

**ILLIBERAL AND AUTHORITARIAN
TENDENCIES IN CENTRAL, SOUTHEASTERN
AND EASTERN EUROPE**

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& DANE TALESKI (eds)

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AUTHORITARIAN TENDENCIES
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PETER LANG

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While there is a discernible regional trend of overall democratic decline, the authors also do not detect a singular trend or causal link. In the cases of Kosovo and Bosnia, democratic stagnation has been a long-term structural feature, not narrowly linked to a particular party. In Montenegro, the link to a single party is pronounced, yet also very stable due to the enduring rule of the DPS. Serbia and Macedonia, on the other hand, have been more volatile as the rule of a particular party or even politician characterizes the de-democratization tendencies.

Overall, the empirical case studies highlight that the indices of democracy, at least when it comes to the Western Balkans, are better at capturing the structural decline of democracy, whereas informal erosion of checks and balances are often underestimated.

Although the role of ideology, and in particular nationalism, is weak overall, there is considerable variation. The authors of all the case studies, however, note the central role of clientalism as an important feature of maintaining power. Most regimes rely on populist strategies and majoritarianism but the use of state resources to bribe, coerce, and entice voters remains the central pillar of democratic decline in the Western Balkans.

Irena Ristić

7. Serbia – A Regime that Only Seemed Gone

Since 2012, when the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) came to power by winning both the parliamentary and presidential elections, Serbia has been increasingly moving towards a competitive authoritarian regime. The ruling party, led by current President Aleksandar Vučić, established a system of control over public goods and access to resources, which provides an indirect influence on the vast majority of citizens, who consequently remain politically passive. In a similar manner the SNS is controlling the media, depriving the opposition of access to a wider audience other than through social networks and a limited number of media. As a result Serbia is drifting into an undemocratic system in which institutions are being eroded, while the EU – through its support for Aleksandar Vučić – is about to jeopardize its credibility and support among those citizens and parties in Serbia, which are in favour of the European Union.

Keywords: Aleksandar Vučić, competitive authoritarian regime, erosion of institutions, EU-integration, Serbia

Introduction

There is no consensus about how to exactly define the different types of regimes that have been in place in Serbia since 1989. There are no doubts about the authoritarian character of the system during the rule of Slobodan Milošević,¹ the period after 2000 remains in a terminologically grey zone in which Serbia has been positioned somewhere between a hybrid system and a democracy. During the first period of Serbia's political and economic transition it seemed that – like the transitions in the Central European countries during the nineties – the implementation of political procedures and the strengthening of democratic institutions combined with the perspective of a European integration would gradually

¹ Milošević served from 1989 to 1997 as President of Serbia and from 1997 to 2000 as President of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

lead to a consolidation of democracy, and consequently to Serbia's EU membership. However, by 2003, when Prime Minister Zoran Đinđić was assassinated, it became apparent that this process would be less smooth. While it can be said that Serbia faced the same "relatively unfavourable conditions for democracy" (Levitsky and Way, 2010: 87)² as other Eastern and Southeastern European countries, it has been additionally challenged by the transition to a consolidated nation state (Offe, 1991), a process that has been pending since the breakup of Yugoslavia.³ The particular reasons why the process of democratization had strongly oscillated and why democratic consolidation did not materialize in Serbia until now are numerous and discussing them would certainly go beyond the scope of this chapter. The focus here is rather on the fact that in the first decade of its transition Serbia was gradually increasing its democratic capacities and hence moving towards a consolidated democracy, only to start declining during the second decade, with aspects of a hybrid system re-emerging (Damjanović, 2017: 1–3; Economist Intelligence Unit, 2018: 14). Although this backlash has a number of external and internal causes, it coincides with the coming to power of the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) and its leader Aleksandar Vučić in 2012. Being for several years in power, first as Vice-President of a government with a SNS majority (2012–2014), then as Prime Minister (2014–2017), and finally as the President of Serbia (2017–) Aleksandar Vučić has dominated the political regime in Serbia since, and therefore the main responsibility for the deterioration of democracy can be attributed to him.

According to the EIU Index, Serbia is a flawed democracy (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2018: 29), while the democracy score according to the rating of Freedom House is 3.82, making it the lowest since 2005 (Damjanović, 2017: 2). However, when taking into account the work of Levitsky and Way the political regime in Serbia under Aleksandar Vučić can be defined as a competitive authoritarian regime (Levitsky and Way, 2002, 2010). In such a regime, those in power praise formal democratic institutions while they are not only depriving these institutions of their relevance but are also misusing and manipulating them in order to strengthen their

- 2 Levitsky and Way refer to the communist legacy of repression and lack of free political expression resulting in a weak civil society, the legacy of central planning and the unequal access to assets, ethnic tension, and ethnic conflicts.
- 3 For the relationship between democratization and the development of a nation state see, among others, Rustow (1970) and Offe (1991).

position, gain more formal and informal power and hence cement their position. And while political competition does exist in such regimes, the "uneven playing field" is unfairly tailored in favour of the incumbents to such a degree that it makes the victory of opposition parties rather exceptional (Levitsky and Way, 2010: 5).⁴ This chapter aims to illustrate the extent to which the features of a competitive authoritarian regime can be observed in Serbia.

Voters' Support and Discrediting of the Opposition

There are two main sources of legitimacy for the political regime in Serbia, encompassing the executive power (government) and the institution of the President. These are a strong voter support, which provides for a majoritarian rule, and a clear delineation from the former regime.

The distinct support of citizens, which the SNS has enjoyed at least since the parliamentary elections in 2014, builds upon existing and strong voter support for the Serbian Radical Party (SRS), from which Tomislav Nikolić and Aleksandar Vučić with their supporters have split in 2008, in order to found the SNS. Apart from the first democratic elections in 2000, when the SRS received only 8.6% of the votes, in all the following elections it won close to 30% of the vote, making it the strongest (in 2003 and 2007) and second strongest (2008) party, respectively. However, on these three occasions it was "winning without winning" (Hamid, 2017) as it failed every time to find a coalition partner to form the governing majority. After the split from the SRS, the newly formed SNS managed to attract the vast majority of the former SRS voters, reaching 24% at the parliamentary elections in 2012 – once again the best results of all participating parties. Given that presidential elections were held at the same time and that in the second round the SNS candidate Tomislav Nikolić

- 4 The playing field is considered to be uneven if: (i) state institutions are disproportionately deployed by the incumbents at the cost of the opposition; (ii) the media broadcasting is disproportionately in favour of the incumbent, be it by the control over the public media, or by ownership and various way of manipulation of private media or (iii) public resources, employees and infrastructure are disproportionately used by the incumbents (Levitsky and Way, 2010: 368).

defeated the incumbent Boris Tadić of the Democratic Party (DS), the Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS), the kingmaker, decided to switch sides. Led by its leader, Ivica Dačić, the SPS quit its coalition with DS, and instead formed a government coalition with SNS, enabling the SNS to come to power for the first time after the regime change in 2000. Despite having had a majority within the parliament and government, the SNS was forced to give the position of the Prime Minister to SPS leader Ivica Dačić, while Vučić became first deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defence. Nevertheless, from this point on, the dominant position of the SNS was not questioned anymore and in snap elections held in 2014 and 2016 it doubled its vote to 48%.⁵ This clear majority was confirmed at the presidential elections in 2017, when Vučić won in the first round with 55%.

Considering all the election results since 2000, it is clear that the SNS did not come to power by winning significantly more votes at one election,⁶ but instead it (or its predecessor) always had sound support, big enough to form a government with a minor coalition partner, but always failed to attract one. This chance eventually came in 2012. Once in power, the party further profited from being in the position of the incumbent on one hand, and the opportunity to gain more informal power on the other. The latter has been used (i) to bring to perfection an efficient system to control the media (Matić, 2018), (ii) to use public functions and public goods for the promotion of the party, especially during election campaigns, and (iii) to flagrantly misuse institutions, for example when calling twice for early snap elections despite the fact that the constitutional conditions for them were not present and that, in 2016, prior to the elections, the SNS even had an absolute majority in the parliament. Consequently, the institution of elections carried out this way primarily aims to divert attention from current problems, to prolong the term of office, to promote office holders and, last but not least, to attack and discredit the opposition.

Discrediting the opposition, especially of the previously dominant DS, is the second source of legitimacy of the SNS. In 2012, when coming to power, harsh attacks on the incumbent parties could have been considered as part of the strategy of a radical opposition party, but the heavy

5 Due to the election system in Serbia these results provided an absolute majority of parliamentary seats both times.

6 On the other hand, when the SNS came to power in 2012 it won less votes than the SRS had won at the previous elections.

smearing of the DS and all the parties from the former government has, over the years, turned into a daily routine. Hence there is rarely a significant press conference with government officials or the President, or a press release, without a reference, mostly in a pejorative wording, to the former government in which it is being accused of corruption, lies, thievery, immorality, or fraud, and generally for every problem the government is facing, despite the fact that the SNS has been in power for several years. For example, while commenting on the position of Serbia related to the negotiation process in regard to Kosovo, Vučić stated: "After we got the independence of Kosovo we had a silence coming from our government, which wanted to ingratiate itself to everyone, we had a catastrophic decision, which is today costing us the most, and which we had brought on our own to the International Court of Justice 2008, by a stupid, irresponsible, criminal policy of our regime, but this is our state."⁷ This statement could hardly be more wrong: not only was the Serbian government in 2008 not silent, but it called for an end to the process of EU integration. Even more striking is the fact, that while overemphasizing the negative impact of the initiative of the former government to obtain an advisory opinion from the ICJ, Vučić is completely ignoring not only the role of the SRS during the 1990s and their responsibility for the situation in Kosovo in the first place, but also the Brussels Agreement, which was negotiated and signed by a majoritarian SNS government in 2013, in which Serbia accepted the conditions leading to a gradual recognition of the independence of Kosovo, which the former DS government did not want to accept and for which it eventually lost support from the European Union, primarily Germany.

This brings us to the use of populist techniques by the ruling party. Whether populism has been an integral element of almost all political regimes in Serbia since 1870, and whether therefore, historically speaking, Serbia is at the vanguard of populism (Stojanović, 2017: 7) is a rather contested question. Certainly, some elements of what is considered to be populism, such as an antipluralist worldview (Müller, 2017: 15–17), or the perception of society being divided into two homogenous and antagonistic groups, the pure people represented by the populists, and the others by the

7 Vučić: Zapad ne želi da razgovara o tome kome pripada Kosovo, N1, 21.3.2018: <http://rs.n1info.com/a373526/Vesti/Vucic-Zapad-ne-zeli-da-razgovara-o-tome-kome-pripada-Kosovo.html> (accessed 31 July 2018). He is referring to the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice, which stated that the unilateral declaration of independence of Kosovo was in accordance with international law.

corrupt elite (Mudde, 2004: 543; Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2012: 8; Stanley, 2008: 102) can doubtless be attributed to the regime in Serbia. However, there are a few differences, one being that “the other” in Serbia is not necessarily depicted as the corrupt *elite*, but as the corrupt *former government*, given that the SNS perceives itself as the *honest elite*. Another difference is that the SNS does not perceive itself, nor can it be defined as, an antiestablishment party because it did not stand in opposition to what were considered to be the conventional social, political, and economic principles of Serbian society, which were prevalent prior to their coming to power. On the contrary, when establishing the party in 2008, and especially once in power, the distinct feature of the SNS was exactly that it gave up the antiestablishment rhetoric and policies of the SRS. As a consequence it had started to propagate and support Serbia’s EU integration, continued to make arrangements with the IMF, and most importantly, went significantly further than the previous government in regard to the EU-led dialogue with Kosovo. By doing so, within a year of being in power the SNS had made substantial concessions and signed the Brussels Agreement with Kosovo, and had opened access negotiations with the EU – two policies for which they were, before coming to power, heavily attacking the previous government.

These policies towards the European Union and regarding Kosovo enjoy majority support in Serbia and since 2012 no significant protests have taken place. Consequently, it could be concluded that there is a consensus within society about the reforms that the government and the President are claiming to undertake. However, although there are no substantial objections to the program of the government and the reforms, the absence of protests itself cannot be interpreted as popular approval of the current government. On the contrary, as the results of a public opinion poll from 2017 show, approval for the work of the current government is rather weak: 35% of the citizens believed that Serbia was being led in the wrong direction, while only 30% believed that the direction was good (Buturović and Ristić, 2017: 71).⁸ Corresponding with this, more than half of the respondents (53%) described the results of the government as bad, only 40% confirmed that they trusted President Aleksandar Vučić, and 50% were not satisfied with the state of democracy in Serbia (Lutovac, 2017: 25, 30).

⁸ Another 35% are without an opinion. Public opinion poll conducted in June/July 2017 by the Institute of Social Sciences/Belgrade, with a focus on measuring populist attitudes among the citizens of Serbia.

Support for Serbia’s EU integration by its citizens is also volatile. According to a poll from December 2017, a small majority of 52% would support Serbia’s EU membership, which was the highest acceptance level since 2011.⁹ While this score was significantly more than it was in 2015, when it stood at only 41%, it remains considerably lower than in 2009 when it was 73% (Ministry of European Integration, 2017: 4–5). Generally, Serbian society has a pragmatic and sceptical attitude towards the European Union. While the majority, when asked about their personal feelings, perceive the European Union as a smaller or bigger threat for Serbia, it also believes that somehow the natural place for Serbia is within the European Union, despite all its downsides (Lutovac, 2017: 61). This reflects the standpoint of the ruling party and Aleksandar Vučić, who presents himself as a supporter of Serbia’s European Union integration, but at the same time pictures the European Union from time to time as a threat to Serbian interests, which he will protect.

Erosion of State Institutions and of the Media System

Before coming to power in 2012, the SNS, moreover Tomislav Nikolić and Aleksandar Vučić, questioned the main state institutions insofar as they considered them to be misused by the incumbents. They were not questioning the institutions as such, nor did they have an antisystem position. In this sense, their road to power (at least after 2008) was not paved by attacking the institutions, the state, or their policies, but only the officials of the former government and its parties. Still, for two reasons we cannot talk of an old and a new elite, or of an elite replacement in Serbia in 2012. First, the SNS, SPS, and their other main coalition partners cannot by any means be considered as new elites, because not only their parties but also their top leaders were holding high positions during the rule of Milošević during the 1990s. In addition the SPS was already since 2004 supporting the minority government of Vojislav Koštunica and became from 2007 on a coalition partner in all governments to follow. And although both the SNS and the SPS distanced themselves from that period during the 1990s and from Slobodan Milošević and Vojislav Šešelj, this process was

⁹ Only 12% of the respondents would vote against membership.

not a clear break and remained very vague and not explicit. Therefore it is far from a real questioning of their political activism in those times. This becomes evident in talks or interviews in which the leadership of the SPS and SNS are asked to take a standpoint regarding their personal role during the conflict in the 1990s, when they usually relativize both the conflict and their role in it. Second, many members of the former government and politically appointed employees of the public sector and administration changed their party affiliation and became members of the new ruling party. This phenomenon could already be observed in 2000, when Goati showed that the number of members of each party had varied significantly, while the number of party members in total remained the same (Goati, 2006: 134–135).¹⁰ According to available sources, in 2013 the SNS had 350 000 members, while by mid-2016 it counted more than 600 000, with a tendency to further increase (Mastlović Jasnić, 2016).¹¹ This means that 8.3% of the total population of Serbia are SNS members, and that, without minors and citizens living abroad, roughly every twentieth citizen of Serbia is a member of the ruling party.¹² This data certainly cannot be interpreted as indicating a high level of political activism or political participation, nor it can be used to illustrate a high level of party identification with the SNS based on its ideology, program, or principles. It rather indicates a very high level of clientelism, upon which the functioning of the party is based. This means that apart from formally being the linking organization between citizens and the parliament and/or government, the SNS is also an organization that overlooks all sectors related to public jobs, companies, services and goods, being the only access channel to them. Consequently a party membership and open loyalty through voting and acquiring new voters is to a great extent motivated by the fact that party loyalty is the most secure way to secure access to public goods or not to lose it.

10 In 2000 it was most of all the Democratic Party and the Democratic Party of Serbia that were overrun by applications from new members, formerly members of the ruling parties.

11 According to official party statements, the number of members went up to 730 000.

12 As a comparison, in 2002 the Democratic Party had around 100 000 members and at its peak as a government party in 2009 around 165 000 members. In a wider context, the German Christian Democratic Party, which had been in power since 2005, had 425 000 members in 2017, which makes 0.52% of the German population. Even the ruling party in Russia, United Russia, operating in a similar type of regime, encompasses a membership of roughly 2 073 000, only 1.4% of the population of Russia.

Given the extent to which the SNS has infiltrated Serbian society, and especially given its power to influence the distribution of public goods and resources, it is not surprising that large parts of society remain politically rather passive. Apart from activist groups, which are mostly linked to bigger cities and organize occasional protests, there are no significant movements or associations challenging the system. The biggest and most persistent among them were those organized by the initiative *Ne da(vi)mo Beograd* (Don't let Belgrade d(r)own), which was formed as a reaction to the construction project *Belgrade Waterfront*, arranged by the government of Serbia and co-financed by an investor from the United Arab Emirates. The protests were primarily underlining the usurpation of the neighbourhood in which this project was planned, because in the previous decade this quarter had developed into a working space for the cultural scene of Belgrade. Apart from this the protests criticized the lack of transparency of the contract, which was signed with the company from the United Arab Emirates. These protests intensified significantly in April 2016, after hooded persons illegally demolished several buildings in this neighbourhood at night, while the police did not intervene, despite calls from citizens. As it was very likely that this was done with the knowledge, if not approval, of the government of Belgrade and/or government of Serbia, the protests called for their responsibility. However, although the highest officials, including Aleksandar Vučić, said that they expect the state prosecution to solve this case, by 2018 it was still not solved. At the same time, the protests also ran out of steam. The second big protest wave, organized primarily by students in Belgrade, Novi Sad, Niš, and few other towns, started after the presidential elections in April 2017, as a reaction to the election results, the unfair campaign that preceded them, and to the overall and disproportional presence of Aleksandar Vučić in the mainstream media. After some time these protests expanded their support basis beyond students to include many citizens, labour unions, and political initiatives, and took on a stronger social component, even though the initial requests were more political (improvement of democracy, better institutional control of the President, the dismissal of a number of state officials). However, by the end of May 2017, after two months of daily protests, they ended, widely ignored by the public media and the regime, and apparently not capable of mobilizing larger parts of the population.

The role of the media, not only during these protests, has been severely restricted. The public television often did not mention the protests at all,

despite them taking place in front of the main public broadcasting building, and despite their demands for dismissals within the public television broadcasting organization. As mentioned above, the media regularly disproportionately favour the incumbent, especially during election campaigns, while at the same time they report negatively on opposition parties. Strategies to do so include press conferences of officials (President, Prime Minister and some ministers), during which, mostly without any context, a negative reference to the opposition is made and TV talk shows to which members of the opposition are not invited. Instead these talk shows give the floor to someone from the ruling party, who is able to accuse and label members of the opposition or independent media as traitors, liars, tycoons, without providing a chance to them to defend themselves. In the print media, the control works mostly through financial means and financial blackmail: as soon as a newspaper criticizes or reveals something compromising about the government, advertisements from public companies reduce. This eventually leads to self-censorship, which, according to recent research among print media journalists, is widespread (Matić, 2018: 16).

Being faced with such a media system, the opposition switched to the use of social media and a limited number of media outlets, such as the daily *Danas*, the weekly *Vreme* and *Nin*, and the TV channel and Internet portal N1. Although the circulation of these media is very low, they are all nevertheless regularly exposed to attacks and smearing by the President and a number of ministers and SNS high officials, being depicted as traitors, financed by foreigners, “American”, and so forth.

Dominance of Informal Power

Both the separation of powers and the checks and balances foreseen by the constitution have been problematic in Serbia since the introduction of a multiparty system. After 2000 the separation of powers functioned to some extent fairly only when the President and Prime Minister were cohabitating, being from opposing parties, which was the case between 2000 and 2008. Afterwards, the President and Prime Minister were hailing from the same party and clear domination of the President could be observed during the second presidential term of Boris Tadić (2008–2012),

when the government was DS led. However, although the separation of powers between the President, the executive, and legislative branch was limited in this period, there were still independent institutions, such as the ombudsman, electoral commissions, courts and, to a significant extent, the media, which had a corrective role. But in 2012 the SNS filled the position of the (Deputy) Prime Minister and the President, and even these corrective institutions gradually ceased to have any significant influence. As with some other aspects of rule, this also cannot be defined as a technique introduced by Aleksandar Vučić and his party. However, Vučić further eliminated controlling mechanisms, tailoring the system more and more to one person.

The main problem has been the informal power the President amassed, which extends beyond the powers attributed to his office by the constitution,¹³ and thus takes over functions and decisions that are reserved by the constitution for the executive (government) and judicial power. In the case of Aleksandar Vučić, who when elected President remained the president of the SNS, this included decisions about the appointment of the Prime Minister and the members of the Cabinet, and all other high officials, such as the President of the Parliament. Consequently, he was deciding about the main state policies and directions, both domestic and foreign. He also held the main meetings with foreign head of governments, be they in Serbia or abroad – something he was doing when he was Prime Minister. Then it was in the realm of his constitutional competences, while the Prime Minister who followed was carrying out this duty at best only formally, or together with Aleksandar Vučić. Finally, the President is taking credit for everything that is being accomplished in Serbia and where the state in some form took part, be it at local or state level. Having in this way marginalized not only other political parties and politicians but also high officials of his own party, he became the only source for the success of his party, and hence for every local election. As a result, the SNS list usually carries his name for elections on all levels, despite he not running for that given office, and this way enabling him to campaign during his official presidential activities and agitate against the respective opposition parties.

13 According to the constitution the President has no executive nor legislative power, and although he is formally the head of the Armed Forces, his function is considered to be representative.

Contestable European Union Commitment Backed by Brussels

One of the paradoxes when the SNS came to power in 2012 was that it started to promote the EU integration of Serbia after it and its precursor had engaged in two decades of radical opposition to Serbia's Western orientation. Once in power this radical shift was followed by another, now related to Kosovo and the status negotiations mediated by the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs. In 2013, the government led by Ivica Dačić, and supported by Aleksandar Vučić and the SNS, signed the Brussels Agreement, which marked a higher level of integration of the municipalities in North Kosovo into the legal judiciary system of Kosovo, and consequently a withdrawal of the judiciary and security structures of Serbia from Kosovo. As a result, the European Union opened negotiations on Serbia's accession in January 2014, which was considered to be a major success of the SNS-SPS government.

However, while the formal state policy is a full commitment to the EU integration of Serbia, and while certain steps in the dialogue regarding Kosovo were taken, this commitment remains disputable considering the flagrant misuse of power and the media, which caused the erosion of state institutions and the law. Furthermore, the Serbian government continued with the practice of exercising control over Kosovo Serb politics.

The role of the European Union has also been controversial, because its officials have been failing to address state capture by the SNS, including the discrimination and defamation of the opposition parties and their leaders and the misuse of the media. Instead the European Union and leaders from member states have been giving Aleksandar Vučić unanimous support since 2012. One explanation of this EU policy is that EU officials consider only Vučić to be able to de facto recognize the independence of Kosovo. The other is the false promise of stability Vučić offers (BiEPAG, 2017). A third is that the EU is indifferent towards the Western Balkan states and their development and is fine with anyone who keeps the status quo. Either way, the European Union has shown, not for the first time in the case of Serbia, a low level of sensibility regarding the fragile state of Serbian democracy, and has sent an ambiguous message to the citizens and opposition parties in Serbia, especially those supporting the EU integration of Serbia. Having built the image of controlling and checking on the

implementation of progressive reforms and having imposed conditions on previous democratic governments in Serbia, EU officials' praise of Vučić has surprised some observers. The danger arising from this is not only that the European Union risks losing credibility among Serbian citizens but also that it further erodes the roots of democracy in Serbia and leads to an increase in nationalism and anti-EU positions carried by parties that used to be pro-European.

Finally, apart from formally showing a commitment to Serbia's EU integration, the regime in Serbia is not giving up on close ties to Russia, Turkey, and China. Of these three, relations with Russia are certainly of special interest. Not only does it have historical roots but it is also considered as crucial for keeping the status of Kosovo, at an international level, if not blocked for good then at least frozen. However, this policy and position towards Russia has been constant among all Serbian governments since at least 2004 and it can largely be considered as being directed for internal use only.

Concluding Remarks

While the political developments in Serbia since 2012 have been getting worse, putting them in the context of the period since the mid-1990s lets them appear less surprising. The transition process, which started after 2000, required from the very beginning much more internal consensus and external support than it was given. Politically and economically, Serbia did make progress but the lack of a consensus related both to the breakup of Yugoslavia and Serbia's role in it and a lustration of members of the former regime, hindered the process at an early stage. Closely linked to it was the issue of full cooperation with the International Crime Tribunal for Yugoslavia (ICTY) and the unresolved status of Kosovo. Until 2012, Serbia had a President and governments that were committed to the European Union, and if not as a result of their own convictions then at least through the conditionality of the European Union they were strengthening independent institutions and gradually improving democracy. Contrary to that, since 2012 the EU-orientation of Serbia has seemed more formal than substantial. Paradoxically, the level of support and conditionality of the European

Union, and its role in influencing the work of Serbian governments has been disproportional to the commitment towards the European Union of the leading political leaders and parties: while in the first years, most of all under Prime Minister Zoran Đinđić, EU support was linked with a very high conditionality, causing polarization in his government, which eventually led to a temporary shift of Serbia's EU policy, this support was still conditioned, but less restrictive after his assassination and in the period when Boris Tadić and the DS were in power. However, after 2012 this conditionality became almost nonexistent and the European Union has been very limited in using its power to insist on reforms or to address critical issues and the misuse of institutions and formal and informal power by the ruling SNS.

This has been weakening the already weak opposition in Serbia. The opposition parties, especially those that were in power between 2000 and 2012, certainly have their own responsibilities and their weak position can partly be explained by the fact that, during their time in power, they were not resolute enough to establish a different political system of values and to strengthen institutions more. But, it has to be considered that the former government, in particular with regard to the crucial issues of cooperation with the ICTY and the status of Kosovo, was confronted with the threat from the SRS and later the SNS to cause destabilizations, as happened, for example, in March 2003, during the Pride Parade in Belgrade in 2010, or after Kosovo declared its independence. It seems unrealistic that the opposition will be able to defeat the SNS in the near future, especially since, by 2018, the SNS secured a majority at all main institutional levels in Serbia (parliament/government, presidency, and a majority of municipalities in Serbia, including the Mayor of Belgrade). But without the European Union playing a different role, and more particularly without the European Union withdrawing its support for Aleksandar Vučić and his party, this looks like an impossible mission.

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8. Montenegro between Democracy and Authoritarianism

Reforms in Montenegro, which have been implemented with increasing intensity since the beginning of negotiation talks with the European Union in 2012, have limited impact and little influence on democracy in the country. Causes for the slow democratization process relate to captured institutions being under the strong influence of the same party for 28 years. The uninterrupted rule of the Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS) has led to the close entwining of the party and the state at all levels: misuse of state resources for party purposes, control over the employment process and distribution of social assistance, lack of liability for frequent violations of the law, positioning of family members and loyal staff in managerial positions, are some of the mechanisms that the DPS has used. The DPS uses populist language to support these mechanisms, safeguarding its rule.

Keywords: authoritarianism, clientelism, democracy, leadership, populism

Introduction

Montenegro's efforts towards democratic transformation have been conducted by the same political elite that emerged from the League of Communists of Montenegro (SKCG) after the introduction of a multiparty system in 1990. The DPS is a clientelistic political network and the system governed by the party combines autocratic and democratic elements. The party has experienced several shifts, such as change of name from the League of Communists of Montenegro to the Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS) in July 1991, or advocating Montenegrin independence after years of efforts to preserve the state with Serbia. These changes in party politics were accompanied by a rhetorical turnaround.

The restoration of Montenegrin independence in 2006 and the formal progress in accession to Euro-Atlantic structures has not reduced the gap