

Contemporary Dimensions of Serbia's Regional Foreign Policy

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Summary

The article gives an insight into the general course of action of the Serbian state aimed at the diversification of hydrocarbon sources with an emphasis on the supply of crude oil. Furthermore, a case with primary goal related to the increase of energy system stability is presented in the light of its secondary psycho-informational influence. Interactions with the Russian leadership are analysed, mainly along the lines of the Serbian position regarding the territorial integrity of Ukraine and the possible accession to the sanction's regime against the Russian Federation. The methodology of the study is based on a structuralist approach consisting of synchronic interpretation of separate phenomena directed towards the derivation of gross constituent units of relations.

The results extrapolate that the practical steps aimed at guaranteeing the energy security of the country show lack of interest to move away from Russian supply of natural gas and crude oil which is in turn intrinsically related to the future general geopolitical stance of official Belgrade. Active diplomacy in the region is concentrated along the Vienna - Budapest axis. The significance of the results arises from the fact that the represented gross constituent units of relations expose a firm course that is diverging from the EU CFSP.

Keywords: Serbian foreign policy, energy system, diversification of energy resources, Serbian regional diplomacy, Serb-Russian relations, Serbia and EU

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Introduction

The June 2022 - December 2022 period has been marked by a downward trend in the relations between Belgrade and Pristina which in turn predetermines the wider regional context, characterized by increased conflict potential, uncertainty in the supply of energy

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resources and staggering inflation rate. This time frame has been chosen as representing the development of the main line along the surge in tensions related to the decision of Kurti's government (announced on 29 June 2022) to issue temporary ID papers to Serbian citizens entering Kosovo and to force a re-registration process of vehicles that continue to drive with Serbian-issued plates (Info-ks, 2022). As the present piece of research argues, both parties pursued goals different than the stated ones, which were hidden behind the visible pretexts of opposition transforming through the period mainly due to external pressure.

Thus, we witnessed the "phased" approach proposed by the prime minister of Kosovo on 28 October 2022, the decision of Fehmi Hoti, Deputy General Director of Kosovo police, to dismiss the director of the Northern Regional Police Department, Nenad Djuric, precisely due to his refusal to enforce the order to issue warnings to persons driving vehicles with old license plates which in turn led to the meeting in Zvecan on November, 2022 and the withdrawal of the political and institutional representatives of the Serbs in Kosovo – from the assembly, government, local self-government bodies in North Mitrovica, Zubin Potok, Zvecan and Leposavic, as well as judicial and police authorities. These have led to increased police presence in Northern Kosovo, the statements by the Serbian side that it wishes to deploy its security forces there (in accordance with item 4 of Resolution 1244) and the arrest of Dejan Pantic (who left the Kosovo police force in protest in November, 2022) on 10 December 2022 on charges of preparing a terrorist attack that culminated in the blocking of main roads and border crossings.

The release of Mr. Pantic and his placement under house arrest two weeks later marked an inflection point with the removal of barricades between 12 December 2022 and 3 January 2023. For the successful regulation of the bilateral moves a critical role was played by Miroslav Lajcak² (especially during his visit to Pristina on October 10, 2022) and Gabriel Escobar's³ urge to form the Association of Serb Municipalities as soon as possible. The European Commission's annual progress report on Serbia of 12 October 2022 exposes also shortcomings in the normalization process, concluding there was a backslide in regards to the compliance with the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy.

Underscoring the above, while Albin Kurti in an interview with the Croatian newspaper *Večerni list*, points out that "it would be irresponsible to say that there will never be a conflict and war (between Serbia and Kosovo)" (Shenja, 2022), Ivica Dacic (Minister of Foreign Affairs of Serbia as of 26 October 2022) in turn accuses "the EU and the West" of reacting only against the actions of official Belgrade, while tacitly approving Pristina's efforts directed to "military occupation of the northern parts of Kosovo and Metohija, rout and expulsion of the Serbs". The results of the last census in Croatia are described in a similar way, where, in the words of Dacic, "the expulsion of Serbs continues", and the

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³ The US Deputy Assistant Secretary overseeing policy towards the countries of the Western Balkans and the Office of Press and Public Diplomacy.

demands for revision of the Dayton Agreement were aimed at “eliminating the Republika Srpska” (Tanjug, 2022). This political discourse confirms the hypothesis laid out by Jordan Bakalov that excessive pressure from the West will only strengthen the feeling that Russia is the sole ally of the country (Bakalov, 2018: 226) and Marian Ninov’s arguments about the difficulty to derive a proportionate relationship between the non-military factors and the risks related to trends in the environment that would lead to the use of a military (armed) force (Ninov, 2020: 95).

The USA, as the main external factor in regional dynamics, also expresses its concern about the continued and deepening cooperation between Moscow and Belgrade. Jennifer Brush, initially a deputy and then head of the US diplomatic mission in Serbia (2007-2010), says that Russia’s failed actions in Ukraine will have a parallel effect on the idea of expanding the “Serbian world”. According to her, this move will also fail, while Serbia should stay within its internationally recognized borders and work to strengthen its democracy without interfering in the politics of neighbouring countries (Durdic, 2022).

Against this rich contextual background, the research hypothesis of this article is that the Serbian state’s energy diversification attempts are not genuine and are being used as a tool to reduce external pressure from the USA and the EU to level its position vis-à-vis Russia. This in turn is used to continue the current foreign policy course of the country.

The research strategy relies on a synchronic interpretation of separate regional interactions of the Serbian leadership throughout the period June, 2022 - December, 2022, with subsequent “sectoral” grouping of thematic areas.

Understanding the limitations related to the input breadth and depth of available data, the study is significant with its ability to bring forth a more comprehensive understanding of Serbia’s regional behaviour. This state remains a cornerstone for the future enlargement of the EU and with its entanglement with Pristina, Skopje and Banja Luka, represents a test for the Euro-Atlantic community’s capabilities to overcome Russian hybrid presence in the Balkans. Therefore, the study will focus on the most pressing issues for official Belgrade that has the greatest impact on regional dynamics.

Energy diversification

The Serbian state remains highly dependent on Russian natural gas (89% in 2019) and was faced with particular difficulties with the rerouting of deliveries through Turk/Balkan Stream and its full dependence on this infrastructure since 5 May 2022. The resume of operation of Kiskundorozsma (1 November 2022) might be related to the inflow of Serbian reserves on Hungarian territory. Regarding crude oil, prior to the entry into force on 5 December 2022 of the sixth EU sanctions package (introducing import ban on seaborne crude oil originating from the Russian Federation), Serbian dependence was lowered from 30% to 16%. The mode of transportation of this hydrocarbon is further offsetting the negative effect on the importers.

Following his participation on 1 October 2022 in the ceremony in Sofia for the commissioning of the gas interconnector between Bulgaria and Greece, Aleksandar Vucic confirmed the intention of the Serbian side to build an interconnection point (IP) with the Republic of North Macedonia (RNM), with the argument of guaranteeing access to the quantities flowing through the Trans-Adriatic gas pipeline (Kosovo online, 2022). Vucic emphasized the need to improve the oil transportation infrastructure as well, with a view to overcoming Serbia's current dependence on the Adriatic Oil Pipeline (JANAF), which provides access to the receiving terminal in Omisalj, Croatia. On 10 October 2022, within the framework of the first meeting of the European Political Community in Prague, the decision to grant derogation to the countries of the Western Balkans regarding the import of Russian crude oil was postponed to 1 December 2022.

Vucic expressed his gratitude to the EU for the support regarding the construction of the gas IP with Bulgaria and RNM, and personally to the Bulgarian President Rumen Radev and the Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis for opposing Croatia's initiative to strictly adhere to the sixth package of EU sanctions (although it has received a temporary derogation from the same) and effectively block the supply of crude oil originating from the Russian Federation through JANAF (B92, 2022/c). In view of this, the Serbian Ministry of Mining and Energy stated that all options for diversifying crude oil supplies would be considered. Two options for connecting to the Druzhba oil pipeline have been presented:

- a/ Construction of a 128 km link from Novi Sad to Algyo (north of Szeged), Hungary. Some 104 km of this infrastructure would be on the territory of Serbia, and the value for this section would be equal to EUR 64 million (total value EUR 83 million);
- b/ Construction of an oil pipeline from Novi Sad to Szazhalombatta, Hungary, with a total length of 400 km and a value of EUR 240 million (N1, 2022/b).

In his public address of 10 October 2022, the Serbian president presented the first option as a priority with its value set at up to EUR 100 million and 18-24 months time frame of implementation. In parallel, an intention has been expressed to build an oil pipeline through the territory of the RNM to Durres, Albania. On 17 October 2022, Zorana Mihajlovic, then Minister of Mining and Energy, clarified that the construction of diversion lines to Albania and Greece would cost around €1 billion (N1, 2022/a). According to Vucic, his country had reserves of diesel fuel for 75 days, gasoline for 59 days, 200,000 tons of crude oil for refining and natural gas (NG) – 380 million tons in Hungary and 286 million tons in the Serbian part of the "Banatski Dvor" facility (Biznis telegraf, 2022) – for two months (N1, 2022/l). It was emphasized that in Europe, only Hungary purchased Russian NG at a lower price than the Serbian price, which was €332/1000 cubic meters.

At the opening ceremony of the reconstructed section Novi Pazar – Tutin (built by the Turkish company "Taşyapı", length 20534.16 m) and of the local road Pridvorica – Devici, the Serbian president commented on the expected increase in crude oil prices, as a result of the OPEC+ decision to limit production levels. In his opinion Serbia will also be threatened by the development of this process (Republika, 2022).

Regarding the information about alleged attempts to carry out sabotage against “Turkish Stream” in the Black Sea area, Vucic stated that he had instructed the BIA and the police to take the necessary actions to ensure the safety of the gas transmission infrastructure on the territory of the country (Politika, 2022/c). He emphasized that such actions are unlikely to take place in Serbia, but points out that “whatever is possible must be done”. According to his assessment, a possible suspension of supplies along this line would mean that the Serbian state would be left without NG and electricity for 6 months, since Belgrade alone consumed 3 million cubic meters NG per day and the total consumption regularly reached 6 million cubic meters per day. On 13 October 2022, it was announced that several people had been arrested during a foiled attack against Turkish Stream on Russian territory (Reuters, 2022/c).

In mid-November Vucic stated that the incoming NG quantities on a daily basis were not sufficient to satisfy the current consumption and the use of the available reserves had begun. It was explained that as of that date their quantity had decreased from 760 million cubic meters to 650 million cubic meters (N1, 2022/k). Following the meeting of the Working Party on Energy on 1 December 2022, it became clear that as of 5 December 2022 Serbia would not be able to import Russian crude oil through JANAF (N1, 2022/h).

SWAP of Serbian natural gas for electricity from RNM

As early as 19 September 2022 Vucic pointed out Serbia’s intention to provide NG to meet the needs of TPP “TE-TO” in Skopje (205 MW). At the end of September the adviser on energy issues to the RNM government, Viktor Andonov, expressed optimism about the ongoing negotiations with the Serbian side to obtain NG but emphasized that, if necessary, the production capacities can switch to the use of fuel oil (Sloboden pecat, 2022/a). According to Kreshnik Bekteshi, Minister of Economy of RNM, the price of these quantities of NG would be “three or four times lower than the market one” (Sloboden pecat, 2022/b).⁴

The deal with Serbia envisages that the surplus of electricity generated will be channelled into their electricity grid. The only NG supply point for the RNM is through the Kyustendil-Zidilovo IP, the full capacity of which is reserved by Gazprom until 2030. In this situation, the supply of NG from Serbia to the RNM will rely on “virtual reversible capacity” and consent from the Russian company.

On 23 October 2022, just three days after the adoption of the “Decision on the Temporary Ban on NG Exports and Supplies”, the Serbian Government voted an amendment introducing an exception only for RNM (Pari, 2022). RNM PM Dimitar Kovachevski published on “Facebook” a statement expressing gratitude for the “good neighbourliness and close cooperation within the Open Balkan framework”, which has provided “compressed NG for schools and hospitals in many cities throughout the country” (Kovacevski, 2022).

⁴ In an interview from September 30, 2022, Bekteshi clarified that it is not a question of buying and selling NG, but of exchanging it (ALSAT, 2022).

On 17 November 2022, after the Belgrade summit of the leaders of the Western Balkans countries, the RNM Prime Minister commented on the development of the deal, stating that "talks have not been suspended and our teams are working to find a solution and I think we are now much closer to one than we were at the beginning". Vucic added: "we are close to an agreement with Dimitar, we have opportunities at the moment and we will always share everything with our brotherly people in North Macedonia" (Vlada na RSM, 2022).

This process is in line with the pre-set priorities of the "Open Balkan" Initiative aimed at countering the energy crisis and set out during the economic Summit for regional cooperation in Belgrade in September 2022 (Taylor, 2022).

Regional context of the relations with the Russian federation

During a bilateral meeting held within the framework of the 25th International Economic Forum in St. Petersburg Nenad Popovic, minister without portfolio in the Serbian government and chairman of the Serbian part of the Intergovernmental Cooperation Committee (ICC) with Russia, and Yuriy Borisov, Deputy Prime Minister of the Russian Government and ICC Chairman on the Russian side, express the position that Serbia and Russia are prepared to make maximum efforts to keep bilateral trade between them unhindered (N1, 2022/c).

On 23 June 2022, Alexander Vulin, then Minister of Internal affairs, demonstrated his dissatisfaction with the fact that Ukraine and Moldova were granted the status of candidate countries for EU membership. "If the criterion for membership is to be at war, then Serbia could have received such a status as early as 1999. However, these rules do not seem to apply to those bombed by NATO, for a faster accession to the EU, a conflict with Russia is needed". Vulin then continued that "if the price of faster progress towards the EU is to start a war with someone, then no thanks, it's not worth it" (N1, 2022/m). On 25 June 2022 he added that it is important that all Serbs, no matter where they live, be united and that all issues of national interest "be decided together in Belgrade, the capital of all Serbs" (O21, 2022).

Several days later, Aleksandar Vucic noted that Serbia's path to EU membership depended on the geopolitical situation. Thus, he diverged from the "optimism" of Jadranka Joksimovic, minister of European integration, that the country could become member of the Union "within the next five to seven years" (Dnevno, 2022). In an interview with *Kurir* magazine, Joksimović emphasized that according to the old methodology, Serbia has already completed half of the negotiation work and according to the new one, it is the only country that accelerates the negotiation process. The Minister of European Integration added that when the country becomes a member of the EU, it will have to unify its foreign policy with regard to the introduction of sanctions against Russia (Sloboden pecat, 2022/c).

On 14 July 2022, the Russian state television "Russia Today" (RT) announced its intention to open an office in Serbia. The news was confirmed by the director of the Russian portal *Sputnik* in Belgrade Ljubinka Milincic (Danas, 2022/b). The announcement provoked an

immediate reaction from the European Commission, as its spokesperson, Peter Stano, stated that Serbia was expected to comply with EU decisions, one of which being not broadcast, distribute and advertise RT, considered a tool of propaganda and disinformation (N1, 2022/i). At the same time, on the air of "Pink" TV, Vucic again reiterated his position that "we must be united, continue our European path, protect our relations with the Russian Federation and with China and with everyone else. As you can see, this policy was maintained even in the worst time. How long it can last – we will see, it is a matter of interest of our country" (Slavgorod, 2022).

The Belarusian Telegraph Agency announced that on 27 July 2022 talks were held (via video link) between representatives of the Ministry of Defence of Belarus and the Ministry of Defence of Serbia. The meeting was attended by the heads of the departments for international military cooperation – Col. Valery Revenko (Belarus) and Col. Nebojsa Svjetlica (Serbia), and the "state and prospects of bilateral relations in the military sector" were discussed (BELTA, 2022). The meeting has not been reflected on the website of the Ministry of Defence of Serbia.

About ten days later, in an interview for *SMNews*, the Russian ambassador to Serbia, Alexander Botsan-Kharchenko, emphasized that the possible establishment of a Russian military base there is "a sovereign matter of the country itself and a matter of interest for the Russian Federation" (SMNews, 2022). It should be noted that the statement of the Russian ambassador is not about the Russian-Serbian Humanitarian Center existing since 2012 (NSN, 2022). Commenting on the portal *lenta.ru*, owned by Sberbank since 2020, the Russian military expert and historian Boris Yulin pointed out that in the current state of the regional situation, the only logical purpose of such a facility would be tied to obtaining intelligence information (Lenta.ru, 2022). Vucic also expressed his position on the comments regarding the possible deployment of a Russian military base in Serbia. In his words, "there are three options for this to happen – to replace me, my mandate to expire or to kill me or to die ... otherwise you cannot make me agree Serbia to renounce its military neutrality" (B92, 2022/a).

According to Boško Obradović, leader of Serbian Movement "Dveri", "Vucic is wrong when he rejects the idea of a Russian military base in Serbia. We already have one military base in the country, that of NATO in Kosovo and Metohija. The only way to create a balance and protect Serbia and the Serbian people there is by accepting Russian military which may withdraw as soon as NATO does" (Vo centar, 2022/a).

After a meeting in late August with Alexander Vulin in Moscow, Sergey Lavrov emphasized that the dialogue between Serbia and Russia is developing at all levels, in view of the complex international situation. In the words of the Russian Foreign Minister, Alexander Vucic and Vladimir Putin "coordinated their positions and agreed on next steps" in telephone conversations. Vulin, who also held talks with the directors of Rostech and Rosoboronexport, added that Serbia would not forget the centuries-old brotherhood with Russia and would not join the "anti-Russian hysteria" (IN4S, 2022).

In relation to Lavrov's statements, Zorana Mihajlovic took a sharp position in a written message from her office (on 24 August 2022), stressing that the decision not to introduce sanctions against the Russian Federation did not mean support for its cause in the conflict with Ukraine. She believed that the Russian foreign minister thus put additional pressure on the Serbian government and "although he talks about friendship between the two countries, his behaviour in practice shows the exact opposite" (Politika, 2022/a). In previous statements of Mihajlovic while in ministerial office (2014-2022) she has always supported the pro-EU path of the country but never in such a harsh manner towards Russia. This, combined with her negative comments on the main coalition partner of the Serbian Progressive Party – the Socialist Party of Serbia, might have played a significant role in Vucic's decision not to count on her in the new government in such a sensitive external environment. On 7 September 2022, at the opening of the business forum "EXPO Russia - Serbia 2022" in Belgrade, Botsan-Kharchenko stated that the Russian Federation did not make a request to open a military base, nor did Serbia propose such move (Politika, 2022/b).

On September 20, 2022, Vladimir Putin stated that Russia appreciated Serbia's balanced approach and reaffirmed that "within international law, relying above all on UN Security Council Resolution 1244" it will continue to provide "comprehensive support for our Serbian friends in the defence of their legitimate rights and interests, state sovereignty and territorial integrity" (N1, 2022/d). Meanwhile, according to Serbian media (Novosti, 2022), Aleksandar Vucic has been subjected to considerable pressure from EU representatives during his participation in the 77th session of the UN General Assembly, with a view to the immediate accession of Serbia to the sanctions against the Russian Federation.

After a meeting with the Kosovo mayors in late September, Albin Kurti commented on the information that Nikola Selakovic (at that time Minister of Foreign Affairs) and Sergey Lavrov signed an agreement on foreign policy coordination for the 2023-2024 period on the side-lines of the UN General Assembly session. According to the Prime Minister of Kosovo, this "should have worried the Western democratic centres" (Lider, 2022). Kurti also draws attention to the Serbian president's claims that Kosovo is seeking to acquire artillery with a range of more than 10 km, emphasizing the democratic, progressive and reliable nature of the government he leads, in contrast to Vucic's rule, which he describes as undemocratic and denying the crimes of Slobodan Milosevic's regime.

In relation to the above-mentioned agreement, Selakovic stated that it has been signed every two years since 1996 and does not contain provisions affecting security policy (N1, 2022/g). In parallel, he emphasized that Serbia will not recognize the results of the referendums on the accession of the Ukrainian Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson and Zaporozhye regions to the Russian Federation. The latter did not spare the criticism towards the behavior of official Belgrade, expressed on 26 September 2022 by the US ambassador to Serbia Christopher Hill and the head of the EU delegation in Serbia Emmanuel Joffre. According to them, "right now, nobody should sign anything with Russia" and the behaviour of the Serbian leadership has sent "a completely opposite message to that of the EU"

(RFERL, 2022). EEAS spokesperson Peter Stano added that if the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Serbia begins to hold regular consultations with the foreign ministry of a country that commits criminal aggression, this would give rise to serious questions (Reuters, 2022/a). The US Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs, Karen Donfried, in a telephone conversation with Vucic, also harshly criticized the signed "Consultation Plan" (N1, 2022/j).

At the end of September Vucic reaffirmed that Serbia would not recognize the referendums in the four Ukrainian regions, tying this decision to the need to preserve the arguments against the independence of Kosovo. On 12 October 2022, the Serbian side voted positively in the UN General Assembly on the adoption of a resolution in support of the territorial integrity of Ukraine (UN News, 2022). However, Konstantin Kuhle from the German Free Democratic Party called to freeze Serbia's EU membership negotiations, citing the significant number of people from countries such as India, Burundi and Tunisia moving from Serbian territory to that of member states of the Union (SOT, 2022). In previous statements Kuhle has criticized official Belgrade and the close relations it maintained with the Russian Federation.

On 3 October 2022, the Romanian Directorate for the Investigation of Organized Crime and Terrorism conducted a search of the offices of "Naftna Industrija Srbije" (NIS) in Bucharest and Timișoara, in a case related to "disclosure of classified information and unauthorized transfer of digital data" (N1, 2022/e). In parallel, the homes of 9 employees of the Serbian company were also searched. NIS is de facto controlled by Gazprom, although the Russian energy giant holds only 6.15% of the shares (B92, 2022/b). Gazprom Neft owns 50% of NIS and in turn is 95.68% owned by Gazprom. After questioning 8 people, the Romanian Prosecutor's Office confirms that four NIS employees are the subject of a criminal investigation, due to alleged non-compliance with the Fuel Law and the regulations of the National Agency for Mineral Resources (Agenția Națională pentru Resurse Minerale) (Reuters, 2022/b). Reports representing classified information regarding crude oil and NG deposits in western parts of Romania are believed to have reached NIS headquarters in Belgrade and were "provided to a foreign security service".

The Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Russia, Alexander Grushko, stated that Serbia is under "unprecedented pressure" that exceeds the limits of civilized international communication (RTV, 2022). According to him, bilateral relations are built on a "stable foundation of historical partnership and mutual sympathy" and cooperation in key areas such as energy and high technology is maintained. During his visit to Belgrade in mid-October, a number of issues were discussed, including the "growing tension in Kosovo and Metohija" and the sanctions regime against the Russian Federation (Sputnik, 2022). Regarding the imposition of sanctions, Grushko emphasized that "any government that is guided by its national interests and does not succumb to pressure will not commit such political harakiri" (Ibid.).

On 19 October 2022, Dragan Šutanovac, former minister of defence of Serbia, sharply criticized the Russian side, pointing out that in 1992 the rulers in Moscow voted to support

the introduction of UN sanctions against Serbia, in 2003 they left Kosovo and Metohija, exploited the Serbian mineral resource base, in 1941 they negotiated with Hitler "while he razed us to the ground", and the current prices of Russian NG for the Serbian market are 30% higher than those for Turkey, which provides military technical assistance to Ukraine (Informer, 2022).

However, Serbia's behaviour on the international stage remains highly dependent on Russian interventions. The non-participation of the country in the first parliamentary summit of the "Crimea Platform" in Zagreb at the end of October was due to the "expectation" expressed by Alexander Botsan-Kharchenko during his meeting with the Speaker of the Assembly, Vladimir Orlić (on September 16), that the Serbian "Narodna skupština" will not send a delegation to participate in the above-mentioned event (Vo centar, 2022/b).

Meanwhile, in mid-November the multimedia online platform of "Russia today" in Serbia (under the name "RT Balkans") started operation. An intention has been expressed to start television broadcast in 2024 (N1, 2022/f). On 7 December 2022 the "Wagner Private Military Company" announced on its "Telegram" channel that their resident cultural and information centre for friendship and cooperation "Orly" was established in Serbia (Danas, 2022a). Alexander Lisov is named as its director.

Illegal migration

During a one-day working visit to Belgrade in September, Viktor Orbán criticized the "Western-invented" sanctions against the Russian Federation. According to the Hungarian prime minister, such actions were usually taken by a strong country against a weaker one and the Europeans were "energy dwarfs" who imposed sanctions against an "energy giant". In addition, the importance of cooperation in countering migration pressure is highlighted. Vucic, for his part, again compared the positions of the international factor in relation to the protection of the territorial integrity of Ukraine and that of Serbia, meanwhile thanking for the strong support received from the Hungarian state regarding the European integration process (Cabinet Office of the Prime Minister, 2022). Meetings were also held between the Serbian Minister of Finance Sinisa Mali and the Minister of Economic Development of Hungary, Marton Nagy, as well as between the former Serbian Minister for European Integration Jadranka Joksimovic and Hungarian Foreign Minister Peter Szijjártó.

During a tripartite meeting between Aleksandar Vucic, Viktor Orbán and Karl Nehammer in Belgrade in November, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed on strengthening cooperation in the fight against illegal migration, providing for the harmonization of Serbia's visa policy with Tunisia, Burundi and other non-European countries and the formation of a joint police force to be deployed on the border with the RNM. According to the Serbian president, 40% of the registered migrants in the country are of Afghan origin, 27% are from Syria, 12.5% from Morocco, 7% from Burundi and 2% from Pakistan (Vecer, 2022).

These developments were preceded by a meeting in the same format on 3 October, which aimed to give impetus for the alignment of Serbia's visa policy with that of EU as to

ensure that citizens of countries such as India will not be able to use its territory for transit purposes and subsequent migration (Grieshber and Gec, 2022).

Conclusions

The applied research strategy along the processed data allows deriving the following main conclusions:

- The inability to use JANAF for supplies of Russian crude oil will not have a significant economic effect but will hinder Serbia in its efforts to extract dividends from its position vis-à-vis the Russian Federation.
- Kurti's government seeks to increase the conflict potential with Serbia, with a view to preventing the formation of the Association of Serb Municipalities. However, through its behaviour, Pristina creates an indirect positive effect for the Serbian leadership and its interactions with the USA and the EU.
- It is noted that the pro-Russian orientation of the new government of Serbia is preserved, with the distinct absence of Zorana Mihajlovic (very probably due to the fact she expressed mildly negative statements towards the Russian Federation in August 2022) and the granting of key positions to persons maintaining close contacts with the Russian government (Ivica Dacic as Foreign Minister and Alexander Vulin as director of BIA).
- In the period under consideration, Serbia's foreign policy line does not change and remains subordinated to the long-repeated thesis that it will not suffer losses regarding its national interests due to potential future dividends.
- Both Serbia and Kosovo show traits of overbalancing that have the potential to trigger a security dilemma in a wider context, especially along different regional axes and in the first place between Belgrade and Zagreb.

The above-listed statements clearly confirm the research hypothesis and set a possible short-term course of action for the Serbian leadership.

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