

STRATEGIC CHALLENGES FOR SERBIA'S INTEGRATION WITH THE EUROPEAN UNION

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Abstract

Serbia began the process of integration with the European Union in 2003. After eleven years on a difficult road to the transformation of political and constitutional contexts, Serbia gained the chance to become a member of the Community. On the path to accession to the European Union, Serbia had to resolve some strategic challenges, of which the main one is the problem of regulating the political status of Kosovo.

The aim of this article is to indicate the position of Serbia and Kosovo's Albanians regarding the dispute over the political status of Kosovo, as well as examine the process of normalisation of relations between Serbia and Kosovo as a key mechanism for resolving the dispute. The challenges emerging for Serbia as a result of the negotiation process will be covered. The new dimension of Serbia's cooperation with Russia will also be analysed as one of the factors which may have a significant impact on the further dynamics of the process of Serbia's integration with the European Union.

Keywords: Serbia, challenges, European Union, Kosovo, Russia, political status, negotiations

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Introduction

Serbia was recognised² during the European Union (EU) summit in Thessaloniki as a potential candidate to be a member of the Community in 2003. Five years later, Serbia signed the Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA) and the Interim Agreement on Trade and Trade-related issues with the European Union. The Serbian government officially applied for European Union membership in 2009³. The political status of Kosovo during this period was still an unsolved problem that aroused controversy and caused increased tension between Serbs and Kosovo Albanians. Officially, Kosovo, in accordance with Resolution 1244 of the United Nations Security Council that specified the conditions for ending the war in Kosovo in 1999, had broad autonomy while remaining an integral part of the territory of Serbia, but administered by the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo⁴.

Nowadays, the dispute around the political status of Kosovo still remains unresolved and is a major challenge for Serbia regarding finalising the accession process with the European Union. Moreover, a number of doubts have been raised about the effectiveness of the mechanism of negotiations under the auspices of the EU to normalise the relations between Serbia and Kosovo, which seems to play the role of an indirect measure for resolving the problem of Kosovo's status. It appears that the result of the dialogue brought more new challenges for both Serbia and Kosovo in the regulation of relations between Belgrade and Pristina. Also, some questions regarding the future of Serbian policy in the process of association with the EU were raised by the intensification of Serbian cooperation with Russia in the military field.

2 This main problems from this study were presented in the article: M. Žakowska, *Political status of Kosovo as strategic challenge for Serbia's integration with the European Union*, [w:] *Србија и стратегијска раскрића Зборник радова. Научни скуп. Србија и стратегијска раскрића*, Г. Зековџ, М. Талијан, Београд 2016, p. 669-715.

3 European Commission, *European Neighborhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations, Serbia membership status*, http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/countries/detailed-country-information/serbia/index_en.htm [accessed: 3.08.2016].

4 United Nations, *Security Council Resolution 1244*, <https://daccess-ods.un.org/TMP/2528744.33994293.html> [accessed: 3.08.2016].

The Serbs' and Kosovo Albanians' positions regarding the political status of Kosovo

Resolution 1244 of the United Nations Security Council, established in 1999, including the arrangements of a solution to the problem of the political status of Kosovo, did not satisfy either the Serbs or Kosovo Albanians⁵. For the Serbs, it indicated that they could lose Kosovo in the future. The Serbs firmly rejected the possibility of such a scenario. Kosovo is considered by them as the cradle of their statehood. Serbs refer to Kosovo as the *Serbian Jerusalem* because it contains numerous medieval sacred sites. These represent for the Serbs symbols of the creation of the Serbian state, as well as play the role of important elements for defining their national identity. Therefore, Kosovo is perceived by Serbs as a holy place and it is defined by them as the *most precious Serbian word*⁶.

According to the Kosovo Albanians, Kosovo should be granted independence because of the disintegration of Yugoslavia that started in 1991, when the breakdown of the federation occurred. The conviction of Kosovo Albanians of the rightness for granting Kosovo independence strengthened the authoritarian policies of the Serbian authorities, particularly the experience of political discrimination that took place in the 90's during the reign of President Slobodan Milosevic. In response to the political repression, the Kosovo Albanians created a parallel state - the Republic of Kosovo, manifesting to the international community that they can organise an independently functioning state. From that moment, the independence of Kosovo was perceived by the Kosovo Albanians as the only possible solution to resolve the dispute with the Serbs over the political status of the region⁷. Therefore, the lack of a clear settlement of this problem in Resolution 1244 of UN Security Council intensified Kosovo Albanians' political frustrations. The final settlement of Kosovo's status was also not determined during the negotiations conducted from 2005 under the auspices of the United

5 For the details of the arrangements see: United Nations, *Security Council Resolution 1244*, op. cit.

6 M. Żakowska, *Uwarunkowania współczesnych konfliktów zbrojnych na przykładzie konfliktu serbsko-albańskiego w Kosowie*, Praca naukowo-badawcza, Akademia Obrony Narodowej, Warszawa 2016, pp. 58-61.

7 M. Żakowska, op. cit., pp. 82-87.

Nations and led first by Martii Ahtisaari (former President of Finland, Special UN Envoy for the future status process of Kosovo) and next by The Diplomatic Troika (consisted of diplomats of the European Union, United States and Russia)⁸. This standoff situation was for Kosovo Albanians a strong impulse to declare unilateral independence of Kosovo on 17 February 2008⁹.

The decision concerning the proclamation of sovereignty by Kosovo led not only to increased tensions in relations between Serbs and Kosovo Albanians, but made Serbia confront this new challenge in the process of integration with the European Union. The vast majority of the EU countries recognised Kosovo's independence¹⁰. This situation resulted in strong pressures on the authorities in Belgrade to also accept the Kosovo decision. However, the Serbian government, clinging to maintaining the territorial integrity of the state, was trying to prove the illegality of the Kosovo decision before the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in Hague. These actions were not successful as the ICJ stated, in its advisory opinion of 23 July 2010, that the decision on the declaration of independence of Kosovo is not contrary to the letter of international law¹¹. The Serbian Parliament, expressing their opposition to this opinion, adopted a resolution at an extraordinary meeting, which stated Serbia will never recognise Kosovo as an independent state¹².

Serbian authorities, continuing the protest against the proclamation of sovereignty by Kosovo, made a series of diplomatic efforts aimed at limiting the number of countries recognising Kosovo's independence, and blocking Kosovo's implementation of internal state policies. Moreover, the authorities in Belgrade refused to deal directly with the Republic of Kosovo, agreeing to contacts with Kosovo's government only through the mediation of an international representative

8 S. Geci, *Kosovo's Final Status Negotiation Process: A Way Out or Cul-de Sac*, pp. 29-60, [www.diplomacy.edu/sites/default/files/23082010103117Geci\(Library\)-1.pdf](http://www.diplomacy.edu/sites/default/files/23082010103117Geci(Library)-1.pdf) [accessed: 3.08.2016].

9 D. Bilefsky, *Kosovo Declares Its Independence From Serbia*, http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/18/world/europe/18kosovo.html?_r=0 [accessed: 3.08.2016].

10 In 2008 of all member states of the European Union only Spain, Greece, Cyprus, Slovakia and Romania opposed recognizing Kosovo, D. Bilefsky, *Kosovo Declares Its...*, op. cit.

11 International Court of Justice, *Reports of Judgments, Advisory Opinions and Orders*, www.icj-cij.org/docket/files/141/15987.pdf [accessed: 3.08.2016]. See also: *Kosovo Independence Move Not Illegal, say UN Court*, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-10730573> [accessed: 3.08.2016].

12 *Serbia vows never to recognize Kosovo's independence*, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/jul/27/serbia-parliament-kosovo-independence> [accessed: 3.08.2016].

of UNMIK and ELUEX¹³. The firm position of the Serbian government in dealing with Kosovo strengthened the attitude represented by the Kosovar political elite. In their opinion, Serbia should unequivocally accept Kosovo's independence, as well as agree to all issues concerning Kosovo including those on the status of the Serbian minority, which should be treated as internal affairs of the Kosovo state, and solved in accordance with the law applicable by the Kosovo government¹⁴.

The position of Serbia in relation to Kosovo has slowly changed under pressure from the state members of the European Union, which frequently pointed out to the Serbian policymakers that granting EU membership will depend on the normalisation of Serbian relations with Kosovo¹⁵.

The process of the normalisation of relations between Serbia and Kosovo

Under pressure from the European Union, Serbian authorities started talks in March 2011 with the representatives of Kosovo's government. The primary objective of the dialogue was to build confidence between the parties, solving everyday problems in the Serbian and Kosovo Albanian relationship, and reducing tensions in the Western Balkans¹⁶. The result of negotiations conducted in the

13 Serbia blocked the possibility of Kosovo's membership in international organisations. It also increased financial assistance to institutions organised by the Serbian minority in Kosovo in order to prevent the Kosovo authorities controlling the entire territory of the newly formed state. Moreover, it imposed a blockade on the movement of goods, and people with Kosovo documents. Serbian authorities refused to recognise documents issued by Kosovar authorities and to carry out flights to Kosovo over Serbian territory. M. Szpala, *Hostages to dialogue. The process of normalizing Serbian-Kosovar relations*, Center for Eastern Studies/Commentary, No 214, 2016, pp. 1-2.

14 Ibidem, p. 2.

15 S. Lehne, *Kosovo and Serbia: Toward a Normal Relationship*, p. 6, https://www.carnegieendowment.org/files/Kosovo_and_Serbia [accessed: 4.08.2016]; *Germany's Angela Merkel ties Serbian EU hopes to Kosovo*, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-14631297> [accessed: 4.08.2016]; *How to EU Brought Serbia and Kosovo to a Deal*, <http://carnegieeurope.eu/strategieurope/?fa=54403> [accessed: 4.08.2016]. See also: *Clinton Urges Serbia to Open Talks with Kosovo*, <http://www.voanews.com/content/clinton-praises-serbia-for-move-toward-west-104789299/127891.html> [accessed: 4.08.2016].

16 *Serbia-Kosovo talks open under Ashton's watch*, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/global-europe/news/serbia-kosovo-talks-open-under-ashton-s-watch/> [accessed: 4.08.2016].

period of March 2011 to February 2012 was the signing of a series of agreements (so-called Technical Agreement) including the agreement on public records, freedom of movement, mutual recognition of documents, free movement of goods, and the participation of Kosovo in regional forums¹⁷.

Among issues discussed during the negotiations, the problem of determination rules on the movement of goods brought most controversies and tensions. It was invoked by the actions of Serbia, which refused to import goods with Kosovo customs stamps into its territory and banned transit of Kosovo goods through the territory of Serbia. In response to the Belgrade decision, Kosovo's authorities introduced a similar embargo on Serbian goods. In addition, the government in Pristina ordered deployment of special police units on the border with Serbia to enforce the embargo. This decision led to an outbreak of numerous protests and riots organised by Serbs living in northern Kosovo, which were eventually stopped by the intervention of KFOR¹⁸. The disputed issue of the movement of goods was finally resolved due to an agreement signed by both Belgrade and Pristina authorities, in which it was stated that *the sides will make every possible effort to ensure free movement of goods in accordance with CEFTA. The Customs stamps, stating 'Kosovo Customs', as confirmed to all CEFTA parties, will be accepted. All accompanying documents and communication will also reflect this usage*¹⁹. Under these assumptions, Serbia allowed the transport of goods labelled with Kosovo customs stamps without signs of Kosovo's independence²⁰.

The next important step in the process of normalisation of the relations between Serbia and Kosovo was signed in December 2012. It was the Integrated Boundary Management of the administrative crossing points agreement (so-called integrated border management agreement, IBM) and the creation of offices of permanent envoys agreement (so-called liaison officers agreement). The first one

¹⁷ *Key agreements reached in Serbia/Kosovo dialogue*, <http://www.eubusiness.com/news-eu/balkans-us-serbia.kd1> [accessed: 4.08.2016]. For the contents of agreements see: *Technical Agreements*, <http://www.kim.gov.rs/eng/pregovaracki-proces.php> [accessed: 4.08.2016].

¹⁸ P. Pacuła, *Kosovo: problemy teraźniejszości, wyzwania przyszłości*, Bezpieczeństwo Narodowe, No. 22, II-2012, p. 117. See also: *Kosovo tense after deadly clash on Serbian border*, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-14303165> [accessed: 5.08.2016].

¹⁹ *Customs stamp agreement*, <http://www.kim.gov.rs/eng/p09.php> [accessed: 5.08.2016].

²⁰ K. Hoxha, *Customs Stamps: Serbia's Choice, Kosovo's Chance*, <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/blog/custom-stamps-serbia-s-choice-kosovo-s-chance> [accessed: 5.08.2016].

stated the rules for establishing joint integrated posts at all their common IBM crossing points and overseeing the Serb-Kosovo border with the participation of officials and police officers from Serbia, Kosovo and EULEX. It also covered matters of location and the nature of the facilities of crossing points and their opening hours²¹. According to the second agreement, the authorities of Serbia and Kosovo agreed to establish offices of liaison officers, which would be located in EU offices in Belgrade and Pristina. The liaison officers are in charge of monitoring implementation of key agreements reached between Belgrade and Pristina in the Brussels-led dialogue as well as addressing any problems that may arise²². Pristina called the officers *ambassadors* but Belgrade rejected this term because Serbia did not recognize Kosovo as a state²³.

In the view of the European Union, the agreements were seen as significant progress in the normalisation of Serbia's relations with Kosovo. Therefore, the European Council decided to grant Serbia the status of a membership candidate²⁴. The EU's decision was the culmination of observations of the Serbian process of reform and change in foreign policy. It was aimed at adapting the Serbian law to the EU requirements and to fulfill the political criteria for accession. By receiving the European Union candidate status, Serbia had the opportunity to obtain more financial resources under the EU pre-accession funds. This new position in the integration process also reinforced the image of Serbia in the international community²⁵.

The turning point in relations between Serbia and Kosovo was signing the First Agreement of Principles Governing the Normalization of Relations (called the

21 *Integrated boundary management of the administrative crossing points agreement*, Paragraph 3, 4, 5 <http://www.kim.gov.rs/eng/p13.php> [accessed: 5.08.2016]. See also: European Forum for Democracy and Solidarity, *Belgrade and Pristina reach deal over border*, http://www.europeanforum.net/news/1298/belgrade_and_pristina_reach_deal_over_border [accessed: 5.08.2016].

22 B. Barlovac, *Kosovo, Serbia Liaison Officers to Start Work*, <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/kosovo-and-serbia-liaison-officers-ready-to-start> [accessed: 5.08.2016].

23 Ibidem.

24 European Council, *Serbia is granted EU candidate status*, http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/.../128445.pdf [accessed: 5.08.2016].

25 M. Szpala, *Joy overshadowed by crisis. Serbia has been granted EU candidate status*, Center for Eastern Studies, <http://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2012-03-07/joy-overshadowed-crisis-serbia-has-been-granted-eu-candidate-status> [accessed: 5.08.2016].

Brussels Agreement) on 19 April 2013²⁶. The main objective of this agreement was to facilitate integration of the Serbian minority living in municipalities in northern Kosovo with the administrative system of Kosovo by creating an Association/Community of Serbian-majority municipalities in Kosovo (called the Association of Serbian Municipalities) and providing certain guarantees for Kosovo Serbs. The Association of Serbian Municipalities had extensive rights in the areas of economic development, education, health, urban and rural planning, and administration structure (President, vice President, Assembly, Council). According to this agreement, all police in northern Kosovo should be integrated in the Kosovo Police framework and the ethnic composition of the local police in the north would reflect the ethnic composition in this area. A Police Regional Commander for the four northern Serbian majority municipalities was appointed, which was to be a Kosovo Serb selected by the Kosovo Ministry of Interior from a list of nominees provided by the mayors of the four Serb municipalities in the north. Likewise, the judicial system was determined to function, which was going to operate under Kosovo's legal framework. And the Appellate Court in Pristina would have a panel composed of a majority of Kosovo Serb judges to deal with all Kosovo Serb-majority municipalities. The division of this court would be located in northern Mitrovica (so-called Mitrovica District Court)²⁷. The leading negotiator, Catherine Ashton, the European Union High Representative, testified that through this accord both of the participants *step away from the past*, and take *steps closer to Europe*²⁸. *Serbia and Kosovo's authorities committed in this accord that neither side will block, or encourage others to block, the other side's progress in their respective EU path*²⁹.

The Brussels Agreement was overwhelmingly approved by Kosovo's parliament. But in Serbia it met with strong opposition from the government party (i.a. Democratic Party of Serbia), the Holy Synod of the Serbian Orthodox Church and many Kosovo Serb leaders. Several thousand Serbs held peaceful demonstrations

²⁶ *Serbia and Kosovo sign historic agreement*, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/apr/30/serbia-kosovo-historic-agreement-brussels> [accessed: 6.08.2016].

²⁷ See: *First Agreement of Principles Governing the Normalization of Relations*, <http://www.kim.gov.rs/eng/p03.php> [accessed: 5.08.2016].

²⁸ *Ashton Says Serbia, Kosovo Reach Deal*, <http://www.rferl.org/content/eu-serbia-kosovo-talks/24962271.html> [accessed: 6.08.2016].

²⁹ *First Agreement of Principles Governing the Normalization of Relations*, op. cit.

against the accord in Belgrade and north Kosovo. Finally, the Serbian parliament approved the government's report on the negotiations with Kosovo but had not ratified the agreement into a binding law yet³⁰. The Serbian government started implementation of the arrangements of this agreement by the dissolution of the Serbian minority assemblies it had created in northern Kosovo. In this manner, Belgrade showed that it allowed integration of the Kosovo Serbian minority into the Kosovo population. In response, the Kosovo parliament passed an amnesty law pardoning any past acts of resistance to Kosovo authorities in order to facilitate the assimilation of the Serbian minority in the north into Kosovo society³¹.

The constructive implementation of the Brussels Agreement initiated the European Union to launch accession talks with Belgrade³², and also to start the negotiations of the Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA) with Kosovo³³. In December 2015, the EU opened the first two of the thirty-five chapters in the accession negotiations with Serbia, namely Chapter 32 on financial control, and Chapter 35 on the normalisation of relations with Kosovo³⁴. In the common position regarding Chapter 35, the EU indicated that *the advancement of Serbia's EU accession under negotiations will be guided by Serbia's progress in preparing*

30 S. Woehrel, *Kosovo: Current Issues and U.S. Policy*, pp. 4-5, fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/142748.pdf [accessed: 6.08.2016].

31 *Dacic: First the agreement and the EU accession*, <http://www.balkan.eu.com/dacic-agreement-eu-accession/> [accessed: 6.08.2016]; *Kosovo Parliament to Ratify EULEX Deal*, <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/eu-kosovo-deal-to-be-ratified-by-the-parliament> [accessed:6.08.2016]; *Serbia Pulls Plug on North Kosovo Assemblies*, <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/belgrade-dismantles-north-kosovo-assemblies> [accessed: 6.08.2016]; *Kosovo President Approves Controversial Amnesty Law*, <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/kosovo-president-decrees-amnesty-law> [accessed: 6.08.2016].

32 *EU to launch accession talks with Serbia in January*, http://www.europeanforum.net/news/1832/eu_to_launch_accession_talks_with_serbia_in_january [accessed: 6.08.2016], *Serbia starts EU membership talks*, <https://euobserver.com/enlargement/122809> [accessed: 6.08.2016]

33 *EU starts the Stabilisation and Association Agreement negotiations with Kosovo*, http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-13-938_en.htm [accessed: 6.08.2016].

34 M. Szpala, *The European Union opens the first chapters in negotiations with Serbia*, <http://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2015-12-16/european-union-opens-first-chapters-negotiations-serbia> [accessed: 6.08.2016].

*for accession and measured in particular against Serbia's continued engagement towards a visible and sustainable improvement in relations with Kosovo, as well as the other requirements contained in point 23 of the Negotiating Framework*³⁵.

Challenges in the normalisation of relations between Serbia and Kosovo

The government led by Prime Minister Aleksander Vučić declared after parliamentary election in April 2016 it would continue the pro-European politics of Serbia and keep working on normalisation of relations with Kosovo³⁶. In order to fulfil the political promises, Serbian authorities will have to confront several challenges. One of them is still unresolved - the problem of Kosovo political status. Among Serbian policy makers there is a visible dissonance with regard to determining a clear position on this issue. They, on the one hand support a pro-European policy of dialogue with Kosovo, which suggests that they are ready to acknowledge its independence, while concurrently, in official statements, they emphasise that Kosovo is part of Serbia. In the opinion of Przemysław Pacuła, this ambiguous stance stems from the fact that *the waiver of the right to the province of symbolic meaning in the history of Serbia is a decision of great political weight*³⁷. *Pacuła explains that despite the pro-European oriented politicians understanding the irreversibility of the secession of Kosovo and the need to settle the issue as a condition sine qua non for future accession to the European Union, they do not want to incur the political costs of its adoption*³⁸.

In addition, finding a solution to Kosovo's status hinders the contradictory view on this matter presented by the Serbian government, pro-European-oriented and

³⁵ Conference on Accession to the European Union – Serbia, *European Union Common Position. Chapter 35*, Brussels, 30 November 2015, p. 2, <http://www.kord-kim.gov.rs/eng/pozicija-za-poglavlje-35.php> [accessed: 6.08.2016].

³⁶ *Serbia's PM wins election in endorsement of pro-EU policy*, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/apr/24/serbs-vote-in-election-seen-as-test-of-pms-pro-eu-path> [accessed: 7.08.2016]; *Serbia election tests pro-EU course of PM Vucic*, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-36112451> [accessed: 7.08.2016].

³⁷ P. Pacuła, *Kosovo: problem terażniejszości, wyzwania przyszłości...*, op. cit., p. 122.

³⁸ Ibidem.

ultra-nationalist opposition, which rejects integration with the EU and demands closer ties with Russia. Also, it is worth emphasising the potential option of recognition of Kosovo independence is firmly rejected by President Tomislav Nikolić. He claims that any solution regarding Kosovo's political status should be decided by referendum³⁹. Nikolić has repeatedly stressed in official statements a great concern that achieving EU membership may depend on the recognition of the sovereignty of Kosovo. He explained his view as follows: *I hope that the recognition of (independence) Kosovo will never be a precondition for Serbia's accession to the European Union, but if it is a condition of our membership in the EU, they don't have to accept us*⁴⁰. Also, Nikolić stressed that, *if during the accession negotiation process, there were situations when the Serbian government would be forced to recognise the independence of Kosovo, Serbia would refuse to be an EU member at this moment and it would be the only country reformed by 34 (out of 35) of the accession negotiations chapters*⁴¹. However, a different opinion regarding acknowledgement of Kosovo's independence by Serbia was presented by the authorities in Pristina. In their view, Serbia has already recognised Kosovo's sovereignty by signing, on 26 August 2015, a series of agreements in key areas including energy, telecommunications, establishment of the Association/Community of Serb majority municipalities (the so-called Association of Serbian Municipalities), and regarding reopening free movement over the bridge in Mitrovica (the so-called Peace Park)⁴².

39 L. Norman, *Serbia President Says Won't Recognize Kosovo as Price to Join EU*, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052702303796404579101491658824468>, [accessed: 7.08.2016]; I. Nikolic, *Serbian President Demands Kosovo Referendum*, <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/serbian-president-calls-for-kosovo-referendum> [accessed: 7.08.2016].

40 *Serbia: Jesli Kosowo jest warunkiem, nie musza nas przyjmowac do UE*, <http://balkanistyka.org/serbia-jesli-kosowo-jest-warunkiem-nie-musza-nas-przymowac-do-ue/> [accessed: 7.08.2016].

41 Ibidem.

42 *Four agreements signed during Kosovo talks round*, http://www.b92.net/eng/news/politics.php?yyyy=2015&mm=08&dd=25&nav_id=95216 [accessed: 7.08.2016]. See terms of *Arrangements regarding energy*, <http://www.kim.gov.rs/eng/p04.php> [accessed: 7.08.2016]; *Arrangements regarding telecommunications*, <http://www.kim.gov.rs/eng/p05.php> [accessed: 7.08.2016]; *Association/Community of Serb majority municipalities in Kosovo – general principles/main elements*, <http://www.kim.gov.rs/eng/p17.php> [accessed: 7.08.2016]; *WG Freedom of Movement/Bridge Conclusions*, 25 August 2015/2, <http://www.kim.gov.rs/eng/p18.php> [accessed: 7.08.2016].

The series of August 2015 agreements have been heralded by the EU as a *landmark achievement*⁴³. For the Serbia and Kosovo governments, the biggest challenge was implementation of the accord's Association of Serbian Municipalities. Under the deal, the rules of establishment of the Association, a particularly defined legal framework, organisational structure, relations with central authorities, legal capacity, budget and financial support were laid down. Also, it was set out that areas of activities conducted by Kosovo Serbs may be financed by Serbian authorities. The Association will have its own institutions and will be entitled to have its own official symbols (coat of arms and flag), in accordance with Kosovo law⁴⁴.

Kosovo's opposition was strongly against adoption of this agreement by the parliament. In their view, the accord was giving too much freedom to the Serbian minority depriving the Kosovo authorities of control over the areas inhabited by the Serbian minority and preventing efficient management of the state. The opposition claimed that implementing this agreement could lead Serbia to obtaining control over Kosovo's internal policy. Therefore, their representatives, in order to prevent adoption of the accord, repeatedly paralysed the work of the parliament by firing tear gas. Also, at the opposition's request, the agreement was contested by the Kosovo Constitutional Court, which found that some of the regulations are inconsistent with the Kosovo constitution. Moreover, many Kosovo Albanians were against adoption of this accord, who organised a series of demonstrations in which they often expressed support for the opposition stance⁴⁵.

Nevertheless, the ending of this dispute and constructive implementation of agreement is awaited by the Serbian minority in Kosovo. They expect that establishment of the Association will stabilise and normalise their life, give them

43 *Kosovo and Serbia sign 'landmark' agreements*, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34059497> [accessed: 7.08.2016].

44 Association Community of Serb majority municipalities in Kosovo – general principles main elements, eeas.europa.eu/statements-eeas/docs/150825_02_association [accessed: 8.08.2016]. See also: M.J. Warren, A. Zeqiri, Decentralization or Destabilization? Striking an Ethnic Balance in the Balkans, <https://theglobalobservatory.org/2016/07/kosovo-serbian-minority-decentralization-balkans/> [accessed: 8.08.2016].

45 *Kosovo Opposition Builds Resistance to Brussels Agreements*, <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/kosovo-opposition-swell-ranks-against-brussels-agreements-01-12-2016#sthash.dHnVGVne.dpuf> [accessed: 8.08.2016]; *Kosovo, Serbia Failing to Implement Normalization Deal*, <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/kosovo-serbia-failing-to-implement-normalisation-deal-12-01-2015> [accessed: 8.08.2016]; G. Delauney, *Why Kosovo's opposition MPs are tear-gassing parliament*, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34986909> [accessed: 8.08.2016].

a sense of security, both economic and personal, and lead them to preserve their national identity. Currently, the Serbian minority is in an ambiguous situation because Serbian state institutions representing them have been dissolved by the Brussels Agreement and no useful counterparts have been established in their place. Besides, Kosovo's institutions are not prepared yet for the integration of Serbs into society in the way that allows them to preserve their national identity⁴⁶. In order to resolve this problem, Serbian and Kosovo authorities need to start effective cooperation of implementing legal acts. Prolonging the dispute over the Association's establishment will cause a slow movement downwards to undermining the other, already adopted agreements. Furthermore, this situation could generate tensions between the Serbs and Kosovo Albanians and lead to civilian unrest.

A significant impact on the advancement in relations between Serbia and Kosovo could also come from the lack of a clear interpretation by the Serbs and Kosovo's government of the arrangements for personal ID-cards. The debate about this issue started at a time when Kosovo's authorities decided to close the border to residents of Kosovo who used Serbian parallel structures' ID-cards⁴⁷. The decision sparked a series of protests of the Serbian minority in Kosovo. After difficult negotiations mediated by European Union representatives, delegations from Belgrade and Pristina worked out a solution for monitoring traffic on the Serbian-Kosovo border. However, both parties presented the outcome of this agreement in differing ways, which raised some doubts about how it could be implemented. Kosovo's Minister for Dialogue, Edita Tahiri, said that the European Union had introduced a transitional period for the cancellation of Serbian documents, and during this time Serbs living in Kosovo had to apply for their Kosovar counterparts. The Director of the Serbian Government's Office for Kosovo and Metohija Marko Durić denied this information, stating that the Serbian identity cards would continue to be valid on the territory of Kosovo⁴⁸. According to Tahiri, more than

⁴⁶ *Kosovo: Serbowie dalej czekają na utworzenie Związku Gmin Serbskich*, <http://balkanistyka.org/kosowo-serbowie-dalej-czekaja-na-utworzenie-zwiazku-gmin-serbskich/> [accessed: 8.08.2016].

⁴⁷ *Kosovo bans usage of Serbian parallel ID cards*, <http://prishtinainsight.com/kosovo-bans-usage-serbian-parallel-id-cards/> [accessed: 9.08.2016].

⁴⁸ *Kosovo: Nie będzie jednak blokady granic*, <http://balkanistyka.org/kosowo-nie-bedzie-jednak-blokady-granic/> [accessed: 9.08.2016].

90.000 Kosovo Serbs have already obtained ID-cards of the Republic of Kosovo, which shows increasing trends of their reintegration in the Kosovo system. She also claims that the EU is going to propose some solutions that will bring an end to illegal ID-cards through the transitory process⁴⁹.

However, it has been noticed that some Kosovo Serbs avoid getting Kosovo ID-cards because they are more interested in receiving Russian citizenship. Around 20 thousand of the 70 thousand Serbs living in Kosovo have already applied for Russian passports⁵⁰. These actions are motivated mainly by the security dilemma. Kosovo Serbs are afraid the Serbian government will recognise the independence of Kosovo in exchange for Serbia's membership of the EU. In this situation, they will be left without state protection. They view Russia as a strong defender of their rights against the Kosovo Albanians⁵¹. Russian migration specialist Viatcheslav Postavnin points out that in the case of Kosovo Serbs who become Russian citizens, Moscow would have an obligation to protect them, possibly by sending military forces into the Balkans⁵².

Another issue stimulating the growth of tensions in relations between Serbia and Kosovo is a plan by the Serbian authorities to build the so-called settlement *Sunny Valley* for Serbs returning to Kosovo. The settlement is going to be built in the north of Kosovo and Metohija, between Kosovska Mitrovica, and Zvečan and will be a place of residence for 1500 people. The project is a joint venture of the Serbian government, the Office for Kosovo and Metohija, the Serbian Orthodox Church, and members of the local Serb administration in Kosovo. Its implementation involves extensive help to Serbs returning to Kosovo including assistance in

49 Ministry for Dialogue of Republic of Kosovo, *Brussels Agreements Implementation State of Play, 1 January – 15 June 2016*, p. 21, www.kryeministri-ks.net/repository/docs/Kosovo_Report_on_State_of_Play_in_the_Brussels_Dialogue_15_June_2016-signed.pdf [accessed: 9.08.2016].

50 D. Warszawski, *Kosowo: Niektórzy Serbowie chcą być Rosjanami*, http://wyborcza.pl/1,76842,10690806,Niektorzy_Serbowie_chca_byc_Rosjanami.html?disableRedirects=true [accessed: 9.08.2016].

51 D. Warszawski, *Kosowo: Niektórzy Serbowie chcą być Rosjanami*, http://wyborcza.pl/1,76842,10690806,Niektorzy_Serbowie_chca_byc_Rosjanami.html?disableRedirects=true [accessed: 9.08.2016].

52 See in R. Gocharenko, Z. Jakupi, A. Khan, *Kosovo Serbs apply en masse for Russian citizenship*, <http://www.dw.com/en/kosovo-serbs-apply-en-masse-for-russian-citizenship/a-15546775> [accessed: 9.08.2016].

finding employment⁵³. In the opinion of the Director of the Office for Kosovo and Metohija in the Serbian government, Marko Đurić, this project is a historic step that will enable the return of Serbs to Kosovo, particularly Serbs who had to leave the region after the end of the war in Kosovo in 1999. On the other hand, the Prime Minister of Kosovo, Isa Mustafa, argues that the project does not have legal permits to be carried out; therefore, the already started construction of settlement will not be allowed to continue. Some of the Albanian media in Kosovo have also strongly objected to building housing for Serbs, and have described the move as a neo-colonial attempt by Belgrade to consolidate its influence over the Serbian minority in north Kosovo⁵⁴.

The EU expectations versus the Serbia position

The European Union does not formally ask Serbia to recognise Kosovo but urges Serbia to normalise relations with Kosovo through implementing already accepted bilateral agreements and engaging in reaching further agreements leading gradually to the comprehensive normalisation in relations between Belgrade and Pristina. In a report on the common position on Chapter 35, the EU stated that Serbia should ensure completing work on implementation of the 25 August 2015 agreements, particularly on the establishment of the Association/Community of Serb majority municipalities in Kosovo and complete its work on realisation of the objectives of the First Agreement of April 2013 and its commitments under the Technical Agreements⁵⁵.

The European Commission indicated that in relations between Serbia and Kosovo there had been progress in implementation of agreements, particularly in the fields of: a) Association of Serbian Municipalities – adoption of its Statute;

⁵³ *Kosovo Vows to Halt Serb Refugee Settlement*, <http://www.pravoslavie.ru/english/94932.htm> [accessed: 10.08.2016]; *“Słoneczna dolina” – projekt budowy osiedla dla Serbów wracających do Kosowa*, <http://balkanistyka.org/sloneczna-dolina-projekt-budowy-osiedla-dla-serbow-wracajacych-do-kosowa/> [accessed: 10.08.2016].

⁵⁴ *Kosovo Vows to Halt Serb Refugee Settlement*, op. cit.

⁵⁵ Conference on Accession to the European Union – Serbia, *European Union Common Position. Chapter 35*, op. cit., p. 3.

b) justice system for Association - dismantling of the Serbian structures of justice in Kosovo, facilitated applications of Kosovo Serb judges and prosecutors in the Kosovo judiciary; c) security force - almost finished completion of integration of Kosovo Serb police and civil protection personnel in Kosovo police forces; d) energy field – two new Serbian energy companies were established in Kosovo; e) telecoms – approved plan detailing implementation steps of the arrangement; f) Mitrovica bridge – both sides agree to involve the EU to revitalise the bridge; g) vehicle insurance – a recognition of each other’s jurisdiction for respective vehicle insurance proceeds; h) on customs – agreements reached on the import of controlled goods into Kosovo, including medicines, i) the liaison arrangements – all official visits are directly arranged by Liaison Officers, j) cadastre – there is an archives building in Belgrade with scanning of documents pertaining to Kosovo⁵⁶. However, Serbia needs to make some progress in establishing legal adjustments regarding implementation of the energy and telecoms agreements. Slowly, Serbia is proceeding with the IBM agreement, where the main problem is for the Serbian government to take additional measures to stop illegal crossings on the border with Kosovo, which are used to smuggle substantial amounts of goods. In addition, Belgrade needs to fulfil the obligations of the agreement on representation and participation of Kosovo in regional forums⁵⁷.

In the view of the Serbian government, the process of the dialogue with Kosovo is significantly and adversely affected by several vital circumstances: *firstly, a deviation from the dynamics of implementing the First Agreement which is clearly set forth by the Implementation Plan; secondly, evident absence, on the ground, of the leading role by facilitators in the dialogue and other international missions in Kosovo-Metohija, in terms of the full implementation of the agreed; thirdly, Pristina’s incessant attempts to include the issue of status in each topic initiated in Brussels, thereby directly violating the status neutral format of the dialogue, as agreed at the very beginning of the process; fourthly, lack of clear incentives for the negotiating sides, primarily concerning the uncertainty of the dynamics in the*

56 European Commission, *Commission Staff Working Document: Serbia 2015 Report*, pp. 22-23, ec.europa.eu/.../pdf/key_documents/2015/20151110_report_serbia.pdf [accessed: 10.08.2016].

57 Ibidem.

*process of European integrations*⁵⁸. At the same time, Belgrade emphasises that progress has been reached in implementation of the agreement on the bridge over the Ibar River and the “Peace Park”, the Agreement on Civil Protection. Also, there is ongoing dialogue on energy and telecommunications issues. However, there has been no substantial improvement in negotiation between Serbian and Kosovo officials regarding the formation of the Association of Serbian Municipalities provided for by the First Agreement, mainly because the Kosovo authorities kept trying to evade the implementation of the first six points of the First Agreement relating to the formation and role of the Association of Serbian Municipalities⁵⁹. Reaching progress with Pristina in this area is one of main concerns for the Serbian government. In the opinion of the Director of Office for Kosovo and Metohija, Marco Durić, *only the fully fledged Community of Serbian Municipalities would be able to properly ensure the much needed prerequisites for consolidating mutual trust between the Serbs and Albanians, as well as to create a reliable framework for a long-term sustainable development, return, endurance and persistence of the Serbian people in Kosovo and Metohija*⁶⁰.

However, The Minister for Dialogue of the Republic of Kosovo, Edita Tahiri, states that the main reason why Kosovo has not yet commenced any advanced steps in implementation of the Agreement on Association of Serbian Municipalities is namely the delays of Serbia in implementing the Agreement on the country code for Kosovo and the Agreement on independent operation of the Kosovo energy transmission system. These accords are significant for development of the Kosovo state policy. Tahiri also emphasises that Serbia has not made any significant moves to remove the barricade from the Mitrovica Bridge, excusing lack of action with the latency of the EU to commence the revitalisation of the bridge. Moreover, Belgrade has not remained committed to fully implementing the conditions of the Agreement on free movement and Agreement on the participation of Kosovo in regional forums⁶¹.

58 Republic of Serbia Government Office for Kosovo and Metohija, *Progress Report on The Dialogue Between Belgrade and Pristina, April 2015*, p. 2, www.kim.gov.rs/doc/FinalniIzvestajKKiM_april2015_engl.pdf [accessed: 10.08.2016].

59 Ibidem, p. 27.

60 Ibidem.

61 The Ministry for Dialogue of Republic of Kosovo, *Brussels Agreements Implementation State of Play, 1 January-15 June 2016*, pp. 2, 3, 21, www.kryeministri-ks.net/repository/docs/Kosovo_Report_on_State_of_Play_in_the_Brussels_Dialogue_15_June_2016-signed.pdf [accessed: 10.08.2016].

The Kosovo's authorities assert that they will start implementing their responsibilities regarding the Agreement on Association of Serbian Municipalities when Serbia changes its position and meets the obligations under the mentioned above agreements. Besides, they present a particular and unequivocal view on formation of the Association of Serbian Municipalities: *shall not have any executive power and shall not be a third level of governance, considering that Kosovo's Constitution nor respective Kosovo Laws do not provide for any of such competences. Consequently, the status of the Association shall be in accordance with the Kosovo Constitution and Law and the decision of the Kosovo Constitutional Court of 26 December 2015. Kosovo perceives the Association as legal structure that will help municipalities to coordinate better the local issues and help reintegration of the Serb community into the Kosovo system. (...) the establishment of the Association is conditioned with the full and veritable dismantlement of Serbia's remaining parallel structures in Kosovo. The Association cannot be established under still ongoing paradoxical situations when both legal and illegal municipalities are still operational in northern Kosovo*⁶². *Pristina criticises Belgrade that it deliberately delays* creation of the Association because it continues to support the activities of parallel structures in Kosovo municipalities, thereby holding them off to fully comply with Kosovo laws. The municipalities have not yet approved the symbol and seals set by Kosovo laws. They do not comply with Kosovo law on budgeting issues, namely in education and health sectors⁶³. Kosovo authorities stress that the Serbian support for parallel structures in Kosovo municipalities is violating the principles of dialogue for normalisation of relations between Belgrade and Pristina.

The European Union, after analysing all Serbia's actions, concludes that Belgrade has remained engaged in the dialogue with Pristina and committed to implementations of the April 2013 First agreement on the principle governing the normalisation of relations and other agreements reached in the dialogue⁶⁴. On the other hand, Belgrade is showing no flexibility towards the independence question of Kosovo. It is approaching the Kosovo status by seeking to maintain the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Serbia. According to Daniel P. Serwer,

62 Ibidem, p. 3.

63 Ibidem, p. 4.

64 European Commission, Commission Staff Working Document: Serbia 2015 Report, op. cit., p. 23.

Serbia has a fallback strategy, which he calls the three Ds. – delay, division and distraction. It is possible to use this when some of the factors appear: the first one - when proposal of *maximum autonomy* for Kosovo Albanians may not succeed, and the second one: Russia will not hold forever to vetoing every Security Council Resolution that offers independence to Kosovo. Applying this strategy will enable Serbia to solidify control over the north municipalities in Kosovo as well as several Serbian enclaves and also to present the international community with the fact of partition⁶⁵. However, it also creates the possibility of pushing Serbia away from accession to the European Union and from normalising its relations with Kosovo.

Russia's influence on Serbia's integration with the EU

Russia is a key political ally for Serbia because it does not recognise Kosovo's independence. It is also its important economic partner as the third-largest source of imports and fourth-largest destination for exports. Serbia is heavily dependent on Russian natural gas. In 2008, it agreed with Moscow that the \$50bn South Stream pipeline would cross its territory, and in turn sold a controlling stake in its national oil and gas company NIS to Gazprom⁶⁶.

On 17 May 2016, both parties signed an agreement on military cooperation which included purchasing new equipment for the Serbian army from Russia, and upgrading the Russian arms previously purchased by the Serbs. According to this agreement, there will be a centre for repair and maintenance of helicopters produced in Russia established in Belgrade and there will be a production line of Russian weapons open in Serbia. The agreement involves cooperation of both participants in the military technology and development of the Serbian-Russian

⁶⁵ D.P. Serwer, *Serbia: Current Issues and Future Direction*, <http://www.usip.org/publications/serbia-current-issues-and-future-direction> [accessed: 10.08.2016].

⁶⁶ *In Serbian Politics, Current Problems Hail From the Past*, <https://www.stratfor.com/analysis/serbian-politics-current-problems-hail-past> [accessed: 10.08.2016]; A. Byrne, *Serbia caught between Russia and the west*, <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/b44d6260-7ac6-11e4-b630-00144feabdc0.html#slide0> [accessed: 10.08.2016].

humanitarian centre in Nis⁶⁷. The centre was formed in 2011 and, because of its strategic location, can be seen as an outpost of the Russian military presence in the region⁶⁸.

Strengthened Serbian relations with Russia in the fields of military cooperation causes great concern for the European Union. Brussels perceives this step as an *ambiguous signal* sent by Serbia to Europe regarding the further development of pro-integration reforms and policy. The concern of the EU accentuates the fact that Serbia did not agree to impose sanctions on Russia in response to President Putin's aggressive policy towards Ukraine. All these circumstances may result in Belgrade losing its credibility as a stable partner for the EU, which certainly can affect the advancement of the process of Serbia's accession to the EU. Serbian Prime Minister, Aleksandar Vučić, in order to dispel the concerns of the West, assured that the purchase of Russian weapons is not related to the *reinforcement of Serbia*, but is intended to ensure security in the face of *the reinforcement of Croatia by NATO*⁶⁹. Despite this, the West discerns a potential threat to the security of the Balkans region in closer ties between Serbia and Russia.

Moreover, the present Serbia-Russia cooperation indicates that the Serbian government could change its geopolitical strategy and move away from its pro-Western policy and turn towards a further strengthening of political relationships with Moscow⁷⁰. This may happen in a situation when the accession conditions set out by the European Union will be too harsh, namely when the EU will increase pressure on the Serbian authorities to accept Kosovo's independence. Also,

67 *Serbsko-rosyjska współpraca wojskowa w kontekście „bałkańskiej zimnej wojny”*, <http://balkanistyka.org/serbsko-rosyjska-wspolpraca-wojskowa-w-kontekscie-balkanskiej-zimnej-wojny/> [accessed: 10.08.2016]; S. Ramani, *Why Serbia is Strengthening its Alliance with Russia*, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/samuel-ramani/why-russia-is-tightening-_b_9218306.html [accessed: 10.08.2016].

68 M. Szpala, *Russia in Serbia – soft power and hard interests*, <http://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/osw-commentary/2014-10-29/russia-serbia-soft-power-and-hard-interests> [accessed: 10.08.2016].

69 *Ibidem*; I. Jovanovic, *Serbian Military Drill With Russia Annoys EU*, <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/eu-opposes-to-serbia-s-military-drills-with-russia-08-18-2015-1> [accessed: 10.08.2016].

70 Serbia already had observatory status in The Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and is willing to develop closer cooperation with it preserving the position of a neutral state. See: *President Nikolic with Secretary General of the Collective Security Treaty Organization*, <http://www.predsednik.rs/en/press-center/press-releases/president-nikolic-secretary-general-collective-security-treaty> [accessed: 11.08.2016].

Belgrade's decision to choose the pro-Eastern direction in politics may play a role in Russian policy in the Balkans. In Russia's view, Serbia's geopolitical position has a strong effect on stabilisation of the Western Balkans. Serbia is one of the biggest countries in the region, and it is a neighbour of states with large Serb minorities such as Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro. Therefore, Russia will keep close relations with Serbia because in this way it can maintain its influence in the Balkans. This region is, for Moscow, the area to compete with other political actors e.g. the US and the EU. And by having a dominant or significant position here, Russia is allowed to control routes of energy supplies to Europe⁷¹.

However, the present and highly controversial position of Russia in the international community brings up a reflection that Serbia should find some other strategic ally which will advocate on the EU forum for it and give support to speeding up Serbia's accession process to the EU. Polish authorities have frequently expressed acknowledgment for Serbia's political reforms. Also, Poland is continuing its endorsement during the ongoing Polish Presidency in the European Union⁷². In view of the Prime Minister, Alexander Vučić, Serbia can take advantage of the Polish experience in the accession process to the EU, especially in the field of economy and foreign investment⁷³.

Conclusions

Serbia faces a major challenge – solving the problem of the future political status of Kosovo on the way to becoming a member of the European Union. Serbia does not recognise the proclaimed independence of Kosovo and does not consider Kosovo as an autonomous region. However, the Kosovo government and Kosovo

71 M. Szpala, Russia in Serbia – soft power and hard interests, op. cit., pp. 1-2.

72 *Talks on Serbia's European Integration*, http://www.msz.gov.pl/en/news/talks_on_serbia_s_european_integration [accessed: 11.08.2016]; *Nikolic, Vucic thanked Tusk for the support of Poland*, <http://inserbia.info/today/2013/06/polish-prime-minister-in-visit-to-belgrade-on-june-10/> [accessed: 11.08.2016].

73 Serbia: prezydent Tomislav Nikolić żegna ambasadora Polski, <http://balkanistyka.org/serbia-prezydent-tomislav-nikolic-zegna-ambasadora-polski/> [accessed: 10.08.2016]. See also: *Poland - a good Example in the Implementation of Reforms and Use of EU Funds*, <http://www.seio.gov.rs/news.101.html?newsid=1913> [accessed: 10.08.2016].

Albanians see Kosovo as a sovereign state, which is autonomously functioning in the international arena. Therefore, in their view, Serbia should recognise Kosovo's independence. The European Union expects that the ongoing dispute will be resolved during negotiations between Serbia and Kosovo conducted under the auspices of the EU representatives. The main aim of the dialogue is normalisation of bilateral relations. The EU makes granting Serbia's EU membership conditional on its fulfillment of obligations regarding regulation of relations with Pristina.

The conducted Serbia-Kosovo dialogue on the one hand brought some positive changes in the normalisation of bilateral relations, but on the other hand created some new challenges. The complex nature of the emerging problems may cause Serbia delays on the way to its accession to the EU. Among those issues which provoke strong political and ethical tensions are the establishment of the Association of Serbian Municipalities, the recognition of ID-cards by Kosovo's Serb minority and construction of settlements for Serbs returning to northern Kosovo and Metohija.

All of the challenges create a specific model system, which can be named as a system of strategic challenges for state integration with the EU. The structure of the system has a construction like the pyramid. On the bottom of the pyramid, on the first level, the main challenge is located, which for Serbia has been the unresolved political status of Kosovo. On the next - second level - there are new problems, which in Serbia's case has been the issue emanating from negotiations conducted under the auspices of the EU representatives. The final level of the structure generates a general challenge for the state policy, which is obtaining EU membership. The main instrument used to resolve all the challenges is a mechanism of negotiation under the auspicious of the EU representatives. An impact on the progress in solving the issues and at the same time accelerating the state integration with the EU may have some influence on external factors, namely one or more political actors. This may substantially shape the state policy regarding continuation of the process of bilateral negotiations as well as future integration with the EU. In the case of Serbia, the role of influential actor is played by Russia. The recently noticed strengthened cooperation between Serbia and Russia, particularly in the military fields, may lead to withdrawal of Serbia from the future development of the pro-European Union policy and turning towards consolidating its pro-East and pro-Russia partnership. It is possible that this

scenario can happen when the EU keeps up pressure on Serbia to resolve the issue of the future status of Kosovo, which practically means forcing Serbia to accept Kosovo's independence. In this situation, the EU actions can be seen by Serbia as a threat for state security. On the other hand, Russia has been seen by Serbia as a long term strategic partner. Moscow supports Serbian stands regarding Kosovo's political status as well as strongly cooperating with Belgrade in the field of energy security.

The complexity and difficulties of the challenges Serbia meets in the integration process with the European Union lead to conclusion that more time is required to resolve these problems. Nevertheless, choosing this option may cause delays in completing Serbia's accession negotiations with the EU. And for Belgrade, losing the prospect of obtaining EU membership in the near future could fuel nationalist sentiments and lead to a new conflict in the region. A potential way that could accelerate Serbia's integration process is renegotiation with the European Union on the conditions regarding Chapter 35 on normalisation of relations with Kosovo.

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