

# SOCIOLOGICAL AND SECURITY ASPECTS OF GEOPOLITICAL POSITIONING OF THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA IN THE EU ACCESSION PROCESS

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**Abstract:** *Sociological and safety aspects of the geopolitical integration of the Republic of Serbia into the EU are part of the reality the country and the society have been confronting since the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. To single out and determine every sociological and safety factor is almost impossible since there is no definiteness of factors affecting the positioning of a country within the association of new countries. Neither is there any unique prototype applicable to all countries. Each country possesses cultural, national, religious, institutional and economic uniqueness; hence, it can be concluded that each country undergoes various experiences in the process of integration into a new institutional family. Since the creation, the European Union by its structure has presented a challenge to the society in all respects. This may certainly be measured and explained by sociological and safety standards. This paper presents the past correlations of the Republic of Serbia from two decades ago to the present, using a synthetic method to carry out a comparative analysis of the descriptive pattern, position, and capacities of the national in relation to supranational.*

**Keywords:** *Sociological, Security, European Union, Geopolitics, National, Supranational, International relations.*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The geographical area of Serbia belongs to the central part of the southern Slavic region of the Balkan Peninsula. Throughout history, several civilizations have developed in the wider environment of Serbian geographical region: Ancient Greek, Roman, Byzantine, Germanic, Hungarian, and Islamic-Turkish. These civilizations had a significant influence on the development of the entire Balkans, due to frequent conflicts among them. The contemporary cultural-religious position of Serbia is complex since it is determined by the position at the crossroads of three cultural-religious spheres, i.e., the collision of various ethnic, cultural and religious factors.

The Republic of Serbia represents an area of religious crossroads, where different cultural-civilizational spheres and geopolitical lines intersect, and great powers' interests and projects collide. "The geo-cultural history of Serbia portrays Balkanization as a cultural and geopolitical phenomenon and an expression of constant division and clashes, where frequent conflicts accompany cultural pluralism coexisting through the centuries. In addition to its multiconfessional and multicultural determination, the geo-cultural history of Serbia is characterized by specific ethnocultural processes primarily marked by the continuous ethnic separation of the unique Serbian ethnos that has existed in this geographical area since the twelfth century. Namely, a double ethnic separation of Serbian ethnicity is currently in progress. The first, based on reli-

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gious separation from the Serbian ethnic group and the second on the basis of politics and state” (Sekulovic & Gigovic, 2009).

## **2. GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF GEOPOLITICAL POSITION OF SERBIA**

“Geopolitical position defines the Republic of Serbia as an unavoidable area in connecting North, West, East and Southeast Europe. Analyzing the geopolitical position of Serbia, it may be noticed that its geographical area represents a region of the infusion of various geopolitical interests. In terms of geostrategy, it represents the physical connection between Europe, Asia, Near-East and the Mediterranean. A particular geostrategic dimension is a fact that certain areas, three of the ten Pan-European corridors, identified by the European Commission as being of vital strategic importance for Europe, extend across and in the immediate vicinity of Serbia’s geographical area. Such an analysis of the position of Serbia indicates that being a transit area is the basic geostrategic determinant of Serbia. The fragmentation of a part of the territory and the placement of Kosovo and Metohija under a protectorate significantly undermined Serbia’s geopolitical position. Kosmet, in addition to the ethnic space of the Albanians in the south of Central Serbia, gravitates significantly towards the Vardar-Aegean direction, and may thus be of crucial military strategic importance for Serbia concerning potential geostrategic constellations of powers in the Balkans. Therefore, the existential geopolitical issue of Serbia is the preservation of its territorial integrity and sovereignty over that part of the territory. The geopolitical position of Serbia may be successfully valorised in the conditions of its full European integration. The valorisation is only possible by stabilizing the interior state of affairs, harmonizing the relations with the social environment and cooperating with European and world’s institutions and associations. Hence, the priority geopolitical interest of Serbia is the integration in European economic, political and security systems“ (Sekulovic & Gigovic, 2008).

Due to its geographical position, Serbia has quite frequently been an area of great powers’ interest. Therefore, a dilemma arises over the choice of the most appropriate geopolitical strategy that will guarantee national integrity and security, internal and external, political, and economic stability.

„The basic criteria for defining Serbia’s geopolitical priorities should be established depending on the reality of its geopolitical and geostrategic position. Considering the cultural and historical development, geographical position and regional geopolitical structure, Serbia should actively engage in further geopolitical initiatives to achieve European integration. The state should take advantage of its unique position at the crossroads of three important European subregions to strengthen the role in the processes of integration and to maintain a balanced relationship with the great powers“ (Sekulovic & Gigovic, 2008).

## **3. GEOPOLITICAL POSITIONING OF THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA AT THE BEGINNING (IN THE FIRST TWO DECADES) OF THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY**

The historical, cultural and state-building development of the Republic of Serbia has predetermined its current positioning in the global geopolitical environment of the modern world. The development of international relations, international law, and international security systems has influenced the perception of political decision-makers in the Republic of Serbia about a new approach and establishment of an adequate geopolitical position of Serbia both in the Balkans and in Europe and the world.

The integration processes on the „old continent” started with the creation of the European Union and due to its enlargement towards the East and Southeast of Europe subsequently influenced the re-examination and determination of Serbia’s future geopolitical trend under conditions of significant economic, cultural and political interdependence and integration of European states. Following a tumultuous and socially and politically devastating decade of the collapse of Yugoslavia at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and a civil war outbreak, this period was marked by the NATO bombing contrary to accepted norms of international law, resulting in Serbia’s social, economic and existential losses of incomprehensible proportions. This was a turning point in accepting the harsh geopolitical reality that required a change and re-shaping of Serbia’s position in the future. Nowadays, the following questions arise, both in public and in scientific circles: How is it possible that Serbia, after being on the victorious side in two world wars with confirmed allies, was left alone, with no allies at all? How is it possible that the political elite overlooked geopolitical reality and put its own citizens, society, and state into the position of biological survival? The answers to these questions will remain the subject of a long-standing debate among historians and experts on international law and international relations.

The first two decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century indicate that Serbia has nevertheless learned lessons regarding its future geopolitical positioning under new conditions and circumstances, accompanied by increased integration, cooperation and the impact of globalization on the entire humanity. Particular indicators of this process are the process of Serbia’s accession to the European Union (hereinafter the EU) and the advancement of economic and political relations with major geopolitical players in the global arena such as the USA, Russia, and China. Although at first glance such co-operation may seem like an impossible mission or „sitting on two chairs”, as often referred to by Western political leaders and EU representatives, maintaining this way of cooperating is nonetheless possible up to the period of a year or two prior to Serbia signing the treaty of accession to the EU and obtaining a full EU membership of the sovereign European states community. This is possible primarily due to the indefinite duration of the accession process that has been in progress for almost 15 years and the alignment with the EU Foreign and Security Policy, as one of the final stages of the accession process.

Geopolitical balancing and such constellation of relations in the case of Serbia are quite justified while waiting for Kosovo and Metohija issue to be resolved and struggling to preserve national sovereignty over a part of the territory where Serbian nation and state have been historically and culturally created and developed. According to the classical theory of international relations, no sovereign state has voluntarily renounced sovereignty over a part of its territory since the protection of territorial integrity demonstrates the capability of a state and a nation to take care of itself and defend its national identity while protecting its territory. This is, inter alia, an ongoing challenge for the United Nations, due to a constant conflict between two fundamental principles of international law and two forms of collective rights guaranteed to modern states. These are the right to territorial integrity and the right to self-determination. The positioning of Serbia on the contemporary global geopolitical scene requires a pragmatic approach, clear understanding, consideration and reflection on the current global development trends, a direction the entire humanity is heading in, the division of geopolitical power and a territorial overlap between „hard” and „soft” powers of the major actors involved in geopolitical relations.

As already mentioned, throughout history the region of Serbia has always been a kind of a boundary of great powers’ overlapping interests, and quite frequently an area where opposing forces established borders and policies through battles and wars. However, it has also been a

point of interaction, cooperation, and coexistence of diverse ethnic groups and various nations. In this respect, based on previous centuries of coexistence and conflicts, it is of utmost importance to take a realistic, pragmatic geopolitical view on the future development of the Serbian state and society in the conditions of high international interdependence, integration and global balance of power, bearing in mind well balanced, realistic and achievable national interests as a common denominator, i.e., national interests that are carefully defined and aligned with the current global geopolitical reality and the interests of major international geopolitical actors.

#### **4. THE EU AS A GEOPOLITICAL POWER AND A MODEL FOR THE PROTECTION OF MEMBER STATES' NATIONAL INTERESTS**

As previously mentioned, Serbia has been on the road to EU accession for more than 15 years. This path should ultimately result in the Republic of Serbia's membership of a specific community of sovereign states with supranational elements that has been developing on the European continent for the last 70 years. As a community of six European states created to contribute to peace, economic prosperity and the well-being of citizens after World War II, the EU has today grown from an economic community of founding members into a community of 27 sovereign states with a high degree of economic power, thus creating its geopolitical identity in global contexts.

These are significant parameters for the future positioning and accession of Serbia to a unique collective, economic and geopolitical alliance. A digression should be taken to emphasize that the EU is not a perfect concept of connecting states; it is neither a super (federal) state nor a community of European states possessing a „magic formula” for solving all the problems of the member states. On the other hand, bearing in mind what it is not, we will very briefly touch upon what the EU is, based on the aforementioned segments.

The EU supranationality represents nation-states' sovereignty conferred on the EU institutions upon accession to the EU, or simply put, the states reduce their sovereignty in favour of the EU to primarily regulate the areas of economic cooperation as a common interest, by applying legal regulations enacted by the EU institutions and defined as exclusive EU competences according to The Treaty on European Union.<sup>3</sup> It should be noted that in addition to these, there are both shared competences between the EU and the Member States and the exclusive competences of the Member States.<sup>4</sup> Thus, it may be concluded that the Member States have not lost their sovereignty; the EU accepts and respects the Member States' sovereignty, territorial integrity, the maintenance of public order and the preservation of the national security, thus both exercising conferred competencies and sharing competences for the benefit of the union. To put it differently, the member states have created and relinquished some of their sovereign rights to the EU, retained much of their sovereignty, and agreed to share part of their sovereignty with the EU institutions in certain areas.

On the other hand, the EU has been founded on European values and objectives common to all Member States and accepted and shared by candidate countries. These values include respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities, pluralism, non-discrimination, toler-

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<sup>3</sup> By the new Treaty of Lisbon, which entered into force in December 2009, the EU was established based on the following two treaties: The Treaty on European Union and the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU. Treaty on European Union (Consolidated version 2016), OJ C 202/37, 7 June 2016.

<sup>4</sup> For more information on EU competences, see Articles 4 and 5 of the Treaty on EU and Articles 2-6 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU

ance, justice, solidarity, and gender equality.<sup>5</sup> The EU respects the equality, national identity, culture and traditions of each Member State and is often referred to as a community of states governed by the united diversity.

In addition, as a powerful geopolitical actor, the Union defines and ensures both the external and internal security of the community. The internal security is an integral part of the area of freedom, security and justice guaranteed by the Union to all EU citizens and its content is defined in Title 5 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. External security is an integral part of The Common Foreign and Security Policy and The Common Security and Defence Policy. These policies set parameters for the Union's diplomatic action and military cooperation by establishing joint armed forces, to ensure geopolitical activity and involve elements of the Union's hard and soft power in global relations. These external security segments have been developed separately and independently from the NATO Alliance which has interfered with the establishment and development of a joint EU defence project in the last 30 years. Based on the aforementioned indicators, of primarily historical, social, cultural and economic relationship to the European continent and belonging to the same legal tradition, considering all the advantages and disadvantages of European integration, it may be concluded that the Republic of Serbia is more likely to achieve the protection of national interests, rapid economic development, high level of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, the establishment of an effective rule of law, sociological transformation and citizens' security, by establishing geopolitical connections with the European community of sovereign states i.e., the accession to the EU, than by surviving and developing as an "isolated island" of the Western Balkans.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The research on geopolitics, particularly of its social, economic and safety aspects in the modern global world, is directly related to the historical heritage, international relations, international law, and integrative processes, both regionally and globally. The positioning of small countries, such as the Republic of Serbia, in the global geopolitical relations, is no easy task.

Being a country with a long national and state tradition over the last 200 years, the modern Serbian state underwent uprisings, liberation, international recognition, the Balkan wars, and participating on the victorious side in two world wars. After the breakup of Yugoslavia and civil wars, as well as the NATO aggression at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the geopolitical positioning of Serbia was conditioned by the improvement of the international relations with the Second World War allies and China, for the preservation of national interests and sovereignty, particularly in Kosovo and Metohija. Economic development, trade and connecting economies within the European frameworks are prerequisites for the citizens' standard of living and for strengthening the economic, political and social influence in the region.

Hence, the national interest of the Republic of Serbia is to provide citizens with rapid economic growth, a decent standard of living, high-level respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, an effective rule of law, social and sociological transformation and security of each individual. New and old EU Member States have adopted a common model for the protection of national interests and geopolitical action for the benefit of all countries and their citizens. Quite a few European countries have decided not to participate in geopolitical integrative processes within the EU, such as Norway which has rejected EU membership twice in a referendum despite its partial economic and security ties within the Schengen area.

<sup>5</sup> For more information on values and objectives of the EU see Articles 2 and 3 of the Treaty on EU

Sociological factors contributing to national rootedness are a synthesis of the past and trust in the institutional order of the state, which is the essence of overall progress, both nationally and internationally. The symbiosis of citizens' sociological values and the sense of security, as well as the perspective of the development of a nation both domestically and internationally, determine the way of a country's development. This article outlines geopolitical and historical factors indicating the current position of the Republic of Serbia, its aspirations for EU integration, the challenges of the past and uncertain future, a nation that is experiencing a severe birth rate decline and human capital flight. All these factors contribute to social disorientation, thus both directly and indirectly affecting the security of citizens, but also the priorities of national policy that must include the elements of international development and multilateral cooperation.

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