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Who Is a Friend and Who Is an Enemy? Serbia's Relations with Selected International Entities from the Perspective of the Inhabitants of Serbia

Introduction

Over the last few years, the world has been facing events that have had a major impact on the global politics of states. The COVID-19 pandemic and Russia's aggression against Ukraine, and thus the beginning of the war in the region, have led to tensions in the system of international relations in Europe. The expansion of the pandemic in 2020 and 2021 has shown how the world is interdependent and, at the same time, helpless in the face of clashes with the virus.¹ Additionally, regardless of their international position, all countries had to face economic, political and social consequences.² At that time, Serbia also faced many problems, as the pandemic had a significant impact on the economy of this

¹ M. Grasso, M. Klicperova-Baker, Y. Koos S. Kosyakova, A. Petrillo, I. Vlase, *The impact of the coronavirus crisis on European societies. What have we learnt and where do we go from here? – introduction to the COVID volume*, "European Societies", 2021, vol. 23(1), pp. S2–S32.

² E.K. Chowdhury, I.I Khan, B.K. Dhar, *Catastrophic impact of Covid-19 on the global stock markets and economic activities*, "Business and Society Review", 2021, vol. 127(2), pp. 437–460.

country.³ However, in 2021, Serbia was strengthening its position in the region by conducting the so-called “vaccine diplomacy” and strengthening cooperation with China.⁴ Russia’s aggression against Ukraine apparently divides the world into those who strongly oppose the attack, join the sanctions against Moscow and provide military aid to Ukraine, and those on the other side. Although Serbia condemned Russia’s military attack on Ukraine, it did not join the sanctions against the aggressor. Common dependencies between Serbia and Russia stand in the way of integration with the European Union, which strongly condemns the actions of Vladimir Putin. It can be said that the state stands at a crossroads maneuvering between entities. However, do the actions of the rulers translate into what citizens think? How do Serbs perceive relations between their country and Russia or the European Union? Who do they trust more, China or the United States? I will answer these questions in this article. Initially, the research procedure, main submissions and research questions will be explained. Next, I will try to describe relations between Serbia and selected international actors from historical, economic and political perspectives. Finally, I will present the results of the research, start a discussion and present conclusions. This article has contributed to the literature on Serbia-China relations as seen through the eyes of Serbian residents. The article will present the findings based on a research model developed by the author. This model aims to explore the perspective of Serbs on their state’s relations with various international entities. The research included in the article is merely a framework that has been expanded with available literature and other studies. Given the small sample size used, in the future, this model could be applied to a larger group of respondents, thereby confirming or refuting the results.

Research methodology

The aim of this work is to present the results of research on the perspective of Serbs on the relationship of their state with individual international entities. The research was carried out using a proprietary questionnaire between November

³ S. Sadiković, B. Branovački, M. Oljaca, D. Mitrović, D. Pajić, S. Smederevac, *Daily monitoring of emotional responses to the coronavirus pandemic in Serbia: A citizen science approach*, “Personality and Social Psychology”, 2020, vol. 11, p. 2133.

⁴ Z. Sielska, *Balkan Game – Contemporary Relations of Serbia with Selected International Entities (Russia, USA, European Union, China)*, [in:] *Selected Socio-Economic and International Relation Issues in Contemporary Asian States*, eds. J. Marszałek-Kawa, T. Dmochowski, Adam Marszałek, Toruń 2021, pp. 2–48; D. Šantić, M. Antić, *Serbia in the time of COVID-19: Between “corona diplomacy” tough measures and migration management*, “Euroasian Geography and Economics”, 2020, vol. 61, pp. 546–558.

2021 and June 2022. The study involved 589 randomly selected respondents aged 18 to 65. The survey was conducted in large cities such as Belgrade, Novi Sad, Niš as well as in small towns such as Čačak and Zaječar. The survey was carried out in person and as an internet questionnaire with invitations to participate sent by email, posted on Facebook groups (groups for students, hobbyists, associations, etc.), LinkedIn and by e-mail to universities and schools all over Serbia. The survey consisted of 9 questions. Most of the questions used the 5-point Likert scale.

For the purposes of the study described in this article, the following hypotheses were formulated. The main hypothesis was: Serbs can identify at least one international organization that they consider their most important partner on the international stage.

The subsequent hypotheses were:

- According to Serbs, international organizations invest money in Serbia.
- According to Serbs, Serbia maintains positive relations with at least one international organization.
- According to Serbs, there are international organizations with good intentions towards their country.

In the literature, one can encounter the statement that Serbs do not trust international organizations, especially those associated with the UN, the European Union, and NATO. This stems from the fact that during the war in Serbia, the UN unequivocally opposed Serbian actions in the region. This became another factor that pushed Serbs towards strengthening ties with the Russian Federation. However, since 2013 and the signing of the so-called Brussels agreements, the situation has somewhat improved – Serbs felt that Western organizations also act in their defense when necessary. Therefore, it seems pertinent to investigate what sentiments the mentioned institutions currently evoke in Serbian society⁵.

Therefore, because Serbia is trying to maintain a neutral stance regarding Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine and refuses to join the sanctions imposed by the West on this country, the author decided not to separately consider this factor in her research as potentially differentiating Serbs' attitude toward Russia.

In the course of preparing this study, the following research questions were posed:

1. Which international entity is Serbia's most important partner on the international arena according to the respondents?
2. Which international entity invests the most in Serbia according to the respondents?

⁵ M. Szpala, *Kosowo – Serbia: próba przełamania impasu*, Ośrodek Studiów Wschodnich, 2023, <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/node/31340>, access 7 V 2024.

3. According to the respondents, Serbia has the most friendly and partner relations with which international entity?

4. Which international entity, according to the respondents, has good intentions towards Serbia?

The study selected six international entities which, according to the author, are important in relations with Serbia, both at the historical, political and economic level, but do not belong to the Western Balkans region. The author listed the European Union, Russia, China, the United States, the United Arab Emirates and Turkey. The aim of the study was to identify the attitudes of the respondents towards international organizations and to assess the level of trust the respondents have in them. The study relied on the opinions of the respondents rather than their knowledge – the selection of participants was random rather than based on a specific criteria. The research group consisted of 590 individuals, as the author decided to use it as a basis for constructing a model reflecting the social structure of Serbia.

Serbia's relations with selected international entities:

European Union. The region of the Balkan Peninsula⁶ is a strategic area for the European Union, especially in terms of maintaining peace on the European continent, but also in connection with the economic equalization of European regions. The European Union is active in the region as a negotiator in various conflicts and disputes between international actors. In addition, the Western Balkans region is currently the largest beneficiary of the European Union's financial instruments.

Serbia applied for EU membership in December 2009 and obtained candidate status in March 2012, after Belgrade and Pristina reached an agreement on the regional representation of Kosovo. Accession negotiations officially started on January 21, 2014. So far (as of January 2023), 22 out of 35 negotiation chapters have been opened, of which two have been provisionally closed. However, this does not mean that the negotiations have been completed or suspended. Serbia's foreign policy strategy clearly states that "European integration and membership of the European Union are the national interest and strategic commitment of the Republic of Serbia, while European values are precisely those values that the Republic of Serbia supports and wishes to further cultivate"⁷ In

⁶ The classification of countries belonging to the Balkan Peninsula is controversial, for the purposes of this work I will include such entities as Slovenia, Croatia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Serbia, Kosovo, Bulgaria. M. Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, Oxford University Press 2009.

⁷ Republic of Serbia Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Political relations between Serbia and the EU*, 2022, <https://www.mfa.gov.rs/en/foreign-policy/eu-integration/political-relations-between-serbia-and-eu>, access 11 VII 2022.

addition, the European Union is Serbia's largest trading partner and a guarantor of the country's economic stability. Over the last 10 years, the EU's cumulative foreign direct investment in Serbia amounted to EUR 15.4 billion (67% of total FDI inflows), while trade between the EU and Serbia accounted for 62% of Serbia's total trade.⁸ In 2016, the deputy head of the EU Delegation to Serbia Oskar Benedikt said the EU is the "main investor" in Serbia with a share of 82% of net foreign investments and by the past 15 years.⁹

In early 2021, the European Union allocated EUR 78.4 million to Serbia under the Instruments for Pre-Accession Assistance for socio-economic recovery and EUR 15 million for urgent needs such as medical equipment, support for vulnerable groups and exceptionally for the employment of 200 additional medical staff. Almost EUR 12 million has been allocated to Serbia under the EU Solidarity Fund. In addition, the European Union provided Serbia with a subsidy of more than EUR 27 million to purchase vaccines from EU Member States and equipment related to the ongoing vaccination campaign. Serbia can also benefit from a EUR 7 million EU regional project by the World Health Organization to support safe and effective immunization in the Western Balkans.¹⁰

Serbia also cooperates with the EU in the framework of foreign and security policy (CFSP). In addition, Serbia continues to participate in EU Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP) crisis management missions and operations, in particular in EU training missions in Somalia and the Central African Republic, including NAVFOR Atalanta.¹¹

Currently, one of the issues determining relations between Serbia and the European Union is the problem of the non-recognition of Kosovo's independence.¹² Both Kosovo and Serbia are applying for membership in the EU, but the

⁸ In 2007–2013, Serbia received EUR 1.4 billion under the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA I), and in 2013–2020 the budget for Serbia amounted to EUR 11.5 billion (IPA II). Delegacija EU u Srbiji, *EU partnerstvo sa Srbijom: EU najbolji partner i najveći donator već 20 godina – i na prvoj liniji fronta u borbi protiv COVID-19*, 2020, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/serbia/eu-partnerstvo-sa-srbijom-eu-najbolji-partner-i-najveci-donator-vec-20-godina--_sr?s=227&page_lang=sr, access 11 VII 2022.

⁹ Statistic Office of the Republic of Serbia, *Open data*, 2024, <https://www.stat.gov.rs/en-us/otvoreni-podaci-izbor/>, access 11 V 2024.

¹⁰ European Commission, *Serbia Report 2021*, https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/serbia-report-2021_en, access 11 VII 2022.

¹¹ *Ibidem*.

¹² After the war, and as a consequence of the North Atlantic Treaty military operation, Kosovo seceded from Serbia and in 2008 it was recognized as an independent state by most countries. The European Union, but also the United States and Russia are participating in the negotiations between Serbia and Kosovo. The conflict between the states is still ongoing and takes on different intensity.

condition is the normalization of relations between these countries. The EU has been negotiating between Serbia and Kosovo since 2011, unfortunately without success. Recognition of Kosovo is one of the key points in Serbia's accession negotiations to the European Union.

Russia. Relations between Serbia and Russia are determined by their shared history as well as their religious and cultural community. Although Russia does not financially support Serbia to such a large extent as the European Union, it is still a desirable partner for this country. Additionally, Serbia has signed a free trade agreement with Russia that allows Serbian companies to export virtually everything they produce in Serbia to Russia duty-free. Most importantly, however, Russia is one of the few international actors that openly supports Serbia in its conflict with Kosovo. This support is important, not only for those in power, but also for the majority of society.

Russia, in the memory of the inhabitants of the Balkan Peninsula, played a significant role in the liberation of the region from the rule of the Turkish Ottomans in the battle of 1878. In addition, Russia played a significant role in the war after the dissolution of Yugoslavia. On the one hand, Boris Yeltsin wanted to rebuild and strengthen good relations with the West, but on the other hand he was under strong pressure from the popular Pan-Slavic idea. Undoubtedly, Russia was the strongest and most important ally of the Serbs in the war after Yugoslavia collapsed. Russia was in opposition to the United States, which supported the Muslims in Bosnia and the Albanians in Kosovo during the Balkan war. However, the most important matter was the opposition of Russia to NATO's attack on Serbia in 1999. The Serbs remember this gesture of solidarity, and although they are trying to join the European Union now, they stress the reluctance to join NATO. Then, Aleksandar Vučić admitted that Serbia will not join the bloc's sanctions on Moscow and said: "Serbia will continue to pursue its own policies and we expect to get understanding from the EU, if not – Serbia is an independent and free country". It was said after the meeting with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov in Belgrade.¹³ The best example of Serbian and Russian friendship was occurrence in January 2019. More than 100,000 people welcomed Vladimir Putin during his visit in Belgrade to support his politics on Balkan peninsula. Putin was throwing his weight behind Serbia in the dispute over Kosovo in his speech. In Belgrade, he fired criticism at Kosovar Albanians for establishing an army last year.

¹³ G. Filipović, M. Savic, *EU Membership Won't Change Serbian – Russian Ties, Vucic says*, Bloomberg, 2018, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-08-17/draghi-s-richer-toolbox-keeps-ecb-calm-as-turkey-and-italy-rage>, access 27 VII 2022.

In January 2021, Vučić opened the Serbian section of the European branch of the Turkish Stream gas pipeline, called the Balkan gas pipeline. Natural gas from Russia runs through this section (via Turkey and Bulgaria). In November 2021, Aleksandar Vučić and Vladimir Putin met in Sochi, where they signed an agreement on the prices of gas supplies. For the benefit of Serbia, it was agreed to keep the price and double the volume of deliveries. At the end of each year, Gazprom concludes new gas price agreements, and the negotiations in 2021 were characterized by record prices for this energy source on the global market. Only two countries could count on favorable conditions – Serbia and Belarus.¹⁴ Russia has been conducting energy diplomacy for years, making countries dependent on the supply of its resources. The friendly gesture towards Serbia can be treated as a political game, as Russia was already building its support at dawn in connection with the planned attack on Ukraine.

Serbia's and Russia's joint military relationship is also significant. Serbia is the only country in the Western Balkans and the former Yugoslav republics that is not and is not seeking to join NATO,¹⁵ declaring itself a militarily neutral state. However, Serbia is not entirely impartial, especially when it comes to its relations with Russia. For years, they have been conducting joint military operations as part of the Eurasian Alliance, in which the main partners in military maneuvers involving Serbia are Russia and Belarus. Over the past three years, the Serbian army has purchased five Mi-17V-5 helicopters, four Mi-35M combat helicopters and the "Pancir S1" anti-aircraft missile system from Russia.¹⁶ However, in addition to military cooperation with Russia, Serbia also cooperates with NATO through membership in the Partnership for Peace program.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Serbia also received significant aid from Russia. Vladimir Putin decided to allocate about 300,000 doses of vaccines, thus Serbia was one of the first countries to start vaccination with the Russian Sputnik V preparation. In addition, in June 2021, Serbia was the first country in Europe to launch the production of Russian Sputnik V vaccines. Until October 2021, the Torlak Institute in Serbia produced one and a half million doses of Russian vaccines against the virus¹⁷.

¹⁴ M. Szpala, *Zgoda Rosji na utrzymanie cen gazu dla Serbii*, Ośrodek Studiów Wschodnich, 2021, <https://www.osw.waw.pl/pl/publikacje/analizy/2021-12-02/zgoda-rosji-na-utrzymanie-nizszych-cen-gazu-dla-serbii>, access 10 VII 2022.

¹⁵ It belongs only to the Partnership for Peace.

¹⁶ Z. Sielska, *op. cit.*, pp. 28–48.

¹⁷ Radio Slobodna Evropa, *Kineski ministar odbrane SA Vučićem u Beogradu*, <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/vucic-srbija-kina-ministar-odbrane/31171120.html>, access 27 VII 2022.

While most European countries have introduced sanctions against Russia, regarding the attack on Ukraine as aggression against another country, the Serbian authorities still evade this action. Moreover, the majority of Serbian society believes that the US and NATO unleashed the war in Ukraine¹⁸, provoking Russia to conduct military operations.

China. Beijing's relations with Serbia are built through Chinese investments in this region and granting loans, but the most important thing is that China is not interested in "imposing" its model on others in any overt sense, but invests in high-visibility infrastructure, like motorways and railways, as well as cultural and language centres instead. China is primarily concerned with completing its "New Silk Road" project, also known as the "One Belt, One Road" Initiative,¹⁹ wherefore is interested in improving the basic infrastructure of Balkans, which is considered a future entry point into Europe proper for its economics products²⁰. Relations with Serbia are important mainly due to the plan to form the southern branch of the New Silk Road through the project of building a transport corridor between the Greek port of Piraeus and Central Europe.²¹ Furthermore, in 2014, the construction of the second bridge over the Danube in Belgrade, worth EUR 170 million, was completed and was financed mostly by a China Exim Bank loan. In 2016, the Chinese company He Steel Group took over the largest Serbian ironworks Železara Smederevo, which cost EUR 46 million and in November 2017 and started the construction of a new power unit at the 350 MW power plant in Kostolac.²²

In addition to the aspect of economic cooperation, the People's Republic of China also focused on soft power. Primarily, it manifests itself through cooperation in the field of culture, but also tourism. In 2019, Serbia was visited by 80,000 Chinese tourists.²³ Additionally, Serbia has a high number of students participating in numerous educational exchange programs. China is also pursuing an effective

¹⁸ Demostat, *Spoljno-političke orijentacije građana Srbije, 2022*, <https://demostat.rs/upload/Prezentacija%2029062022%20Demostat.pdf>, access 27 VII 2022.

¹⁹ P. Tonchev, *China's Road: Into the Western Balkans*, "European Union Institute for Security Studies Brief", 2017, no. 3, <https://www.iss.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EUISSFiles/Brief%203%20China%27s%20Silk%20Road.pdf>, access 10 VII 2022.

²⁰ L. Poulain, *China's New Balkan Strategy*, Center for Strategic and International Studies – Central Europe Watch, 2011, vol. 1(2).

²¹ J. Jakóbowski, *Xi Jinping in Serbia: not just the economy*, Ośrodek Studiów Wschodnich, 2016, <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2016-06-22/xi-jinping-serbia-not-just-economy>, access 22 VII 2022.

²² Z. Sielska, *op. cit.*, pp. 28–48.

²³ M. Janković, *Šta zove 80.000 Kineza u Srbiju – gde mogu da slikam selfi?*, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/serbian/lat/srbija-46526531>, access 28 VII 2022.

policy, because although their investments and loans are smaller than those of the European Union, they are rated best in terms of aid and influence in the region. Based on the database of the National Bank of Serbia, investments from China in 2019 for a total amount of EUR 321.8 million accounted for 8% whilst total foreign investment in Serbia is around EUR 3.8 billion.²⁴ However, in 2019 the EU invested EUR 3.2 billion in Serbia, which is almost 85% of all investments in Serbia in the previous year.²⁵ Nevertheless, it is Beijing that receives the most praise from Vučić. China is also looking to tighten military cooperation between the two countries and has recently delivered unmanned aerial vehicles to Serbia.²⁶ In May 2024, the President of the People's Republic of China, Xi Jinping, even described Serbia as "China's most important trading partner in Europe"²⁷.

During the pandemic, Sino-Serbian relations were further strengthened. In 2020, on March 21, a plane with protective equipment and a group of 6 Chinese medical specialists landed in the Serbian capital. It was then that the President of Serbia thanked the Chinese authorities so much.²⁸ As early as January 2021, China supplied Serbia with one million doses of Sinopharm. In April, Serbia had 2.5 million doses of the vaccine from the PRC, making Serbia one of the most rapidly vaccinating countries for its citizens. The Belgrade authorities appreciate Beijing's help very much because China does not interfere in the policy pursued by President Vučić. At the last meeting, the President of Serbia stated that he "greatly appreciated China's consistent stance in respecting Serbia's territorial integrity and sovereignty".²⁹

It is worth noting, however, that the closeness between China and the Balkans has not always been apparent. Relations between China and the former Yugoslavia (SFR Yugoslavia) were complex and evolved during different historical periods. Initially, after the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, Yugoslavia under the leadership of Josip Broz Tito (Tito) adopted a neu-

²⁴ D. Marjanović, *Social environment as a factor of capital investment in Serbia*, "Eastern European Economics", 2022, vol. 60(3), pp. 247–264.

²⁵ Z. Sielska, *op. cit.*, pp. 28–48.

²⁶ China daily, *Serbian president meets with Chinese defense minister*, 2021, <http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202103/27/WS605ee6eca31024ad0bab205f.html>, access 28 VII 2022.

²⁷ J. Bawolek, *Xi Jinping wskazał najważniejszego w Europie partnera dla Chin*, 2024, <https://www.pap.pl/aktualnosci/xi-jinping-wskazał-najwazniejszego-partnera-w-europie-dla-chin>, access 17 V 2024.

²⁸ Direktno.hr, *Vučić poljubio je kinesku zastavu i obećao slušati diplomaciju kako bi izbjegli katastrofalan talijanski scenarij*, 2020, <https://direktno.hr/eu-i-svijet/vucic-poljubio-kinesku-zastavu-i-obecao-slusati-diplomaciju-kako-bi-izbjegli-katastrofalan-talijansk-189142/>, access 28 VII 2022.

²⁹ Radio Slobodna Evropa, *Kineski ministar odbrane sa Vučićem u Beogradu*, 2021, <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/vucic-srbija-kina-ministar-odbrane/31171120.html>, access 27 VII 2022.

tral position in the conflict between China and the USSR.³⁰ Tito attempted to establish cooperation with China, but was met with rejection from Mao Zedong, who declined Tito's proposal due to his split with Stalin.

Nevertheless, Yugoslavia and the PRC established diplomatic relations in 1949. However, the actual rapprochement between the two countries occurred only in later years. Tito's first visit to China took place in 1977, indicating a certain distance between the two countries for much of their post-war history. In later years, especially after Tito's death in 1980, relations between China and Yugoslavia began to develop. The PRC gained international significance, leading to a more active foreign policy in the Balkan region.³¹

United States of America. Relations between Serbia and the USA cannot be described as good. First of all, because the Serbian society perpetuates in their memory NATO interventions in their country in 1999, which they believe were wrong. Although relations between the countries are definitely cooled down, the United States is also an important player in the Western Balkans. The event that significantly influenced relations with Serbia was the civil war in the 1990s, and especially the interference in the Serb-Kosovar conflict. After all, following unsuccessful negotiations of the contract group, on March 24, 1999, NATO forces began military operations without a declaration of war, undertaking Operation Allied Force. Yugoslavia (today's Serbia, Montenegro, and Kosovo) was bombed by NATO peacekeepers until June 10, 1999.³² The Serbian government severed diplomatic relations with the US, Great Britain, Germany, France, and Albania. Ultimately, after a successful operation and negotiations, peace was achieved. Kosovo declared independence on February 17, 2008 and was recognized by most UN states. Among others, Spain, Romania, Cyprus, Greece, Slovakia, Russia, Israel, and China did not recognize it. The demonstrating Serbs expressed their objection by setting fire to the US Embassy in Belgrade. For the demonstrating Serbs, it was the US and its interests that led to the secession of part of Serbia.

The conflict over Kosovo continues to exist in Serbian internal and external politics and it results primarily from the question of the interpretation of histo-

³⁰ S.Z. Arežina, *Sino-jugoslovenski odnosi u periodu 1949–1977. godine – značaj posete Josipa Broza Tita NR Kini 1977. godine*, "Zbornik radova Filozofskog fakulteta u Prištini" 2020, vol. 50(2), pp. 145–163.

³¹ Ł. Jureńczyk, *Polityczno-wojskowy wymiar rywalizacji pomiędzy Chińską Republiką Ludową a Stanami Zjednoczonymi Ameryki Północnej w XX i XXI wieku*, „Annales Universitatis Mariae Curie-Skłodowska”, 2017, vol. 24(2), pp. 9–27.

³² T. Gazzini, *NATO Coercive Military Activities in the Yugoslav Crisis (1992–1999)*, 2021, <http://ejil.org/pdfs/12/3/1526.pdf>, access 13 VII 2022.

ry (issues of priority in the lands) and culture, because a frequent argument in the discussion is the Serbian historical legacy, which is strongly associated with the Kosovo region. Serbs also cannot come to terms with the loss of remnants in the Kosovo lands in the form of Orthodox churches and monasteries, the history of which dates back to the 14th century. For the Serbs, this conflict also has a symbolic dimension, as it is often compared to the 14th-century Battle of Kosovo, in which the Serbs fought against the Ottoman Empire.³³ Therefore, the assistance of the US and NATO to the Kosovo Liberation Army was and is perceived negatively by the Serbs. Currently, the US participates in negotiations between Serbia and Kosovo, especially when the conflict escalates (August and December 2022).

The relationship between the two countries is best described on the website of the Republic of Serbia Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2022) “after the deterioration of relations during the dissolution of the SFRY and the severance of diplomatic relations due to the bombing of NATO in 1999, relations were restored on November 17, 2000 at the level of Ambassadors. Today, bilateral relations are much better than in previous years.”³⁴ However, although political relations are correct, public attitude towards the USA is still negative. First of all, because of the memory of the wrongs associated with the NATO intervention in their country. The Serbs also believe that the US as a negotiating party is siding with Kosovo, not listening to what the Serbs have to say.

Turkey. Relations between Serbia and Turkey are determined by the region's complicated history. In the 14th century, Serbia was conquered by the Ottoman Turks and remained under their rule until the 19th century, leaving a legacy related to the Muslim religion. Also the battle in Kosovo in which the Serbs fought with the Ottoman Turks and which entered the memory and identity of the Serbian people was an important aspect. This battle is the census of the greatness of the state in Serbian history.³⁵ In the 1990s, a Serbian rhetoric emerged calling Muslims “Turks,”³⁶ because it was during the Turkish conquests

³³ I. Čolović, *Śmierć na Kosowym Polu, historia mitu kosowskiego*, Sejny 2019.

³⁴ Republic of Serbia Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Political relations between Serbia and the EU*, 2022, <https://www.mfa.gov.rs/en/foreign-policy/eu-integration/political-relations-between-serbia-and-eu>, access 11 VII 2022.

³⁵ I. Čolović, *op. cit.*

³⁶ Muslim Slavs (from Bosnia and other regions) were popularly referred to as *Turks*, a term that was essentially considered neutral, as opposed to various equivalents of the Serbian *potura*, *poturica*, *balija*, etc., which were of a stigmatizing character (J. Mindak-Zawadzka, *Bosniak Identity and the Bogomil Tradition: Medieval Dualist Heretics as Desirable Ancestors of Present-Day Post-Yugoslav Muslim Slavs*, [in:] *The Experience of Faith in Slavic Cultures and Literatures in the Context of Postsecular Thought*, eds. D. Sosnowska, E. Drzewicka, UW, Warszawa 2018).

that the population of the Christian region was supposed to convert to Islam, which the Serbs considered the greatest betrayal. In addition, in 2008, Turkey recognized Kosovo's independence, which significantly worsened relations between the two countries.

The turning point of Turkey's greater involvement in the Balkans, especially in Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, began after the signing of the Istanbul Declaration in 2010 - an agreement between three countries to build peace, prosperity and stability in the Balkan Peninsula. Turkey has significantly contributed to the improvement of Serbo-Bosnian relations, but it has also had an impact on calming down the conflict in Serbian Sandžak.³⁷ This type of Turkish policy towards the Western Balkans has been called "Neo-Ottomanism". This policy is shaped by the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TIKA), which focuses on building dialogue with the Muslim community in the region.³⁸ TIKA started operations in Serbia in 2009 and by December 2016, more than EUR 20 million had been invested and ties between Turkey and Serbia are continuously taking root.³⁹ Currently, TIKA's support includes small business loans, Turkish language courses, K-12 education (e.g. incorporating Islamic history into the secondary school curriculum), information offices for those wishing to travel or study in Turkey, school construction and funding of health facilities.⁴⁰

Investments also play an important role in Serbian-Turkish relations. As of 2019, Serbia is Turkey's largest trading partner in the Western Balkans. Furthermore, Turkish state and private institutions are also investing in strategic sectors of Serbia, such as banking, highways and energy. By 2018, the annual amount exceeded one billion euros, with great prospects for future growth.⁴¹ Turkish investments in Serbia have been on the rise since 2015, and currently almost 800 Turkish companies operate in Serbia with 10,000 employees.⁴² However, according to the number of projects and the 2019 Annual Report, Trade

³⁷ A. Đukić, D. Vuletić, M. Milenković, *The relations between Russia and Turkey in the context of contemporary international events*, "Vojno Delo", 2022, vol. 74(1), pp. 1–91.

³⁸ C. Luke, *Heritage interests: Americanism, Europeanism and Neo-Ottomanism*, "Journal of Social Archeology", 2018, vol. 18 (2), pp. 234–257.

³⁹ B.S. Ağır, M.N. Arman, *Turkish foreign policy towards the western Balkan since the post-cold war era: Political and security dimensions*, [in:] *Turkey's Foreign Policy and Security Perspectives in the 21st Century: Prospects and Challenges*, ed. S. Demir, Boca Raton 2016, pp. 143–166.

⁴⁰ C. Luke, *op. cit.*, pp. 234–257.

⁴¹ H.F. Büyük, A.E. Öztürk, *The role of leadership networks in Turkey-Balkan relations in the AKP era*, "Turkish Policy Quarterly", 2019, vol. 18(3), pp. 119–127.

⁴² K. Bieniek, *Thirty years of relations between the Republic of Turkey and the Republic of Serbia: Changing political and international dynamics*, "Yearbook of the Institute of East Central Europe", 2021, vol. 19(4), pp. 175–189.

Regulations and Digital Disruptions Affect the Economic Outlook, Turkey has only a 3.3% share of total FDI projects in Serbia⁴³ and the European Union is currently leading the way in investing in this region.

United Arab Emirates. Significant relations between Serbia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) began to form in 2012, when the party of Aleksandar Vučić came to power. Twice, in 2014 and 2016, Serbia received a USD 1 billion loan from Abu Dhabi for budget support. Over the past three years, the UAE has been at the forefront of countries to which Serbia exports arms and military equipment, their companies buy agricultural land, and have become a minority owner of Serbia's national airline. The UAE primarily has strategic, political, economic and military motivations that influence aid allocation decisions, as well as humanitarian and development goals.⁴⁴

In addition, in 2014, the Serbian government launched a multi-billion dollar renovation project of the Belgrade waterfront, which is financed by the Emirati company Eagle Hills (the company is managed by Mohamed Alabbar, one of the most important and influential businessmen in the Emirates). The project called "Belgrade on Water" met with protests from Belgrade residents. From the very beginning, this investment provided many problems, starting with the lack of a competition for construction, ending with the protests of employees who do not receive payments on time.⁴⁵ There are also reports that already in 2014, Emirati companies made multi-million dollar investments in the Serbian arms industry.⁴⁶

In its trade and investment activities, the UAE has concentrated its efforts in four sectors (aerospace, construction, military technology, agriculture), which respectively develop areas of common interest. This is based on the narrative of South-South cooperation that the UAE promotes.⁴⁷ However, it has also been suggested that Serbia is not only a place of good investment and friendly government, but also strategically located to counter Turkey's expanding interests and influence.⁴⁸

⁴³ V. Vukmirović, M. Kostić-Stanković, D. Pavlović, J. Ateljević, D. Bjelica, M. Radonić, D. Sekulić, *Foreign direct investments' impact on economic growth in Serbia*, "Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies", 2021, vol. 23(1), pp. 122–143.

⁴⁴ L. Cochrane, *The United Arab Emirates as a global donor: What a decade of foreign aid data transparency reveals*, "Development Student Research", 2021, vol. 8(1), pp. 49–62.

⁴⁵ N1, *Protest stranih radnika koji grade Beograd navodi*, 2021, <https://rs.n1info.com/biznis/protest-stranih-radnika-koji-grade-beograd-na-vodi/>, access 26 VII 2022.

⁴⁶ R. Donaghy, *The UAE's Shadowy Dealings with Serbia*, 2015, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/uaes-shadowy-dealings-serbia>, access 25 VII 2022.

⁴⁷ L. Cochrane, *op. cit.*, pp. 49–62.

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*.

Research results

Based on the analysis of the obtained test results, the following conclusions can be drawn. Referring to Serbia's most important partners, almost two out of five respondents pointed to Russia – 38.6%. Slightly less often the respondents leaned towards the EU – 37.6%. Every fifth respondent pointed to China in this matter – 19.3%. Against this background, only 2% of the respondents said that the most important partner of Serbia is the US, 1.5% of people indicated the UAE, and 0.8% – Turkey (Figure 1).

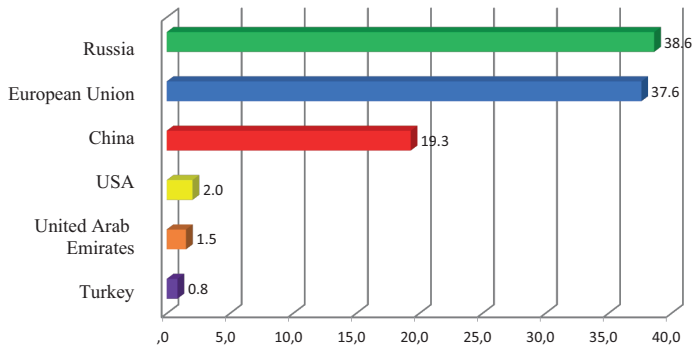


Figure 1. Serbia's most important partner, $N = 590$ (%)

Source: Author's own study.

When evaluating Serbia's most important partners, it turns out that the highest scores concerned cooperation with Russia (on a scale of 1–5, average 4.21), China (4.05) and the EU (3.72). Respondents were relatively less positive about cooperation with Turkey (3.03), the US (2.99) and the UAE (2.98) – Figure 2.

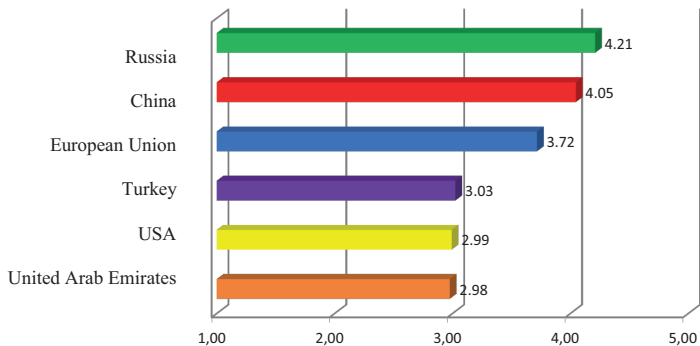


Figure 2. Serbia's most important partners, $N = 590$ (scale 1–5)

Source: Author's own study.

Almost two out of five respondents declared that the European Union invested the most in Serbia – 39.7%. Equally often, the respondents pointed to China in this matter – 38.6%. Less often, the respondents leaned towards Russia – 15.6%, and the UAE – 4.4%. In addition, 0.8% of respondents each pointed to the US or Turkey in this aspect (Figure 3).

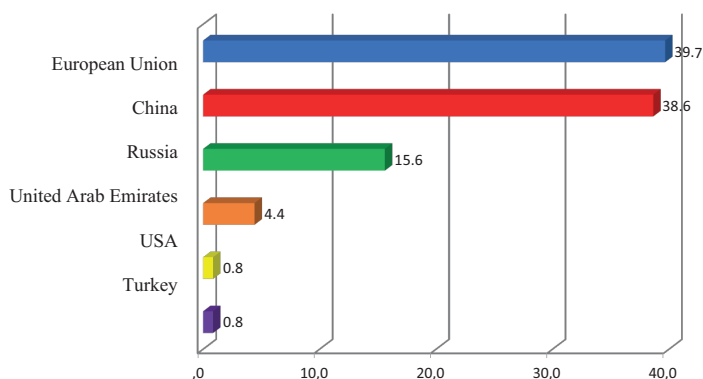


Figure 3. Invests the most in Serbia, $N = 590$ (%)

Source: Author's own study.

Referring to the countries with which Serbia has the best relations based on friendship and partnership, more than half of the respondents pointed to Russia – 55.8%. Almost three out of ten respondents leaned towards China – 29.7%, while every tenth respondent said that it is the EU – 10.5%. Relatively less frequently, the respondents pointed to the UAE (2.9%), the US (0.7%) and Turkey (0.5%) – Figure 4.

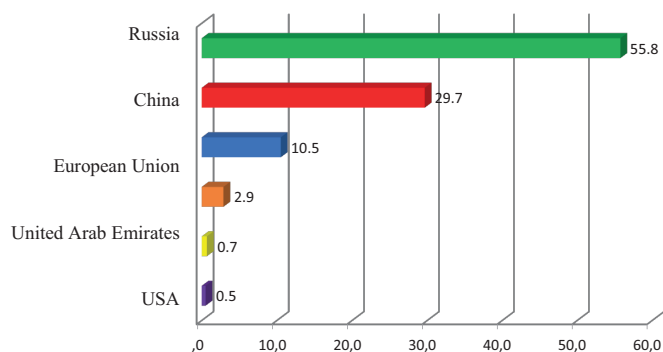


Figure 4. Serbia has the best relations (based on friendship and partnership) with, $N = 590$ (in %)

Source: Author's own study.

When evaluating Serbia's relations with individual partners, the respondents were definitely the best in terms of relations with Russia and China – on a scale of 1–5, average 4.43 and 4.33 respectively. The respondents rated Serbia's relations with the UAE (3.54), Turkey (3.43) and the EU (3.20) relatively lower. On the other hand, they expressed the worst opinions about Serbia's relations with the US – the average was only 2.63 (Figure 5).

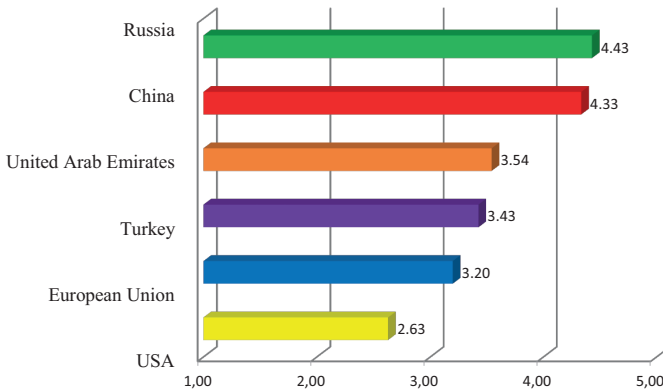


Figure 5. Assessment of Serbia's relations with its partners, $N = 590$ (scale 1–5)

Source: Author's own study.

When evaluating trust in Serbia's relations with individual partners, the respondents declared the greatest trust in relations with Russia and China – on a scale of 1–5, average at 3.57 and 3.37. Respondents had relatively less confidence in Serbia's relations with the EU (2.60) and the US (1.90) – Figure 6.

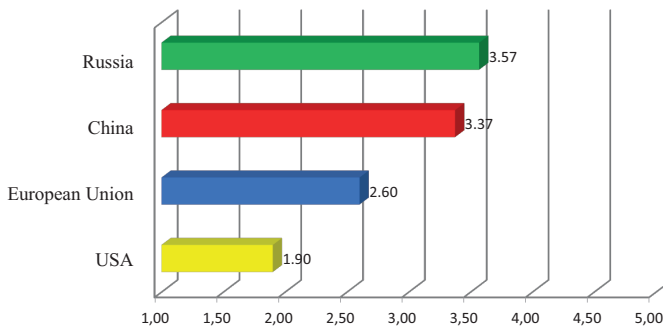


Figure 6. Assessment of Serbia's trust with its partners, $N = 590$ (in %)

Source: Author's own study.

Looking at the results of the *r*-Pearson correlation coefficient for individual statements in relation to the assessment of trust in Serbia's relations with individual partners, the following statistically significant dependencies were observed:

- the greater the trust in Serbia's relations with China, the greater the trust in relations with Russia,
- the greater the trust in Serbia's relations with the EU, the greater the trust in relations with the US, and the less trust in relations with Russia,
- the greater the trust in relations between Serbia and Russia, the greater the trust in relations with China and the less trust in relations with the EU,
- the greater the trust in Serbia's relations with the US, the greater the trust in relations with the EU (Table 1).

Table 1. Relationships between the assessment of Serbia's trust with its partners.

		China	EU	Russia	USA
China	<i>r</i> -Pearson	-	.016	.644	.019
	P	-	.690	.000	.648
EU	<i>r</i> -Pearson	.016	-	-.134	.634
	P	.690	-	.001	.000
Russia	<i>r</i> -Pearson	.644	-.134	-	-.064
	P	.000	.001	-	.118
USA	<i>r</i> -Pearson	.019	.634	-.064	-
	P	.648	.000	.118	-

Source: Author's own study.

Discussion and conclusions

The aim of the research presented in the article is to diagnose the perspective of Serbs regarding the relations of their state with individual international entities. Analyzing the results, it can be concluded that Russia is the most important partner for the Serbs. Although the respondents are aware that the European Union invests the most in their country, Russia is considered the country that has the best relations with Serbia based on friendship and partnership and enjoys the greatest trust. Similar research over the years confirms the sympathy of the Serbs towards Russia, indicating that it is a country close to their culture of Slavic origin.⁴⁹ In addition, in a 2022 study commissioned by index.hr,⁵⁰ respondents

⁴⁹ U.V. Šuvaković, J.S. Petrović, *Russia in the eyes of Serbian students*, 2012, <https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/russia-in-the-eyes-of-serbian-students>, access 20 I 2023.

⁵⁰ Index.hr, *Istraživanje: 88% Srba je protiv ulaska u NATO, 84% neželi sankcije Rusiji*, 2022, <https://www.index.hr/vijesti/clanak/istrazivanje-88-srba-je-protiv-ulaska-u-nato-84-nezeli-sankcije-rusiji/2383936.aspx>, access 14 XII 2022.

confirmed that Russia should be the main partner in Serbia's foreign policy.⁵¹ The sympathy of the Serbian society towards Russia results primarily from two factors: cultural and civilizational aspect: Russia appears as a historical common civilization that initially fought against the Ottoman Empire, and then sided with Serbia in the conflict over the lands of Kosovo. In addition, both nations share a common Orthodox religion and the origin of the Slavic tribes: psychological and political aspect: the popularity of Russia and Putin among the Serbs is also intensified by the government media, which do not hide their sympathy for their eastern neighbors. The narrative is most often built by emphasizing Russia's support for Serbia regarding Kosovo, but also through joint military exercises and, for example, assistance during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Considering the importance of partners in relations with Serbia, according to respondents, the European Union oscillates between the second and third place among the most frequently chosen international actors. This is evidenced by the importance of this organization in shaping policy in the Western Balkans region. Not only as an entity watching over peace in the region, but also as a partner whose opinion matters. In addition, this is enhanced by the awareness of the Serbs that the European Union is the largest investor in Serbia among all international entities. Also an important partner who provides money and finances for investments. The European Union fared much worse in surveys assessing relationships based on friendship and partnership. According to the Serbs, their relations with the European Union are based on friendship to a small extent. This may be due to the fact that this entity was involved in many heavy negotiations during the Yugoslavia break-up war, but also in the current Kosovo talks. Membership in this organization requires acceptance of Kosovo's independence, which for many Serbs seems impossible to fulfill, often thinking about the unfair treatment of Serbs towards other countries in the region. Moreover, they trust the European Union relatively less than other entities. Ipsos research conducted in 2022 confirms these results, as 44% of Serbs do not want to join the European Union and only 35% opted for membership⁵² (Standars.rs). The results of the polls are worrying because for the first time since polls have been conducted, such a small number of Serbs have voted in favor of joining the Union.

The latest dispute between Belgrade and Brussels, which emerged in early February 2024, is also not improving Serbian-EU relations. The European Parlia-

⁵¹ *Ibidem*.

⁵² Euronews, *For first time, a majority of Serbs are against joining the EU – poll*, 2022, <https://www.euronews.com/2022/04/22/for-first-time-a-majority-of-serbs-are-against-joining-the-eu-poll>, access 09 XII 2023.

ment adopted a resolution calling for an independent investigation into possible electoral fraud. If the results show that the authorities in Belgrade were directly involved in this wrongdoing, EU funding should be suspended, appealed MEPs. If this were to happen, the country could lean even more towards cooperation with Moscow and Beijing.

A few months ago, the European Commission adopted a Growth Plan for the Western Balkans worth EUR 6 billion to stimulate economic growth and accelerate investment in the region, primarily to support candidate countries on their path to the Union. Some of the funds are expected to go to Serbia, whose largest trading partner is the EU. China ranks second, but the significance of investments from that country is sometimes exaggerated in public debate. The implementation of the free trade agreement could exacerbate this.⁵³

According to the majority of respondents, China is an important partner in relations with Serbia. In addition, respondents believed that China invested the most in Serbia, next to the EU. This is mainly due to multi-million investments and loans that China grants to Serbia. These activities are exceptionally publicized by the media and by politicians on social media. China was also positively assessed as Serbia's partner whose relations are based on friendship and partnership. This is related to the policy pursued by China, as they do not force their partners to meet the requirements as the EU does and, in the opinion of the average citizen, they act disinterestedly.⁵⁴ It is also important that Beijing has not recognized the independence of Kosovo, which is a key issue in Serbian politics. Additionally, the respondents expressed confidence in China that they had good intentions towards Serbia. This is certainly due to the many actions that Beijing is taking towards Serbian public opinion. Moreover, China considers the NATO operation – "Allied Force" – illegal, supporting the Serbian side.⁵⁵ But also the very fact that China was the first international actor to provide assistance during the COVID-19 pandemic already in March 2020. For the Serbian society, it was a very important act, because it showed that they were quite important in the region, but also showed solidarity in such hard times.⁵⁶ China is steadily

⁵³ M. Tomczak, *Serbia: Między Brukselą, Moskwą i Pekinem*, 2024, <https://www.obserwatorfinansowy.pl/bez-kategorii/rotator/serbia-miedzy-bruksela-moskwa-i-pekinem/>, access 16 V 2024.

⁵⁴ I. Milutinović, *Media framing of COVID-19 pandemic in the transitional regime of Serbia: Exploring discourses and strategies*, "Media, Culture & Society", 2021, vol. 43(7), pp. 1311–1327.

⁵⁵ I.M. Božić-Miljković, *Geoeconomic aspects of the cooperation between the Republic of Serbia and the People's Republic of China: Situation and perspectives*, "Sociološki pregled", 2021, vol. 55(2), pp. 314–351.

⁵⁶ Ž.V. Obradović, *China's soft power and the Balkans: Example of Serbia*, "Sociološki pregled", 2021, vol. 55(4), pp. 1771–1798.

increasing its presence in the Balkans, aiming to create a counterbalance to the European Union in Europe. Serbia is eager to respond to these overtures, as close relations with China allow it to further reduce its dependence on the EU.⁵⁷

Despite the fact that the United States is an important actor in the negotiations between Serbia and Kosovo, the results of research show that the Serbian society considers the United States to be one of the least important partners in relations with Serbia. However, the assessment of the relationship based on friendship and partnership seems to be quite specific, as the USA was rated the worst by the respondents. Moreover, they do not trust the US to have good intentions regarding relations with their country. Both the low assessment of partnership in relations and the lack of trust in the US are caused by the history of relations between these two entities. The Serbs remember the NATO operation "Allied Force".⁵⁸ Serbs consider themselves as victims of NATO bombing, imprinting in their minds their dislike of the US. The society is also convinced that the United States is not conducting negotiations on Kosovo fairly, because it takes the Albanian side in this conflict without understanding the Serbian arguments. According to many studies conducted in Serbia, about 80% of respondents do not want to join NATO.⁵⁹ Therefore, Serbia to this day, although it expresses its willingness to join the structures of the European Union, unequivocally refuses to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

The United Arab Emirates and Turkey were rated the worst along with the US due to the importance of the partnership, but also investing in Serbia. First of all, Turkey is associated with the Ottoman Empire, which conquered Serbia and ruled it until the 19th century. In addition, the state recognized Kosovo, which is why, in the opinion of the Serbs, relations are not based on friendship and partnership. On the other hand, the United Arab Emirates are primarily associated with the investment in Belgrade, which is associated with numerous protests.⁶⁰ Also, the UAE is not a significant player on the international arena, and information about investments is less visible in the media and therefore not as significant to respondents as other international entities.

⁵⁷ M. Tomczak, *op. cit.*

⁵⁸ M. Glišić, D. Stojković, I. Ladevac, *NATO Crisis Management Concept: Twenty Years After Bombing of The Federal Republic of Yugoslavia*, [in:] *David vs. Goliath: NATO war against Yugoslavia and Its Implications*, Institute of International Politics and Economics, Faculty of Security Studies, Belgrade 2019, pp. 327–349.

⁵⁹ European Western Balkans, *Istraživanje: 80% srpskih građana protiv članstva u NATO, ali samo 33% protiv saradnje*, 2020, <https://europeanwesternbalkans.rs/istrazivanje-80-srpskih-gradjana-protiv-clanstva-u-nato-ali-samo-33-protiv-saradnje/>, access 15 VII 2022; Index.hr, *op. cit.*

⁶⁰ N1, *op. cit.*

Considering the above, it can be stated that the hypotheses formulated for the purpose of this study can be considered confirmed – Serbs mostly consider Russia or the European Union as the most important partner for Serbia on the international stage. Russia is the country that Serbs trust the most and recognize to the greatest extent as having good intentions towards their country. As for the hypothesis regarding investment in Serbia – here, respondents indicated European Union and China as the largest (in their opinion) investors. The research was based on the subjective opinions of the respondents because the author aimed to obtain the broadest reflection of the views of “ordinary Serbs” on this topic, including their opinions, stereotypes, and prevailing societal sentiments. Therefore, she did not choose to select the research sample in such a way that the participants had professional knowledge in this field. In the analyses conducted by the Centre for Eastern Studies, a similar conclusion is also highlighted – although Serbs do not explicitly support Russia’s aggression against Ukraine, they strive to maintain a neutral stance on the matter. The Serbian government also has its hands tied in this regard, as pro-Russian sentiments still prevail among citizens. The West is accused of hypocrisy and the NATO bombings of Serbia in 1999 are often brought up. Pro-Russian indoctrination finds fertile ground and is spread on social networks, including by anti-vaccine groups, and even the most absurd conspiracy theories are gaining popularity. The opinion of Serbian elites, a more critical stance towards Russia would entail significant economic losses. The two countries share strong political and business ties. Russian entities control the Serbian energy sector, which is entirely dependent on gas and oil supplies from Russia. Additionally, Russia is a key export market for Serbia, valued at USD 996 million (3.9% of total exports in 2021). At the same time, Belgrade seems to be counting on tangible benefits from assisting Russian entities in circumventing EU sanctions, mediating in the export of goods from the EU, and facilitating air traffic to Russia (Air Serbia increased the number of flights to Moscow after the invasion). However, it should be noted that Serbia’s stance towards Russia negatively affects its image as a candidate for the European Union. Apart from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia, all Balkan countries have unequivocally condemned Russia’s aggression against Ukraine and joined the international community’s sanctions against Russia.⁶¹ In February this year, the Serbian president clearly stated that his country would not join the European sanctions against Russia. However, he justified this not by supporting

⁶¹ J.S. Blank, *The Balkan and Euro-Atlantic Energy Security*, “Orbis”, 2020, vol. 66(1), pp. 58–77.

Russia's actions, but by citing Serbia's interests. Vučić even stated that the West is exerting "great pressure" on Serbia to support their sanctions.⁶²

In conclusion, and at the same time answering the research questions, according to the respondents, Russia is Serbia's most important partner on the international arena. It is also believed that these two countries have the most friendly and partnership relations. In addition, the Serbs have the greatest trust in Russia, claiming for the most part that it has good intentions towards their country. However, most respondents believe that the European Union and China are investing the most in Serbia.

During the analysis of the research results, an interesting observation was made. The old division into West and East is clearly reflected among the people of Serbia. From the results of the relationship between the assessment of trust in partners, it can be concluded that statistically Serbs are divided into those who trust Western entities (USA, EU) or those who trust the world of the East (Russia, China). Because those who trust the West more are most likely to trust less entities belonging to the East and *vice versa*. Thus, the more confidence a Serb has in the European Union, the less confidence he has in Russia, and *vice versa*. This gives a picture of the division that is being formed among the Serbian society, which, after the start of the war by Russia, strongly supported Moscow. In research published by the Center for Research, Transparency and Accountability, as many as 66% of the surveyed Serbs said that they are closer to the Russian side in this conflict, and only 22% to the Ukrainian side.⁶³ This may be due not only to the sympathy for Russia, but also to the fact that the Ukrainian side is being helped by NATO, which for the Serbs may have the face of an aggressor. But does this mean that Serbia is on the side of the East? It is impossible to say unequivocally, because the problem seems to be more complex. In the CRTA survey, as many as 69% of respondents believe that it would be a bigger problem for Serbia if the EU introduced visas for Serbia than if it were Russia, and 59% of respondents believed that it would be a bigger problem for Serbia if EU companies would leave Serbia than Russian companies⁶⁴. It can be assumed that if we look at economic issues, Serbs see the privilege of joining the EU and belonging to the Western world, but if we look at cultural issues, most of society will be closer to Russia.

⁶² Bankier.pl, *Vucic: Mimo wielkich nacisków Zachodu, nie przyjmujemy sankcji wobec Rosji*, 2024, <https://www.bankier.pl/wiadomosc/Vucic-Mimo-wielkich-naciskow-Zachodu-nie-przyjmujemy-sankcji-wobec-Rosji-8698400.html>, access 16 V 2024.

⁶³ CRTA, *Democracy on the Margin of the War, opinion poll May 2022*, Belgrade 2022, <https://cрта.rs/en/survey-democracy-on-the-margin-of-the-war/>, access 19 I 2023.

⁶⁴ *Ibidem*.

As mentioned above, due to methodological limitations and resulting empirical constraints, this article constitutes a contribution to further discussion on the complex relations between Serbia and China, Russia, and the European Union. According to the author, it is a valuable contribution to the discussion on the aforementioned topic because it presents a perspective on the issue from the viewpoint of Serbs.

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Abstract: As a consequence of recent events in the world, people have become more interested in international politics, clarifying their approach to international entities, especially hegemons such as the USA, China, Russia or the European Union. Serbs have been maneuvering between the East and the West for centuries, which is why I decided to find out how they currently assess relations with individual international entities. According to surveys, the majority of Serbs believe that Russia is Serbia's most important partner in the international arena and that their countries have the most friendly and partner relations. In addition, Serbs have the greatest confidence in Russia, claiming for the most part that it has good intentions towards their country. However, most respondents believe that the European Union and China are investing the most in Serbia.

Keywords: Balkans; Serbia; society; international relations; China; EU; Russia

Kto jest przyjacielem, a kto wrogiem? Relacje Serbii z wybranymi podmiotami międzynarodowymi z perspektywy mieszkańców Serbii

Streszczenie: W wyniku niedawnych wydarzeń na świecie, zainteresowanie polityką międzynarodową znacząco wzrosło, co skłoniło ludzi do dokładniejszego rozważenia swojego podejścia do międzynarodowych podmiotów, zwłaszcza tych o dominującej roli, takich jak Stany Zjednoczone, Chiny, Rosja czy Unia Europejska. Serbia od stuleci znajduje się w strategicznym punkcie pomiędzy Wschodem a Zachodem, co sprawiło, że postanowiłam zbadać, jak mieszkańcy tego państwa obecnie oceniają swoje relacje z różnymi międzynarodowymi podmiotami. Na podstawie przeprowadzonych badań wynika, że większość Serbów uważa Rosję za najważniejszego partnera Serbii na arenie międzynarodowej i twierdzi, że ich kraje utrzymują najbardziej przyjazne i partnerskie stosunki. Dodatkowo Serbowie wykazują największe zaufanie wobec Rosji, głosząc, że ten kraj ma dobre intencje wobec Serbii. Niemniej większość respondentów uważa, że Unia Europejska i Chiny inwestują najwięcej w Serbii.

Słowa kluczowe: Bałkany; Serbia; społeczeństwo; stosunki międzynarodowe; Chiny; UE; Rosja