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Should Serbia apply the process of “strategic reflection” in compiling its new strategic documents in the area of security and defense?*

Summary

This practical policy proposal is a contribution to a debate that should begin once the process of compiling a new national security strategy and a new defense strategy is initiated. The process is unavoidable in view of Serbia's obligations regarding Chapter 31 (“Common Foreign, Security and Defense Policy”) of the country's pre-accession negotiations with the EU, but also because since 2009 certain major security changes have occurred in its wider neighborhood. It should be noted that some European countries, for example, have in this period changed their strategic documents twice.

This paper presents an innovative approach of “strategic reflection”, i.e. “participation stages” in preparing strategic documents, which calls for the inclusion of a wider, expert community in the process, instead of the habitual, relatively narrow expert team tasked with the job. That means experts from third countries, employees from the institutions that have initiated the process, and, finally, all interested citizens.

The ‘strategic reflection’ approach, or “participation stages,” has so far been applied in Germany twice: during the preparation of the strategic document titled “Foreign Policy Review – Crisis, Order, Europe” (2014) and the so-called “White Paper on German Security Policy and the Future of Its Armed Forces” (2015-2016). The same approach was used in the European Union itself during the drafting of its “Global Strategy for Foreign and Security Policy” (also in 2015-2016). This paper reviews all three processes in detail, and presents the conclusions and recommendations for the adoption of a similar approach in the process of preparing the two new strategies that is currently taking place in Serbia.

Conclusions and recommendations

The essential objective of this paper is to encourage the authorities in Serbia to introduce a process similar to strategic reflection in the preparation of new documents in the area of defense and security. There are several reasons for that:

- Security has become a multi-dimensional challenge to which governments and armed forces cannot adequately respond unless they have built sustainable coalitions in advance, both internally and externally;
- Application of the strategic reflection process makes the citizens better aware of the extent and the nature of the challenges that the Republic of Serbia and wider region are facing, as well as of the ways to respond to such challenges;
- Application of this process contributes to a consensus in society on the strategic course that the state should adopt in its national security, defense and foreign affairs, although the first steps in the process (and possibly the process itself) may prove more challenging than initially expected;

*) Marko Savkovic, PhD, programme director of the Belgrade Fund for Political Excellence did a peer review of this paper. Mr. Savkovic was the first in Serbia who proposed to examine the process of making of the German “Foreign Policy Review” 2014-2015 and to apply similar approach in the case of eventual process of making of the “Foreign Policy Strategy of the Republic of Serbia.” See Marko Savković, „Nemačka kao mogući uzor“ in Novi Magazin, no. 215, 11 June 2015.

- Application of the process narrows the ground for the omission of some important security- and defense-related elements;
 - Strategic reflection is an excellent means of internal and foreign public diplomacy, i.e. a “tool” that can be used to advance communication both with the countries in the region and the key partner states in the sphere of security, defense and foreign affairs;
 - A decision to adopt the “strategic reflection” approach would be a good signal to the EU that Serbia indeed values cooperation with civil society,
- and, finally,
- After an inclusive and an open-as-possible process is completed, the final appearance and content of both documents should be defined by a group designated by the Government to prepare the said strategies on proposal by the ministry in charge.

In initiating the strategic reflection approach the following should be taken into account:

- The group for preparing the strategies should define their initial framework, which, during the process, may be expanded. When defining the initial framework, and later as well, both the results of the segments of the process, and the final results of the preparation of similar strategic documents in Germany and the EU, should be taken into account;
- A way the “strategic reflection” is to be implemented should also be defined, wherein the application of European and German experience should offer the best solution – adjusted, of course, to Serbia’s size, position and capacities. In that sense, the following should be carried out:
 - A special webpage (or webpages) dedicated to the preparation of the strategies that would include the key aspects, results of the process, and – what is particularly important – an option for a direct participation of citizens, should be created;
 - Employees of the Ministries of Defense, of Interior and of Foreign Affairs should be included. In addition to the internal reflection process (making comments or proposals regarding specific topics) in the ministries themselves, the employees – primarily those in leading positions – will have to take part in certain public events;
 - Based on the precisely established criteria a group of experts should be selected to offer opinions on key issues independently. These experts should come both from Serbia and the region, as well as from most important partner states;
 - Debates (panel discussions, workshops etc.) should be organized on the previously defined key elements of the strategies both in Belgrade and other major cities in Serbia. Their number should not be limited and a possibility should be left open to various interested parties to organize additional debates, as was the case in Germany and the EU;
 - Debates (panels, workshops) on the key aspects and approaches in strategies, should be organized in the states of the region and the key EU member states, as well as in Brussels. Such an approach would be a useful contribution to Serbia’s public diplomacy and make certain open issues less problematic, which, in turn, would improve mutual understanding on key security challenges. In this way a basis for better cooperation would be created;
 - Support from the civil society in all aspects of the task should be expected and accepted.
- To make the process meaningful and comprehensive, a sufficiently long period for its implementation should be planned;
- The preparation of a strategy is a process that does not end with the publication of such a document. Therefore, after the strategies are released, a series of their public presentations should be organized both at home and abroad (primarily in the neighboring countries, and then in major international centers such as Berlin and Brussels). It is advisable to arrange the presentations together with domestic and foreign CSOs, thus enabling Serbia to significantly save on its resources, and to provide these events with additional importance, which would result in the positive perception of the system itself as progressive.
- After the presentation stage ends, regular annual events, such as, for example, Austria’s “reviews of security policy” should be planned, at which the content of the documents, or only certain selected topics from them should be re-evaluated publicly, in the presence of, and with the opening remarks by, the minister in charge. Constant evaluation is necessary because of the speed with which various security challenges change, and to keep the public informed.

Introduction

Although at the time this paper was completed Serbia was still waiting for the arrival of the Screening Report on Chapter 31 (“Common Foreign, Security and Defense Policy”), it is clear that in the course of negotiations the country will have to change two existing strategies in this area – the National Security Strategy and the Defense Strategy. Despite the fact that unofficial reports have it that the Government of the Republic of Serbia, i.e. the negotiating team, have formed a group to draft these two documents, it is rather obvious that the process will not end soon, primarily because of several open issues in connection with these documents. Although the International Security Affairs Centre – ISAC Fund – openly advocates a radical change in Serbia’s foreign policy, and to an extent in its security and defense approach¹, the goal of this paper is not exclusively to deal with the content of the two future documents, but to present the so-called “reflection stage” or “review stage” as an innovative approach in the preparation of strategic documents.

This paper will present the process of strategic reflection, i.e. the “participation stage” in preparing strategic documents. This approach has been applied twice so far in Germany, first during the composition of a strategic document entitled “Foreign Policy Review – Crisis, Order, Europe” (2014), and then during the drafting of the so-called “White Paper on German Security Policy and the Future of Armed Forces” (2015-2016). It was also applied at the EU level, during the compilation of the new “Global Strategy for Foreign and Security Policy of the EU.”

The term strategic reflection, i.e. the “participation stage” implies broad consultations on the content of these documents, i.e. a broad dialogue with all the relevant actors – primarily within the so-called security community – including the academic community, civil society representatives, the business community, and all interested citizens as well. In addition to the internal dialogue, in all three processes the so-called external dialogue was also held, through the inclusion of security community representatives from third countries. The key issues and dilemmas were presented transparently, and all interested parties were directly invited to participate in the dialogue through thematic events and webpages.

In this paper we will analyze all three processes and compare them with the ongoing process in Serbia. Finally, reasons as to why it would be advisable to apply this approach in Serbia will be presented, along with the ensuing conclusions and recommendations.

The process of drafting the “Foreign Policy Review – Crisis, Order, Europe,” 2014, in Germany

A redefinition of Germany’s foreign policy and security approach entitled “2014 Review: A Fresh Look at Foreign Policy” began at the end of 2013, when German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier announced a revision of the country’s foreign policy approach toward making it participative and comprising “as big a number of directly interested parties as possible, the civil society included.”² The goal was to put together a foreign policy document – “Foreign Policy Review – Crisis, Order, Europe” – that should offer a basis for understanding and accepting a new role of Germany in Europe and the world, as well as the setting up of clear guidelines for such a foreign policy approach that would rest on the interests, values and a firm solidarity approach at the level of Europe, international cooperation and the rules-based international order in the globalized world. The process was necessary because Germany was still moving within the framework set up as a result of the WWII experience and the post-war period, with the country keeping away from playing an independent role on the international scene. This reluctance particularly concerned the use of the *Bundeswehr* – the German armed forces. In the wake of the global economic crisis, however, Germany could no longer avoid its leading position in Europe, and a need arose for redefining the objectives and approaches of its foreign policy.

During the Munich Security Conference held in February 2014, the strategic reflection was supported by Defense Minister Ursula von der Leyen and then German President Joachim Gauck. Gauck dubbed the process “a step toward a new understanding of society by society,” underlying that for Germany “how, when and where we should seek to defend our values and our security will gradually give us greater clarity about the extent and aims of Germany’s international involvement.”³

The process actually began with experts and the expert public being directly asked two questions: “What, if anything, is wrong with the German foreign policy? What needs to be changed [in it]?” Minister Steinmeier entrusted Christoph Bertram, former

1) See, Igor Novaković, *Od četiri stuba spoljne politike do evropske integracije*, Centar za međunarodne i bezbednosne poslove - ISAC fond, Beograd, 2013.

2) Quoted in: Annegret Bendiek, “The 2014 Review: Understanding the Pillars of German Foreign Policy and the Expectations of the Rest of the World“, Working Paper, SWP Berlin, May 2015, p. 4 Internet [retrieved 14 May 2017], https://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/arbeitspapiere/WP_IFRI_The_2014_Review.pdf

3) Bendiek, *op.cit.*, p. 5

director of the German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP) with the practical application of the strategic reflection process in the preparation of the foreign policy review.

Before it began, the Körber Stiftung foundation conducted an opinion poll among 1,000 German citizens on their country's foreign policy, thus obtaining an insight into what the people think of Germany's areas of engagement, and of the deployment of troops outside the country. The poll offered a basis for the further directing of the dialogue in the strategic reflection stage.

A webpage⁴ was set up, wherein all aspects of the strategic reflection process were brought together: expert opinions, information on public debates, short notices released via the Twitter social network and, finally, proposals of interested citizens, posted on the blog that was a part of the webpage.

The process itself was divided into three stages: experts participated in the first, citizens in the second, and German Foreign Ministry employees in the third.

In Stage One Steinmeier personally invited authors from 26 countries to write critical articles on Germany's foreign policy. A total of 52 articles dealt with various aspects of the German foreign policy approach, and the questions the authors responded to were the following: the role of Germany in the world (in all its aspects – from the position of Germany in NATO to Germany's relation to globalization); the role of Germany in Europe; Germany's bilateral relations with key partners; Germany's engagement in crises and conflicts and its role within the international system, and, Germany and the human rights. Among the authors were experts for international relations, international security and conflict resolution, former politicians, historians, businesspeople, journalists, senior U.N. officials, including the organization's former secretary general, Kofi Annan. In addition to 21 articles from Germany, 31 came in from around the world: three each from Great Britain and France, two from the U.S., China, Canada and the South African Republic, and one each from Mexico, Brazil, Greece, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Poland, Russia, Indonesia, Afghanistan, India, Italy, Singapore, Kenya, Ghana, Holland, Israel and Norway. Recommendations differed by content, orientation and intensity, but, as the report put it, all experts agreed that "Germany should take advantage of its leading position to enable Europe to grow unified and undivided, and remain an internationally relevant factor."⁵

Stage Two consisted of establishing a direct communication with the citizens through organization of events on specific topics. These were everything but peaceful gatherings, debating a variety of issues. Over 60 "public forums, debates, conferences and simulation workshops (simulating the work of international organizations and situations, author's note) on topics such as: "Humanitarian aid: between foreign policy and neutrality"; "25 years after the end of the Cold War: a new global order or an unending crisis"; "Germany's role in Europe"; "Russia, Germany and Europe: how to go on," and similar. Speakers at the events came from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, including its highest officials and the minister himself, while interested citizens took part in the debates. In different cities experts and citizens sometimes displayed fundamentally opposing views on issues such as, for example, the arming of the Kurdish militia in Syria, the country's policy toward Russia, the scandal involving the tapping of the German chancellor's phone by the U.S. National Security Agency, and so on. The debates were frequently quite confrontational. This Stage ended with a university students' competition in writing essays on issues and topics raised by Minister Steinmeier.

Stage Three, which was not public, involved the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' employees, who were encouraged to freely express their ideas and objections. Open thematic panel discussions (dubbed "aquarium discussions") were organized with a limited number of participants, wherein every attendant could directly participate and offer his or her view on a specific problem. These were followed by so-called "gallery strolls," where the diplomats discussed critical commentaries and proposals publicly raised during the two previous stages, and by the "ideas workshops" wherein smaller groups of employees formulated specific proposals for reforming certain approaches and procedures within the Ministry, and, finally, an online anonymous discussion run by moderators who asked specific questions, thereby initiating further debate.⁶ The goal was not only to discuss foreign policy priorities and approaches, but the organizational structure of the Ministry itself, so that it could perform more efficiently and flexibly in the future.

After a yearlong "reflection phase" the process was completed at the end of 2014. The results were presented in the Bundestag on Feb. 25, 2015, and later through a series of debates organized by various institutions, primarily international civil society organizations (Carnegie Europe in Brussels, the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, and others).

4) <http://www.aussenpolitik-weiter-denken.de/en/topics.html>

5) *Review 2014- Aussenpolitik. Witer Denken, Crisis.Order. Europe*, Federal Foreign Office, Germany, 2015, p. 24

6) *Review 2014...op.cit*, p. 37-41

The preparing of the “White Paper on German Security Policy and the Future of German Armed Forces,” 2015-2016

The other “strategic reflection” process that immediately followed the publication of the Foreign Policy Review was the preparation of the “White Paper on German Security Policy and the Future of German Armed Forces,” initiated by Defense Minister Ursula von der Leyen. The previous “White Paper” was published in 2006 and, according to the minister, “the deadline for preparing a new document was long overdue.”⁷ She stressed that the goal is “to avoid the entire process taking place in a ‘silent chamber’” and that the idea was “to include as many experts as possible from the start, today’s security being an all-encompassing field, exceeding the bounds of military issues.”⁸ In other words, the intention from the very beginning was to have experts and the general public directly included in the process, as it was concluded that the public is not sufficiently aware of these questions, while the military element, on the other hand, is “disproportionally present” (even if unable of independently responding to all modern challenges, author’s note). As a result, the public had to be more decisively included in the process itself, whereas the ensuing debate had to “strengthen the awareness of the non-military aspects of security as well.”⁹ The strategic reflection process and the compilation of the document were run by the Ministry of Defense, which closely cooperated with other ministries, and, particularly, with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. After it was completed, the German Government adopted the document. Brigadier General Carsten Breuer was in charge of the process.

The strategic reflection and document preparation process was planned to last until the summer of 2016, i.e. almost half a year longer than was the case with the previous document. The goal was to define the course of German security and defense policy in the forthcoming period, as well as a plan for advancing the organizational structures and capacities of the Bundeswehr, as a fundamental instrument of German security and defense policy.¹⁰ In other words, strategic reflection was meant to be of aid in realistically determining Germany’s possibilities in its new role of a key actor in international security policy (as compared to that of a follower, which was the case until then), that is, to approach security challenges in a strategic manner instead of *ad hoc*, to determine modalities and deepen cooperation within NATO and the EU, as well as with other partners, and to ensure support from its citizens and partner countries for such a change. According to Géza Andreas von Geyr, a public communications expert, the process of preparing the White Paper was as important as the paper itself (which, in any case, is the basic means of communication).¹¹

The key questions asked were the following:

1. What challenges will German security and defense policy face in the coming years?
2. What instruments are available and how are they integrated in various alliances and partnerships?
3. What is the national framework for action?
4. What direction should the Bundeswehr-related development processes take? And, in particular: in view of the limited resources available, in what way should Germany’s military capabilities be further integrated in the European framework?

The debate proceeded through workshops dedicated to different topics, four of them initially, later to be expanded to 10 upon additions from other institutions. They were held from April to October 2015, on the following topics: “Perspectives of the security and defense policy,” “Perspectives of partnership and cooperation,” “Perspectives of national action,” “The challenge of crises early warning,” “Hybrid wars,” “The Bundeswehr and society,” “Development and security,” “Cyber security,” “The economy and security,” and “Perspectives for the Bundeswehr.”

7) Quoted in Sabine Kinkartz, “Germany kick-starts work on a new White Paper“, Deutsche Welle website, 18 February 2015, Internet [retrieved 14 May 2017], <http://www.dw.com/en/germany-kick-starts-work-on-a-new-white-paper/a-18264702>

8) Weißbuchprozess: Ministerin von der Leyen eröffnet die Diskussion, “Das Bundesministerium der Verteidigung website, 17 February 2015, Internet [retrieved 14 May 2017], https://www.bmvg.de/portal/a/bmvg/start/ministerium/!ut/p/z1/04_Sj9C

9) Ibid

10) Quoted in “The German Defence White Paper: presentation and perspectives“, Par Ceis, Université d’été de la Défense, 2016, p.1, Internet [retrieved 14 May 2017], http://www.universite-defense.org/fr/system/files/mars_xiv_pp_ceis_pl_m2_2.pdf

11) Weißbuch-Prozess: die Organisation des großen Diskurses, Das Bundesministerium der Verteidigung website, 27 April 2015, Internet [retrieved 14 May 2017], https://www.bmvg.de/portal/a/bmvg/start/weissbuch/aktuelles/!ut/p/z1/hY9BC4MwDIX_kWkrc_WoDkEQmXO4tZdRbHE-O10rpZif9-

The workshops were organized in cooperation with the academic community, independent think-tanks and CSOs,¹² as well as with the business community. As far as the experts, “the key segment of the process,”¹³ were concerned, over 100 of them from Germany and about 50 from other countries took part in the workshops, representing the interested ministries, the Bundeswehr, the Bundestag, the academic community, the news media, the domestic and international civil society, the diplomatic corps and the institutions of other states (from the EU, as well as some other countries, depending on the topic), the domestic and international businesspeople, and sundry churches. In addition to experts, however, the participants also included the representatives of the so-called “security community” and various interested citizens, altogether some 1,800 debaters.

Over “500 interviews with 1,500 experts were made and over 70 lectures throughout Germany were held.”¹⁴

Many other events related to the preparation of the White Paper were also organized by political parties, churches, trade unions and professional associations, and their results incorporated in the final version of the document.¹⁵

Only after the strategic reflection process was over did the putting together of the document begin, with elements of the Foreign Policy Review being included in it as elements of the Global Strategy for the EU. According to General Breuer, the drafting process was easy because all dilemmas among the ministries were clarified in the reflection phase, and the Cabinet had no problems in being unanimous on the text.¹⁶

After it was adopted by the German Government, the White Paper was presented to the public on July 13, 2016, some two weeks after the Brexit referendum in Great Britain and the release of the “Global Strategy for Foreign and Security Policy of the EU.” The White Paper deals in greater detail with the topic initiated by the Foreign Policy Review, elaborating on certain concepts that were only outlined in the previous document, primarily those on the role and the use of the Bundeswehr, the European security cooperation (whether to strive towards a security and defense union or not), and others.

By applying both strategic reflection processes Germany managed to “share responsibility” for foreign policy objectives and their implementation with its citizens and thus practically “obtain legitimacy” for the moves that only 20 years ago would not have been looked upon with benign approval, either by the German citizens themselves, or by Germany’s international partners. As Annegret Bendiek put it, “Not only is the idea of a policy expressing the national interest taboo for most of the German political class, receives limited support in the context of discussions between experts.”¹⁷

Through the dialogue implemented during the strategic reflection stage and, later, through public presentations, Germany did a great service to its public diplomacy. Every strategic document which is public is a communications tool of a kind, both at home and in relations with key foreign partners and third countries. Moreso, the process of preparing the Foreign Policy Review had inspired the process of preparing the Global Strategy of the EU, whereby complementarity of the EU’s strategic approaches and those of its currently strongest member was created.

12) From Germany and other countries; thus, a workshop dealing with hybrid wars was organized together with the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) from London, England.

13) *Weißbuch 2016 - Wege zum Weissbuch*, Das Bundesministerium der Verteidigung, Berlin, 2016, p. 19

14) Ibid

15) Ibid

16) Debate - White Paper on German Security Policy and the Future of the Bundeswehres“, German Marshall Fund, 21 September 2016, Washington, DC, Internet [retrieved 14 May 2017], <http://www.gmfus.org/events/white-paper-german-security-policy-and-future-bundeswehr-livestream>

17) Annegret Bendiek, *op.cit.*, p.6

The process of composing the “Global Strategy for Foreign and Security Policy of the EU,” 2015-2016

The financial and economic crisis that has been lasting since 2008, and the “Arab Spring” have changed the EU’s security environment and the approaches from the 2003 European Security Strategy no longer corresponded to reality. Because of that in December 2013 the European Council entrusted Catherine Ashton, the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, with the task of initiating a process of considering the challenges that the EU was facing and to, in the course of 2015, “report to the Council on the challenges and opportunities” created by the changing circumstances confronting the Union.¹⁸ In June 2015 Federica Mogherini, who in the meanwhile took over the post from Ashton, presented a report entitled “Strategic Review – the EU in a Changing Environment” wherein the basic new challenges that the world and the EU were facing were identified, along with the opportunities and ways for the Union’s engagement. It was then decided that a new strategic document should be drafted, but through a radically different process from the one used for the previous strategy, which was put together by a small team gathered around the then high representative. The new high representative formed a new team tasked with the job of compiling the new strategy, and Mogherini’s adviser, Nathalie Tocci, director of the Institute for International Relations in Rome, Italy, was appointed its head.

As already mentioned earlier, the inspiration for the process came from the German experience acquired during the preparation of the Foreign Policy Review, in which Tocci participated as one of the invited experts.¹⁹ Mogherini and her team chose this method to avoid “classical” negotiations on the strategy content since, according to Tocci, that would make the text look like “a Christmas tree.”²⁰ It was decided that the strategic reflection process in this case should consist of two parallel procedures – public consultations and official communication with Member States.

As in the two previous cases, a webpage was set up²¹ where all material pertaining to the public part of the strategic reflection process was gathered (and is still being collected).

As far as the official communication in the participation stage was concerned, the team led by Tocci created a skeleton of the strategy, which served to prepare a questionnaire for Member States, whose responses were to be used as adequate suggestions that served to draft the main body of the text. The final versions of the text, however, were not sent to Member States before the Strategy was released, to avoid unnecessary politicization.

As far as the public part was concerned, members of the Steinmeier team which implemented the first German process suggested to Tocci to “launch the process with several key events, and then await a voluntary application of other interested parties.”²² Although initially the holding of seven events was planned, a huge number of interested parties applied for organizing additional events on specific topics²³ so that the final number of workshops and panel discussions exceeded 50. Some events were held outside the EU, for instance in Japan, Georgia, etc. Much like in the case of Germany, individuals, various organizations and associations, civil society, churches, and even third states such as Norway, sent in a large number of non-papers (non-binding documents summing up the key positions of the sender) expressing their opinions on certain aspects and topics pertaining to the EU’s foreign policy and security approach. Contributions came from the parliaments of Member States as well, in the form of numerous resolutions, reports and other documents.²⁴ Finally, also very much like it happened in Germany’s case, the team invited 50 renowned experts from the EU and third countries (28 came from the EU and 22 from other countries – four from the U.S., two each from Japan, China and India, and one each from Egypt, Lebanon, Ukraine, South African Republic, Turkey, Russia, Singapore, Australia, Brazil, Mexico, Palestine and the Gaza Strip).

After the release of the EU Global Strategy, its presentation continued through public events at which its content was discussed. The first event of the kind was organized in Belgrade on July 14, 2016. The promotion stage, i.e. the post-strategic reflection stage is still underway and is now focused on the Strategy’s implementation.

18) European Council Conclusions“, Brussels, December 20th, 2013, p. 4

19) She later participated in the process of drafting the White Paper.

20) “Conference report – The European Union’s Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy and the Western Balkans“, International and Security Affairs Centre – ISAC fund, 2016, p. 12

21) <https://europa.eu/globalstrategy/en>

22) Conference report....“,op.cit, p. 20

23) Thus, for example, a workshop on the Western Balkans was held in Vienna, on Austria’s initiative. See <https://europa.eu/globalstrategy/en/eu-foreign-policy-and-western-balkans-re-engagement-strategic-choice>

24) „Conference report....“,op.cit, p. 20

According to Tocci, the entire process is very important from the viewpoint of public diplomacy, because to experts and the public of Member States, as well as to third countries, it brings closer the EU's objectives in the realm of foreign and security policy, and the ongoing trends in its approach to them, allowing for their continuous revision. This, in the long run, provides for a debate with partner states and reduces the possibilities for misunderstanding over certain critical issues, by explaining in advance why, regarding some of them, the EU will react in a certain way.

The potential for applying Germany's and EU's experiences in the case of Serbia

Are these experiences of relevance for Serbia? The author of this paper believes that they are, since they suggest that the strategic reflection process is not of significance only because it allows for the gathering of important information and of useful proposals in an unconventional way, but because it may help obtain domestic and foreign support, or at least ensure understanding, for the country's approach to international security and foreign policy.

During the previous process of drafting strategic documents in the area of security and defense which took place in 2008-2009, the public was included rather reluctantly. According to representatives from the civil sector, the draft documents prepared by the Ministry of Defense (with contributions from other ministries and institutions) were offered for debate at the very end of 2008, i.e. on the eve of the New Year holidays, and only after a petition by civil society representatives was the deadline extended until January 31, 2009.²⁵ The Ministry then invited the petition's signatories for bilateral meetings, to offer their comments orally. Additions were made to the texts, and maybe the most important result of this intervention on the part of Serbian civil society was the inclusion of the human security concept in the documents. When the new drafts were published, the Belgrade Center for Security Policy (then called the Center for Civilian-Military Relations) organized a major public debate on the amended version of the documents but, unfortunately, in the absence of the Ministry representatives.

During the drafting of the new strategies, it is essential to avoid such non-inclusive process and apply a diametrically opposite approach, based on the examples from Germany and the EU, i.e. the implementation of the strategic reflection method. Of course, the approach would have to be adjusted to Serbia and the challenges it faces, which, to an extent, differ from those of the EU and of Germany, one of the largest EU member states.

There are practical reasons to apply the strategic reflection approach, too. The first one is that such an approach would be positively perceived by the EU and would without doubt favorably reflect on the negotiations concerning Serbia's ongoing bid for EU membership, but also because it would result in relevant and applicable documents.

Furthermore, such approach would be of great significance for Serbian public diplomacy, both internal and external. Since the end of the Cold War, the understanding of security challenges has changed to a great extent, and the question of security now bears upon all segments of society. If the strategic reflection approach is applied, the citizens would be much better informed of contemporary security challenges, on the country's capabilities to meet them, and on its possibilities to respond. This would ensure advance support from citizens for certain decisions and moves (such as bigger budget allocations for certain measures, for instance) that, potentially, would have to be made. As far as external public diplomacy is concerned, organizing of panel discussions and workshops with foreign experts (and in other countries) would be of indubitable importance in acquiring a direct insight into the manner in which other parties understand security challenges, as well as those specific for Serbia, and also into the manner of how, in their view, to react to them. Of special importance too is the fact that in this way it would be possible not only to establish communication with the expert communities in those countries, but also with their public opinion and sentiment, concerning the reasons why Serbia would opt for certain approaches. Thus the application of strategic reflection would create possibilities to narrow the differences over certain issues, which for Serbia, as a country located in a post-conflict region, is of singular importance.

Of course, if applied, the process would be quite challenging. There are great differences among citizens over certain questions and strategic priorities, which would undoubtedly surface in the course of public debates. As we have seen, in Germany too major differences and disagreements came to light in similar circumstances. Without a debate, however, it is certain that existing differences will remain and that the citizens will not be informed of all the challenges and their scope, although an adequate and timely response to them hinges on their support. A debate within an institutionalized framework, on the other hand, leads to a better understanding and the creation of a common denominator in perceiving and evaluating a country's security, defense, and even its foreign policy.

25) "An appeal to extend the deadline for a public debate on the National Security Strategy and the Defense Strategy," Dec. 28, 2008, the Belgrade Center for Security Policy's webpage [retrieved 14 May 2017], <http://www.bezbednost.org/Bezbednost/1194/Poziv-da-se-produzi-javna-rasprava-o-nacrtima.shtml>