

# SERBIA AND THE GLOBAL SOUTH: BETWEEN NON-ALIGNMENT POLICY AND A MULTI-ALIGNMENT STRATEGY

Aleksandar Mitić

**ABSTRACT:** *The Republic of Serbia pursues a foreign policy which stands out among its Balkan neighbors and wider European Union members and candidates. The legacy of socialist Yugoslavia's leadership in the Non-Aligned Movement, the 1999 NATO bombings, and the 2008 EU-US masterminding of "Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence", in violent breach of international law, play an important role in the strategic posturing of the country, reducing the chances of West-bound bandwagoning. Indeed, since 2014, Belgrade has been negotiating EU membership in a sluggish if not stalled process, while at the same time reinforcing its military neutrality. The struggle to preserve territorial integrity regarding Kosovo has furthermore implied a strong diplomatic leaning in the UN Security Council on the People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation, including decisions not to harmonize with EU restrictive measures against the two. In the process, Serbia has strengthened its energy cooperation with Russia, elevated the formal status of its bilateral relations with China to the highest level in Europe, and pursued an active diplomatic policy towards the Global South vying for support regarding Kosovo and economic diversification. Such an approach, with its hedging features, has not been welcomed by Brussels. This paper looks at the context of Serbia's quest to (re)establish close cooperation with the Global South, at the opportunities and also at the limitations of this pursuit.*

**KEYWORDS:** Serbia; Global South; Non-Aligned Movement; China; hedging; multi-alignment

## THE GLOBAL SOUTH: A GEOPOLITICAL TRAJECTORY CHARACTERIZED BY REDUCED TENSIONS

Reflecting on the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of laying grounds to the future Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) at the 1961 Belgrade Conference of Non-Aligned Countries, the Republic of Serbia (as legal successor state of socialist Yugoslavia) and the Institute of International Politics and Economics (as one of the originators of the Conference) hosted a series of events in September 2021, including a high-level conference, celebrating the historical trajectory and future opportunities for NAM and the Global South in general.

Set in the global context of the Covid-19 pandemic and the escalating crisis over Ukraine, the Belgrade conference gathered representatives from 105 countries and nine international organizations. While delegates focused on the need to revamp multilateralism and development paths, boost solidarity amid the pandemic and avoid further militarization, Serbia enjoyed the status of confirmation as successor of Yugoslavia's legacy and reinforced yet another of its key foreign policy avenues. It was seen

as representing a “comparative advantage and positive determinant in the development of political and economic cooperation with the countries of Europe, Asia, Africa and America, which does not jeopardise its other foreign policy priorities and goals in terms of developing interdependence and integration into European and wider international processes” (Dimitrijević, 2021).

Indeed, pursuing key national interests without jeopardizing “other foreign policy priorities” has been one of the most delicate balancing acts facing Serbia’s diplomacy in recent years and decades. How to reconcile the EU integration path with the preservation of the country’s territorial integrity in relations to the southern province of Kosovo and Metohija, when the majority of EU members have recognized “Kosovo’s unilateral declaration of independence” in flagrant violation of the UN Charter? How to accommodate EU talks with the decision not to align with Brussels’ sanctions against the Russian Federation, Serbia’s key supporter in the UN Security Council? Or with the elevation of relations with another key UNSC ally, the People’s Republic of China, to the highest level in Europe – the building of the Community of China and Serbia with a Shared Future in the New Era, accompanied by the sole Free Trade Agreement with Beijing in Central and Eastern Europe? Finally, with the incessant diplomatic struggle against the lobbying of some key EU countries with regards to the policy of recognition of “Kosovo’s UDI” in the Global South.

While formally in membership talks with the EU since 2014, Belgrade insists it is pursuing an “independent foreign policy”, based on its military neutrality, the need to preserve its territorial integrity and Serbian national interests in the Balkans, and to diversify its economic relations, while adapting its proclaimed “four-pillar” policy (EU/ U.S./Russia/China) to the rising multipolar landscape in the international arena. In such circumstances, the Global South has found an important place in Serbia’s foreign policy thinking: through the China-led Belt and Road Initiative, through BRICS and NAM, as well as through bilateral agreements involving both diplomatic consultations over Kosovo and economic cooperation. While there has been more discussion on Serbia’s “Eastward” hedging (Russia and China) and Western attempts to make Serbia “de-hedge”, Belgrade has also paved “geopolitically less contentious” avenues towards numerous Global South partners.

In this paper, we will look at the place of the Global South in Serbia’s foreign policy thinking, evaluating motivations and opportunities, but also constraints. Such an approach could help the understanding of Serbia’s foreign policy positions, but also provide an opportunity for neighboring Balkan and Central and Eastern European countries to contrast and compare their own experiences and adapt pathways to reap benefits.

## THE ENDURING RELEVANCE OF STRATEGIC BALANCING IN TODAY’S MULTIPOLAR INTERNATIONAL ORDER

For small states, such as Serbia, the process of multipolarization presents important challenges. Adapting to the changes while preserving traditional national interests and commitments requires agile upgrades of grand strategies and associated strategic narratives. For Serbia, multipolarization and the reshuffling of great power capabilities

have actually meant more opportunities. This is largely due to Serbia's "non-Western uniqueness" in the region and in Europe. The foundation of this uniqueness can be found in the clash of strategic narratives between supporters and critics of the Western "rules-based world order" (RBO). The RBO is perceived by its supporters as the "foundation of liberal internationalism and a resilience mechanism in preserving the post-Cold War order – epitomized by the US 'unipolar moment' – against non-Western 'autocratic transgression'" (Mitić, 2024a). However, this narrative is challenged by Russia, China, numerous countries of the Global South, but also – albeit not formally – by Serbia. These critics underline that the RBO "incorporates a set of mechanisms that selectively lean on elements of international law, interpret them freely and creatively, and align them with the interests of the political West, using double standards and the principle of 'unique', sui generis cases to fit the needs, thus effectively undermining the UN system" (Mitić, 2024a). Such critical view of the RBO, adopted by proponents of multipolarization, paints it as "the United States' alternative to international law, an order that encapsulates international law as interpreted by the United States to accord with its national interests" (Dugard, 2023, 225). Talmon considers that the term "rules-based order", in fact, "blurs the distinction between binding and non-binding rules, giving the impression that all States and international actors are subject to this order, irrespective of whether or not they have consented to these rules" (Talmon, 2019). He points to the fact that while international law is "general and universal", the "rules-based order seems to allow for special rules in special-sui generis cases" (Talmon, 2019). Indeed, Serbia has been a key European "victim" of the RBO in the last quarter of the century. First, through the NATO 1999 aggression, a bombing campaign unauthorized by the UN Security Council. Then, building on 1999, the EU-U.S. 2008 masterminding of "Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence". The Kosovo "UDI" was recognized by the large majority of Western countries (with the exceptions of Romania, Spain, Greece, Slovakia and Cyprus) in flagrant violation of international law and with use of the "sui generis/unique case" argumentation, but effectively setting a "double standard" for the respect of territorial integrity of states which tremors continue to shake the world's hotspots today.

In practice, the five "non-recognizers" among EU members have opened the possibility for Serbia to continue with EU integration and indeed officially start negotiations in 2014. However, at the UN SC level, Serbia has to count on EU's two geopolitical rivals – Russia and China. In addition, Serbia's EU negotiations started at the time when the EU was still reeling from the shock of the economic crisis, unable if not unwilling to assist in Serbia's economic development recovery. This role was immediately filled by two countries of the Global South – China through its Belt and Road Initiative, which helped Serbia build transportation infrastructure and save its key mining and metal processing companies, and the United Arab Emirates through investments and credit lines which helped Belgrade stabilize its troubled finances.

How can we then describe Serbia's foreign policy? Cold-war era concepts outlined by Walt (Walt, 1987), such as "balancing" (allying with others against the prevailing threat) and "bandwagoning" (allying with a potentially threatening power) do not fully apply to Serbia's current strategic posturing. Indeed, as argued by Nikolić, "no evidence is found to indicate the adoption of pure forms of balancing or bandwagoning in Serbian behavior", which

is due to its proclaimed military neutrality (Nikolić, 2024). The military neutrality was adopted in the context of the threat of Kosovo's UDI in 2007, when the Serbian Assembly adopted the Resolution on the Protection of Sovereignty, Territorial Integrity, and the Constitutional Order of the Republic of Serbia.

Instead, the concept of "hedging" has been recently applied to Serbia's strategy. The concept of *hedging* has originated in the Global South. It has featured most importantly in the literature on China and Southeast Asia (Goh, 2005; Gerstl, 2022; Kim, 2023) and to the Middle East (Salman and Geeraerts, 2015; El-Dessouki and Mansour, 2020; Fulton, 2020). However, it is increasingly being mentioned in the Serbian case (Ejdus, 2023; Dettmer, 2023; Nikolić, 2024; Mitić, 2024a). Mitić and Nikolić both identify the sources of Serbia's hedging in the aftermath of "Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence" and the simultaneous rise of multipolarization. Serbia's hedging strategy has several underpinnings, grounded mostly in its slow, if not stalled membership talks with the European Union. Primarily, these are due to Chapter 23 (respect of rule of law – a major hurdle for all candidate states), Chapter 31 (alignment with EU foreign policy) and Chapter 35 ("normalization of relations" with the Kosovo Albanian leadership in Priština), in addition to chronic challenges of EU "enlargement fatigue" and lack of political will (Mitić, 2024b). These hurdles have prompted Serbia's "non-Western" turn, which has manifested itself in the struggle for the support on Kosovo at the UNSC (China and Russia) and at the General Assembly and UN bodies such as Interpol and UNESCO (Global South). In addition, Serbia has increased military-technical cooperation with Russia and China (imports) and the Global South (exports), as well as cooperation in energy security (Russian gas), mining and infrastructure (China's investments and loans) and overall trade diversification. In the context of the conflict in Ukraine, particularly since 2022, Serbia's hedging has turned more prominently in China's direction.

There are other Global South-related concepts which have implications for Serbia. India has shifted from non-alignment towards "multi-alignment", as a "series of parallel relationships that strengthen multilateral partnerships and seek a common approach among the grouping towards security, economic equity and the elimination of existential dangers like terrorism" (Drishtiias, 2022). Yet, India has done so through formal memberships in BRICS, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC, with Russia, Iran and Central Asia) and QUAD (with the U.S., Japan and Australia), while Serbia remains outside NATO, the CSTO and (for now) the EU or BRICS – although it is participating in lower-tier arrangements with each.

A "multi-vector" policy – maximizing national interest through diversified partnerships – as exemplified by Azerbaijan, Serbia's strategic partner, has also been relevant due to the strategic functionality of particular relationships (energy, defense, diplomacy, culture) and the dexterity needed to navigate through them in a complex geopolitical environment (Azemedia, 2025).

The Global South cases of South Africa, Brazil or Uzbekistan follow these principles of multi-alignment or multi-vector foreign policies.

Finally, Mihaylov takes a more holistic approach, and delves into Yugoslavia's NAM legacy, to consider that Serbia is pursuing a "third way" geopolitical positioning of searching for

benefits from geopolitical poles while remaining outside of them, which includes several features, including military neutrality, political multi-vector strategy, trade diversification, and “external projection of domestic cultural-historical sentiments” (Mihaylov, 2024).

## STRATEGIC OPPORTUNITIES FOR SERBIA IN ITS RELATIONS WITH THE GLOBAL SOUTH

There are a number of factors impacting on Serbia’s Global South pathways.

### The Non-Aligned factor

The Republic of Serbia, as the legal successor to the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia – one of the originators of the idea of the Non-Aligned Movement and host of the first summit of non-aligned countries in 1961 – builds up on this historical and political legacy. The NAM was set up in an atmosphere of bipolar confrontation, with great power pressure on third countries to align with respective blocs. The uniqueness of a European non-bloc country interested in leading a pro-active global approach aimed at liberation struggles and decolonization in Africa, Asia and South America was infused into Belgrade’s foreign policy thinking well beyond the Cold-War era, notwithstanding current statecraft capabilities and international context.

Being a prominent member of an organization spanning four continents and including the majority of UN members has meant a wealth of opportunities for developing bilateral economic and political relations. Nowadays, Serbia is not a full member of the NAM, but it continues to honour both the legacy and the connections made. Thus, it gathered NAM leaders for the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Belgrade Conference in 2011, and then for the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary a decade later. Indeed, “NAM remains one of the major institutional relics of the Cold War today, still very much active and present in world affairs, though with a somewhat diminished global role and influence as compared to the heyday years of the 1960s and 1970s, but, nonetheless, one of the relevant institutional instruments through which the Third World, i.e. Global South, still exercises a tangible collective role in international politics in general and inside the UN in particular” (Čavoški, 2021). Thus, at the December 2024 Africa-Serbia Dignity Conference, featuring over 40 African delegations, Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić said Belgrade was Africa’s “greatest friend in entire Europe” (Politika, 2024). Serbia’s Foreign Minister Marko Đurić argued, while expressing “extreme interest” in strategic partnership with African countries, that “we genuinely in many ways feel like the Africans of Europe, not only because we have helped to counter colonial aspirations for decades, but because we share the same outlook for the future and we want to continue contributing to all those countries aspiring to remain on their own independent path” (Đurić, 2024a).

Indeed, Serbia is nowadays “reviving historical links made through the NAM” to build new partnerships at a time when “Brussels is going through an identity crisis and EU members are fighting their own economic problems amid a changing world” (Čadež, 2025). As argued by the President of Serbia’s Chamber of Commerce Marko Čadež, “the fast urbanization and infrastructure needs of Africa are a perfect fit for Serbia’s expertise in construction and engineering. Our companies can bring knowledge and innovation to African countries, building new trade routes for Serbia’s exports” (Čadež, 2025). Indeed, the Serbian Chamber

of Commerce is planning to open its first African office in Cairo in 2025, after Serbia and Egypt signed a Free Trade Agreement in 2024. Such focus on Africa is understandable, given the fact that Serbia, despite excellent historical and political relations, had a trade exchange with the continent of merely 700 million euros in 2022, albeit with a 20 percent yearly growth (Rilak, 2023). Indeed, to many Global South countries, particularly those active in the NAM, Serbia's foreign policy posturing is, at least partially, reminiscent of the Yugoslav era, in particular its military neutrality, the decision not to seek membership in military alliances, political independence and non-Eurocentric outreach.

### **The role of the Kosovo issue in shaping Serbia's foreign policy agenda**

Yet, beyond trade, a key focus for Serbia's diplomacy with African and other Global South countries is the question of Kosovo. Around two thirds of Global South countries have not recognized "Kosovo's UDI". Among these are some of the leading countries of the Global South, including India, Brazil, South Africa, Indonesia, Ethiopia, Iran, Mexico, Argentina, Morocco and the Philippines. Furthermore, 28 countries of the Global South have revoked their recognition of "Kosovo's UDI" since 2017, including Ghana, the Central African Republic and the Maldives. For Serbia, as well as for Western countries pushing for the recognition of the "Kosovo's UDI", the Global South has been an arena of intensive diplomatic battle and lobbying. Indeed, the votes from the Global South have been decisive during the failed bids by "independent Kosovo" to gain membership in bodies such as UNESCO and Interpol.

### **The Chinese influence on Serbia's external strategic outlook**

For Serbia, the key country in the Global South has been China. While socialist Yugoslavia and China had their ups and downs since the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1955, and Beijing remained on the sidelines of the Yugoslav conflicts in the 1990s, the major turnaround has been the NATO bombings of the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade in May 1999. This event sparked outrage in China against NATO, and the U.S. in particular, but also brought Beijing and Belgrade closer than ever. When Chinese President Xi Jinping visited Europe for the first time since the end of the Covid-19 pandemic, he chose the symbolic 25th anniversary of the bombing of the embassy, on May 7, 2024, to visit Belgrade and to argue that "the China-Serbia friendship, forged with the blood of our compatriots, will stay in the shared memory of the Chinese and Serbian peoples". The memory culture has become one of the four cornerstones of what is dubbed China-Serbia "iron-clad friendship". The second cornerstone has been political cooperation. Since 2009, when Serbia and China signed a Strategic Partnership, bilateral relations were elevated twice – both during Xi's visits to Belgrade: in 2016, to the level of Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, and in 2024, to the building of a China-Serbia Community with a Shared Future in the New Era. Such level of cooperation, the highest in Europe, is in line with the building of a Community with a Shared Future for Mankind, the core concept of Xi Jinping's diplomatic thought and the objective of China's diplomacy. It has made Serbia stand out among the Central and Eastern European countries which have been participating in the format known as China-CEEC (formerly 16+1). A particular contrast can be made with the Czech Republic. While Serbia and the Czech Republic both signed agreements on Comprehensive Strategic

Partnership with China in 2016, their trajectories have been diametrically opposed since. Relations between Prague and Beijing deteriorated following a series of Czech political actions undermining China's sovereignty and territorial integrity with regards to Taiwan and Tibet. When Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi met his Czech counterpart Jan Lipavsky in 2025, he "expressed the hope that the Czech side would engage in earnest self-reflection, develop the right perspective about China, and take concrete actions to rebuild trust with China" (Xinhua, 2025). On the other side, Serbia went on to a full upgrade of relations with China, with the two countries mutually expressing absolute support in terms of protection of territorial integrity.

In the economic sphere, there has been a fulgurant ascension of China's importance for Serbia's development over the last decade. For Beijing, Serbia, an EU candidate but not a member, has been an important entry point to Europe: China chose Serbia to build there its first European bridge, highway and high-speed railway. Serbia was the first country to obtain Chinese weapons systems through the acquisition of a battery of FK-3 medium-range, road-mobile, surface-to-air missiles, made by the China Aerospace Science and Industry Corporation. Serbia also became the first Central and Eastern European country to sign such a Free-Trade Agreement with China, which went into effect on July 1, 2024. The agreement was a major contribution to Serbia's unique FTA network: it is the only European country with free trade agreements with the EU, the Russia-led Eurasian Economic Union, Turkey and China, thus becoming a potential hub for duty-free exports of most key industrial products – with only a few exceptions and annual quotas – to more than 2.5 billion people. Furthermore, China has been the top investor country in Serbia since 2022, while three top Serbian exporters are Chinese companies. In addition to new automotive, green energy and mining projects, the country is set to launch in 2025 the Serbian portion of the Belgrade-Budapest high-speed railway, a flagship project for the Belt and Road Initiative, while Chinese companies aim to play a major role in the infrastructure and development projects related to the 2027 Specialized Expo, to be held in Belgrade.

Finally, the fourth cornerstone has been the shared vision of the global geopolitical transition toward multipolarity and a world order based on international law and the United Nations Charter instead of the RBO system based on double standards regarding the territorial integrity of states. Thus, at the October 2024 "Dialogues on China" conference, hosted by the Institute of International Politics and Economics in Belgrade, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Serbia Marko Đurić defined Serbia's foreign policy as "Strategic Independence with Serbian Characteristics", in reference stemming from Beijing's formulations about "Chinese characteristics" (Đurić, 2024b). These "characteristics" are compatible with Xi Jinping's new Chinese initiatives – the Global Development Initiative and the Global Civilization Initiative – initiatives that recognize the importance of diversity and endorse the right of nations to have their paths, as well as the Global Security Initiative, under which China drafted its joint plan with Brazil for the resolution of the conflict in Ukraine, an initiative President Vučić labelled as "common sense".



## LIMITATIONS ALONG THE DEVELOPMENTAL TRAJECTORY OF THE GLOBAL SOUTH

Despite opportunities and promising avenues, Serbia's cooperation with the Global South also faces obvious hurdles. The primary source is, expectedly, Belgrade's membership talks with the EU. In fact, Serbia has often declined to harmonize with EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy declarations against Global South "non-recognizers", sparking the ire of Brussels. Regarding interior affairs, Belgrade still holds a visa-free regime with 16 countries that are on the EU list of visa-required countries, most of them from the Global South. Nevertheless, on both these issues, Serbia has also sought to improve its harmonization with the EU. In 2024, Serbia augmented its harmonization with the CFSP declarations, reaching the level of harmonization of 59 percent, in comparison with 48 percent in 2022 and 54 percent in 2023 (Novaković, 2025). In terms of the visa policy, in 2024 and 2025, Serbia re-imposed visas for the citizens of four countries of the Global South – Oman, Kuwait, Qatar and Mongolia (Tanjung, 2025).

Yet another contentious point with regards to the Global South has been the issue of bilateral agreements with third countries. In addition to the FTA with China, Serbia has recently negotiated such agreements with the UAE and Egypt. With regards to the Bilateral Investment Treaties (BIT), a large number of the 46 BITs in force are with Global South countries, and Serbia is planning to sign new ones with Bahrain, Uzbekistan, India, the Kyrgyz Republic and Equatorial Guinea. The European Commission has called on Serbia to develop a strategy for "amending or terminating" BITs that fall short of EU standards and expose the country to risks due to the broad and open language used (European Commission 2024, 95).

Indeed, the EU has launched a series of actions and policies aimed at Serbia's "de-hedging", that is to encourage the country, to reduce, if not abandon its hedging strategy in the context of geopolitical competition. In 2024, the "de-hedging" has involved Serbia signing with the EU an agreement on a strategic partnership regarding sustainable raw materials, battery value chains, and electric vehicles as to limit Belgrade's energy dependence on Russia and China's access to lithium and other critical minerals in Serbia (Hodgson, 2024). Serbia has also acquired 12 French Rafales warplanes instead of Chinese J-10C. A particularly strong signal of "de-hedging" has been the pressure on President Vučić not to attend the BRICS summit in Kazan in October 2024. Instead of attending the summit, featuring some of the key Global South countries, Vučić sent a ministerial delegation to Kazan, while hosting in parallel in Belgrade EU leaders, including European Commission President Ursula Von der Layen, Polish and Greek prime ministers Donald Tusk and Kyriakos Mitsotakis.

Yet another potentially constraining factor could be the policy of the U.S. under President Donald Trump. In fact, Serbia has sought to elevate its relations with Washington, and has established solid links with the Trump administration. However, Trump's rivalry with China could impact on Serbia in the case of U.S. attempts at rooting out Chinese investments from the region. Washington might be tempted to use "wedging" strategies – coercive or accommodative – which intend to "move or keep a potential adversary out of an opposing alliance" (Crawford, 2021). Washington has in the past attempted to do so in the case of Huawei and 5G. Under the 2020 Washington agreement, signed by Vučić,



under the auspices of Trump, Belgrade committed to a number of actions, including acquiring 5G equipment “supplied by untrusted vendors”, an indirect hit at Chinese providers. Under the same agreement, Belgrade and the Albanian authorities in “Kosovo” committed not to pursue policies of seeking (de-)recognition internationally. Such commitment was required by Washington to stop Belgrade’s strong diplomatic success aimed at de-recognition of “Kosovo’s UDI”, which was at the time in full gear, running in parallel, although not directly linked, with China’s gains in its policy of de-recognition of Taiwan among Global South countries. However, while Belgrade lost momentum with the commitment, the Albanian authorities in Priština continued to plan inroads into the Global South, particularly with the sponsorship of Turkey, resulting in recognitions of “Kosovo’s UDI” in 2025 by Kenya and Sudan.

## CONCLUSIONS

Socialist Yugoslavia, with its rather impressive statecraft repertoire, was punching beyond its weight during the Cold-War era of NAM. Nowadays, its legal successor, the Republic of Serbia, has a smaller array of capabilities, although it maintains a solid diplomatic network in the Global South and has a proactive policy. Its role is nevertheless far from being central anymore, and for many countries of the Global South, without Belgrade’s political leadership in NAM, Serbia is geographically too distant and economically too small.

Nevertheless, Belgrade has not given up on its Global South ambitions. These are due to the specific (geo)political code of the country, with its military neutrality, and an Eastward, Eurasian hedging policy in a Western, Euro-Atlantic environment, in the context of the country’s need to battle for its territorial integrity regarding the province of Kosovo. The diplomatic fight for Kosovo, particularly after the UDI in 2008 and its recognition by the majority of the West, has pushed Serbia towards re-establishing closer links with the Global South, a direction it had lost or put on pause during the Yugoslav conflicts in the 1990s and transition towards an EU path in the 2000s. This policy has brought important successes in preventing further recognitions, and has prompted Serbia to revive the NAM legacy.

In parallel, Serbia has made a breakthrough in its relations with China, particularly since President Xi Jinping launched his Belt and Road Initiative. The result has meant not only a strong Chinese economic presence in Serbia and the elevation of bilateral political relations to the highest level in Europe, but also Serbia’s further interest in (re)establishing connections with China’s BRI partners in the Global South.

However, despite unremarkable results in the EU membership talks, Serbia, as a candidate country, has aimed to harmonize with Brussels its policies towards the Global South in external and domestic domains, particularly with regards to the visa policy. Its close relations with China are also under scrutiny by Western powers, particularly the United States. Further de-hedging and “wedging” policies against Serbia’s foreign policy and economic diversification can thus be expected, testing Belgrade’s agility to navigate in the stormy waters of multipolarization. Still, Serbia’s legacy of the anti-colonial NAM and its modern fight against double standards with regards to the respect of territorial integrity are looked upon with sympathy in Asia, Africa and Latin America. While Serbia’s

position and posturing are unique and at times incompatible with its neighbors, its experiences can present valuable insights and lessons for countries seeking to expand cooperation with the Global South.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Azemediia. 2025. "A Historic Convergence: The Strategic Significance of the Azerbaijan-China Comprehensive Partnership". *Azemediia*. <https://aze.media/a-historic-convergence-the-strategic-significance-of-the-azerbaijan-china-comprehensive-partnership/>
- Čadež, M. 2025. "Srpska ekonomija u 2025. godini". *Lawlife*. <https://lawlife.rs/index.php/privreda/909-srpska-ekonomija-u-2025-godini>
- Čavoški, J. 2021. "The Evolution of NAM's Role in World Affairs During the Cold War Decades". In D. Dimitrijević and J. Čavoški (eds.). *The 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Non-Aligned Movement* (23-50) Belgrade: Institute of International Politics and Economics
- Crawford, T. W. 2021. *The Power to Divide: Wedge Strategies in Great Power Competition*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press
- Dettmer, J. 2023. "Serbia's Vučić Faces a Tough Choice". *Politico*. <https://www.politico.eu/article/serbia-aleksandar-vucic-europe-russia-choice/>
- Dimitrijević, D. 2021. "The Non-Aligned Movement – Sixty Years Since the Belgrade Summit". In D. Dimitrijević and J. Čavoški (eds.). *The 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Non-Aligned Movement* (13-19) Belgrade: Institute of International Politics and Economics
- Đurić, M. 2024a. "Serbia is Ready to be a Reliable Partner to African Countries". *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia*. <https://www.mfa.gov.rs/en/press-service/statements/serbia-ready-be-reliable-partner-african-countries>
- Đurić, M. 2024b. "Address by His Excellency Mr. Marko Đurić". In A. Mitić and K. Zakić. *Harvesting the Winds of Change: China and the Global Actors*. Belgrade: Institute of International Politics and Economics
- Drishtiiias. 2022. "From Non-Alignment to Multi-Alignment". *Drishtiiias*. <https://www.drishtiiias.com/daily-updates/daily-news-editorials/from-non-alignment-to-multi-alignment>
- Dugard, J. 2023. "The Choice Before Us: International Law or a 'Rules-Based International Order'?" *Leiden Journal of International Law*. 36: 223-232
- Ejdus, F. 2024. "Spinning and Hedging: Serbia's National Security Posture". *New Lines Institute for Strategy and Policy*. <https://newlinesinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/5-Serbia.pdf>
- El-Dessouki, A. and O. R. Mansour. 2020. "Small States and Strategic Hedging: the United Arab Emirates' Policy Towards Iran". *Review of Economics and Political Science*. DOI 10.1108/REPS-09-2019-0124
- European Commission. 2024. *Serbia 2024 Report*. Brussels: European Commission. [https://www.mei.gov.rs/upload/documents/eu\\_dokumenta/2024/serbia\\_report\\_2024.pdf](https://www.mei.gov.rs/upload/documents/eu_dokumenta/2024/serbia_report_2024.pdf)
- Fulton, J. 2020. "China in the Persian Gulf: Hedging under the US Umbrella". In Mehran Kamrava (ed.) *Routledge Handbook of Persian Gulf Politics* (492-505). New York: Routledge

- Gerstl, A. 2022. *Hedging Strategies in Southeast Asia: ASEAN, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Vietnam and their Relations with China*. New York: Routledge
- Goh, E. 2005. "Meeting the China Challenge: the U.S. in Southeast Asian Regional Security Strategies". *Policy Studies*. 16. Washington, DC: East-West Center
- Hodgson, R. 2024. "EU Remains 'Fully Committed' to Lithium Deal Despite Unrest in Serbia". *Euronews*. <https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2024/08/20/eu-remains-fully-committed-to-lithium-deal-despiteunrest-in-serbia>
- Kim, S. C. 2023. *China and Its Small Neighbors: The Political Economy of Asymmetry, Vulnerability, and Hedging*. Albany: State University of New York Press
- Mihaylov, V. "Geopolitical Positioning of a Small State: Serbia in the Shadow of Yugoslavia's 'Third Way'". *Central European Journal of International and Security Studies*, volume 18, issue 2, 71-102
- Mitić, A. 2024a. *Global Strategic Narrative Wars: The Battle for Serbia*. Belgrade: Institute of International Politics and Economics
- Mitić, A. 2024b. "A Decade of Serbia's EU Accession Process: Implications for Sino-Serbian Political Relations". In A. Mitić and K. Zakić (eds.): *Harvesting the Winds of Change: China and Global Actors*, vol. 2 (511-527). Belgrade: Institute of International Politics and Economics
- Nikolić, K. 2024. "Serbia Hedging Its Bets Between the West and the East". In M. Nikolić (ed.), *Proceedings of the Faculty of Political Sciences*, vol. 17 (85-102). University of Belgrade
- Novaković, I., Stanojević, N., Plavšić, T. 2025. *Analiza usaglašavanja Srbije sa spoljnopolitičkim deklaracijama i merama Evropske unije: Godišnji izveštaj za 2024. godinu*. Belgrade: ISAC
- Politika. 2024. "Srbija najveći prijatelj Afrike u celoj Evropi, kod nas nema rasizma". *Politika*. <https://www.politika.rs/scc/clanak/648120/srbija-najveci-prijatelj-afrike-u-celoj-evropi-kod-nas-nema-rasizma-video>
- Rilak, M. 2023. "Srbija i Afrika: Razmena vredna 700 miliona dolara koja raste 20 odsto godišnje". *Biznis.rs*. <https://biznis.rs/vesti/srbija/srbija-i-afrika-razmena-vredna-700-miliona-dolara-koja-raste-20-odsto-godisnje/>
- Salman, M. and G. Geeraerts. 2015. "Strategic Hedging and China's Economic Policy in the Middle East". *China Report*. 51:2, 102-120
- Talmon, S. 2019. "Rules-Based Order v. International Law?" *German Practice in International Law*. <https://gpil.jura.unibonn.de/2019/01/rules-based-order-v-international-law/>
- Tanjug 2025. "Srbija usaglašava viznu politiku sa EU, državljani Mongolije od marta sa vizom u našu zemlju". *Euronews*. <https://www.euronews.rs/srbija/politika/163224/srbija-uskladuje-vizni-rezim-sa-eu-do-2026-godine/vest>
- Walt, S. M. 1987. *The Origins of Alliances*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press
- Xinhua 2025. "China Open to Good Ties with Czech Republic Provided Core Interests Respected: FM". *Global Times*. <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202502/1328502.html>