year, and become a full member of the EU in 2014, Božidar Đelić (Deputy Prime Minister, B.M.R.), 2008.

11 FRY Federal Government, 1996. See also: Rakić, 1997.

12 EU-Western Balkans Summit, 2003.

13 Television News 2 of the “Serbian Radio and Television” Broadcasting Agency, July 20, 2003.

I believe in Serbia joining the EU by 2014, Boris Tadić (President of the Republic, B.M.R.), 2010.

The earliest deadline for our country's entry into the EU would be 2016, Boris Tadić (President of the Republic, B.M.R.), 2010.

There is a chance to enter the EU by 2020, Aleksandar Vučić (Prime Minister, B.M.R.), 2015.

We hope that Serbia will become a full member of the European Union in 2022, and I am sure that it will be before 2025', Aleksandar Vučić (Prime Minister, B.M.R.), 2016.¹⁴

The infatuation and obsession of politicians, above all those in power, with Euro-enthusiasm found an echo in the media, which, in Serbia, could hardly be seen as particularly free. European integration, specifically Serbia's future membership in the EU, considered certain and imminent, became a ubiquitous topic, which dominated the discourse in all appropriate and inappropriate forums. Almost every event, whether or not it had anything to do with European integration, was used as an occasion to talk about the EU and Serbia's membership in it, and all public figures, regardless of their occupation, were expected to express their opinion, unavoidably positive, about Serbia's European perspective. For example, on 28 January 2010, when the newly elected Patriarch of the Serbian Orthodox Church, Mr. Irinej, held his first press conference, the journalists were mainly interested, in a completely inappropriate manner – taking into account the primarily spiritual role of the head of the Church and a number of significant spiritual topics and current church issues that the newly elected Patriarch had to deal with –, in the Patriarch's position on the European Union and Serbia's European integration, and the Patriarch's answers to the journalists' questions were given priority treatment by practically the entire media.¹⁵

Conviction about swift EU accession, as well as about the desirable and useful nature of said membership was soon instilled in the vast majority of Serbian citizens. Public opinion surveys carried out by competent state authorities, primarily the Government Office for EU Accession and the Ministry of European Integration, speak eloquently about this, as well as about the subsequent evolution of the attitudes of Serbian citizens.¹⁶ Thus, according to a public opinion survey conducted in September 2006 by the Office for EU Accession, to the question 'If a referendum were called tomorrow with the question: Do you support the membership of our country

14 Ekspres, 2017.

15 Politika online, 2010.

16 The results of the public opinion survey by year are available on the website of the Ministry for European Integration. See: Government of the Republic of Serbia, Ministry for European Integration, 2006–2022.

in the European Union, how would you vote?’, a huge majority, 69.90% of citizens said they would vote “for”, 17.80% said they would not vote, and only 12.30% were “against”. In December 2003, the pro-European attitude was even stronger: 73% of citizens said they would vote “for”, 12% said they would not vote, and only 8% said they would vote “against”.

Over time, as expectations that Serbia would soon join the EU waned and as the entire accession process was called into question, citizen enthusiasm decreased and the percentages changed drastically. According to the research of the Ministry of European Integration from December 2022, 43% of citizens would vote “for”, 32% would vote “against”, 13% would not vote, while 12% did not have an answer to the question.

The fact that the EU’s attitude towards us is the key reason for this change of public opinion in Serbia towards the EU is quite eloquently indicated by the fact that, in December 2022, 28% of the respondents believed that the factor that slowed down and hindered Serbia’s entry into the EU to the greatest extent was the ‘policy of constant conditioning and blackmail applied by the European Union towards our country.’¹⁷ It should be noted that, before voicing the aforementioned “expectation” of the most influential circles in the EU towards us regarding the recognition of Kosovo’s independence and the request to join the sanctions against Russia, there was another request from Brussels that was unacceptable for a significant number of Serbian citizens, and which Serbian authorities fulfilled, namely “cooperation” with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia. Primarily, the cooperation required the extradition of accused members of the political and military leadership of the Republic of Serbia, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, the Republic of Srpska and the Republic of Serbian Krajina, as well as other accused parties who were believed to be accessible to the Serbian authorities. The relevance of that request ended with the extradition of General Ratko Mladić on 31 May 2011. The negative public attitude in Serbia towards “cooperation” with the Hague Tribunal was particularly influenced by the fact that the vast majority of persons accused and convicted before this court were Serbs and that almost no one was finally convicted for the many crimes committed against Serbs. The emergence of new, humiliating demands led to the general feeling about “constant conditioning and blackmail”.

It is quite interesting to see the structure of the answers to the question

In your opinion, should the reforms that are necessary for joining the EU be implemented, first of all, because it represents the fulfillment of the conditions set by the

17 12% of respondents said that the culprit was ‘the mentality of our people and unwillingness to change’; 11% indicated ‘the current situation within the European Union itself’; 10% indicated ‘the failure to fulfil assumed international obligations’; 9% indicated ‘objective obstacles (extensive reforms in all areas that need to be carried out)’; 9% indicated ‘the inability of the domestic leadership’; 5% indicated that ‘our country’s entry into the EU has not been slowed down and/or difficult’; 1% indicated ‘the situation regarding Pristina’; and 15% said that they did not know, meaning that they had no opinion.

EU, or should they be implemented even if the EU did not set them as a condition, for the sake of creating a better Serbia and for our own sake?

In a survey from December 2022, as many as 65% of respondents answered that ‘those reforms should be implemented even if they are not a condition for joining the EU, for the sake of creating a better Serbia and for our own sake’, 14% answered that ‘such reforms, in general, should not be implemented’, 11% answered that ‘reforms that are necessary for entry into the EU should be implemented primarily because this is the fulfilment of the conditions for entry into the EU’, while 10% said that they did not have an answer. These percentages have not significantly decreased compared to 2009, when these figures were 72%, 5%, 14% and 9%, respectively. In light of these results, and especially when taking into account the fact that, during the 1990s, when the perspective of EU membership could not even be considered, a decision was officially made to harmonise the legal system in the FRY with the European system, we can conclude that there is a stable desire among the Serbian population to live in a society organised according to European models and standards, but that the former enthusiasm has dropped significantly when it comes to EU membership itself.

These changes in mood among the population are not in proper correlation with the attitude of the authorities of the Republic of Serbia regarding the perspective of our membership in the EU. “European integration” and, above all, the acquisition of the status of a full member of the EU, has been the foreign policy priority of the Serbian government since the regime change of 5 October 2000. Ana Brnabić, Prime Minister of the government of the Republic of Serbia, who was also holding the mandate for assigning the new Government, said in her speech held on 25 October 2022 before the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia, in which she presented the proposal of the government programme the next mandate:

Serbia will continue its European path, because Serbia belongs to the family of European nations and countries. (...) Our whole region can be long-term stable, better connected and prosperous, only as part of the wider European family. The European Union can certainly be criticized a lot, but it is the most successful peace project of all mankind and, strategically, our final destination is in the Union.¹⁸

However, the Prime Minister also noticed the following:

How successful our negotiations with the EU will be in the coming period certainly depends on a whole series of factors, but, unfortunately, it seems to depend least on the speed and quality of our reforms. (...) In any case, it is in the interest of our country and our people that we continue with reforms on the European path, first of all because these reforms are good for us, because they strengthen our economy, because they make our public administration more efficient and transparent, and

18 National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia, 2022.

because the rule of law is important to us. We are building a European Serbia, and membership itself certainly does not depend only on us.¹⁹

It has been demonstrated that Serbian authorities show continuity and perseverance in their European determination, but also realism in the sense that the prospect of membership is neither imminent nor certain. Such realism is a novelty compared to the rather naive conviction of the authorities in the first decade of the 21st century regarding swift integration.. As for the citizens, the absence of a clear perspective of Serbia's EU membership led to a significant decrease in support for said membership.

3. “Europe has no alternative”?

In the period of European integration ecstasy that ruled Serbia during the first fifteen years of the 21st century, one of the claims widely repeated by the media and the different ranks of politicians, up to the level of the President of the Republic,²⁰ practically a political mantra, was that ‘Europe does not have an alternative’.²¹ A look at the geographical map of Europe will justify this idea, since Serbia and the countries of the so-called Western Balkans – Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Albania – represent a small, still unintegrated island in the middle of the vast space of the European Union.



¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ See, for example: Danas Online, 2008; RTS online, 2011.

²¹ One movement, made up mostly of young people, that was ubiquitous on the public scene was called ‘Europe has no alternative’.

In addition to the EU's economic power, it is exactly due to Serbia's geographical position that the country Serbia has far closer economic cooperation with the EU and its members than with any other partner, as pointed out by Ana Brnabić in her government programme proposal, quoted above:

Over 65% of foreign investments in the Republic of Serbia are investments from EU member states. If you look only at German companies operating in the Republic of Serbia, they currently employ around 78,000 people. Over 70% of our exports go to EU member countries. With the support of the EU, we build many infrastructure projects and implement public investments in schools, hospitals, gerontological centers and the like. Our citizens also benefit from favorable loans from European financial institutions, such as the EBRD, EIB and CEB, with which we finance the construction of a whole range of projects - from science and technology parks to sanitary landfills.²²

However, the awareness that there is no readiness in the European Union to admit Serbia in the foreseeable future, i.e. that there is no readiness to ever admit the country without setting unacceptable conditions for Serbia, the likes of which have never been applied to any other country that has joined the EC/EU,²³ led to a decrease in Euro-enthusiasm among citizens (as shown by the results of public opinion polls cited above) and made them look for alternatives. This phenomenon is not exclusive to Serbia. A similar loss of illusions about EU membership occurred, for instance, among a significant part of the citizens and state leadership of Turkey, especially after the failed coup attempt in July 2016.²⁴ Turkey has been a candidate for EU membership since 12 December 1999, after concluding the initial association agreement in 1963 and beginning the pre-accession negotiations on 3 October 2005.

When determining whether it makes sense at all to look for alternatives to Serbia's membership in the EU – and the EU's position makes us believe that it does –, and what those alternatives are, it is of particular importance to consider, on the one hand, Serbia's historical experience in positioning on the international economic and political scene and, on the other hand, the dynamics and perspectives of the further development of the European integration process and its positioning on the international scene in the context of globalisation.

In any case, it is certain that resorting to any alternative solution instead of full membership in the EU is not possible without the simultaneous close cooperation of Serbia with the European Union and its member states, both economically and in other areas, primarily due to the aforementioned geographical position of Serbia,

22 National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia, 2022.

23 Jovanović, 2015, pp. 38–39.

24 Müftüler-Baç, 2018, pp. 119–128.

and also because of the already existing close cooperation in the economic field, among others, as pointed out by Ana Brnabić in the quote above.

Therefore, an alternative to EU membership that makes sense to think about is a position of the Republic of Serbia that implies good relations and cooperation both with the European Union and its member states, as well as with the West in general, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, with other countries in the world, primarily those that increasingly present themselves as leading economic and political actors on the international scene, such as China, Russia, India, etc.

The historical experience of Serbia and the Serbian people in balancing between influences from the West and from the East, as well as the current determination for the military neutrality of Serbia, make our country, according to many, destined to continue building its future international position by cooperating in the most balanced way possible with countries and organisations from different parts of the world. Likewise, modern developments on the international scene, the re-establishment of the multipolar structure of the international community and the process of globalisation make it clear that the natural and correct choice is the commitment to balanced cooperation with countries and organisations from different parts of the world. In fact, this is not even a choice in the true sense of the word, since the absence of a sincere willingness from the part of the EU to admit Serbia into its ranks in due time, as well as under possible and acceptable conditions, leaves us no other options.

4. The historical experience of Serbia as “The East to (in) the West and the West to (in) the East”

The exit of the United Kingdom from the European Union after the referendum held in 2016 reminded many of the fact that the traditional geopolitical self-experiences of certain peoples during earlier centuries can have an impact on their perception of their own geopolitical position today and play, to a non-negligible extent, a defining role in major political decisions and in determining the political course of a nation. When considering the attitude of British political decision-makers and the general public towards European integration, not only at the moment of Brexit, but also before the British entry into the EC and later during the period of this country's membership in the EC/EU, there were numerous reminders and references, above all in the United Kingdom itself, to the traditional, centuries-old British idea of “exceptionalism”, or “splendid isolation”, as coined in Victorian times, which led to the distancing of Britain from continental Europe.²⁵ When Brexit became effective, the President of the European Commission, Ursula van der Leyen alluded to the similarity between the

25 Maccaferri, 2019, pp. 70–77 and 95–102.

centuries-old British approach to Europe and Britain's departure from the EU, stating: 'Our experience has taught us that strength does not lie in splendid isolation, but in our unique union.'²⁶

This example indicates that it is legitimate and sensible to look for the influence of political approaches to past alliances on the possible commitment of citizens and political circles from today's Serbia when looking for a possible alternative for EU membership in a situation where it seems that there is not enough readiness in the EU to accept Serbia as a member.

The statement that Serbia is 'the East to (in) the West and the West to (in) the East', as a description of both the geographical position and the civilizational affiliation and collective sense of identity of the Serbian people, was often quoted in public and attributed to the founder and first archbishop of the Serbian Orthodox Church from the 12th century, Rastko Nemanjić, also known as Saint Sava. Even though the attribution of these words to Saint Sava is incorrect and historically unfounded,²⁷ its wide acceptance and frequent use, while ignoring what East and West meant in the 12th century, speaks of how the citizens of Serbia perceive their position at the meeting point of great civilizational units. That Serbia is located on the border between civilizations, namely Western and Orthodox civilizations, is also stated by Samuel Huntington in his book *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. While Huntington classifies Serbia as part of the Orthodox civilization, the boundary between the Orthodox and Western civilizations runs along the western border of the Republic of Serbia with Bosnia and Herzegovina, where a large percentage of the population is Serbian, and Croatia.²⁸ In fact, if we start from the fact that religion is an important factor in determining civilizational affiliation, then it could be said that Serbia is at the place of a more complex civilizational encounter. On its territory, both in historical and current terms, three religions meet: Orthodox Christianity, Catholicism and Islam (in addition to other religious communities with a significantly smaller number of believers). Therefore, it can be said that Serbia is the meeting place of these three civilizational units, which is by no means without significance when it comes to understanding where the citizens stand on EU membership. The majority Orthodox Serbs are influenced by the EU's relationship with Russia, which is the largest Orthodox and the largest Slavic country, while the attitude of the Muslim population towards the EU is significantly influenced by the relationship between the EU and Turkey, which they perceive as their civilizational motherland.

26 Stone, 2020.

27 As the historian Radivoj Radić points out, in reference to the research of his senior colleague Sima Ćirković, a member of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, these words attributed to Rastko Nemanjić appeared for the first time in the short story "Sād" ("The Plant") from the short story collection "Brojanice Svetog Save" ("The rosaries of Saint Sava") by Milan D. Miletić, published in 1980, as a quote from a letter sent by Rastko Nemanjić to Bishop Irinej (unknown to historical science, i.e. non-existent at the time in question). It is, therefore, a matter of fiction. Radić, 2011.

28 Huntington, 1996, p. 27.

The influence of Orthodoxy on the self-awareness and identity of the Serbs was particularly amplified (even if the population may not be sufficiently aware of this circumstance) by the fact that during most of the centuries-long Turkish occupation, lasting from the end of the Serbian Despotate in 1459 until the establishment of the Principality of Serbia in 1815, there was no Serbian state, meaning that the Serbian people as a nation survived primarily thanks to the Orthodox Church, the only organisational form in which it was united and which, by the nature of things, had a decisive influence on the preservation of the national consciousness of the Serbs. Nevertheless, during the process of liberation and re-establishment of the Serbian state, during the 19th and early 20th centuries, the Serbian rulers, trying to free their emerging state from the Turkish civilizational influence as much as possible, built state institutions, a legal and political system, and other elements of social life according to Western models, primarily under Germanic (both Austrian and German) and French influence.

As a small nation that was in the process of freeing itself from the centuries-old occupation by the powerful Turkish Empire, which was mighty even in its weakened state, and re-establishing its statehood against the backdrop of various interests and influences, above all the interests of the great powers of the time, the Serbs had to seek alliance and support from some of the larger countries. Thus, during the entire 19th century, Serbia maneuvered and balanced between the influence of Russia on the one hand and Austria on the other. At the beginning of the 20th century, Russia's influence prevailed, and relations with the Austro-German bloc reached their lowest point during the First World War. After the October Revolution, there were practically no relations between Russia (within the USSR) and Serbia (within the Yugoslav state). The Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, or later the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, had close relations with other allied countries from the First World War, primarily France, but the highly educated Russian emigrants who fled from the revolutionary turmoil played a major role in the spiritual uplifting of the Serbian nation, which was decimated by the war. Only after the beginning of World War II, faced with the danger of a German attack (which occurred in the spring and early summer of 1941), did Yugoslavia and the USSR establish official relations in 1940 and early 1941.²⁹ After the Second World War and the short-lived Soviet domination, lasting until 1948, the socialist Yugoslav state pursued, for several decades, a policy of not joining any of the two established blocs in the bipolar world, playing a key role in the establishment and functioning of the Non-Aligned Movement³⁰ (which did not represent an obstacle to cooperation with the European Communities, with which the SFRY concluded trade agreements in 1970 and 1973, and a Cooperation Agreement in 1980, which entered into force in 1983 and resembled, in many ways,

29 See: Životić, 2020.

30 For detailed information on the Non-Aligned Movement and the position of Yugoslavia, see: Dimitrijević and Čavoški, 2021.

association agreements, even though it was not called that³¹). This policy of equidistance, both towards the East and the West, lasted until the dissolution of the SFRY during the last decade of the 20th century. This period was followed by the decade of wars and sanctions, when the majority of Serbian citizens felt resentment towards the West on the one hand, perceived as the instigator of wars and the culprit for the disintegration of the SFRY – and later, in 1999, as a direct and open enemy –, while also feeling disappointed due to the lack of Russian support.

All in all, it can be said that Serbia and the Serbian people have a long history of positioning in such a way that it is not completely tied to either the East or the West, but balancing between the influence of the two.

There are two additional points to make here. First, Serbia is the only country in the Region located in an area whose parts have been under two different civilizational influences for several centuries. The greater part of present-day Serbia, south of the Sava and the Danube, was under Turkish occupation for several centuries and suffered oriental influence, while Vojvodina, a territory north of the Sava and the Danube, was part of Austria, i.e. Austria-Hungary, during those same centuries, and was, therefore, under the civilising influence of the West, primarily Hungary. Also, of all the countries in the Region, only Serbia and Montenegro were ruled by national dynasties after liberation from Turkish occupation – all the other countries in the Region were ruled by one of the German dynasties.³²

Second, even though its current foreign policy priority is to approach the European Union with the aim of acquiring full membership, the Republic of Serbia has proclaimed and maintains a policy of military neutrality. The National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia, at the session held on 26 December 2007, adopted the „Resolution of the National Assembly on the Protection of the Sovereignty, Territorial Integrity and Constitutional Order of the Republic of Serbia”, which contains, in section 6, the following proclamation:

Due to the overall role of NATO, from the illegal bombing of Serbia in 1999 without a Security Council decision to Annex 11 of the rejected Ahtisaari plan, in which it is determined that NATO is the “final organ” of government in “independent Kosovo”, the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia makes a decision on declaring military neutrality of the Republic of Serbia in relation to the existing military alliances until the eventual calling of a referendum at which the final decision on the issue would be made.³³

31 See: Lopandić, 1985; Lopandić and Milikić, 2021, pp. 207–224.

32 Members of the German dynasties ruled most of the countries around us in the period after gaining independence from Turkey, namely the Wittelsbach and later Glücksburg dynasty in Greece, Battenberg and then Sachsen-Coburg and Gotha in Bulgaria, Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen in Romania and Wied-Neuwied in Albania. Rakić, 2020, pp. 553–582.

33 Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia, No. 125/2007.

Although there were complaints about the insufficient clarity of the term “military neutrality”, the said proclamation provides sufficient grounds for drawing conclusions about the meaning content the term and the key motivation behind the proclamation. Since it takes the form of a parliamentary resolution, it is obviously a political statement, given weight by the fact that it was adopted by the National Assembly, which is the highest representative body. The proclamation clearly states that the Republic of Serbia is politically determined not to enter into (existing) military alliances, which does not exclude cooperation, or even cooperation regulated by appropriate agreements – even though the neutral status would imply holding, to the greatest extent possible, balance in terms of the degree of cooperation with existing military alliances –; however, membership is excluded. Therefore, neutrality in this sense is not the same as “permanent neutrality” under international law, but simply a political determination, proclaimed unilaterally by a state. Military neutrality does not constrain Serbia in terms of defence and does not exclude the possibility of participation in wars. The quoted section of the Resolution foresees the way in which military neutrality can be ended – through a decision of the citizens by referendum. Finally, the proclamation explicitly indicates that the motive behind its adoption was the rejection of membership in NATO. The reason for this refusal is the aversion that exists in Serbia and among a large majority of the Serbian people towards NATO due to its overall hostile attitude towards the country during the Yugoslav crisis of the nineties, which culminated in NATO’s military intervention against the FR Yugoslavia in 1999, as well as open and active support and sponsorship provided by the most important NATO member states – and, indeed, the vast majority of members – to the self-proclaimed “independence” of Kosovo.

Wrapped in the cloak of total military neutrality in relation to all military alliances, Serbia’s rejection of NATO membership is not, in itself, an obstacle to EU membership. Out of the 27 current EU member states, only 22 are also members of NATO. Nevertheless, accession to NATO would certainly bring Serbia closer to the European Union, even if it is not a condition for EU membership. As we have seen, Serbia is committed to becoming a member of the EU in spite of regularly reaffirming the country’s military neutrality in a number of official documents and statements made by politicians. In fact, EU membership is one of the foreign (and internal) policy priorities of Serbia, as evidence by the statements of officials, a number of official documents and a series of practical actions. At the same time, the fact that Serbia has chosen not to be tied neither to the West (NATO being a Western organisation) nor to the East militarily contributes to the conviction of the citizens and political circles of Serbia, disappointed by the apparent unwillingness of the EU to admit Serbia into its membership at in the foreseeable future and without setting unacceptable conditions, that the position “somewhere in between”, balancing between the EU on the one hand and countries and organisations from other parts of the world on the other, is a realistic, achievable and valid alternative to the currently unattainable membership in the EU.

Naturally, the question arises as to how willing the European Union, as well as the USA and other Western countries, are going to accept the balancing position and policy of the Republic of Serbia in domains within the scope of EU competencies (excluding the military domain), and how much they will insist on the exclusive attachment to and cooperation with the West by Serbia, even without being a member of the EU. Publicly expressed dissatisfaction of EU officials and certain member states, as well as the USA, with Serbia's existing cooperation with China (not to mention Russia, especially since the EU started imposing sanctions on the Russian Federation, with the expectation that Serbia will join them by harmonising its external policy with the CFSP of the EU), indicate the absence or low level of such readiness. Nevertheless, the question arises as to how much the EU itself will be forced, owing to globalization, the creation of a multipolar world order, as well as other international processes and movements, to develop cooperation with countries from other parts of the world and to treat them as partners instead of competitors in the race for world supremacy, as has often been the case until now.

5. The European Union was created as an expression of the need for a common market and, as such, is it too narrow now?

We pointed out that the geographical position of Serbia (and the Western Balkans), as an island surrounded by the wide space of the European Union, naturally predisposes Serbia to develop good relations and close cooperation with it and its member states. The rationale of this belief becomes abundantly clear when one looks at the map of Europe (shown above).

However, if we look at the European Union, and even the whole of Europe, from a wider, global perspective, it also becomes clear that Europe is but a small cape of the larger Eurasian area, as Paul Valéry said,³⁴ not to mention the entire world. This is shown eloquently by the following map:

34 'L'Europe deviendra-t-elle ce qu'elle est en réalité, c'est-à-dire: un petit cap du continent asiatique?' Valéry, 2000, pp. 9–10.



The question arises as to where the EU stands in global perspective and what its future is when one takes into account the increasing interdependence and intertwining of ties and interests that comes with the intensifying process of globalization. In order to understand that, one must consider both the dynamics of the European integration process and the dynamics of globalisation, as well as the relationship between the two. Finally, Serbia and its European perspective, or the absence of that perspective, must also be interpreted in that context.

The Free Trade Agreement between China and Serbia, signed on 17 October 2023, was met with criticism and protests by pro-European circles in Serbia.³⁵ As Europe's enthusiasts in Serbia claim, our future is in the European Union, and therefore any close economic cooperation with China is unnecessary and undesirable. Moreover, they regard it as harmful, because it only serves China's interests, and not ours (interestingly, they fail to apply the same reasoning to a similar cooperation with the EU, which, they say, is in our interest too). This argument does not take into consideration the nature and dynamics of the European integration process and its relationship with wider phenomena, primarily in the context of globalisation. It is exactly this dynamic and relationship that shows us the necessity and inevitability of building strong and close economic relations with partners both in the West and in the East, especially with those with enormous and, therefore, unavoidable economic power.

In 2012, the European Union received the Nobel Peace Prize because, as announced by the Nobel Committee, '(t)he Union and its forerunners have for over

35 Both the European Union and the USA criticised the strengthening of economic cooperation between China and Serbia. Reporting on the newly concluded Free Trade Agreement, Radio Free Europe said: 'Due to the strengthening of cooperation with China, (Serbia, B.M.R.) has been repeatedly criticized by Brussels and Washington. Reacting to the signing of the Free Trade Agreement with China on October 17, the European Union announced that Serbia, as a candidate for EU membership, committed itself to withdraw 'from all bilateral free trade agreements' on the day of accession to the Union.' Radio Free Europe, 2023.

six decades contributed to the advancement of peace and reconciliation, democracy and human rights in Europe.³⁶ It is almost universally accepted that the European Communities (EC), which later grew into the EU, were created during the 1950s as a peace project, as a reaction to the sufferings of the Second World War and an attempt to prevent future divisions similar to those that had led to wartime devastation. The founders envisioned that the way to prevent those divisions would be to connect, join and integrate France and Germany first, and then other Western European countries. Indeed, the document that initiated that integration process, the Schumann Declaration of 9 May 1950, clearly indicated that achieving peace had been the key goal of the proposed project since the very beginning.³⁷

Nevertheless, the question arises as to how it is possible that, despite the fact that Europe has gone through many bloody wars over the centuries, it did not occur earlier that the integration of states and peoples represents a possible preventive measure against future divisions and conflicts. Part of the answer to that question is given by Shuman himself in the next sentence of the Declaration, where he invokes, through allusion, the French initiative for creation of a “European Federal Union” within the League of Nations,³⁸ and the author of that initiative, the Prime minister and Minister of foreign affairs of France, Aristide Briand, who presented his idea at the Assembly of the League of Nations on 5 September 1929, said that he embraced a centuries-old idea.³⁹ Indeed, there have been dozens of proponents of the idea of European integration among politicians, philosophers, artists, scientists, etc. since the Middle Ages. In Briand’s time, there was already a European integrationist movement, who adopted the title of a book by Gaston Riou, “Unite or die” (*S’unir ou mourir*).⁴⁰ The number of European integrationist projects always increased significantly after major war cataclysms, with clearly expressed pacifist tendencies.⁴¹

In light of all this, the question arises why the European integration project managed to take off only after the Second World War, and not before.

36 The Norwegian Nobel Committee, 2012.

37 ‘World peace cannot be safeguarded without the making of creative efforts proportionate to the dangers which threaten it. The contribution which an organised and living Europe can bring to civilisation is indispensable to the maintenance of peaceful relations.’ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the French Republic, 1950.

38 ‘In taking upon herself for more than 20 years the role of champion of a united Europe, France has always had as her essential aim the service of peace. A united Europe was not achieved and we had war.’ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the French Republic, 1950.

39 ‘I have associated myself during these last years with an active propaganda in favor of an idea which one wanted to qualify as generous, perhaps to dispense with qualifying it as imprudent. This idea, which was born many years ago, which has haunted the imagination of philosophers and poets, which has earned them what can be called successes in esteem, this idea has progressed in people’s minds by its own value. It ended up appearing as responding to a necessity. Propagandists have come together to spread it, to bring it further into the minds of nations, and I confess that I found myself among these propagandists.’ – Briand, 1929.

40 Riou, 1929.

41 See, for example: Rougemont, 1990; Vuyenne, 1964; Rakić, 2003.

The answer to this question lies within the content of that project. In particular, the European Communities were created as a Common Market of six Western European countries, the number of which increased over time, followed by a certain number of so-called common policies, primarily in the economic and social domain (common agricultural policy, common transport policy, common competition policy, common social policy, common/foreign/trade policy, etc.). Without denying the significant influence of the pacifist motivation, it can actually be concluded that the European Communities were created primarily as an expression of the needs of six highly developed Western European states, which had recovered from the war's destruction and had strengthened economically, thanks, to a large extent, to American aid through the Marshall Plan, for a market that was significantly wider than the individual national markets. As a consequence of the subsequent development of science, technique and technology, as well as the development of the economy, the markets of those countries became too narrow for the economic process at the time, which required a wider base for raw materials and wider opportunities for the placement of products. This also applies to the large countries of the initial European six (France, FR Germany and Italy), not to mention the Benelux countries. The opportunities offered by those countries and markets became too narrow for the economic needs of the time, especially compared to rivals on the world stage, such as the USA or the USSR.⁴²

The fact that the main reason for the creation of the European Communities was the need of the founding countries for a wider market, because the national markets were too narrow to meet the requirements of modern economy, is confirmed by the words of their creator, Jean Monnet, during the Second World War, in a speech held before the National Liberation Committee in Algiers on 5 August 1943:

The countries of Europe are too small to provide their peoples with the prosperity and social development they need. This presupposes that the States of Europe form a federation or a European entity that makes a common economic unit out of them.⁴³

Therefore, the European Communities were created as an economic integration organisation (for a long time, the term Common Market was used as a synonym for EC), which the European Union still is today, despite the expansion of competencies to non-economic domains. Efforts to expand the political dimension led to several major crises during the development of the European integration process, such as the failure to create the European Defence Community in the first half of the fifties, the failure to create the European Constitution in 2005, or Brexit, whose

42 At the conference at Cannes in January 1922 Briand privately told his colleagues: 'We will one day find ourselves sandwiched between two giants, Russia and the United States. This is why we must create a United States of Europe, at least in the economic field.' Laroche, 1957, p. 101; Boyce, 2012, pp. 71–93.

43 Monnet, 1943.

main advocates, like Nigel Farage, clearly and loudly claimed that the UK entered the Common Market by entering the EC and that it left the EU precisely because numerous political elements were grafted onto that market in an often undemocratic manner, which the British initially did not count on and which they did not want.⁴⁴

Looking a few centuries into the past, we see that the development of the economy, a consequence of progress in science and technology, i.e. the expansion of the economic process, led to the expansion of the scope of basic socio-political structures. Thus, the fiefs, which had been the dominant structures in the Middle Ages and, in a part, of the Modern Period, where almost all aspects of the citizens' life and the economic process took place, with relatively limited interactions, were replaced – thanks to the development of science and technology, the ensuing expansion of communication capabilities, and, in particular, the expansion of the scope in space of the economic process (primarily through the emergence of proto-industrialisation and then industrialisation – by the nation states that still dominate the geopolitical landscape. Due to the expansion of certain social functions, as a result of the development of science and technology across the borders of nation states, international organisations appeared in the 19th century. For a long time, until the League of Nations was founded in 1919, these existed only in domains where cross-border organisation was required by the development of science and technology and by the ensuing development of communications and economy, such as telegraphy, postal services, the protection of intellectual property, trade in certain products, etc.⁴⁵ Finally, the first and, so far, the most developed integration organisation, the EC/EU was created, mainly as a result of the development of science and technology and the consequential need and possibility to create a wider common market for a group of European states.⁴⁶

Looking at the present, it is obvious that the expansion of economic and social processes has continued, due to the development of science and technology. Nowadays, these historical trends and processes are accelerating considerably. We are witnessing and experiencing globalisation, when an ever-increasing number of social processes are raised to the global level. It is a social tendency that is independent of any individual or collective will; the next step in the process that led to the creation of nation states, international organisations and supranational organisations,

44 At the session of the European Parliament of 26 June 2016, immediately after the Brexit referendum, Nigel Farage addressed the European parliamentarians with the following words: '(...) the main reason the United Kingdom voted the way that it did is that you have by stealth, by deception, without ever telling the truth to the British or the rest of the peoples of Europe, you have imposed upon them a political union.' Farage, 2016, 1:18–1:41. At the session of the European Parliament of 2 February 2020, at the time of Britain's final exit from the EU, Farage said: 'Madam President, so this is it, the final chapter, the end of the road: a 47-year political experiment that the British, frankly, have never been very happy with. My mother and father signed up to a common market, not to a political union, not to flags, anthems, presidents – and now you even want your own army.' Farage, 2020, 0:00–0:22.

45 Dimitrijević and Račić, 2011, pp. 15–25.

46 Rakić and Vučić, 2014, pp. 66–146.

i.e. integrational organisations at the regional level, and this process is unstoppable.⁴⁷ The preservation of cultural diversity through opposing the abuses inherent to globalisation, such as economic exploitation and the imposition of cultural patterns of the stronger and more developed actors on the weaker and less developed societies is a necessity and a noble goal, pursued by the progressive part of humanity. However, opposing globalisation itself as a social phenomenon would be just as pointless as opposing the laws of nature.⁴⁸

In the conditions of globalisation, the EU market, despite its considerable expansion compared to the time when the EC was created, is becoming too narrow. Similar to the times when fiefdoms became too narrow for the economic processes, leading to the formation of nation states, national markets too became obsolete, leading to the creation of a Common Market. This process is going to continue. The European Union, which was created several decades ago and functioned for a long time in accordance with the aforementioned tendency to expand the scope of economic and other social processes, will have to adapt to the process of further expansion, as a result of which its space will become too narrow. Jean Monnet himself wrote about this in his Memoirs, drawing a parallel between the narrowness of sovereign states and the historical limitations of the EC itself:

47 Al-Rodhan and Stoudmann, 2006, pp. 1–21.

48 Mihailo Marković, a member of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, points to the need to separate the concept of globalisation from the concept of globalism: ‘The term “globalisation” today covers two very different meanings. One thing is scientific: as we have seen, objective social processes are increasingly acquiring, on the one hand, a comprehensive, global character. In this sense, globalisation refers to the development of modern technology, communication, scientific research, the unification of economic and political institutions and models in various parts of the world, the connection of different national and regional cultures and civilizations, the general degradation of the natural environment, etc.’

‘The second meaning is ideological and it prevails today. In this sense, the term is used to denote the increasing control over the world economy, politics and culture by the governments and multinational corporations of today’s sole superpower and its allies (the G-7 Group). They use the term “new world order” to justify and rationalize the dictatorial structure of relations between individual countries and regions. Such different meanings should not be attached to the same term, as this would cause very unwanted, in fact, deliberate confusion. We are talking about two different concepts that should be expressed using two different terms: “globalization”, which refers to the objective scientific, progressive concept of world integration, and ‘globalism’, which expresses the ideological and very regressive concept of the struggle for world domination. Any text that does not make this distinction remains at best confusing and contradictory, and at worst a deliberate rationalization of the greatest evil of today’s civilization.’ Marković, 2004, p. 32.

The sovereign nations of the past can no longer solve the problems of the present. And the [European] Community itself is only a stage on the way to the organised world of the future.⁴⁹

Therefore, the European Union will have to adapt to globalisation as an inevitable social phenomenon, and open up for closer and more intensive cooperation with other important (and less important) actors on the world stage, above all with China, the USA, Russia, India, Brazil and other countries worldwide. Any closure or attempt to unnaturally suppress the competition of other important actors, which today is expressed, above all, through the phobia of the Chinese economic boom, can only lead to the deepening of existing crises and the creation of new ones within the EU. Any attempt to turn the EU into some kind of exclusive club would be as unnatural as it was in the fifties of the last century, when it would have been unnatural to close France, Germany and other founders of the EC into their national frameworks.

It may appear so that some of the recent and current crises in the EU are the result of external factors. However, the fact is that practically all major crises that have shaken the European Union in recent times resulted from its collision with global phenomena. The economic crisis in the EU and, especially, the eurozone crisis was caused by the global economic crisis that erupted in 2008. The migrant crisis is of a transcontinental nature, being a global phenomenon in its roots, manifestations and consequences. The Covid crisis is a pandemic, and therefore a global phenomenon. The current energy crisis is also an integral part of a wider, global problem. The European Union obviously does not cope well with global phenomena and global crises. It should also be added that, despite all the expansions, the European Union has become, and is increasingly becoming, too narrow a framework for a number of economic functions, while it has not yet come close to establishing a unifying identity.⁵⁰

The question arises as to how Serbia should position itself in these conditions. It seems that, despite the fact that membership in the EU is the country's key declared commitment, Serbia has already taken up the position that the future will require her to hold. Despite opposition and pressure from the West, Serbia has significant economic cooperation with China, Russia, Turkey and other countries outside the EU, and the cooperation is becoming more and more intense. The obvious and increasing uncertainty of the European integration perspective for Serbia (or, even better, the increasingly clear absence of such a perspective) pushes us to cooperate with other economic forces. More and more citizens of Serbia believe that we should

49 Monnet, 1976, p. 617. The President of the European Commission, José Manuel Barroso, in his speech at the ceremony where of the Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to the European Union in 2012, after quoting Monnet's above words, spoke of the existence of awareness among European leaders in recent times about the need to include the EU in the process of globalisation based on the principles of responsibility and solidarity. Baroso, 2012.

50 Rakić and Vlajković, 2022, pp. 231–285.

be grateful to the European Union for making us act this way, since, by cooperating with actors from different parts of the world, in accordance with evident economic and other interests, we may be unconsciously positioning ourselves in a position that the future will require us to hold. Obeying this rule will increasingly prove necessary for the EU and its member states as well.

6. Concluding remarks

In summary, we can conclude that, when it comes to the European integration perspective of the Republic of Serbia, two things are certain, and everything else is tainted with uncertainty.

The following things are certain: (a) Serbia, as a European country that is completely surrounded by EU member states or states that aspire for membership, must imagine its future, by the nature of things, either as a member of the European Union or, if the European Union fails to express a will to admit Serbia (or if that will is tied to conditions that Serbia as a sovereign country cannot accept), in a very close relationship with the EU and its member states. For not only in terms of geography, but also in terms of cultural patterns and values, and in line with the current (and traditional) development of economic relations, Serbia belongs to Europe and is part of the European family of nations. (b) The modern world is characterised by the accelerated elevation of social functions to a global scope, and this process, known as globalisation, is unstoppable and is taking place ever faster. Regardless of the future direction of relations between the EU and Serbia, both of them, separately and together (to the extent that there is a commonality between them), will have to adapt to globalisation and seek the most favourable place in its system.

As shown, the certainties regarding the future of relations between the EU and Serbia are objective conditions and processes that are not directly dependent on the will and decisions of individuals.

Everything else, which depends on the will of individuals, seems pretty uncertain at this point. The position of EU decision-makers on whether, when and under what conditions they want Serbia to become a member of the EU is uncertain. It must not be forgotten that the admission of a new member state requires the consent of all existing member states. Even if it may seem that, for a moment, the will to accept Serbia as a member is dominant, the opposition of a single country, or their imposition of unacceptable conditions, will derail the entire project. What's more, the future of the EU itself is uncertain, especially when one takes into account the stated need for deep reform. Although the Serbian political elite is significantly dominated by a pro-European attitude and EU membership is declared to be the number one foreign policy goal, it is debatable who in the leading political circles in Serbia is ready to accept which of the proclaimed or implied conditions for Serbia's admission.

As for the mood of the population in Serbia, there is a clear trend of declining enthusiasm for the EU, and it is uncertain whether, when and how this unfavourable trend can change. Finally, the general geopolitical context, to the extent that it depends on the will of individuals, i.e. in those segments where human will can shape the ways the general trend is manifested, is itself full of uncertainty.

Given the presented state of affairs, it is difficult to draw clear and certain conclusions about the perspectives of Serbia's European path. Nevertheless, from the Serbian perspective, the fundamentally important issue is that we should work intensively and persistently to build our society in accordance with European models. On the one hand, we are part of Europe, and, on the other hand, these models and values will most certainly gain more and more supporters, as humanity is increasingly becoming one big family.

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