



## **With all strength into reforms of the Russian-UAE kind**

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**Analysis of the Center for Euro-Atlantic Studies on the foreign policy course of Serbia in the election campaign of the Serbian Progressive Party for the 2014 parliamentary elections**

*„For the first time in modern Serbian history, and I am convinced that the people sees it, we avoid all the pitfalls that international politics sets before us smartly and wisely, because our one and only goal, is not to play heroes, and we have shown bravery many times, but to seek for ways to get the best for our people and our country, and not to suffer, but to work more and to live better.“*

**Aleksandar Vučić**

The election slogan of the First Deputy Prime Minister of Serbia, Aleksandar Vučić, is „With all strength into reforms“ („Svom snagom u reforme“).

The Center for Euro-Atlantic Studies from Belgrade believes what is urgently needed is a definition of the wider political and foreign policy framework in which the country wants to move in order to enable an understanding regarding what sort of reforms, including economic, it is about, as these certainly depend on whether they are being implemented in a country with clearly defined and segregated branches of power, in a free market environment, in an environment of rule of law and respect for human rights, in a country with strong democratic oversight of the security sector, a free civil society and media - or

not. None of this, so far, have we heard from the SNS yet, because of their perfidiousness, as well as the inertia of the mainly dependent and controlled media, but also because of the opportunism of the Western international community.

The start of Serbia's negotiations with the EU is an important and necessary step that can aid Serbia to achieve some of the abovementioned goals, but, unfortunately, it is not a strong enough framework for continuing intensive cooperation of Serbia with the EU and U.S. as hoped for by American officials in charge for the region, especially in the light of most recent developments in Ukraine, Bosnia and Bulgaria.

CEAS has already previously expressed its concern that the election campaign does not provide more and more clearly information on how [Serbia's foreign policy](#) will look like in the future, from regional, through security, to defense integrations, and who with would it dominantly develop in line with, all that the negotiation framework with the EU does not provide. One gets the impression that the authorities in Serbia fail to understand that a candidate-state form EU membership should harmonize its foreign policy views, if at all possible, with the harmonized positions of the EU. Hence, Vučić's latest statement on the evasion of the pitfalls of the international community must be clarified at once.

The matter of Kosovo, if not seen as *sui generis*, ties Serbia's hands, which the loud silence on developments in Ukraine, until recently, demonstrated.

Unfortunately, the escalation of the conflict in Ukraine, and primarily the Russian invasion of Crimea, have proven where, and with whom the state leadership lies, no matter what Vučić said about not taking sides in any conflict as Serbia's strategic commitment, where he really wants to see Serbia in the future, and the manner in which he wants to reign.

In the show Ćirilica, aired on March 3, 2014, on TV Happy, in which the only guest was Aleksandar Vučić, we finally got an answer of how this policy will look like – unfortunately, it is far even from the common position which the EU manages to form on some current challenges and crisis.

The CEAS team, considering Vučić's TV appearance very important for the future of Serbia, made a transcript of the most interesting parts of the show:

**Vučić:** I ask the people to understand why we do not align with either side, in any conflict in the world. Nowhere. So, our job is to protect ourselves, to develop our country and to think of our future. And I only ask you all, because I know what the opinion of the majority of people in Serbia is, and I know how emotionally people react. I only ask of the people to trust their leadership, to trust their country, that we are doing what is best for us. That we are protecting Serbia, not getting into conflicts...

**Marić:** What is political stability? We naively believed. It should be recognized, and on television, how stupid we were. For example, we believed that a multi-party democracy, or market, is a cure for everything. And we counted on having everything flourish, once parliamentarism and democracy are introduced in Serbia, and once our own defeat Milošević. And then we realized the paradox that what is more important than this fictitious democracy is political stability. We have the fantastic success of China under the Communist Party. We have the success of Turkey. We have the success of many countries, the „Asian Tigers“, where democracy is not as we imagined it. These are the countries that have achieved economic growth that no other country in transition has.

**Vučić:** Have a look today, if you will, of course that there are political games... In one day, Gazprom, Sberbank, and I do not know which other shares fell by 9 to 12 percent. In one day, all Ukrainian firms on the market dropped by 30, 35 percent. I only ask you, who in Serbia needs, who are those people, how did they decide to fight against us politically, by calling for such scenarios. Scenarios of demolishing political stability. Political stability is *conditio sine qua non*. Therefore, a condition without which nothing can be made, no economic reforms, investors cannot be attracted, and nothing can be done. And one bad news..

I was the one who said, when we were thinking about it, when a decision had to be made – it was 6:6 – at the Bureau meeting where a decision was made on the Gay Parade, which is exactly what I was thinking about. Not because I have anything against those people, I don't. Everyone should do as they wish, it's their right, this is a democratic society, and

everything is in order, it was even our obligation to provide security. But I was thinking about the image of a smashed Belgrade, that would sweep the world, one that we already had in 2010, if I am not mistaken.. Don't allow me, boys and girls, to lie, I think it was in 2010. If someone thinks that this is what Belgrade and Serbia needs one more, I thought that we do not need it, that we need to look at everything by ourselves and that the time will come when we are all more mature and more tolerant and can make this. We do not need such images for anything. We do not need them for anything. You have an opportunity now, there is ten days left until elections. Here you go people, win. In the most democratic way possible.

**Marić:** Why do they call upon a Serbian Spring, rather than going to the polls?

**Vučić:** Well, that is what I cannot understand. You know, there are a couple of things. Today, talking with Sheikh Mohammed, he told me, we were talking about the lack of principles in world politics. And then, of course, we concluded that we, as small countries, have to think of our own interests and our own people. And he told me, you know Aleksandar, look only at one thing, and this, Marić, you understand quite well, as I am sure most of the people present here in the studies, and people in Serbia. When it did not suit someone to have 25 million people gathered in Egypt – and in two, three days you had more than 25 million people gathering across all cities – then it was called a coup. And somewhere where it did fit, you did not have even 100 thousand people gathered, it is called a revolution. Therefore, those are principles...

**Marić:** Here we have a situation where rebels, protesters, in Crimea are extremists, and the freedom fighters are in the squares in Kiev.

**Vučić:** You noticed that, not me, but what I want to say is that we need to get out of those stories. Unfortunately, we have many negative experiences and it is clear that the principles of international public law are often violated, brutally violated, in the example of Serbia as well, and that we should stick to our own interests and understand that the world is dominated by interests. Hence, as the world is dominated by interests, and not principles, and not love, sorry dear friends, we love you a lot, we love you all a lot, but most in the world we love our country and we will stick with our country.

To this, the [statement](#) of Dušan Dajatović, SPS Vice President and Director of „Srbijagas“, should be added, who, on the occasion of the Russian invasion of Crimea, stated: „I do not think that Kosovo had the right to self-determination, because historically it is Serbian. On the other hand, Crimea is a historically Russian territory. The right to self-determination of Crimea depends on the people who live there. With this statement Putin only gave an example of how it is when double standards are applied.“

CEAS believes that a full deterioration in implementation of the Brussels Agreement will be reached if it is not immediately publicly said that mass crimes against civilians were committed in Kosovo, that the FRY Armed Forces planned ethnical cleansing of Albanian, that there was a multilateral decision that the atrocities must be stopped militarily, as well as that UN SC Resolution 1244, no matter how strongly Serbian officials deny, contains within itself provision from Rambouillet that envision a referendum in the case of failure of the negotiations. None of the mentioned is present in Crimea, aside from clear Russian aggression. This would even help to adequately calm tensions over the recently announced reform of the Kosovo Security Force into an armed force. The energetic Serbian opposition to it, and demands to have it discussed at a meeting of the UN Security Council, will also delay the implementation of the Brussels Agreement.

Having in mind all of this, as well as the [influence](#) that Russia articulates through the South Stream and the increasing cooperation of Russia in the defense field with Serbia, it is superfluous to characterize the current policy of the Serbian state leadership in the following manner: „Serbia’s performance in the Dialogue reflects its current leaders’ pragmatic approach to invigorating Serbia’s standing in the world, and this progress also makes it possible to deepen the U.S. bilateral relationship“, as it was by Hoyt Yee, Deputy Assistant Secretary at the Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs of the U.S. State Department, in his testimony before the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe (Helsinki Commission) of the U.S. Congress. CEAS expresses its concern that the entire situation in Serbia is seen only through the prism of the Brussels Agreement , and

believes more attention should also be paid to whether it is at all still being implemented in how, despite justifiable circumstances – early elections.

Furthermore, in Serbia, just as in the Republic of Srpska, there is no Euro-Atlantic aspiration that Yee talks about, which in the case of Montenegro „should only be slightly strengthened“ in order to accelerate the accession of Montenegro to NATO, and which is suggested as one of the response measures to the Russian invasion of Crimea. It is also dangerous to rely on having the aspiration towards EU membership solely enough to have the current and future (same) authorities in Serbia continue with reforms (which reforms?) and in the direction of even stronger cooperation with the EU and U.S. as Yee believes.

For a number of years it has precisely been the West that was unable to support the creation of a situation for a systemic and open debate in Serbia more strongly, which would see a fact-based argument on Atlanticism and potential NATO membership of Serbia, as well as the causes and consequences of the NATO bombing of FRY.

The relation towards the UAE, and most of all, the relation of Aleksandar Vučić towards Sheikh Mohammed, are completely non-transparent, like the condition under which Serbia allegedly obtains favorable loans. Having in mind that Vučić has gone much further in cooperation with Sheikh Mohammed from the economy, and that the two are adopting common positions on the developments in Egypt and Ukraine, that poses as a situation that needs to be considered seriously, not just in the light of challenges of Serbia's EU integration (state-land trade) and contracting of major projects without tender, but also in the light of defining the [real foreign policy course](#) that is looming, and which, unfortunately, is not Serbia in the West.

If the EU and U.S. want to see Serbia in the EU and, at least, as a NATO partner, and it is similar in the entire region, their further presence is an unquestionable condition and should not fall victim of the need for stronger presence in Ukraine. However, in order for this presence to give long-term expected results, it is time that the West stops fooling itself. In the case of Serbia, primarily when it comes to Aleksandar Vučić, but also Ivica Dačić. The

West should stop implementing its aspirations in the Western Balkans regions and in Serbia through a series of ad hoc, uncoordinated, too expensive crisis management measures, including the continuous reliance on compromised individuals instead of institutions. Often, in the accomplishment of these aspirations, support to those forces who – with all their objective and subjective shortcomings, still moved Serbia towards the right direction in the long-term compared to the present, and obviously the future, leadership – is withdrawn. In this way, the West would protect, and hopefully strengthen, its invested political credibility in the region, and in Serbia, and protect its unquestionably large and selfless investments in the strengthening of democratic processes, erection of independent institutions and civil society.

*Belgrade, March 7, 2014.*