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PROJECT

Monitoring Russia-Serbia Relations: Twenty Project Conclusions

The ISAC Fund's Project *Monitoring Russia-Serbia Relations* is a comprehensive programme for monitoring the relations between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Serbia. The ISAC Fund's aim is to analyze the current situation of relations between the two countries in all important areas as well as to bring contemporary Russia, Russian politics and Russian society closer to the citizens and political elite of Serbia. The basic goal of the Project is to improve the overall provision of information to the public and support the transparent and rational decision-making process in Serbia. The ISAC Fund considers that only a transparent and rational relationship between Russia and Serbia is in the interest of the citizens of both countries, and Serbia in particular.

During the first year of Project implementation, the ISAC Fund published five reports with 20 articles and texts of renowned national and foreign authors. In addition, in 2009 the ISAC Fund organized two round-tables on Russia-Serbia relations. The articles and texts as well as video records and other documents are available on the ISAC Fund's website (www.isac-fund.org).

The general impression about the state and perspectives of Russia-Serbia relations is that the responsibility lies with the Serbian political elite to formulate the relation of Serbia with Russia. Russia, as a country that is neither a part of EU nor aspires to be, will always formulate clearly its own interests in the relations with Serbia. When Serbia considers the relations with Russia, it always has to take into account its obligations imposed by the European integrations. Therefore, the agreements between Russia and Serbia should always be formulated and adjusted so as to avoid their contradiction with the political and legal norms of the European Union.

Up to now the ISAC Fund has made the following conclusions:

About ideas

1. Russia does not offer either to Serbia or to any other country a complete ideological alternative to the western model of liberal democracy, market economy and human rights respect. Moreover, Russia does not even dispute these concepts, but participates in all the fora, both at the global and regional levels (United Nations, Organization for European Security and Cooperation (OSCE), Council of Europe (CoE)), where these issues are discussed.
2. The only ideological concept that Russia brought forward, in a semi-official form, in the last two decades in the concept of *sovereign democracy (2006)* – as a form of internal establishment that rejects any foreign involvement in those matters that Russia sees as its internal affairs. Russia claims that the practical application of democracy, market economy

and human rights is up to each individual state and that there is no universal pattern for the application of these ideas. Any implementation of the idea of sovereign democracy is absolutely impossible for Serbia, not only due to the forthcoming European integration process, but also because Serbia has signed a series of international treaties that involve the interference with Serbian internal affairs (for example, the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights). Besides, Serbia as a potential candidate for EU membership has already accepted "interference with its internal affairs". Therefore, any attempt to propagate the idea of sovereign democracy in Serbia is weird and inappropriate because it is incompatible with European integrations. Some practical consequences of the adoption of idea on sovereign democracy could be seen in Russia as soon as by the end of 2007, when the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) refused to observe the parliamentary elections for the Russian Federation State Duma because of the restrictions related to the number of potential observers and the period during which the observers were allowed to stay in Russia;¹

About the cooperation between Serbia and Russia

3. Russia has been proclaimed one of the pillars of Serbian foreign policy. At the same time, Russia and Serbia have been building a strategic partnership. The strategic partnership between Russia and Serbia has three aspects: (1) the Russian support to the Serbian policy concerning the status of Kosovo; (2) the coordination of positions of the two countries related to other international issues; (3) the unhindered realization of strategic economic infrastructural projects such as *South Stream* and the entire oil-gas arrangement between Russia and Serbia.
4. The right model for the cooperation between Serbia and Russia is a practical - bilateral cooperation rather than strategic partnership! The reason for that lies in the fact that Russia does not have a decisive role in solving the issue of final Kosovo's status, that with its actions in Georgia in August 2008 Russia copied the transatlantic community's action in Kosovo and by doing so, lost the opportunity to influence significantly any actor in the international relations, on the basis of ethics and principles, in relation to the issue of Kosovo's status.
5. The practical – bilateral cooperation between Russia and Serbia implies the finding out of mutual interests of cooperation. For Serbia, it is certainly the unhindered implementation of the South Stream Project and the construction of regional underground gas storage in Banatski dvor, which are undoubtedly the most advantageous and the biggest strategic infrastructural projects that are likely to be implemented in Serbia. However, Serbia should not, in the name of the strategic partnership with Russia, support any initiatives in the international relations contradicting the common foreign and security policy of EU. This refers primarily to the initiatives such as the conclusion of a new European Security Treaty, proposed by the President of Russia Medvedev. The task of Serbian diplomacy is to separate the strategic infrastructural projects from any Russian policy that may contravene the EU accession policy.
6. There is a plenty of unused space for the development of cultural cooperation between Serbia and Russia. For example, the work of Russian cultural organizations in Serbia is not at the level of cultural institutions of France, Spain, Italy, Germany and Great Britain. Bearing in mind the intensified cooperation between Russia and Serbia, there is both the market and

¹ ODIHR's press release - unable to observe Russian Duma elections, <http://www.osce.org/item/27967.html>

the need for studying Russian language. Also, for example, in the last 20 years the Russian cinematography created some important films, but the Serbian audience had the opportunity to see only a small number of them, mainly those that achieved success also in the western countries. This is a field with the huge space for the development of bilateral cooperation.

About contemporary Russia

7. During the term of office of the former Russian President Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin, Russia established the economic and political stability, relying primarily on the revenue from expensive energy resources exported to the world market.
8. There has been foreign policy continuity in the first year of the new Russian President Dmitry Medvedev's term of office. This continuity is reflected in the geopolitically formulated national interest of Russia, which has been primarily concerned for the expansion of NATO Pact to Ukraine and Georgia.²
9. Along with the economic and political stability as well as prosperity, Russia regained its self-confidence and in 2008 formulated several ambitious internal and foreign-policy priorities. The military reform and strategic development, so-called "Four Is": institutes, investments, infrastructure and innovations, undoubtedly fall among the most ambitious internal projects.³ The most ambitious foreign policy projects are unquestionably the initiative for concluding a new European Security Treaty and the strengthening of integration processes in the territory of former USSR.
10. Russia has been severely struck by the global economic crisis. The capitalization of big companies dropped and their commercial debt increased to several hundreds of billions of Euros. The industrial production in Russia decreased and the gross domestic product dropped in the first half of 2009 by more than 10% in comparison to the same period in 2008. Russia lost 150 – 200 billions of US dollars by August 2008. It is expected that the recovery of energy resources prices in the global market will result in the partial recovery of Russian economic stability. However, many analysts warn that due to serious structural turmoil in Russian economy, the considerable economic reforms in the huge, state-owned conglomerates will be necessary.

Russian foreign policy

11. Russian foreign policy, particularly the one related to EU and USA, is formulated mainly in the Kremlin, i. e. in the President's administration, and much less in the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.⁴
12. Russia has been formulating its foreign policy in a multi-vector mode, aspiring towards the multi-polar world in which Russia is one of those world poles. There is no proof that Russia has been striving to take place of the former USSR in the world, but Russia does have a tendency to enhance its power and influence in the world, above all through its pragmatic

² Andrej Zagorski, Ph. D, Russian and the West, Revisionism or Status Quo, The Fourth Report of the Monitoring Russia-Serbia Relations Project, pp. 9 – 11, <http://www.isac-fund.org/publishing.php#analysis>;

³ In fact, the economic policy directed to the development of those "Four Is", Dmitry Medvedev, Address to the Federal Parliament of the Russian Federation;

⁴ See Mihail Vinogradov, The Third Report of the Monitoring Russia-Serbia Relations Project, pp. 13 and 15, also Thomas Gommart, EU-Russia Relations, Toward a Way Out of Depression, Center for Strategic and International Studies, July, 2008, p. 2. available at: www.ifri.org/files/Russie/Gomart_EU_Russia.pdf;

policy deprived of "ideology" under which the Russian political elite implies also the ideology of democracy.⁵

13. The priority of Russian foreign policy is the space of the Community of Independent States.⁶ Under its umbrella, several integration projects are being implemented in the territory of former Soviet Union. First of all, there is a plan for turning the Union of Russia and Belarus into the Federal State of Russia and Belarus. Besides, the Euro-Asian Economic Community,⁷ in which Russia has recently invested 7.5 billion euros as the assistance provided to the members of that organization in order to overcome the economic crisis, is being further strengthened by creating a customs alliance union between Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan. Further on, the Collective Security Treaty Organization, including some of the former USSR states, and finally, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, which beside Russia and China gathers also the four Central Asian states (Kazakhstan, Kirgizstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan). Finally, Russia has been working intensely on connecting with the so-called BRIC group of states (Brazil, Russia, India and China). It is obvious that Serbia does not stand any chances to be any part of these Russian integration processes.
14. The growing isolation of Russia at the international level is visible. None of the states that are members of the organizations under Russian umbrella have recognized the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, which is evidently a diplomatic defeat for Russia. Moreover, with the exception of Mongolia and Kazakhstan, Russia has plenty of problems with all other neighbours.
15. One of the absolute priorities of Russian foreign policy is to stop the enlargement of NATO and the entrance of Ukraine and Georgia into this organization. The initiative for concluding a new European Security Treaty that would guarantee "equal security" and "general security" is directed exactly to the prevention of NATO enlargement. In the words of the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov: *"if there is no political will again [for reviewing the security situation in the Euro-Atlantic space – author's remark] we are facing the threatening perspective of full re-nationalization and privatization of military-political security with all unwanted consequences deriving thereof"*.⁸

Russia and EU

16. The relations between Russia and EU are intensive, although full of misunderstandings and tensions. These misunderstandings and tensions are closely related both to the Russian energy policy and the problems that some individual EU members have with Russia at the bilateral level and which these countries raise to the EU level. Some of these tensions are economic-political (ban on importing meat from Poland to Russia), but some of these issues hit the very essence of self-perception of Russia and the countries of former Eastern Europe. More precisely, Russia sees itself as the country that gave major contribution to the defeat of Nazism in the World War II and as the liberator of Europe, while the Eastern European countries, in particular Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland see this as the replacement of

⁵ The Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation Sergej Lavrov: We have been trying to de-ideologize our actions ("Мы стараемся деидеологизировать наши действия") <http://www.izvestia.ru/person/article3114615/>

⁶ The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation), July 12, 2008, available at: <http://eng.kremlin.ru/text/docs/2008/07/204750.shtml>

⁷ It includes Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kirghizstan, Tajikistan and until 2007 Uzbekistan.

⁸ The speech of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation at the opening of the OSCE Annual Security Review Conference on June 23, 2009 in Vienna, available in Russian at: http://www.mid.ru/Brp_4.nsf/arh/ADED9C34EE795D2BC32575DE003DECD1?OpenDocument

one occupation with another. Those misunderstandings also influence political and economic relations between Russia and these countries and complicate the relations between Russia and EU.

17. Lately, since August 2008, the misunderstandings between EU and Russia have been transferred also to the field of their common neighbourhood – Belarus, Ukraine, Moldavia, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan. Russia opposed “coloured revolutions” in Georgia (2003), Ukraine (2004) and Kirghizstan (2005), which resulted in the change of governments in those countries. Russia considers the support provided to these “revolutions” to be the interference of the West with those countries’ internal affairs. In addition, Russia objects the EU’s initiative of “Eastern Partnership”⁹, in which Russia can see only a way of expanding EU influence to the Russian neighbours, which Russia opposes.¹⁰ At the same time, EU claims that its policy of neighbourhood and Eastern Partnership programme are directed only towards the welfare of states and not at all against Russia. Such misunderstandings between Russia and EU lead into tensions in mutual relations.
18. The energy characterizes the relations between Russia and EU. EU imports approximately one fourth of its gas and oil needs from Russia with the projection that indicates its absolute domination by 2020 (over 80%). On the other hand, Russia sells more than two thirds of its gas export and about one half of its oil export in the EU market.¹¹ EU tends to reduce its importing dependency on Russia due to the gas supply problems that occur as a result of disputes between Russia and the transit countries, primarily Ukraine. Beside the security of supply, the priority of European Energy Policy is also the sufficient quantity of energy. Therefore, although opposed, the projects *Nabucco* and *South Stream* can find their place in the future fulfilling of energy demand. Russia and EU are in close mutually interactive correlation.

Russia and USA

19. Until the summit in Moscow held on July 6, 2009, the quality of relations between Russia and USA since 2003 had been declining. The Russians consider that the problem in their relations derive from the unilateralism of USA and its closest allies (Kosovo, Iraq) and perceive some of USA’s actions as a direct threat to their security (anti-missile shield in Europe and enlargement of NATO to Ukraine and Georgia). On the other hand, USA sees Russia as a state with the archaic understanding of international relations characterized with realism and geopolitics. USA sees Russia as a threat to the development of democracy in the Post-Soviet countries and as a threat to the transatlantic solidarity, considering the Europe’s dependence on Russian energy resources. The summit in Moscow between Presidents Medvedev and Obama indicated some tangible steps towards the improvement of mutual relations, but it is too soon to give any assessment of this progress.

⁹ The Eastern Partnership is the EU initiative for establishing a format of relations between EU and other states - Ukraine, Georgia, Moldavia, Azerbaijan and Armenia, and also Belarus provided that it meets certain requirements, according to which the individually tailored approach would be applied to the relation with each of these states in the following areas: liberalization of trade and investments, investment building programmes, mobility of citizens and liberalization of visa regime in the secure environment, energy efficiency; see Joint Declaration of the Prague Eastern Partnership Summit 7 May 2009, Prague.

¹⁰ Russia's Lavrov Lashes EU Over New 'Eastern Partnership' 22 March 2009, available at: <http://www.eubusiness.com/news-eu/1237635122.1/>

¹¹ Ferran Tarradellas Espunz, Spokeperson for Commissioner Piebalgs, EU – Russia Energy Dialogue at the Origins of the European Foreign Energy Policy, in the EU - Russia Centre Review “EU - Russia Energy Relations”, published by EU Russia Centre Issue Nine, p. 8, available at: <http://www.eu-russiacentre.org/reviews>

20. The issue of Kosovo's status was the matter of dispute between Russia and USA. President Medvedev did not mention the issue of Kosovo's status in the joint statement after the dialogue in Moscow on July 6, 2009, while President Obama advocated for the territorial integrity of Georgia.

In Serbia, we should not spread any unrealistic expectations from Russia because it can lead to disappointment when Russia fails to fulfil those expectations. For example, Russia said that in Kosovo it defended the principle, and not Serbia and it is unrealistic to expect that Russia will help Serbia to make the status of Kosovo different than the one decided by the consensus reached within the transatlantic community. In addition, certain parts of Serbian political elite analyze contemporary Russia superficially: *Russia wants to see Serbia in the EU in order to have one more friend in the EU*. Russia has much bigger and more important "friends" in the EU than Serbia is.

The ISAC Fund will continue to monitor Russia-Serbia relations in 2010.

ISAC Fund Team and Consultants