

## THE FUTURE OF SERBIA IN EUROPE: THE DIVIDING LINE IN SERBIAN POLITICS?

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This had happened before. Months of heated negotiations, countless campaign promises and bitter disagreements amounting, finally, into a temporary solution of only limited affect. In both January and April of this year, Serbia was reminded that regardless of the EU's emphatic proclamations to the contrary, Serbia's path to Europe is still far from certain. On April 29, 2008 the EU opted to invite Serbia to sign the coveted Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA), the first major stepping stone to EU membership. But it added one major caveat: implementation of the Agreement would be contingent upon Serbia's full cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY). Though certainly symbolic of the EU's aspirations for a European Serbia, in practice having signed the SAA will do little to hasten Serbia's path to membership. Indeed, by conditioning SAA implementation on ICTY cooperation, the EU effectively put to rest any hope that Serbia would achieve EU candidacy in the near future. By all accounts, the EU's decision was meant to bolster Serbia's pro-European forces in the run-up to parliamentary elections scheduled for May 11, 2008. But the hesitance with which the agreement was made (Serbia was denied the Agreement in January) reflected mounting frustration with Serbia's perceived lack of commitment to European norms and values, if not the accession process in itself. As Luis Amado, Portugal's Foreign Minister remarked, "there is a division [in Serbia] between those who are in favor and those against Serbia's integration."<sup>1</sup> Indeed, in both foreign and domestic circles, the blame for Serbia's tardy EU trajectory is often placed on Serbia's so-called anti-European bloc. Serbian politics, the common wisdom goes, is polarized between two competing factions: those for and against Serbia's future in Europe. But is this characterization accurate? Not entirely. No significant political party in Serbia consistently opposes EU accession. All claim to support EU membership and have vowed to move Serbia closer to Europe. What distinguishes parties in Serbia is not their position on European integration. Nor is there necessarily a clear distinction between parties' positions on the policies that would enable Serbia's accession. As the following pages demonstrate, Serbia's political scene cannot be reduced to a straightforward dichotomy of good versus evil, pro versus anti-European, appealing though such simplifications may be. The lines which divide political parties in Serbia are far less clear-cut than is often presented and the options before Serbia's voters are thus more complex.

This paper examines the cleavages that distinguish parties in Serbia. It seeks, in particular, to assess whether the issue of European integration is in fact the driving force behind such cleavages, as is often alleged. It shall be demonstrated that this is not the case. To make this argument, the paper is structured as follows: section one presents an overview Serbia's current place in Europe, most notably the EU's position towards the Western Balkan countries and Serbian public opinion regarding European integration. Section two presents an analysis of Serbian political parties and their stated positions towards EU membership. Next, the paper discusses parties' positions on the policies

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<sup>1</sup> As quoted in "EU offers interim deal, signing on Feb. 7", *Radio and Television B92*, 28 January 2008, available at: [http://www.b92.net/eng/news/politics-article.php?yyyy=2008&mm=01&dd=28&nav\\_id=47275](http://www.b92.net/eng/news/politics-article.php?yyyy=2008&mm=01&dd=28&nav_id=47275).

which would enable EU membership to take place. Finally, the paper concludes by defining the genuine sources of contention amongst Serbia's political elite, and argues that these are far less dichotomous than one might expect.

### **Serbia and Europe**

Since the ouster of Slobodan Milosevic in October 2000, Serbia's place in Europe has come to seem all but inevitable. Beginning in June 2003, when EU member states professed their "unequivocal support to the European perspective of the Western Balkan countries" in Thessaloniki, Greece the EU has undertaken numerous efforts to stress its conviction that Serbia, like the rest of the Western Balkans, belongs in Europe. In June 2005 the European Council reiterated this commitment and in November 2007 the European Commission went so far as to state that "the perspective of EU membership is a reality."<sup>2</sup>

In Serbia, too, support for EU accession is strong, with approximately 68 percent of Serbs consistently favoring European integration.<sup>3</sup> Put in perspective, this number is fairly high: in October 2001 only about 60 percent of citizens in the 13 candidate countries (all of which have since become member states, with the exception of Turkey) expressed their support of EU accession.<sup>4</sup> Yet Serbia's integration process has all but stalled. By contrast, its neighbors, Croatia and Macedonia, have attained the status of EU candidates and both Albania and Montenegro have signed SAAs and are well on their way towards becoming candidate states themselves. Only for Bosnia-Herzegovina and Serbia (and potentially Kosovo) has the finalization of the SAA proved elusive. This is surprising, not least because Serbia equals or even outperforms its neighbors in many of arenas deemed vital for EU accession (see Table 1). According to Freedom House, for example, Serbia is actually slightly more democratic than much of the region, including Croatia. As pertains to levels of corruption, only Croatia does better. And although Serbia comes a far second in terms of GDP per capita, it does notably better than Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Macedonia. Despite such achievements however, Serbia lags far behind much of the region in its bid to join the EU.

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<sup>2</sup> European Commission, "Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament: Enlargement Strategy and Main Challenges 2007-2008", 6 November 2007.

<sup>3</sup> When asked to specify their support for Serbia's integration in the EU, between 64 and 72 percent of respondents answered positively between September 2006 and June 2007. See: "European orientation of the citizens of Serbia: Trends", EU Integration Office, 31 June 2007. It should be noted however, that the pro-European orientation of Serbs experienced a marked shift following Kosovo's declaration of independence on February 17, 2008. In a recent poll conducted by the Center for Free Elections and Democracy (CESID), just 41 percent of respondents expressed their support for Serbia's European orientation, as compared to 31 percent who opposed it, and 28 percent which were neutral. It remains to be seen whether this shift in public support away from EU accession will remain a constant.

<sup>4</sup> Applicant Countries Eurobarometer, 2001-1, 1-28 October 2001.

**Table 1: Comparative Performance of Western Balkan Countries**

Country	Democracy Score <sup>5</sup>	Corruption ranking <sup>6</sup>	GDP per capita <sup>7</sup>
Albania	3.82	105	3,256
Bosnia-Herzegovina	4.04	84	3,399
Croatia	3.75	64	11,271
Macedonia	3.82	84	3,573
Montenegro	3.93	84	----- <sup>8</sup>
Serbia	3.68	79	5,397

Not surprisingly, the blame for Serbia's tardy integration process is often placed with Serbia's so-called anti-European bloc. Analysts often highlight the supposed cleavage between parties' visions for a "pro-European and anti-European Serbia."<sup>9</sup> Likewise, segments of Serbia's political elites are keen on highlighting their monopoly over Serbia's pro-EU trajectory, hence Serbian President Boris Tadic's repeated claims that a victory for his rivals would place Serbia on an anti-European path. As Tadic stated during a recent televised Presidential debate, the decision before voters was the choice between being "for or against Serbia's path to Europe."<sup>10</sup> Tadic even went so far as to name his electoral coalition (which included Tadic's Democratic Party, the G17 Plus, the League of the Social Democrats of Vojvodina, and the Serbian Renewal Movement) "For a European Serbia". Brussels, too, has been eager to portray Serbia's political alternatives as a simple dichotomy of those for and against European integration. As Olli Rehn, EU Commissioner for Enlargement recently stated, "Seldom have citizens had as clear a choice as the Serbs do now, between a nationalist past and a European future."<sup>11</sup> While such a portrayal is appealing, not least because it reduces the complexity of Serbian politics to a readily understandable scenario, it is inaccurate. Serbia's parties do not fit neatly into two separate camps; those for and those against European integration. To the contrary, as the following section explains, their positions towards EU membership share much in common.

<sup>5</sup> Freedom House's Democracy Scores run from 1 to 7, with a score of 1 reflecting the greatest level of democratic development and a score of 7 the least. The democracy score is an aggregate of ratings pertaining to the state of a country's: electoral process, civil society, national democratic governance, local democratic governance, judicial framework and independence, and corruption. For more information, see: Freedom House, *Nations in Transit 2007*, available at:

[http://www.freedomhouse.hu/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=84](http://www.freedomhouse.hu/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=84).

<sup>6</sup> This data is taken from Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index 2007. Countries are ranked from 1 to 179, with 1 reflecting the least degree of corruption and 179 the most. For more information, see: Transparency International, *Corruption Perceptions Index 2007*, available at: [http://www.transparency.org/policy\\_research/surveys\\_indices/cpi/2007](http://www.transparency.org/policy_research/surveys_indices/cpi/2007).

<sup>7</sup> All data obtained from the International Monetary Fund's World Economic Outlook Database, October 2007, available at: <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/weo/2007/02/weodata/weoselgr.aspx>.

<sup>8</sup> Data for Montenegro is unavailable.

<sup>9</sup> This was highlighted by Zoran Stojiljkovic, Professor of Political Sociology of the University of Belgrade. As quoted in: "Serb Elections to Show Whether Serbs Remain Polls Apart", *Balkan Investigative Reporting Network*, 19 November 2006.

<sup>10</sup> Boris Tadic, Presidential Debate 2008, Radio and Television Serbia, 30 January 2008.

<sup>11</sup> Olli Rehn, "Balkans on the Mend", *The Guardian*, 28 January 2008.

## Serbia for Europe

If Serbia's public can be said to favor European integration, then so too can each of its major parties. Since the ouster of Milosevic in 2000, five parties have dominated Serbian politics: President Boris Tadic's Democratic Party (DS), Prime Minister Vojislav Kostunica's Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS), Mladjan Dinkic's G17 Plus, Vojislav Seselj's Serbian Radical Party (SRS), and Ivica Dacic's Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS), formerly lead by Slobodan Milosevic. The DS, DSS, and G17 Plus were all constituent members of the Democratic Opposition of Serbia, the 18-party coalition that brought the Milosevic regime to its knees. By contrast, the SRS and SPS were very much the 'old guard', both having served in government during the Milosevic era, and each boasting Presidents indicted by the ICTY for crimes against humanity.

**Table 2: Popular Representation of Serbia's Political Dichotomy**

Pro-EU Bloc		Anti-EU Bloc	
Party	Share of Vote	Party	Share of Vote
Democratic Party	22.9%	Serbian Radical Party	28,7%
Democratic Party of Serbia	16.7%	Socialist Party of Serbia	5,9%
G17 Plus	6.8%		
Liberal Democratic Party	5.3%		
<b>Total:</b>	<b>51.7%</b>	<b>Total:</b>	<b>34.6%</b>

Like those in many post-communist countries, political parties in Serbia suffer from a lack of ideological coherence.<sup>12</sup> Serbia's parties defy the classical (Western European) distinction between left-right politics, hence scholars' need to devise alternative categories through which to make sense of Serbia's political chaos. The most oft-used distinctions are those of anti-democratic versus pro-democratic blocs and anti-European versus pro-European blocs (see Table 2). This paper examines the second of these two claims. Where then do these parties stand on the issue of European integration?

Across the board, Serbia's parties profess their support of EU membership. The staunchest advocates of European integration are the DS and G17 Plus. Both have made the topic an integral part of their platforms, and regularly posit themselves as the forerunners of Serbia's European future. Hence the DS's presidential slogan "To conquer Europe together!" The DSS, by contrast, has made the EU a less central part of its campaign, but adheres to a similarly pro-EU position. According to the party's program, "the fact that Serbia is a European country directs our state toward close cooperation with European states, participation in the work of European organizations, and the inclusion in European integration processes with the final goal that our country, under equal conditions, become a fully fledged member of the European Union."<sup>13</sup> It was in fact

<sup>12</sup> See for example: Vladimi Goati (2004), *Partije I Partijski Sistem u Srbiji*, Belgrade/OGI Centar.

<sup>13</sup> Program Demokratska Stranka Srbije, available at: <http://www.dss.org.yu/pages/program.php?id=65>.

under DSS-leadership that Serbia signed its first official document with the EU, the feasibility study of 2005. Like the DSS, the SPS has declared itself ‘for’ Europe. In the words of its latest program adopted in 2006, “...the SPS supports the process of joining the EU.”<sup>14</sup> In a recent interview, the SPS’s candidate for presidential elections in January 2008, Milutin Mrkonjic, stated that “only a crazy person would oppose joining the EU.”<sup>15</sup> My own discussions with SPS representatives confirm the party’s pro-European orientation. Says Dejan Backovic of the SPS, “We want to be members of the European Union...we call for EU membership and European integration.”<sup>16</sup> Perhaps the greatest skeptic of European integration is the SRS. However, while the position of the party with respect to EU membership has not always been clearly defined or necessarily consistent, it too has pledged its support for Serbia’s European future. According to SRS Deputy Tomislav Nikolic, the party’s Presidential candidate and a self-proclaimed EU skeptic, the SRS “will cooperate with the EU”<sup>17</sup> and is not against European integration. Even in the aftermath of Kosovo’s declaration of independence, Nikolic has maintained that the SRS will abide by Serbia’s European course, so long as doing so does not compromise Serbia’s sovereignty over Kosovo. It thus places Serbia’s claims to Kosovo before Serbia’s claims to a European future. Yet, as the following pages show, the SRS is not alone in this regard. The DSS for its part has made similar statements, while those of the DS are not too far off. While the practical implications of such policies do not bode equally well for Serbia’s European perspective, the fact that no significant party in Serbia blatantly rejects Europe demands that the simple dichotomy between pro- and anti-European parties be re-examined. The following section does just that via an analysis of parties’ positions on the key issues facing Serbia on its trek to EU membership.

### Parties’ Positions on the Policies that Matter

It goes without saying that there are genuine, substantive differences between political parties in Serbia. Some of these differences would likely impact the time and manner in which Serbia enters the EU. But do these differences amount to a simple polarization between pro- and anti-Europeans? If one examines the positions parties have taken with respect to the policies that would enable European integration, the answer is no (see table 2).

**Table 2: Parties’ Position on Issues Pertaining to EU Membership**

Party	EU	Independence of Kosovo	Consequences of EU Recognition of Kosovar Independence	Consequences of EU’s insistence that EU membership be conditioned on Serbia’s recognition of Kosovo	ICTY
DSS	For	Against	Suspension of EU integration	End to EU integration	For

<sup>14</sup> Declaration adopted at the 7<sup>th</sup> Party Congress 2006.

<sup>15</sup> As stated on Utisak Nedelje, 27 January 2008.

<sup>16</sup> Personal interview with author, 9 February 2007.

<sup>17</sup> As quoted in: Dusan Pavlovic and Slobodan Antonic (2007), *Konsolidacija Demokratskih Ustanova u Srbiji Posle 2000 Godine*, Belgrade/Glasnik: 270.

DS	For	Against	Unspecified (likely diplomatic)	End to EU integration	For
G17	For	Against	Unspecified (likely diplomatic)	Unspecified	For
SPS	For	Against	Suspension of EU integration	End to EU integration	Against
SRS	For	Against	End to EU integration	End to EU integration	Against

If one looks, for example, at the matter of Kosovo, one sees a striking similarity between parties' positions but a diverse range of tactics following Kosovo's declaration of independence. Only one party in Serbia, the Liberal Democratic Party of Cedomir Jovanovic, supports Kosovo's independence. This party boasts just five percent of seats in parliament. By contrast, the vast majority of parties in Serbia—and *all* major parties in parliament—oppose Kosovo's independence. This stance brings with it different repercussions, particularly with respect to the EU. Perhaps understandably, neither the DS nor the G17 Plus has provided much clarity as to the course they would take should the EU, as a whole, recognize Kosovo's claims to independence.<sup>18</sup> It is notable that the DS has refused to submit to DSS demands that it suspend its membership efforts should the EU opt towards recognition. Rather, the DS supported a series of diplomatic measures, including the temporary removal of Serbian Ambassadors from select states. The DSS, by contrast, has been rather clear: it refused to give its backing to the SAA and has thereby supported a suspension of the process of European integration. The SPS position on this account is virtually indistinguishable: it, too, favors suspension should the EU disregard its territorial claims to Kosovo. As Ivica Dacic, SPS President explained, "We are for the European Union, but if America and Europe would force us to choose between the European Union and Kosovo, we would choose Kosovo."<sup>19</sup> Undoubtedly, the SRS takes the most hard-line position here: it advocates an alternative course should the EU recognize Kosovar independence: that of forming closer ties with the Russian Federation. Thus, what we see here is that the simple dichotomy between pro- and anti-European parties, as portrayed in Table 1, does not do justice to parties' varying policy perspectives. The DSS in particular defies classification as a purely pro-European party.

On the matter of ICTY cooperation—perhaps the issue with the greatest ramifications for Serbia's future accession—an equally complex situation comes to light. While here the dichotomy would appear to be most applicable (with the DSS, DS and G17 for cooperation, and the SPS and SRS against), the reality is that despite parties' statements to the contrary, not one party has proven itself capable of achieving full cooperation with the ICTY. Thus, while the DS, DSS, and G17 Plus have all stated their support for the Tribunal, Ratko Mladic remains on the run, despite the fact that these parties have held power since 2000. One might argue, as no doubt many critics have, that such positions are meaningless unless they produce tangible results. In the case of Ratko

<sup>18</sup> The EU thus far lacks a united stance towards the question of Kosovar independence. At the time of writing, 19 of the EU's 27 member states have recognized Kosovo's independence. In each of these cases, Serbia has responded by recalling their Ambassadors.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid: 270.

Mladic and Radovan Karadzic, they have not. For the EU, this is a deal breaker. Serbia's accession to the EU will remain stalled so long as Mladic is not in The Hague. Moreover, it is notable that it was the previous government, which relied on the silent support of the SPS, that enabled the greatest number of extraditions. This does not imply that the party supports cooperation, only that it has not necessarily obstructed the process to the extent that many would have predicted.

In sum, we see that the differences between parties in Serbia are more, and slightly less predictable, than meets the eye. The oft-made distinction made between those for and against European integration is not borne out by reality. Serbia's parties do not fit neatly into two opposing camps, in many respects the DSS is no less 'anti-European' than the SPS. To place it within one camp or another is to commit the sin of conceptual stretching. Analysts should avoid this terminology and instead, focus on the specific policies which define parties and distinguish them from their opponents.

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