

# Relations between the United States and Serbia: Asymmetric Confrontation and Relation<sup>1</sup>

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## 1. Introduction

The U.S. and Serbia are highly asymmetrical in size, in international position and in their respective roles. In the period of 1989–2017, Serbia existed in the framework of four different countries. It was part of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia – SFRY (1989–1991), then the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia – FRY (1992–2003), afterwards Serbia and Montenegro (2003–2006), and finally the Republic of Serbia (re-established its nationhood in June 2006). During these times, it suffered changes in size and in political position.

Despite several setbacks due to the role of the U.S. in the Balkans, the U.S. and Serbia had a significant level of cooperation in the examined period, in particular in the security sector. However, most of the determinants shaping these relationships are not of a bilateral nature.

Serbia at the beginning of the 1990s was designated as a ‘bad guy’ in the Balkans. It wanted to keep Yugoslavia together, and safeguard the interests of the Serbs and Serbia in the Yugoslav framework.

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Clearly, the changes in the status of Serbia, its political elite and the policies it pursued, along with the different accentuation of the European and Middle Eastern policies of the U.S. gave different results.

## 2. The 1989–1991 Period

### 2.1. *The political situation*

Yugoslavia in 1991 had a mixed population of 23,542,815 where neither group was dominant, nor did it possess control, or the necessary mechanisms to impose itself over the others.<sup>3</sup> The Yugoslav identity was weak.

Table 1.  
*Yugoslav census 1991*

<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Percentage of the entire population</b>
Croats	19.70%
Slovenes	7.50%
Bosniaks	10.00%
Serbs	36.20%
Albanians	9.30%
Macedonians	5.80%
Montenegrins	2.30%
Others	9.20%

*Source:* Popisi stanovništva Jugoslavije 1991

In January 1989, under the leadership of President Slobodan Milošević (elected in 1986) Serbia became the strongest member of the Yugoslav federation. At the same time, Croatian retired General Franjo Tuđman and few politicians from Slovenia had already established ties with Germany and Austria in order to pursue their independence (JANKOVIĆ 2017, 39–68) – “they prepared the ground for the positive attitude and support of the Western nations for their cause before the conflict” (PAVKOVIĆ–RADAN 2016, 147–155; JANKOVIĆ 2017).

<sup>3</sup> Publications of the Census Returns of 1948, 1953, 1961, 1971, 1981 and 1991. Belgrade, SZS.

The League of Communists of Yugoslavia ceased to function after February 1990. Thus, one of two federal pillars (the Army being the second) crumbled. This situation coupled with an economic crisis led the CIA to conclude: “Yugoslavia will cease to function as a federal state within one year and will probably dissolve within two. Economic reform will not stave off the breakup. [...] There will be a protracted armed uprising by Albanians in Kosovo. A full-scale, interrepublic war is unlikely, but serious intercommunal conflict will accompany the breakup and will continue afterward. The violence will be intractable and bitter” (CIA 1990, iii).

## *2.2. The U.S. factor and the dissolution of Yugoslavia*

While the White House was supporting the territorial integrity of Yugoslavia and the international financial institutions were backing economic centralisation, members of the U.S. Congress lobbied against the Yugoslav interests. Joseph DioGuardi, Tom Lantos and Robert Dole were among the most prominent members of the U.S. Congress advocating against the SFRY. Later they would become lobbyists for Kosovo’s independence. In the period of 1989–1991, U.S. policy vis-à-vis Yugoslavia was to promote economic and politic reforms in order to transform (not disintegrate) the state.

Despite its original intention to keep Yugoslavia together, the U.S. in 1990 decided to finance solely the ‘democratic forces’ in the Yugoslav republics and not the Yugoslav structures themselves. The U.S. Congress passed the 1991 Foreign Operations Appropriations Law 101–513 on 5 November 1990, the side effect of which was a blow for the already fragile Yugoslav unity.

Without previous warning, a section of Law 101–513 cut off all aid, trade, credits and loans from the U.S. to Yugoslavia within six months. It also ordered separate elections in each of the six republics that make up Yugoslavia, requiring State Department approval for the election procedures before aid would be resumed to the separate republics. The legislation also required U.S. personnel in all international financial institutions such as the World Bank and the IMF to enforce this cut-off policy for all credits and loans. Unlike for CEE countries, where the U.S. advocated these types of policy prescriptions at the national level, here the

U.S. adopted an approach that favoured the reform within internal units, and not at the national level. Per se, it was a signal of an important change in the foreign policy of Washington.

Only forces that the U.S. defined as “democratic forces” would receive funding. This meant an influx of funds to small right-wing nationalist parties in a financially strangled region, which was suddenly thrown into crisis by the overall funding cut (Appropriations Act 1991).

Serbian insistence on a strong federation, and its desire to maintain the red pentagram (star) on the flag in the moment of the general demise of communism in Europe exposed it as a designated bad guy.

### **3. The U.S. and Serbia and the Wars between 1991–2000**

#### *3.1. 1991–1992: The war begins*

The U.S. did not react in vacuum, but in concomitance with other foreign and internal actors. After the series of referenda on independence, Slovenia and Croatia proclaimed its independence on 25 June 1991.

In this period, the U.S. acted multilaterally through NATO and the UN, and it also intervened directly. In response to the war that emerged between the central government and the separatist states, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 713 on 25 September 1991 and imposed a “general and complete embargo on all deliveries of weapons and military equipment to Yugoslavia” (UN SC Resolution 713 1991).

NATO announced in November 1991 that: “All attempts to change existing borders through the use of force or a policy of *fait accompli* are unacceptable; we will not recognise any unilateral change of borders, external or internal, brought about by such means” (NATO 1991). On the same day, the Alliance proclaimed its new Strategic Concept that introduced a broader framework and space for action. It acted as a guarantor of the internal administrative lines as future borders. This line was followed by the Badinter Commission, which on 20 November declared that the (internal) boundaries of Croatia, and BiH with Serbia are to be considered as frontiers (PELLET 1992). With the dissolution of the country, the Serbian and Montenegrin leadership agreed in October 1991, during the Badinter

Arbitration Commission to remain in Yugoslavia.<sup>4</sup> These two republics would form the FRY in April 1992 (ĐUKANOVIĆ 2014).

In the meantime, U.S. diplomats, Secretary of State James Baker and Deputy Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger (Ambassador in Belgrade in the 1960s) tried to prevent the collapse of Yugoslavia on several occasions, urging compromise and reforms that would allow the country to survive (FRIEDMAN 1991). Nevertheless, the conflict was evolving towards a full-blown civil war in Croatia starting in 1991, and in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) starting in 1992.

The war in Bosnia, in particular, came after the last U.S. ambassador to Yugoslavia, Warren Zimmermann advised Alija Izetbegović, the leader of the Party of Democratic Action in BiH to back out from José Cutileiro's plan which was previously signed by all parties. According to *The New York Times*, Zimmermann said: "He said he didn't like it. I told him, if he didn't like it, why sign it?" (THOMAS 2003, 9). Thus, the leader of Bosnian Muslims withdrew his signature on 28 March 1992. The European Commission recognised BiH on 6 April 1992 and the war began the same day the Axis powers attacked Yugoslavia 51 years before.

### *3.2. Serbia vis-à-vis the U.S. and the end of the wars in Croatia and Bosnia*

The room to manoeuvre in the international arena was shrinking, and it was utterly aggravated with the outbreak of the war in BiH. On 13 May, the European Commission and the U.S. removed their ambassadors from Belgrade. The UN imposed sanctions against the FRY on 30 May 1992, accusing Serbia of not respecting UN SC Resolution 752 of 15 May 1992, and admonishing Croatia for not respecting it. Milošević tried to mitigate Western hostility by finding persons who would be more acceptable

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<sup>4</sup> It was established by the European (Economic) Community (EC) as a body of the Conference on Yugoslavia (the 'EC Conference') convened through the Declaration of 27 August 1991 by the EC as a tool for reaction to the dissolution of the former SFRY.

to both the internal public and the foreign powers.<sup>5</sup> The Presidential candidate of the third Yugoslavia (FRY, formed on 27 April 1992) was a Serbian intellectual, Dobrica Ćosić. Ćosić together with Milošević named American businessman, Milan Panić the first Prime Minister of Yugoslavia (from 14 July 1992). Ćosić and Panić tried to fulfil the conditions of lifting the UN sanctions. The FRY recognised Slovenia and BiH, and announced the possibility of recognising the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) and Croatia according to the boundaries arranged by the communists in the SFRJ, in August 1992. However, in response, the UN Security Council decided that there was no continuity of the SFRY and that the FRY cannot automatically be a member of the UN, instead it had to apply for a new membership.<sup>6</sup> Besides, the sanctions were augmented in November 1992 (UN SCR 787). Thus, instead of giving signs of reconciliation, the U.S.-led Western community sent a message that suggested to Serbia (and Montenegro) that whoever ruled Serbia, it would be ostracised and condemned.

After an all-out war, and the rejection of several propositions of peace, Washington decided to end the war in 1994. The first step was the creation of a Muslim–Croatian Federation in BiH on 18 March 1994 (Washington Agreement 1994). The Croatian actions against the Serbian held territories in May and in August 1995 (with the assistance and advice of the U.S. private military company, Military Professional Resources Incorporated – MPRI) ended the war in Croatia, and hastened the peace in Bosnia. With the Dayton Agreement signed on 20 November 1995 in an American military base in Ohio, the war in Bosnia was over. The FRY, and BiH recognized “each other as sovereign independent States within their international borders” (UN 1995). This was the time when former U.S. military intelligence officer, James Pardew started a fruitful diplomatic

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<sup>5</sup> UN Security Council, Resolution 757 (1992) sanctions international trade, scientific and technical cooperation, sports and cultural exchanges, air travel and the travel of government officials. Further sanctions imposed by UN SC were: UN SCR 787 (16 November 1992): shipping sanction; UN SCR 820 (17 April 1993): prohibition of import-export in Serb entities; UN SCR 942 (23 September 1994): economic sanctions on Bosnian Serbs.

<sup>6</sup> UN SCR 777 (19 September 1992). In addition, on 6 October the same year, the UN SC continued to condemn Serbs in Croatia accusing them of ethnic cleansing in UN protected areas but refused to do the same regarding ethnic cleansing of Serbs in parts of Croatia held by the government in Zagreb.

career in the Balkans. The U.S. and the Western world lifted most of the sanctions, except for the outer wall of sanctions. The economy was performing better since reforms were implemented in January 1994, and in particular after the loosening of the isolation. A crucial result of the peace agreement for the Serbs was the creation of the Republika Srpska, one of two entities forming BiH with close to 49% of its territory.

For a while, Milošević has been described in Western press as a guarantor of peace (WELLER–WOLFF 2013; LEBOR 2005). The British ambassador in Belgrade, Sir Ivor Roberts, and the U.S. Chargé d’Affaires, Richard Miles, were shown in the Yugoslav media during their visit to state-owned factories during the election campaign. This was a symbolic sign of a support to the coalition led by Slobodan Milošević’s Socialist Party of Serbia (NIKŠIĆ 1996). It seemed that the relations between Serbia and the U.S. might be normalised.

### 3.3. *The Kosovo issue from 1996–2000*

In November 1996, an important and dangerous situation was underway in the Serbian province of Kosovo and Metohija. Foreign intelligence services were engaged in organising and training the Kosovo Albanians, mostly in the neighbouring Albania (DELISO 2007). *The Armed Forces of the Republic of Kosovo* (FARK; in Albanian: Forcat e Armatosura të Republikës së Kosovës), a paramilitary organisation of the Ibrahim Rugova Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) was liquidated by the more aggressive and U.S.-oriented UCK by 1998.<sup>7</sup> In addition, Bin Laden’s Al Qaeda was also operational previously in Bosnia.<sup>8</sup> Despite this, the U.S. capitalised on the terrorist activities<sup>9</sup> and the subsequent armed rebellion of Albanians in Kosovo to test NATO and its new strategy of collective security and out of area missions (NATO 1999).

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<sup>7</sup> On assassinations see Government of Serbia 2003, 11.

<sup>8</sup> On Al Qaeda and Mujaheedin in Bosnia and in Albania see LA VERLE 2002, 9; HOGG 1992.

<sup>9</sup> About the ties of the U.S. with the criminal and terrorist UCK organisation see CRAIG 1999.

German and other Western media channels claimed that Serbian police massacred civilians in Rugovo and in Račak (Kosovo).<sup>10</sup> U.S. diplomat, William Walker played an important role in the start of the war. He claimed that the clash of the Serbian police and armed terrorists in the village of Račak resulted in the death of 40 or 45 Albanian civilians, but he did not have hard evidence for such allegations<sup>11</sup> (European Union 1999; JOHNSTONE 2002, 242–244). Besides Račak, Western governments also claimed that Serbia was preparing for a so called Operation Horseshoe to forcefully push out Albanians from Kosovo. “A retired brigadier general in the German Army, however, later stated that the claims of a plan were faked from a vague intelligence report in order to deflect growing criticism in Germany of the bombing” (ABRAHAMS 2001, 59). As Kelly Greenhill explains, evidence suggests that the primary objective of the Serbian forces was to destroy Albanian separatists (GREENHILL 2010, 132–133).

Serbia was under pressure from NATO countries. In the Rambouillet peace talks, the U.S. was a biased mediator. After Serbia accepted initial proposals, new requirements were added. Kissinger himself noted that “the Rambouillet text, which called on Serbia to admit NATO troops throughout Yugoslavia, was a provocation, an excuse to start bombing. Rambouillet is not a document that an angelic Serb could have accepted. It was a terrible diplomatic document that should never have been presented in that form” (KISSINGER 1999).

On 24 March 1999, NATO and the U.S. started an illegal war under international law. It was conducted without the approval of the UN Security Council.<sup>12</sup> This was the first post-Cold War war of NATO, and since 1945 the first grand scale war effort on European soil with the participation of regular armies from more than one continent. All NATO countries with the logistical support of the FRY neighbours attacked Serbia. This invoked a change in Russian politics.

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<sup>10</sup> For this see a collection of papers with testimony of the Head of UN civilian mission in Bosnia (HERMAN 2011).

<sup>11</sup> He even used force against Helena Ranta, Finnish pathologist, head of the forensics team in Račak – the American diplomat, William Walker “the head of the OSCE Kosovo monitoring mission broke a pencil in two and threw the pieces at her when she was not willing to use sufficiently strong language about the Serbs” (RANTA 2008; KÜNTZEL 2000).

<sup>12</sup> The resolution was sponsored by Joseph Biden Jr. a day before the attack on the FRY was rejected in Congress (Congress 1999).



From Serbia's perspective, this war was seen as an opportunity for NATO to promote the new just war doctrine, and to affirm the role of NATO as the major guarantor of security in Europe. In fact, during the intervention, NATO adopted its new strategy calling for humanitarian interventions and emphasising its role as the guarantor of European security.

As a result, NATO occupied Serbia's Southern province. In response to the former atrocities by Belgrade, ethnic cleansing or "the onslaught led by Kosovo Albanian extremists" took place against Serbs and other non-Albanians.<sup>13</sup> Milošević was still in power in Belgrade despite having lost the war. He was facing isolation and a new round of sanctions. Kosovo and Metohija came under a UN temporary mandate defined in UN SC Resolution 1244 that envisaged its status inside Yugoslavia (and Serbia) (UN SC Resolution 713 1991). KFOR also started its operation in the region: "The resolution provides for an interim period of autonomy for Kosovo of undefined length, until negotiations on the future status of the province take place" (WOEHREL 2006). The special representative of the Secretary General (SRSG) of the UN leads UNMIK, while NATO has a majority component and control of KFOR, reduced from 50,000 to 3,500 in the year 2018.<sup>14</sup>

It seemed that better bilateral relations between the U.S. and Serbia had to wait until a regime change happened on either side.

#### **4. Democratic Governments in Belgrade: 2000–2017**

Milošević lost power after massive demonstrations in Belgrade on 5 October 2000 (with active U.S. financial support in the background) (YORK 2001). The demonstrations with the participation of people from all over the country were organised after Milošević did not recognise his defeat in the first round of the presidential elections, and tried to set up a second round.

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<sup>13</sup> UN officials described the ethnic cleansing as an inter-ethnic crime towards the Serbs. However, independent sources portray massive violence and expulsion as ethnic cleansing (Independent International Commission on Kosovo 2006; Human Rights Watch 2004).

<sup>14</sup> Based on UN SCR 1244 and on the Military Technical Agreement signed between KFOR (NATO) and the Yugoslav Army on 9 June 1999.

Serbs had hopes for a better future, better relations with the EU and eventually with the U.S. Washington and Belgrade exchanged official letters of full diplomatic recognition, in November 2000.

#### *4.1. Economic and development relations*

In the period of 2001–2017, USAID invested more than \$750 million in economic growth, the infrastructure and in the NGO sector involved in promoting reforms in governance, human rights and in the rule of law. U.S. companies made several important investments and purchases, totalling in \$4 billion. The support from USAID and the projects organised by *Bearing Point* were particularly important for the pension system, and the insurance and banking sector reforms. USAID contributed decisively, cooperating with reform minded people heading the National Bank of Serbia “to conduct financial and regulatory diagnostic reviews of 26 Serbian banks which accounted for more than 70 percent of banking system assets. [...] Within four months, six banks were placed in the Central Bank’s Problem Bank Unit, seven banks had their licenses revoked, and four small banks were deemed insolvent. In January 2002, the Central Bank then closed the four biggest and most powerful state-owned banks” (USAID 2013, 49).

Major investments included the acquisition of the Nis Tobacco Factory (DIN) by Philip Morris Corporation in August 2003. This company invested €636 million. The Ball Corporation (Colorado) made the largest green-field investment worth \$75 million to produce beverage cans. “In February 2005 the Coca-Cola Company purchased bottled water producer Vlasinka, for €21.5 million. In January 2008, Merrill Lynch purchased a 25% stake in real estate firm MPC Properties. In August 2008, PepsiCo invested over €200 million to acquire Marbo” (U.S. Embassy in Serbia 2018).

U.S. Steel was present in Serbia from 2003–2012, when it sold the mill for \$1 plus 40 million in debts. The American NCR Company came to Serbia in 2011, as a subsidiary of its Dutch branch (NCR Dutch Holdings B.V.). Thanks to the subsidies to foreign companies, and the skilled and low paid workforce, NCR had 2,134 workers in March 2017, when it signed the contract with the Serbian Ministry of Economy. They agreed on the allocation of a grant for the investment project “NCR Campus – the

expansion and consolidation of operations of NCR in the Republic of Serbia” that is expected to add another 1,500 employees to the company. Cisco also signed a ‘Country Digitization Agreement’ with Serbia in 2017 (U.S. Department of State 2017).

Serbia is a relatively small market, with shrinking protection of labour rights, a huge underpaid workforce with a state ready to discriminate in favour of foreign companies. It remains among the worst countries when it comes to the possibility to retain or attract talent (SCHWAB 2017, 257).

The main Serbian trade partners are the countries of the former SFRY – Germany, Italy and Russia. Trade between Serbia and the U.S. in 2015 represented only 1.2% of all Serbian foreign trade in goods. Still, in parallel with the trade relations of the U.S. and the SFRY, Serbia has a positive trade balance with the U.S. since 2010 (see Table 1).

Table 2.

*U.S. Trade in goods with Serbia (chosen years in millions of USD)*

<b>Year</b>	<b>Export</b>	<b>Import</b>	<b>Balance</b>
2017	125.3	292.8	-167.5
2016	145.1	309.5	-164.4
2015	126.3	272.6	-146.4
2014	135.0	280.0	-145.0
2013	142.0	524.4	-382.4
2010	104.5	164.3	-59.8
2007	109.6	58.3	51.3

*Source:* U.S. Census Bureau 2018

#### *4.2. Political relations*

The FRY, and later Serbia and Montenegro, and after the secession of Montenegro in 2006, Serbia opted for the policy of European integration and cooperation with the U.S. as a facilitator of this process. This was a major change regarding the period of Milošević’s rule. It meant the adaptation to the general foreign orientation of Balkan countries. After 9/11, the U.S. was withdrawing a major part of its troops deployed in Bosnia and in Kosovo (and Metohija), redirecting them to the greater Middle East. The U.S. left the leadership role in the region to the EU. Still, NATO served as a controlling tool, since no Balkan country progressed

fully towards the EU without joining the Alliance first. The EU mission EULEX mostly replaced UNMIK after February 2008. On the other hand, the U.S. did not leave the region entirely. In Montenegro, it continues to support the building of a new identity and the creation of the unrecognised self-nominated Montenegrin Orthodox Church (RAKOVIĆ 2015, 106).

After the ouster of Milošević and the victory of the democratic opposition in the early elections in December 2000, Serbian foreign policy was substantially changed. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs was given to Goran Svilanović. Since then, the foreign policy of Belgrade is mostly seen as a plan presented by a small number of pro-Western liberals, researchers, diplomats and other members of the once communist elite. They have published in 1997 an informal alternative foreign policy strategy (*Proposed Alternative Foreign Policy Platform*). This was the beginning of the promotion of the Euro-Atlantic integrations of the FRY and later of Serbia. It suggests that: “Our relations with the U.S. should be a priority in the foreign engagement of Yugoslavia” (DRAGOJLOVIĆ et al. 2011, 163).

Although the U.S. was not and still is not among Serbia’s major trade partners, its influence and military personnel is present in the Southern province, and it also used to be in Bosnia during the SFOR mandate. Svilanović was the first to announce in October 2001 that there was no alternative to the EU integration. This new foreign policy emphasised the need to reformulate the relations of Serbia and Montenegro, with strong reliance on the U.S. (DRAGOJLOVIĆ et al. 2011, 279–286). The new minister of Foreign Affairs, Goran Svilanović added the necessity that after the EU, the FRY needs to develop open and constructive relations with “Russia, the USA, China, Japan, India...” (DRAGOJLOVIĆ et al. 2011, 288). Hence, at the Zagreb Summit, held on 24 November 2000 between the Western Balkan countries and the EU, the FRY joined the Stabilization and Association Process.

Cooperation based on mutual respect was mentioned as a strategy but “based on reality” with the “contemporary notion of sovereignty”. These phrases meant a subservient relationship, as *desiderata* in relation to the U.S. and the EU. Albeit, this policy had, and still has strong influence on the behaviour of Serbia, and its writers never had a significant support among the Serbs. Vojislav Koštunica, the candidate of the united opposition parties who won more votes than Milošević, wanted to resolve the secessionist intentions of the Montenegrin leadership by calling a referendum in Montenegro in 2001. The EU and the U.S. urged Milo Đukanović,

the Montenegrin strongman to cancel the referendum and to continue his policy without a referendum. The European Stability Initiative with the support of USIP – United States Institute of Peace, published a report on the need to settle differences without a public consultation, (they needed more time to convince enough people to support secession) (European Stability Initiative 2001).

The reform oriented Prime Minister of Serbia, Zoran Đinđić, to publicly announce in February and March 2003 that he thought that Western states were allies of Serbia, but they did not want to help, or respect Serbia. However, his reform of foreign policy was not realised because he was assassinated on 12 March 2003 (DJINDJIC 2012).

In 2004 the new president, Boris Tadić and the new Minister of Foreign Affairs, Vuk Drašković expressed three strategic orientations for Serbia and Montenegro (the FRY was transformed in 2003, with the assistance of the EU, leading to a loose confederation of the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro): EU integration, and priority cooperation with the U.S. and Russia (DRAGOJLOVIĆ et al. 2011, 311).

In the period of 2004–2008, conservative Prime Minister Koštunica (DSS) successfully promoted the new constitution in 2007, strongly confirming Kosovo and Metohija as central parts of the Serbian identity and parts of Serbia, and declaring “the neutral status of the Republic of Serbia towards effective military alliances until a referendum is called” (Government of Serbia 2007).

However, Koštunica fell out of the government after he announced early elections in 2008. The three strategic pillars of foreign policy were updated in 2009 when, then President of the Republic of Serbia, Tadić, added China to the previous three pillars (TADIĆ 2009). This policy never conceptualised – and it has never been formally institutionalised. After 2012, the governments led by the coalition of Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) and the Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS) did not mention these four pillars, but in practice continued to act correspondingly, nurturing strong relations with the above mentioned four powers, among them the U.S.

The U.S. leads two informal groups of Western ambassadors (the *Friends of Sandžak* and the *Friends of South*), which exerts additional influence in the internal policy of Serbia. Both groups lack regular meetings and activities, but they are the framework for the U.S., the U.K., Italy, Germany and France to cooperate more closely with the leadership of Slavic Muslims and Albanians in the South and the Southwest of Serbia. The involvement of

the former U.S. ambassador to Serbia, Ambassador Montgomery in the SNS political campaigns was very disliked among the majority of citizens, since the U.S. has been very unpopular due to its role in the Balkan Wars, and in the secession of Kosovo. Already in 2009, Serbia along with Pakistan was heading the world list of animosity toward the U.S. in public opinion polls (BAKOVIĆ 2009). This did not change in the coming years as U.S. support for the Albanian secessionists in Kosovo has continued.

Another source of disagreement is the public activity of the U.S. through USAID, the think tanks and civil society organisations. During the Obama Administration, the U.S. paid more attention on LGBTQ rights than on the rights of the national minorities. In Serbia, the constant support for Gay pride is particularly problematic. In 2012, public opinion polls showed that only 8% of people supported the Gay Pride, while 70% were totally against it (SRNA Agency 2012).

On the other hand, U.S. movies, TV shows and music have been popular. In 2016, direct flights between New York and Belgrade were established. As U.S. ambassador to Serbia, Mr. Kyle Scott emphasised, today more than 20,000 Serbs visit the U.S. each year and 1,000 Serbs study in the U.S.

Although Serbs were cheering for the election of Donald Trump as a new President of the U.S., this did not alter significantly the U.S. policy on the Kosovo issue (VOA 2017). In the context of the policy of the wider confrontation with Russia, the U.S., under both Obama and Trump, has continued to promote the American export of gas (which is costlier and with dubious capacity of transport) instead of Russian (KOLEKA 2016). In fact, although Serbs had mostly good expectations of Trump, mostly due to his anti-system promises to 'drain the swamp' and to better the relations with Russia, uncertainty over relations with Moscow, and the unchanged attitude towards Kosovo would disperse the positive expectations of the general public.

The activity of former Deputy Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs, Hoyt Brian Yee in the Balkan states seems to have been detrimental to relations with the U.S. as there are rumours of undiplomatic behaviour in conversations with the highest Serbian and Macedonian officials (sources known to the author). His replacement in October 2017 leaves room for the further improvement of relations.

The U.S. became the supporter of Serbia's EU integration, and its institutional and economic reforms. U.S. companies were engaged in

the reorganisation of the National Bank of Serbia and the programme of privatisations. Furthermore, the U.S. together with the EU was pressing Serbia to deliver Slobodan Milošević to the U.S. sponsored International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia – ICTY (Hague Tribunal) that was acting as a UN court of law. At the same time, cooperation with the ICTY was repeatedly mentioned as a prerequisite for EU integration.

Cooperation in arresting and delivering the highest officials from Serbia, Croatia and BiH lasted for many years. Finally, all Serbian wartime presidents, many high-ranking generals, ministers and prime ministers were delivered to The Hague, but the EU and the U.S. pressure did not stop. More than two thirds of all convicted are Serbs at the ICTY (at least 62 convicted are Serbs of the total 89).<sup>15</sup> Major war criminals from the ranks of Bosnian Muslims, Kosovo Albanians or Croatians were not convicted or had their convictions minimised, thus allowing the conclusion for Serbia that the Hague Tribunal served to punish the Serbs.

The U.S. support for the reforms, and the importance of Washington is evident together with Germany and the United Kingdom.

Until today, the U.S. continuously supports Serbia's path towards full EU membership, in order to tie Serbia firmly to the West, disenfranchise it from eventual Russian influence, and finish the unresolved issue of Kosovo. This implies fostering the EU-facilitated dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina with the commitment to *normalise relations* with Pristina (DELAWIE 2017).

In 1994, NATO established a tool for cooperation with the former communist countries: the Partnership for Peace (PfP) initiative. PfP is devised as a framework for bilateral cooperation and was often a prelude to NATO integration.

Serbia and Montenegro applied to join the PfP in 2003, but as relations in the loose confederation were shaky, NATO did not invite the Government of Belgrade to join the initiative. Still, other forms of cooperation were further developed. Thus, a transit agreement for the KFOR mission (led by NATO) was signed in July 2005. In February 2006, NATO and Serbia formed a joint Defence Reform Group (DRG) to serve as a mechanism for the transformation of the armed forces in line with NATO standards (and

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<sup>15</sup> The list of the ICTY lacks information on ethnicity – the Tribunal has indicted 161 Persons (ICTY 2018). Wikipedia has listed them with data of ethnic affiliation (Wikipedia 2018).

objectives). The work of the group was temporarily suspended, after the one-sided proclamation of independence of the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government (PISG) in Priština (European Parliament 2014). In the meantime, Serbia participated in numerous NATO military exercises and reached the highest level of bilateral cooperation in 2015, after it adopted the IPAP (Individual Partnership Action Plan). Because of the previous NATO aggression, Serbia does not aspire to become full member of the Alliance, which has been understood by the secretary generals of NATO.<sup>16</sup> The Serbian population constantly see Russia as the main partner in providing political and security stability (Survey Research 2015).

The Ohio–Serbian State Partnership program is active since the year 2006, when the PfP started. It resulted in joint exercises and the combined military medical engagement between the Serbian, Angolan and Ohio National Guard members in 2017 (U.S. Embassy in Serbia 2017). Serbia is also a *Global Peace Operations Partner* of the U.S. since 2011. The U.S. donated 40 military vehicles (High Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicles) to Serbia, and helped build the Jug military base (South), which is important for the training of army units from different countries (Office of the Vice President 2016).

## 5. Open Issues

The bilateral relations of the two countries are asymmetrical in many aspects, particularly in the economic and military fields. Several issues remain unresolved or represent an obstacle to deepen the cooperation. Two issues remain to be investigated. First, the U.S. keeps asking Serbia to conclude the investigation of a person or persons responsible for the attack on the U.S. embassy during the huge public rally held in Belgrade on 21 February 2008.<sup>17</sup> Second, the U.S. requests an investigation about the killing of three Albanian–U.S. citizens (the Bitići brothers), former members of the Kosovo Liberation Army, who were shot dead after their release from custody.

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<sup>16</sup> For example, Jens Stoltenberg, Secretary General of the Alliance on the occasion of the agreement on IPAP (TANJUG 2015).

<sup>17</sup> Organised as a protest of Serbia against the proclamation of independence of Kosovo (and Metohija) by former terrorists and members of the local Albanian criminal syndicate.



In addition, three major differences exist: 1. the status of Kosovo and Metohija, which Serbia and 82 other countries do not recognise; 2. public animosity towards NATO, and particularly towards the U.S. because of the 1999 war; and 3. good relations between Serbia and Russia, and the U.S. pressure on the Serbian Government to diminish its cooperation with Moscow.

## 6. Conclusions

The relations between Serbia and the U.S. oscillated from cooperation to confrontation. Serbian governments from 2001, and in particular after 2008, tried to cooperate more closely with Washington. Despite this, the foreign policy orientation of the U.S. did not change, and the U.S. did not accept or understand the interests of Serbia in the seceded province of Kosovo. The American approach towards Serbia is determined by several factors, which impede important change in its Balkan policy:

1. The U.S. policy towards the Balkans is aimed at supporting those political forces who would block Russia to project its interests toward the Mediterranean. Serbia is a partner of Russia with significant foreign trade relations.
2. Washington considers Serbia a Russian ally due to the historical and cultural roots and the relations between the two Slavic, Christian orthodox nations.
3. The U.S. decision to consider the administrative boundaries of the former Yugoslavia as the new international borders. This was maybe the primary problem between Serbia and the U.S., since many Serbs lived and still live in the other republics of the former Yugoslavia.
4. The American confrontation with Russia, and its rivalry with China (two of the four major strategic allies of Serbia) induce pressure from Washington on Belgrade to choose sides, while Serbia wants to keep a military and a *de facto* political neutrality.

These four factors negatively affect the relations of the two countries, which could cooperate even better. The U.S. could use a little bit more flexible approach, as Serbia is already as flexible as it can be.

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