



## **EYES WIDE SHUT**

### **RUSSIAN SOFT POWER GAINING STRENGTH IN SERBIA – GOALS, INSTRUMENTS AND EFFECTS**



**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF THE CEAS STUDY**

**MAY 2016**

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CENTER FOR EURO-ATLANTIC STUDIES - CEAS

*progress, determination, influence*

*The integral version of this Study is published on May 9, 2016, the day marking the victory over Fascism in the Second World War. CEAS dedicates it to the legendary musician, the US Army Major Glenn Miller. His artistic legacy and life story are for us a real example of genuine power of attraction of values, policies and methods that we ourselves advocate.*

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

***For stability of the entire region, it is important to solve the problem in Macedonia as soon as possible. I hope that ideas of „Ukrainisation“ of this area will not pass, as nobody in the Balkans needs this.***

*Aleksandar Vučić, Prime Minister of Serbia, 16. 4. 2016.*

***I will strongly confront any attempt at destabilization in Serbia, scenarios from Macedonia and Ukraine.***

*Aleksandar Vučić, Prime Minister of Serbia, 26.4.2016.*

The primary goal of this Study is to present the public in Serbia with new trends of undemocratic operations of the Kremlin, articulated through the application of Russian soft power in Serbia. Instead of encountering resistance, the Kremlin was met with doors wide open by the Serbian government, itself not shying away from such methods of operation. Similar modes of operation of the Kremlin are seen in EU Member States and countries in the wider neighborhood of the Russian Federation. Their objectives and effects, and how to prevent and mediate them, are a topic debated on various level in the political West and elsewhere, for some years now. On the other hand, in Serbia, which is due to the specific circumstances very fertile ground for Kremlin's influence in many ways, this issue receives no attention, not even among democratically oriented individuals and structures.

The Study is also written with the goal to have it entirely, or at least the main conclusions and recommendations, read by those in the political West working on Serbia, the Western Balkans and Eastern Europe. Many of them themselves fall into the trap of the growingly successful *self-fulfilling* narrative on the „traditionally good Serbian-Russian relations“, and based on this assess the processes of Serbia's stabilization, democratization and European integration. The more official Belgrade flirts with the Kremlin, the more the political West brings down its standards, hoping to draw Serbia into its sphere. The growingly autocratic official Belgrade intentionally abuses this deference and lack of an adequate response of

the West, opening the doors wide for the growing influence of Kremlin's soft power, with which it shares several goals.

In this Study, we aim to present as many examples that confirm this thesis. Bearing in mind that in Serbia it is gaining ground, that is, that it possesses a power of attraction, one of the basic elements of the descriptive concept of soft power, in this Study, the term is not put in quotation marks.

The increased interest of the Russian Federation for the Western Balkans, and hence Serbia as well, developed in parallel with Russian preparations to react to developments in Euromaidan in Kiev, the war in east Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea. The Center for Euro-Atlantic Studies (CEAS) already in its previous studies referred to the comprehensive actions of Russia in Serbia, primarily through forms of hard power.

The aim of this Study, therefore, is not to present the different levels of international relations in which present-day Moscow is undoubtedly an indispensable actor for solving burning global and regional issues and challenges, debating whether Russia is a necessary or beneficial partner. Our intention was to analyze the goals, instruments and effects of Russian soft power in Serbia and, to an extent, the Western Balkans, and based on the findings gathered in the process of research to assess whether these are aligned with the public interests of the Republic of Serbia – stabilization, democratization, economic prosperity and Euro-Atlantic integrations. We estimated that the early parliamentary elections in Serbia, held in April 2016 and called during the process of research for the purpose of this Study, can serve as a very relevant, additional parameter in the presentation of conclusions and recommendations, which is why we decided to delay the publication of the final version of the Study.

Within this research, **109 organizations promoting different aspects of Serbian-Russian relations are mapped**, which need not be a bad this for Serbia in themselves. Among these there are: **10 organizations of Russian compatriots; 21 associations of citizens; 6 student organizations; 16 movements with political action; 14 political parties; 8 internet portals; 2 Russian organizations with branches in Serbia; 16 pro-**

**Kremlin media; 6 Russian media; 3 Russian foundations and 5 cultural and educational institutional, as well as two internet portals of unknown ownership.**

For the needs of this Study, two specific papers have been commissioned on the historical and economic relations between Serbia and Russia. A public opinion poll has also been carried on the perceptions and preferences of youth in Serbia on the United States of America, the European Union and Russia.

In parallel, the increasingly extensive literature of primarily think tanks and liberal experts on the nature of the Kremlin regime and the nature and channels of Russian soft power has been intensively followed, and dozens of interviews with relevant domestic and foreign actors have been carried out.

Due to potential disagreement on defining the concept of soft power, the methods and instruments of its realization, the Study also contains an extensive paragraph that chronologically lists key events in Serbian-Russia relations over the past several years.

Conclusions and recommendations are drawn based on all of the above.

**In brief, we believe that Serbia is sliding towards autocracy right under the nose of the political West which still fails to adequately react. It is in the interest of democratically oriented Serbian citizens, to have an end put to the policies described above, led solely by the interests of present-day official Belgrade to stay in power. It also, like the wider public in Serbia, and the political West, must be thrown out into the open in assessing whether Serbia is moving towards democracy or autocracy and what the role of the growing undemocratic Russian soft power is in this.**

The following paragraphs contain a brief analysis of the context and the above-mentioned conclusion elaborated in more detail.

There is a noticeable trend of increase of organizations increasingly advocating for Serbia's direct cooperation with Russia, and the abandonment of Serbia's proclaimed strategic path towards the European Union. They receive unusual and disproportionately – given their

reputation – large media space, but are also slowly, but certainly, becoming the „legitimate other side” in public debates.

The first openly pro-Kremlin structures, that are not cultural centers or various registration forms of the notorious organizations **Naši**, formally engaging methods of soft power, were formed in North Kosovo immediately following its declaration of independence in 2008. These became very active in 2012, during the protests at the so-called „barricades“. There are indications that already then they had logistic support of the so-called Serbian-Russian Humanitarian Center in Niš. Their growth in numbers in other parts of Serbia began in 2008, and intensively started gaining strength with the commencement of the process of negotiations on normalization of relations between Belgrade and Priština, under the auspices of the EU, in early 2013. The number of their activities significantly grew during 2015, when it became clear that Serbia will also open official negotiations with the EU, as well as with the intention of stronger cooperation with NATO within the Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP) made public.

Replacement of democracy with autocracy, under the current Russian model, is the main goal of Russian soft power in Serbia and the region. Another one is reduction of support for European integration, as well as discreditation of the concept of enlargement itself. The instruments of Russian soft power operate in a similar manner in the EU, undermining its functioning and basic principles, which is for some time now a mainstream issue almost entirely neglected in Serbia. Apart from weakening the EU and the transatlantic partnership, the goal of Russian soft power in Europe is to also demonstrate to the Russian public how modern democratic systems and other component of Western soft power are not the only attractive model most countries in Russia's wider neighborhood aspire towards, primarily the „Slavic and Orthodox brothers who have not yet become part of the special civilization which is a response to Western civilization“. Official Moscow explains that the allure the main components of Western soft power had in former Warsaw Pact countries, hence among „Slavic brothers“ who assumed the path of Euro-Atlantic integrations during the nineties, was without competition, as there was no adequate alternative at the time – a strong Russia.

It seems that, in addition to devolving democratic procedures and overthrowing support for European integration, particular priorities of Russian soft power in Serbia and the region are slowing down or stopping the process of normalization of relations between Belgrade and Prishtina, as well as a complete relativization and disruption of the process of transitional justice.

The issue of NATO enlargement in the Balkans, and especially the issue of Serbia's relations with NATO, is both a goal and a means of Russian soft power in our region, which, through frantic propaganda and defamation of protagonists of such policies, prevents rational discussion on Serbia-NATO relations, based on assessed security threats and challenges Serbia is faced with, as well as an assessment of capacities for an individual response or membership in available functional partnership that genuinely act as political-military alliances with a command structure, equipment, procedures and standards.

The main methods of Russian soft power in Serbia are: increasingly intensive bilateral relations at the highest level; strengthened cooperation between the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Russian Orthodox Church; propaganda spread through an increased number of media formats; establishment of new structures for stronger influence through the policy of compatriots; as well as an intensive increase in the number of other instruments of spreading Russian soft power such as citizen associations, student organizations and political movements.

Extremely interesting is the situation with the achievements of spreading Russian influence through culture. One gets the impression that in Serbia there are insufficient opportunities for the public to familiarize itself with the achievements of modern Russian production. How competitive and attractive Russian pop culture, TV production, as well as sports events are compared to those stemming from the political West is questionable. In Serbia, the protagonists of the importance of strengthening ties between Serbia and Russia mainly insist on (pre)Soviet achievements of Russian culture and the cultural-spiritual reach of the Russian Orthodox Church.

Especially interesting is the question how many young people, currently engaged through instruments of spreading Russian soft power, have at all an idea of modern Russia, its

economy, demographic situation, position in the international community, contemporary culture, and in particular of social stratification and decadency of transitional Moscow described, for example, by Peter Pomerancev in his book *Nothing is True and Everything is Possible*.

Publicly available program documents of organizations analyzed in this Study mainly fail to advocate explicitly for separation of powers, rule of law, and respect for individual and collective freedoms, human rights and secularism. Most of them are committed to discontinuing Serbia's European integration, or are extremely Eurosceptic. At the same time, they are formally extremely nationalistic. Although, according to their own statements, their most numerous members are young people, these organizations are formally predominantly conservative, although in practice certain confusion and hypocrisy is noted. These organizations often advocate adoption of sovereign and arbitrarily „nationally responsible“ policies, turning towards Russia as the most important political and economic partner, and bring back into the public space a division of citizens on patriots and traitors. Although often anti-modernization and anti-globalization minded, nearly all of them have several profiles on social media networks created in the political West. They rarely invite opponents to their events and their keynote speakers at such occasions are usually retired military personnel. They also rarely respond to calls to take part in events hosted by civil society organizations advocating the concept of open society, as they themselves do not care much for an exchange of ideas in a democratic environment. An exception are „media duels“ which they request, as these provide visibility and legitimacy, as well as the sharp, sometimes verbally violent, factually incorrect confrontations on social media networks.

Once again, it is important to emphasize the circumstances in which Russian soft power successfully animates young citizens in Serbia for the fulfillment of its goals, through perverting the concepts of non-violent changes of authoritarian regimes, civil society, human rights, transitional justice and other positive democratic achievements that Serbia has been slowly, painfully and expensively adopting since the Fifth of October changes in 2000, until a few years ago. This campaign of devolving the Fifth of October changes has now been joined by political parties, now formally pro-European orientation, who lost

power then, and who have returned successfully (for themselves) back to power in the last four years. Following the April elections, they will most likely remain in power again, which makes the whole situation all the more dangerous.

As demonstrated by the CEAS-IPSOS poll on perceptions and preferences of Serbia's youth on the USA, EU and Russia, commissioned the purpose of this Study, great confusion and damage has already been achieved. Young generations, with high unemployment rates, have a superficial perception of the concepts of human rights, rule of law, media freedoms, importance of separation of powers, and the like. They do not recognize the relations between a good, modern and democratically structured political system and long-term economic, social and political stability in a democratic environment, although they clearly realize where, for example, healthcare and education are better – in the political West.

In the life choices of young people (aged 18 to 35), „Western countries“ (the EU and USA), clearly dominate over Russia. The West dominates in terms of choices in the fields of entertainment and culture, choice of countries to work in, as well as use the educational and healthcare system, as well as the choice of countries to live in (emigrate to) and choice of country models to build Serbia upon. As much as 70 percent chose the „Western“ model as a model of building Serbia (59 percent chose EU Member States and 11 percent chose the USA), while 27 percent chose Russia.

The general perception on EU Member States and the USA is also far more positive than that of Russia. The majority of young people rates that in the EU and USA living standards are higher, the use of alternative energy sources is greater, media freedoms are stronger and that there is far more respect for human rights.

On the other hand, the conflict between rational and irrational is striking, apparently fed further through the lack of information young people have. Despite the dominantly more positive attitudes towards Western lifestyles, young people have positive expectations from a supposed alliance with Russia. Most of them support presence of Russian military bases in Serbia (57 percent) and supports Russian foreign policy (4 percent). Most of them also believe that an alliance with Russia would improve employment opportunities, travel

and education, increase foreign investment, political stability in the country and the region, and event democratization in the country, improving Serbia's image in the world.

The prolonger trend of constant decline in support for Serbia's European integration, which is a necessary but insufficient precondition for stabilization and democratization, is a result of joint action of Russian soft power as well as domestic, allegedly pro-European, politicians, who increasingly and more sharply criticize the EU, pervert the process of integration and lie citizens on its mechanisms and conditions, while at the same time referring to Russia almost exclusively in a positive manner. Public opinion in Serbia is dominantly created through a top-down approach, which is why the objectively greater challenges the EU and the world are faced with has far less influence on this concerning trend than the abovementioned two factors.

Serbia is actually, for four years now, being hit by a *perfect storm*. A synergy of direct Russian and domestic anti-democratic interests has emerged. As already mentioned, the present-day interest of official Moscow in the region is to stop the processes of stabilization and democratization, carried out through the processes of EU integrations of countries in the Western Balkans and their stronger cooperation with NATO. Moscow's aim is to also, through stopping the region's integration processes, weaken and discredit the EU and NATO, while increased cooperation with Russia is being imposed as an alternative. Moscow does this partially for domestic use as well, in order to demonstrate that present-day Russian politics is not entirely isolated in Europe and that it has the support of its Slavic and/or Orthodox „brothers“ in the Balkans.

On the other hand, parts of the political establishment in Serbia do not want European integration in reality, basically due to their authoritarian nature, as well as due to fear of losing their sources of income stemming from corruption, monopolies in dealings with governments and public enterprises, control of party-controlled security sector and judiciary, all of which the process of EU integration would make difficult, if not eliminate. In addition, there are sections in security structures and other parts of the government and society who see continuation of the process of EU integration as a threat that war crimes trials will continue and could reach them as well. In Serbia, these particular interests are

protected by assuring the West and voters that there is an intention for EU integration, because this brings international support and part of the votes due to the idea of more investments and a generally better standards, but that these will need to be slowed down or sacrificed because Serbia will never impose sanctions on Russia, which is at the same time presented as the key foreign policy partner. In parallel, as already highlighted, Serbian officials do not shy away from increasingly rough disqualifications of policies in the EU or its Members States, persistently repeating the mantra of the EU conditionality on Serbia, neglecting the fact that EU integration is not an obligation, but a democratically expressed will of citizens.

As the key argument for this excuse, a narrative on a *self-fulfilling prophecy* is created and intensely promoted, something that has already taken swing in public perception on the “traditionally good Serbian-Russian relations”, despite a lack of facts to support this; on their unquestionability as the backbone of a strong foreign policy and survival of Serbia in the harsh global world, exclusively under the protection of authoritative undemocratic Putin’s Russia. What is worrying is that this newly-created narrative is taken for granted also among Western actors working on Serbia and the region.

In parallel, the volume of economic exchange is exaggerated, as well as the size of grants Serbia allegedly receives from Russia, followed by the level of energy dependency on Russia, while at the same time failing to place the issue of energy efficiency and diversification as a priority and search for other alternatives. The fall of oil prices in the global market and effects of sanctions imposed on Russia for annexing Crimea and the war in eastern Ukraine, are barely considered, both by officials and the media. The state of affairs in the domestic economy is presented as better than it is, while expectations of international financial institutions are sporadically implemented.

One should not forget that Serbia has already, in its recent history, wrongly chosen the path of self-deception, rejecting to confront the need for democratization, acclaimed support for autocracy, nationalism, corruption, partitocracy, and devolution of independent institutions, suffocation of freedoms, false re-traditionalization and other identity confusions. The ruling political establishment now discredits all the good achievement of

the Fifth of October changes which at least carried Serbia out on the right path. The dangerous effects of Russia soft power in Serbia to date would not be of this extent were they not enabled also by ruling structures in Serbia, which is why they must urgently be taken into consideration and their prevention commenced.

Russian soft power is a perverted concept of Western soft power, but it is also very tempting in Serbia and is not being imposed by coercion, but through simply, often illegitimate and perhaps illegal, for example corruptive methods or operating in the grey legal zone. Tired citizens of a transitional country such as Serbia, without long-term experience of a life in democracy which could show them in practice all of its advantages, exposed to relentless propaganda and relativization of almost everything around themselves and a false illusion of modernization and freedom of choice, do not have to be coerced, but hand their citizen obligations and freedoms voluntarily back to authoritarian leaders and a party-led state. They exchange these freedoms for a chance to take part in the corruptive system, the right to arbitrarily judge who is a friend and who is an enemy of the state and society, what the national is and what is the state interest and what is acceptable and what is not.

Those who attempt to maintain the topic of effects of Russian soft power current, are exposed to cyberbullying on social media networks, insults in the media that do not hesitate from spreading lies, threats and other, to which the relevant state institutions fail to act, or act sporadically. It seems that this is, partly, also a result of strengthening Russian soft power in Serbia.

This is why it is especially worrying that democratic forces in Serbia lack the courage or interest to publicly speak on the fact that pro-Kremlin structures in Serbia mainly use illegitimate methods of action in the public sphere. They abuse the achieved level of freedoms, democratic practice and legal procedures in order to publicly advocate for their reduction. In doing so, they often act in the grey zone, without formal registration with the competent state bodies and prescribed legal channels of finance, completely opposite of activities of real civil society organizations in Serbia. It is absurd that in a country with confused identity, that is economically weak, based on skills and work capacity far from

global market needs, mainly Orthodox Serbia, bombed by NATO, and now taking part in negotiations on the new status of Kosovo under the auspices of the EU – hence much more susceptible to effects of Russian soft power than other countries in the region – its goals, instruments and results still pose as a political taboo subject.

Part of the responsibility for the current state of affairs falls on the Western international community as well, which was over the past several years, in order to achieve its particular interests, ready to ignore clear undemocratic trends, “cure” these with short-term measures such as support for political engineering that ungroundedly positions the ruling structure in the center of the ideological spectrum and present it as the only operational alternative. Or, in the worst case scenario, perhaps it will, itself, give up on support for democratizing the rest of the region and Serbia who perhaps have not entered Euro-Atlantic structures yet, focusing solely on maintaining stability, primarily through insisting on cooperation in the fight against terrorism and military cooperation.

Serbia and the Western international community therefore found themselves in a situation in which although Serbia is officially an EU Candidate Country, allow with their eyes wide shut the bringing of the processes of stabilization, democratization, regional cooperation and transitional justice – all of which are preconditions for the process of European integration – to an absurd.

The consequence of this situation is an orchestrated overthrow of support for European integration. It is a result of a “joint undemocratic and non-European venture” of domestic, allegedly pro-European structures in power, nationalistic anti-European opposition and influence of Russian soft power in Serbia. The goals, methods and instruments are becoming increasingly difficult to separate, as if they are organically growing together. Part of the responsibility also falls on the somewhat more sincere, pro-democratic options which are either ideologically incapable to form a position on Moscow’s current policy, or are blackmailed not to do so. The same goes for individuals who have the power to form public opinion in Serbia.

It is therefore not surprising that in April 2016, according to CESID research, as much as 71, 6 percent of respondents in Serbia believe EU and NATO membership is not good for

Serbia, while more than 55 percent of respondents stated Serbia should stick to Russia, although there was not definition of what this would specifically entitle.

The election list for MPs assembled for early parliamentary elections in Serbia held in April 2016 of the leading political party in Serbia – the Serbian Progressive Party, led by Aleksandar Vučić, the old and new Prime Minister of Serbia – with several openly pro-Kremlin persons at its top, pro-Kremlin coalition partners as well as the rhetoric in the campaign, all signaled current Moscow a shift in Serbia's foreign policy. A clear message was sent that in 2016 Belgrade, in addition to the until recently minority partner of the ruling party – Minister of Foreign Affairs until now, Ivica Dačić, President of the Socialist Party of Serbia- Moscow as another springboard. Such a shift obviously has significant support in the Serbian public, as evidenced by the election results of SNS, SPS and the more open pro-Kremlin election actors.

The conditions, in which as much as four openly pro-Kremlin election lists were formed, in addition to hundreds of other pro-Kremlin structures mapped in this Study, out of which two even passed the census and entered Parliament, also underline the fact that Prime Minister Vučić is increasingly turning Serbia towards Moscow.

After all, what do his increasingly often “warnings” that he will not allow for a “Ukrainian” scenario in Serbia mean? It is time to lay the cards on the table.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

During 2015-2016, the Western Balkans, and in Serbia specifically, under the noses of the domestic democratic public and the political West working on the Balkans and Serbia, witnessed a significant increase of Russian soft power. It rewrites history; perverts the concepts of democracy, civil society transitional justice and EU integration; demonizes NATO; successfully introduces propaganda in the media; establishes seemingly democratic structures; selects methods of operation that appear to be democratic but are not, abusing to this end the established levels of democratization in Serbia. The aim of Russian soft power in the entire region of the Western Balkans, and hence also in Serbia, is to:

destabilize the region, discredit the concept of non-violent change of authoritarian regimes, stop the processes of democratization and European integration, pervert the process of transitional justice and demonize cooperation or membership in NATO. At the same time, cooperation with Russia is successfully being presented as a functional alternative to the EU and NATO, although there are no mechanisms for this. Unlike other countries in the region, Russian soft power encounters a widely open door in Serbia for the fulfillment of its goals.

The majority of pro-Kremlin structures, new instruments of Russian soft power in Serbia, mapped within this Study, arose *under the radar* in recent years. Their common characteristics are: non-transparent organizational structures; lack of clearly presented sources of finance; advocacy for non-democratic acquis; disrespect for the principles of separation of powers, rule of law and protection of human rights; relativization or misrepresentation of the concepts of personal and collective freedoms; inaccurate interpretation of the state of affairs in the field of minority rights; and other forms of deceiving Serbian citizens.

Constructed self-fulfilling and factually inaccurate narratives are spread intentionally, on the nature of historical relations, volume of economic cooperation and possibilities for its increase. The future of cooperation between Serbia and the Russian Federation is wrongly compared with the process of European integration, which is completely different from any form of bilateral relations. Such inaccurate comparison is then offered as a legitimate alternative to the process of Serbia's European integration.

The pro-Kremlin opposition has successfully sneaked into almost all mainstream media in Serbia. It is implemented by both official Moscow and official Belgrade. Unfortunately, in the wider not the expert public is it faced with a critical review.

The rhetoric in the election campaign, the choice of key partners of ruling structures in the election process, and the results of early parliamentary elections in Serbia held in April 2016 themselves, unfortunately, confirm the thesis on increased influence of Russian soft power in Serbia, one of the main goals of which is discreditation and misinterpretation of the concept of the EU and its enlargement.

Despite evaluations of the European Commission, and the majority of Western media, parliamentary elections in Serbia did not see a victory of the pro-EU option, at least not in the sense of a genuine policy of commitment to Serbia's entry into the EU, which is also a result of Russian soft power and other aspects of Russian politics in Serbia and the Balkans.

There are fears that the political West is falling into its own self-fulfilling narrative on a pro-EU Serbia, for which it has less and less grounds for, while Serbia is slipping into autocracy which cannot be prevented by the formal process of negotiations by chapters, as in the obvious case of Turkey. It is necessary for the political West, along with other greater and more important challenges it is faced with, to realize that the current approach to Serbia, with eyes wide shut, is not in its interest either, nor is it in the interest of a democratic and stable Serbia and the Balkans.

The so-called progressive opposition in Serbia, quality media and civil society must also be much more precise on the values and foreign policy course of Serbia, nature of the process of EU integrations, importance of NATO integrations for Serbia and influence of official Moscow on the crumbling of democratic procedures and reduction of the level of freedoms in Serbia, which they themselves speak of. Newly established pro-democratic structures, supported by Western donors, mainly focus on the state of affairs in the media, or the fight against corruption, while foreign and security policy, including the increasingly undemocratic influence of the Kremlin are almost not analyzed at all, nor is official Belgrade confronted on this as it is over issues related to the state of the media, or corruption in society.

### What next?

The Western international community should stop lowering standards and expectations in the processes of integration and cooperation with Western Balkan countries as soon as possible, at the same time intensifying its support, instead of the increasingly evident trend of merely ticking the box in the realization of these processes. It must remain committed to its principles and promises related to the potential of achieving full membership in the EU and NATO, given that the candidate countries fulfill all the conditions regardless of new geopolitical trends and challenges it is faced with.

As is already the case in the political, much more stable West, in the Western Balkans, and in Serbia especially due to the specific circumstances Moscow is counting on, it is necessary to employ more resources aimed at preventing and reducing all negative effects of the penetration of Russian soft power and other forms of action of official Moscow. It would be good to encourage debates on internal and external threats to liberal democracies, in the region, reminding of their basic principles and accomplishments, which are increasingly being devolved or taken for granted.

In parallel, it is necessary to, as soon as possible:

- Ask Aleksandar Vučić and his old – and most likely new – ministers what exactly do they mean by the term “not allowing a Ukrainian scenario in Serbia”, and how specifically do they plan to prevent it;
- Examine the legality of the actions of newly formed pro-Kremlin structures and insist on their greater transparency;
- In accordance with the legislative framework of the Republic of Serbia, to respond to all complaints on the position of ethnic Russians in Serbia;
- Define a timeframe and an end game of the process of normalization of relations between Serbia and Kosovo, which caused significant leniency of the West towards the governments of Aleksandar Vučić, and which he expensively charged, strengthening his authoritarian rule;
- Offer stronger support for the processes of transitional justice, primarily trials before domestic courts, in order to cleanse the security sector of personnel that due to fear of justice turn towards official Moscow, and who are genuinely not interested in such processes;
- Focus, finally, on security sector reform, with an emphasis on democratic control. To this end, it is important to use all the mechanisms enabled through the Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP) between Serbia and NATO, as well as relevant chapters in the process of EU accession negotiations;

- Enter a wide public debate, on a rational basis, on the adoption of a new National security Strategy, which is also expected from Serbia within its process of negotiations with the EU through Chapter 31 – Foreign, security and Defense Policy.
- Adopt the already drafted Law on Reducing Risks from Natural and Other Disasters and Emergency Management, and therefore prevent non-transparent operations of the so-called Serbian-Russian Humanitarian Center;
- Encourage a wide debate on the increasing need of join action of the EU and NATO;
- Finally commence an internal debate on the need for Serbia's NATO membership.