

Chapter Four

Challenges of Democracy in Serbia

Daniel Serwer

Serbia is the center of gravity of the Balkans. The largest of six former Yugoslav republics in population, it rivals Bulgaria, which is third in the region only to Romania and Greece. Landlocked, it is geographically central, bordering eight other countries: Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Kosovo, Macedonia, Bulgaria, Romania and Hungary. Only much larger countries have land borders with more neighbors (Brazil, China, Democratic Republic of the Congo and Russia). In GDP per capita at Purchasing Power Parity, according to 2015 IMF figures, Serbia is second only to Montenegro among Balkans countries not yet members of the European Union, despite a decade of war in the 1990s and lagging economic performance in the 2000s.

It would be too much to suggest that as goes Serbia, so goes the Balkans. Many countries in the Balkans progressed politically and economically while Serbia stagnated in the 1990s. But Serbia is an important player that has in the past generated more than its share of regional instability, conflict, economic disruption and displacement. Serbia matters.

A Decade of War and Autocracy

In the 1990s Serbia was at war much of the time. After the Berlin Wall fell, Yugoslavia flew apart with the secession of Slovenia (1990), Croatia (1991), Macedonia (1991) and Bosnia and Herzegovina (1992). Belgrade, which used the remnants of the Yugoslav National Army (JNA) to contest by military means all but the secession of Macedonia, was left with Montenegro in a rump Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, later rechristened the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro. Slobodan Milošević, a former Communist apparatchik, governed it as an elected autocrat whose popularity was based on his appeals to Serbian nationalism, his control of the main media outlets, support from the security services and crony capitalists, and his vicious treatment of rivals and dissenters.

The wars accompanying the secession of three of Yugoslav's republics ended in 1995, after NATO intervened against Serb forces in Bosnia and Herzegovina and brought Milošević to Dayton suing for peace. He had already faced a difficult challenge that spring, when Croatian forces took back from Serb control three of four UN Protected Areas. About two hundred thousand Croatian Serbs, who had lived in the Krajina (border) area of Croatia for hundreds of years, fled Croatia for Serbia, where they called for Milošević to step down in the wake of military disaster. He feared that the Bosnian Serbs, who numbered at least two if not three times as many, would likewise leave Bosnia as Federation (Bosniak and Croat) forces swept west and north in the summer of 1995 with Croatian support in the wake of NATO bombing of the Serb forces. The Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic was regarded at the time as a rival to Milošević in Belgrade. Milošević needed peace in Bosnia to protect his own hold on power in Serbia. He made that peace at Dayton.

He soon faced a challenge from within. Milošević blatantly falsified local election results in late 1996. For the first time, the Serbian opposition political parties and nongovernmental organizations took to the streets to protest through the winter, echoing previous protests in March 1991, when an opposition political party massed large numbers of protesters in Belgrade. Both protests fizzled when Milošević accommodated some of their demands, though not enough to allow a challenge to his own position. He was a master of the political tactics required to keep himself in power despite dramatic military losses and popular discontent.

The Autocrat Falls

Milošević's skills fell short a few years later in Kosovo. An Albanian-majority province nominally inside Serbia, it had a representative on Yugoslavia's collective presidency, like the six Yugoslav republics. Kosovo had enjoyed a wide range of self-governance until 1989, when Milošević ended its autonomy and put it under Belgrade's direct rule. The Albanians then established their own parallel institutions, including a presidency and parliament as well as health and education systems. Milošević's crackdowns on nonviolent protests and the subsequent violent insurgency in Kosovo attracted international attention by the late 1990s, even as he formed a government of national unity and narrowed

the area of dissent allowed inside Serbia. An effort by the United States and the European Union to negotiate a political solution in France at the Rambouillet Chateau outside Paris in 1999 failed when Serbia refused to sign on.

Another war ensued. NATO, without United Nations Security Council authorization, undertook to prevent continuing expulsion of Albanians from Kosovo by bombing Serb forces as well as military and dual use infrastructure in both Kosovo and Serbia proper. The NATO/Yugoslavia war ended 78 days later with UN Security Council resolution 1244, which established UN administration of the province, promised a transition to democracy and foresaw an eventual decision on its political status. Milošević, faced with the prospect of irreversible damage to Serbia's infrastructure and economy, withdrew Serbian forces from Kosovo as NATO-led forces took charge.¹

Serbs were unhappy with the outcome, which left the country in ruins and Kosovo outside Belgrade's control. Sporadic protests against Milošević broke out in the summer of 1999. His opposition controlled a number of local governments, which got preferential treatment from the European Union, in particular supplies of energy.² But by the summer of 2000, an opposition political coalition, formed to demand new elections, had split. Milošević thought he had the situation again under control and called early Yugoslav elections, with himself as a candidate for President. Confident of victory, if only because he could falsify votes, he made a fatal mistake: he allowed counting of votes at the polling places.³

Yugoslavia was no democracy, but it allowed opposition candidates as a useful safety valve for discontent. This time most of the opposition united behind the nationalist democrat Vojislav Koštunica, chosen over his somewhat less nationalist rival Zoran Đinđić because he had 'high positives' and 'low negatives.' Crucially, Serbian civil society also mounted a major effort, led by an organization called CeSID (the Cen-

1. Stephen T. Hosmer, *The Conflict Over Kosovo: Why Milosevic Decided to Settle When He Did*, (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2001)

http://www.rand.org/pubs/monograph_reports/MR1351.

2. "Commission Successfully Completes Energy for Democracy in Serbia," European Commission, May 25, 2000, accessed August 9, 2015, http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-00-527_en.htm.

3. Siniša Vuković, "Serbia: Moderation as a Double-Edged Sword," in I. William Zartman, ed., *Arab Spring: Negotiation in the Shadow of the Intifadat*, (Athens and London: the University of Georgia Press, 2015)

ter for Free Elections and Democracy), to verify the accuracy of the voting and counting. It communicated the results from polling places faster than the government's official election apparatus was able to do. It also blocked efforts to report and tabulate falsified votes from Kosovo. Koštunica had won, by a narrow margin.

Street demonstrations returned. The student-led Otpor (resistance movement), which had pressed for opposition unity, helped turn out millions of demonstrators in favor of acceptance of the election results. Milošević fell when those results were officially recognized. Serbia had delivered a democratic result, despite long odds. Its civil society deserved a lot of the credit.

Another Mostly Lost Decade

But the next decade would not fulfill the hopes of the street demonstrators or most Serbian civil society organizations. Serbia remained bogged down economically and politically. In the aftermath of Koštunica's Yugoslav electoral victory, his less nationalist and more pro-European rival Zoran Đinđić was elected Prime Minister of Serbia. He marshaled Milošević off to the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) in 2001 and showed signs of preparing to reform the security services. But Đinđić was assassinated in 2003, by people closely associated with both the security forces and organized crime. A dozen people have been convicted of this crime, but precisely who ordered the assassination and why is still not clear. Suspicions of high-level involvement persist.

Boris Tadić was elected President of Serbia in 2004 and served until 2012. Unquestionably democratic and European in general orientation, Tadić was also committed to maintaining Belgrade's claim to sovereignty over Kosovo and at the same time preparing for EU membership. Seeing him as their best hope, EU institutions in Brussels and the United States government backed him to the hilt. He launched (2005) and completed (2007) negotiations with the EU for a Stabilization and Association Agreement (interrupted however for a year because Belgrade was not cooperating sufficiently with the International Criminal Tribunal in The Hague) as well as negotiations for the Schengen visa waiver program, which came into force in 2009. Serbia also applied for EU membership in 2009. But none of these steps, other than the visa waiver program, had a serious impact on ordinary people's lives.

In the meanwhile, Tadić presided during the peaceful dissolution of the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro, after Montenegro voted for independence in a 2006 referendum. Tadić also presided during the rewriting the Serbian constitution and then Kosovo's independence, declared in 2008 over Serbian objections but in accordance with a plan prepared by a UN envoy.⁴ Tadić's second term coincided with the global financial crisis and produced little for a Serbia no longer consumed by nationalist passions. Failure to meet the demand for jobs and prosperity resulted in Tadić's resounding defeat at the polls in 2012.

The 2006 rewriting of the Serbian constitution had particular significance for Kosovo and for Serbia's still young democracy, which was anxious not to be blamed for losing Kosovo and committed to maintaining sovereignty. The new constitution was prepared in an opaque process with no substantial public or parliamentary debate. It contains a preamble that appears to obligate the Serbian state to do everything it can to maintain sovereignty over Kosovo (and Metohija, a reference to Church lands in the province):

Considering also that the Province of Kosovo and Metohija is an integral part of the territory of Serbia, that it has the status of a substantial autonomy within the sovereign state of Serbia and that from such status of the Province of Kosovo and Metohija follow constitutional obligations of all state bodies to uphold and protect the state interests of Serbia in Kosovo and Metohija in all internal and foreign political relations⁵

The referendum to approve this constitution had to meet a dual threshold: 50 percent of voters had to approve, and 50 percent of registered voters had to come to the polls. The second threshold was thought to be out of reach if the Kosovo Albanians were counted on the voter rolls and refused to vote, as they had for almost 20 years. They certainly would not go to the polls to enable Serbia to adopt a constitution that included the sovereign claim to Kosovo. Voting 'no' would,

4. Martti Ahtisaari, Report of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General on Kosovo's Future Status, report, March 26, 2007, accessed July 16, 2015, <http://www.unosek.org/docref/report-english.pdf>.

5. "Constitution of The Republic of Serbia," World Intellectual Property Organization, September 30, 2006, accessed July 22, 2015, http://www.wipo.int/wipolex/en/text.jsp?file_id=191258.

ironically, have validated a constitution they disagreed with but could not defeat.

The dual threshold problem was solved, perniciously. Prime Minister Koštunica sent a letter to the UN administration in Kosovo asking to hold the referendum there. The UN did not respond. This provided him an excuse not to include the Kosovo Albanians on the voting register, thus depriving them of the option of blocking the new constitution by not voting. The international community nevertheless praised the process and accepted the results, which were mutually contradictory: the process demonstrated that Kosovo Albanians were no longer counted as Serbian citizens, but the outcome claimed they were. This bit of constitutional hypocrisy is still outstanding, although increasingly there is recognition in Serbia that the constitution will eventually have to be amended, for several reasons.⁶

Alternation in Power Brings Change

Serbia up to 2012 had witnessed only one democratic alternation, when opposition figures Koštunica and Đinđić came to power in Yugoslavia and Serbia, respectively in 2000 and 2001. When Đinđić's heir as head of the Democratic Party, Tadić, lost his bid for a third term in May 2012, Progressive Party leader Tomislav Nikolić came to power under the apt slogan "Let's Get Serbia Moving." Nikolić appointed Ivica Dačić, a holdover from Tadić's government, as prime (and interior) minister. Aleksandar Vučić, deputy leader of the Progressives and a disciple of Nikolić, served as deputy prime minister and defense minister. Nikolić, Dačić and Vučić all had origins on the pro- Milošević, nationalist side of Serbian politics: Nikolić and Vučić in the Radical Party and Dačić in Milošević's own Socialist Party.

This unlikely triumvirate has taken major steps in the European and democratic direction for Serbia in the wake of Tadić's uninspiring second term. The EU and U.S. actively encouraged this evolution, which has gone much further under the aegis of Serbs with strong nationalist credentials than under nominally less nationalist ones. While continuing to declare that it will not recognize Kosovo's unilateral declaration

6. The preamble is not the only problem, see "Opinion on the Constitution of Serbia," European Commission for Democracy through Law, March 19, 2007, accessed July 22, 2015, <http://www.helsinki.org.rs/doc/Venice%20Commission%20on%20Serbian%20Constitution.pdf>.

of independence, Belgrade has implicitly acknowledged that Serbia will not even try to re-establish Serbian authority in its former province, which could only be done by military and autocratic means.

The story of this evolution is essentially one of Serbian acceptance of “external incentives,” building on a foundation of “social learning.”⁷ After Kosovo Serbs injured German peacekeepers in 2011 during a demonstration, Chancellor Merkel read Belgrade the riot act and insisted that it “normalize” relations with the Pristina authorities who had declared independence and were recognized by close to 100 sovereign states. Generated in part by the burdensome costs of maintaining German peacekeepers in Kosovo, Berlin’s pressure, supported by the European Union and the United States, led to a series of technical agreements (on state documentation, Kosovo representation in regional organizations, telecommunications, electricity, border/boundary monitoring, etc.) and eventually to a political agreement in April 2013.⁸ Serbia, it was made clear, would not progress further in its EU ambitions without making significant progress in normalizing relations with Kosovo, which also came under pressure to talk directly with Belgrade.⁹

In both countries, majorities identify as Europeans and want democracy. In Serbia, the political elite regards adoption of the *acquis communautaire* as essential to modernizing a state still mired in outmoded socialism. In Kosovo, adoption of the *acquis* is regarded as essential to building a state from the ground up in a country with limited technical capabilities and governing experience. While implementation of European standards is often lacking in both Belgrade and Pristina, politicians in both countries claim to adhere to European values and norms. They even compete in claiming to be more European than the other.

Neither the technical agreements nor the political agreement between Belgrade and Pristina have yet been fully implemented, but their implications are clear. Belgrade has accepted Pristina’s constitu-

7. Frank Schimmelfennig and Ulrich Sedelmeier, “Governance by Conditionality: EU Rule Transfer to the Candidate Countries of Central and Eastern Europe,” *Journal of European Public Policy*, 11:4, 661-679, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/135017604200024889>, accessed July 31, 2015.

8. Edita Tahiri, Brussels Agreement Implementation State of Play, report, March 23, 2015, accessed July 23, 2015, http://www.kryeministri-ks.net/repository/docs/Kosovo_Report_on_Implementation_of_Brussels_Agreements__230315-signed-signed.pdf.

9. Frank Schimmelfennig & Ulrich Sedelmeier (2004) Governance by Conditionality: EU Rule Transfer to the Candidate Countries of Central and Eastern Europe, *Journal of European Public Policy*, 11:4, 661-679, DOI:10.1080/1350176042000248089.

tional and judicial authority on the whole territory of Kosovo, including its four northern, Serb-majority municipalities, which it has been agreed will form with Serb-majority municipalities south of the Ibar an Association/Community provided for in the Ahtisaari plan. It has also accepted that Kosovo and Serbia will apply and qualify for European Union membership separately (and without hindering each other). This implies that Kosovo is sovereign, as only sovereign states can apply for EU membership. While Serbs in Kosovo remain citizens of Serbia, Kosovo Albanians do not in any practical sense. They generally travel on Kosovo passports, they do not vote in Serbian elections or pay taxes to the Serbian state.

The results in terms of progress towards the EU have been substantial, but more procedural than financial. The European Union rewarded Serbia for its agreements with Kosovo by giving Belgrade a date to begin accession negotiations. They were initiated in December 2015 with the opening of Chapter 35 on normalization with Kosovo and Chapter 32 on financial controls. Serbia had already begun receiving substantial pre-accession funding from the EU, totaling 1.4 billion euros from 2007 to 2013 (178.8 million euros in 2013). An additional 986 million euros in soft loans and grants was provided in 2014, in response to floods. Belgrade is slated to receive 1.5 billion euros in 2014-20, only a small increase over the previous allocation.¹⁰ The bulk of the funding is explicitly intended to support implementation of the *acquis communautaire*. The EU has not generally linked particular funding to particular legislation or other Serbian actions, but the Commission makes its expectations clear in annual progress reports and frequent meetings. The amount of pre-accession assistance could increase or decrease depending on Serbia's needs and rate of progress as well as the European Commission's will and availability of funds.

Accession negotiations began in January 2014. Support for EU membership in Serbia remains around 60 percent, though it has drifted downwards in recent years. Serbia has begun to conform its laws and regulations to EU requirements, especially when it comes to the public administration, the transportation sector and the media law. EU conditionality remains effective on many issues, though implementation is

10. "Serbia Progress Report," European Commission, October 2014, pg. 4, accessed July 20, 2015, http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key_documents/2014/20140108-serbia-progress-report_en.pdf.

often spotty.¹¹ Many chapters of the *acquis* are not expected to cause big trouble for Belgrade, which is socialized to its technical requirements. The current Greek financial crisis may make Serbia leery of adopting the euro, but that has not been an issue so far since the Serbian dinar is free floating and Serbia is nowhere near fulfilling the macroeconomic criteria required to enter the euro-zone, whose members would not likely welcome Serbian membership in any event.

March 2014 elections confirmed Serbia's EU ambitions and brought Vučić's Progressives an absolute majority in parliament, making him prime minister. Thus the choice between Kosovo and the EU that stymied Tadić's presidency and slowed democratization has found at least a temporary resolution under Nikolić, Dačić and Vučić, all of whom came from the more nationalist and less democratic wing of Serbian politics. Serbia has progressed in many respects since the Milošević era. It is now in a position to claim that it is on the road to democracy and to a European future.

International Misalignment Persists

But that claim coexists with an attachment to non-alignment that is unique in the Balkans. Former Yugoslavia was a leader in the non-aligned movement during the Cold War. The habit persists in Belgrade. The parliament in 2007 declared Serbia militarily neutral, in pique at the impending Kosovo declaration of independence. While most Serbs want to join the EU, Belgrade traditionally has close ties with Moscow, with which it shares an Orthodox religion and Slavic language. Cultural heritage counts, especially in an era of contestation between East and West. Russia has significantly stepped up its opposition to EU and especially NATO enlargement in the wake of the Ukraine crisis. It exploits its close connections with more traditional and religious segments of Serbian society to weigh against Serbia's all too obvious inclination to move westward. Despite that, Prime Minister Vučić claims Serbia has made a strategic choice for Europe and democracy, while President Nikolić continues to court Moscow more than Washington.

11. Bodo Weber and Kurt Bassuener, "Analyzing the EC Serbia Progress Reports Useful Tool or Tactical Whitewash?" Democratization Policy Council, June 23, 2015, accessed July 22, 2015, <http://www.democratizationpolicy.org/2Fanalyzing-the-ec-serbia-progress-reports-useful-tool-or-tactical-whitewash->.

Non-alignment lost its real meaning for most of the world more than 25 years ago, with the fall of the Berlin wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union. All the other countries of the Balkans have opted unequivocally for Brussels, leaving Serbia surrounded by EU and NATO members and aspirants. Several maintain good bilateral relations with Russia, even while joining in Ukraine-related sanctions. Serbia has refused to do that, avowedly because it would receive no EU compensation, in contrast to EU member states. But some more nationalist Serbs certainly sympathize with Russia's stated aim of protecting Russian speakers in neighboring states, which is analogous to an objective that Serbia pursued aggressively (often on equally false pretenses) during the breakup of Yugoslavia.

Serbia's disappointment in Russian cancellation of the South Stream natural gas pipeline, on which Belgrade had invested both financial and diplomatic capital, has however led to some reappraisal of the wisdom of relying too heavily on Moscow for energy production. The main near term alternative, heavily favored by the United States, is the Trans-Adriatic Pipeline, which would deliver Azerbaijani gas to Serbia via Italy. Prime Minister Vučić has declared himself ready and willing to reduce dependence on Russian gas.¹²

The question now is what else would encourage and enable Serbia to take further steps away from its traditional "non-aligned" stance and persistent attachment to an increasingly autocratic Russia, towards a more in-depth commitment to European Union accession, democratic values and possible NATO membership.

Priority Internal Reforms

The road ahead to EU membership is still long. While Serbia's electoral mechanisms appear to function correctly, it is just beginning to reform its laws and administrative capabilities in conformity with the *acquis communautaire*, economic growth has been slow and fiscal imbalances are high, even if tax revenues and exports are increasing. Minority protection is imperfect, especially for Roma as well as for gays and lesbians, but progress is visible.

12. Dusan Stojanovic and Jovana Gec, "Premier: Serbia Ready to Reduce Dependence on Russian Gas," *The New York Times*, May 27, 2015, accessed July 22, 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/aponline/2015/05/28/world/europe/ap-eu-serbia-us.html?_r=0.

Serbia remains laggard in three key areas, all of which go beyond the technical requirements of the *acquis*: security sector reform, media freedom and rule of law. It needs to up its game in all three.

It is widely believed that the successful removal of Milošević in 2000 was achieved in part through a pact, tacit or explicit, between at least some leaders of the political opposition, in particular future prime minister Zoran Đinđić, and elements of the security forces, which apparently agreed not to protect Milošević in exchange for at least an implication they would not be held accountable for their behavior during his regime. The result was hesitation in reforming the security services, including not only the army but also the police and intelligence services. After Đinđić's assassination, a special operations unit was disbanded but there was even more reason to hesitate in reforming the rest, for fear of stirring a hornets' nest. Progress since then has been sporadic at best, driven largely by international pressure to cooperate with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia and Serbia's membership in Partnership for Peace, achieved before the declaration of neutrality.¹³ The net result has been slow adaptation of the security services to civilian control but little high-level accountability for past abuses. As Serbia for now is not expected to join NATO and internal pressure for reform is weak, the EU accession process will need to play a far stronger role than usual in its security sector reform.¹⁴

The media issue is not formal censorship but rather informal pressures and even self-censorship, often exercised through politically-appointed editors and fear of losing contracts for valuable government advertizing. In addition, politicians in Serbia, including the current prime minister, frequently attack the medium and even the journalist, not only the message, sometimes rousing extremists to violence against government critics.¹⁵ Fear cows many outlets into submission—memories of what happened to media moguls who resisted Milošević's dominance are still fresh.¹⁶ Serbian media need more diversified rev-

13. "The Missing Link: Security Sector Reform, 'Military Neutrality' and EU Integration in Serbia," Center for Euro-Atlantic Studies and Democratization Policy Council, November 2014, accessed August 9, 2015, <http://ceas-serbia.org/root/prilozi/CEAS-DPC-Study-Missing-Link-SSR-military-neutrality-Serbia-EU-integration.pdf>.

14. *Ibid.*

15. "Serbia Progress Report," European Commission, October 2014, pg. 4, accessed July 20, 2015, http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key_documents/2014/20140108-serbia-progress-report_en.pdf, pg. 46.

16. Kemal Kurspahić, *Prime Time Crime: Balkan Media in War and Peace* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2003).

enue streams and less intimidation by government officials in order to feel free to criticize without fear of retaliation.

Rule of law in Serbia suffers three chronic ailments: slowness, lack of professionalism and political influence. Commercial disputes can drag on for decades. Appointment of judges and prosecutors is politicized. Previous efforts at reform have failed. High-level corruption cases are rarely pursued and the fight against organized crime is lagging, even though the government now takes a hard rhetorical line in public on corruption. Tycoons and higher level war criminals are too often protected from prosecution. One of the prime suspects in the murder of the Bytyqi brothers, American Kosovars killed in 1999 by Serbian security forces, is a member of the prime minister's political party and serves on its executive board.¹⁷ Nongovernmental organizations have accused the Serbian Army chief of staff of war crimes they say units under his command committed in Kosovo.¹⁸ Prosecutors rarely pursue such high level cases. The courts need to be liberated from political constraints and encouraged to pursue malfeasance whenever and wherever it occurs, provided they follow proper procedures.

Interconnectedness is Important

Serbia is heavily dependent on Russian natural gas as well as Russian investment and technology for exploitation of its own gas and oil resources. This dependence will increase as Serbia's own domestic reserves are depleted. It needs alternatives. Theoretical long-term options, in addition to Azerbaijani gas via the Trans-Adriatic pipeline, include gas from Qatar, Libya, Croatia, Israel and Cyprus. Any of these could put Serbia in a much better position to resist Russian pressure on issues like Ukraine. Several of these options would benefit from resuscitation of the Krk pipeline from Croatia, a proposition under study in several countries.¹⁹

17. Marija Ristic, "Serbia's Broken Promises Over US Albanians' Murders," *Balkan Insight*, July 20, 2015, accessed July 23, 2015, <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/bytyqi-case-a-decade-long-broken-promises-1>.

18. Marija Ristic, "Natasa Kandic: Serbia's Bloodstained Army Boss Must Go," *Balkan Insight*, February 10, 2010, accessed July 23, 2015, <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/natasa-kandic-serbia-s-bloodstained-army-boss-must-go>.

19. Sven Milekic, "Croatia to Include Serbia in Gas Pipeline Project," *Balkan Insight*, February 11, 2015, accessed August 6, 2015, <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/croatia-to-include-serbia-into-gas-pipeline-network>.

While located in the heart of the Balkans, Serbia is still not well connected, especially to the Mediterranean. While many in Serbia and Montenegro may object, the quickest and easiest fix would be to complete the Durres/Pristina road through Kosovo to the southern Serbian town of Nis. This project, which the European Union is committed in principle to financing, faces obvious political difficulties, as it would be the first major new infrastructure linking Kosovo and Serbia since their 1990s warfare.²⁰ But it would provide serious economic benefits to both countries and go a long way to healing old wounds.

Also important would be economic cooperation between border/boundary communities in the two countries. Vital for this is an agreement on identification documents that would allow easy transit, like those in use between the U.S. and Mexico as well as the U.S. and Canada. It is difficult, however, to move in that direction without clarity and precision about where the boundary/border lies. It has not been formally agreed or demarcated, though there appear to be no serious disputes about where it lies. One can look long and hard for two countries without a demarcated border that have good relations. Demarcation of the Kosovo/Macedonia border led to a rapid improvement of relations between Skopje and Pristina, despite Kosovar objections that the line had been agreed with Belgrade prior to independence. Kosovo and Montenegro have recently completed demarcation of their border. The time has come for Belgrade and Pristina to begin technical preparations for border/boundary demarcation.

Military Posture Needs to Continue Shifting

Serbia is a member of NATO's Partnership for Peace and enjoys active cooperation with the Ohio National Guard. It has signed a NATO Individual Partnership Action Plan, participates in NATO military exercises and contributes to UN peacekeeping.²¹ But unlike other Balkan militaries, Serbia's army has not deployed with NATO or US forces. That would be an important step in cementing Serbia's relations with the

20. "Western Balkans 6 Meeting in Brussels," European Commission Press Release Database, April 21, 2015, accessed August 10, 2015, http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_STATEMENT-15-4826_en.htm?locale=en.

21. Fred Stern, "Serbia's Growing Role As a UN Peacekeeping Contributor," DipNote, March 9, 2014, accessed September 7, 2015, <http://blogs.state.gov/stories/2014/03/09/serbia-s-growing-role-un-peacekeeping-troop-contributor>.

West, one that Macedonia, for example, has taken by deploying embedded in the Vermont National Guard in Afghanistan. The Serbian Army medical corps is good and prepared for an operational deployment of this sort. War deployments are happily hard to come by these days, but a natural disaster deployment embedded with the Americans (or vice versa) could be a step in the right direction, especially if the Serbs bring their own helicopters (always in short supply) to the venture.

A NATO Membership Action Plan for Serbia is another possibility, albeit one that Moscow would resist, along with portions of Serbia's population committed to neutrality or nonalignment. But it could happen if Belgrade wants it. Once fully qualified Montenegro, which has received an invitation, enters the Alliance, and especially if former neutrals Sweden and Finland were to apply, it would make no strategic sense for Serbia to remain outside. Nonalignment really is going out of fashion.

Serbia has a southern military base on the border with Kosovo (Jug) that it might like to make available to NATO for exercises. So long as these are open to participation by the Kosovo armed forces, that idea might be a positive contribution to regional security. But Serbia's Defense Ministry and Chief of Staff still need to engage constructively, as neighbors normally do, with Kosovo's Security Force and its Ministry.

Regional Issues

When it comes to regional security, Serbia has particularly important roles to play in Bosnia and Herzegovina as well as Kosovo, both of which have Serb populations whose welfare Belgrade rightly values. Most concrete issues with Croatia have been resolved, but bilateral relations wax and wane, often over differing perceptions of what happened between Croats and Serbs during World War II and in Croatia's retaking of Serb-held territory in 1995.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, Milorad Dodik has long led Republika Srpska, the Serb-dominated 49 percent of the country. His political ambitions are tied to independence for his entity. It will not happen, not least because it would leave in central Bosnia a rump Islamic Republic that neither Serbia nor Croatia would find a compatible neighbor. Nor would Serbia risk endangering its EU accession process by recognizing an independent Republika Srpska. But even without secession, Dodik's

pursuit of his nationalist project has rendered the Bosnian state pretty much nonfunctional. At this writing, he is blocking a Bosnian commitment to reform of the labor market that the EU sees as vital. This is just his latest attempt to put a spoke in Sarajevo's wheel.

What is needed from Serbia is a clear break with Dodik. July 2015 marked the 20th anniversary of the Srebrenica massacre of more than 8000 Muslim men and boys by Serb forces in eastern Bosnia. There was no better occasion for Vučić to renounce his past nationalist excesses.²² It was also an opportunity for Serbia to say it profoundly regrets the genocidal act perpetrated in its name and wants Bosnia's Serbs to repair the damage by helping to build a Bosnian state capable of providing equal rights and economic opportunity for all its citizens. Vučić failed to take advantage of that opportunity. He continued the practice of his predecessors of refusing to call what happened at Srebrenica "genocide." Angry people throwing stones chased him from the 20th anniversary commemoration, making the needed break with Dodik more rather than less difficult for him.

In Kosovo, the issue for the moment is nitty gritty. Mediated by the EU, Belgrade and Pristina have reached both a broad agreement of principles, including application of the Kosovo constitution on all its territory, and specific technical agreements. They have also reached agreement in principle on forming a Serb Association of Municipalities inside Kosovo, which will be able to cooperate with Belgrade within the limits of Kosovo law (and is still very controversial in Pristina). Fully implementing the agreements would be helpful both to Serbia in its pursuit of EU membership and to Kosovo in its pursuit of a visa waiver from Brussels. The process will be long and drawn out, but external incentives will continue to function.

Serbia will need some day to face the issue of accepting Kosovo as a sovereign state and establishing some sort of diplomatic relations with it. The easiest way would be for Serbia to drop its objection to UN membership for Kosovo, followed by exchange of diplomatic representatives with the rank of ambassador (liaison officers have already been exchanged). One or more of the 23 EU members who already recognize Kosovo will surely block Serbia's membership if it fails to resolve this issue.

22. Miloš Ćirić, "Contexts Don't Burn," *Pescanik.net*, June 1, 2015, accessed July 22, 2015, <http://pescanik.net/contexts-dont-burn/>.

While Belgrade appears to have decided to postpone formal acceptance of Kosovo's sovereignty until late in its EU accession process, there is a good reason to face it sooner rather than later: Kosovo is designing its security forces, which in the absence of recognition will have to be significantly stronger than might be needed if the two countries had truly normalized their relationship, including by exchange of ambassadors.²³ NATO forces in Kosovo now number under 5000 and likely will decline further by 2020. As they are drawn down, recognition (or at least admission of Kosovo to the UN) and diplomatic relations at some level could reduce Kosovo's security requirements as well as Serbia's, saving both countries a bundle.

Conclusion

Serbia is proud of its long history, which it traces to 14th century Kosovo and earlier. Unfortunately that history also includes an inept monarchy between the world wars, several more recent decades of Communist mismanagement under Tito as well as a decade of autocratic rule and military misadventures under Milošević. It needs now to tend to its democratic future, which is gradually coming into clearer focus. The next decade or more will be devoted to qualifying for EU membership. Both the country's current leadership and its people are committed to that goal and appear ready for many of the domestic reforms required. Serbia has put off the difficult question of explicitly accepting Kosovo as a sovereign state, but once the benefits of EU membership are more proximate even that is unlikely to prove an insurmountable challenge.

Whether the door will be open when Serbia is ready to enter the EU is not however clear. Euro-skepticism is plaguing many EU members, fed by the euro crisis that has engulfed Greece and the dramatic influx of Middle Eastern and African migrants from around the Mediterranean. The EU, much like Serbia, is aging and declining demographically. While the logic of the situation favors revitalizing Europe by opening its doors to both young migrants and neighboring countries with a European tradition, there is no guarantee that will happen. The

23. Kosovar Center For Security Studies, "Destination NATO: Kosovo's Alternatives towards NATO Membership," accessed 2015, http://www.qkss.org/repository/docs/Destination_NATO_Kosovos_Alternatives_towards_NATO_Membership_556716.pdf.

last challenge for democracy Serbia will inevitably face will be convincing the public in EU member states, all 28 of which will have to ratify the accession treaty, that Serbian membership should be welcomed, not shunned.