

## CHAPTER 31 – REDEFINING SERBIAN NATIONAL SECURITY PRIORITIES

After ten years the Republic of Serbia adopted the new National Security Strategy (NSS).<sup>1</sup> NSS is the most important strategic document that defines and protects national interests of the Republic of Serbia. A decade later, the regional security architecture took on a totally new structure - the Brussels dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina was started, Croatia, Albania, and Montenegro have become NATO members, the UK is negotiating with the European Union about leaving, the migrant crisis has not finished, while the populism and strengthening of the right-wing in Europe are increasing. Redefining security strategic documentation represents important part of security sector reform in RS when it comes to its foreign and security policy. This process is directly linked to the harmonization within Common Foreign and Security Policy of the EU through Chapter 31.

The interdependence of domestic circumstances with the regional and international environment significantly affects the perceived and objective state of national security of a country. Therefore, the drafting of strategic documents is aligned with the analysis of the position of one country in relation to its regional environment, but also depending on the current relationship of great powers within the wider international community.<sup>2</sup> The aim of this paper is to analyze changes in the security policy of the Republic of Serbia due to numerous global changes that have taken place in the past decade, by analyzing the content of the NSS (old and new one) through two research questions:

- How the national interest of the Republic of Serbia has been interpreted and understood?
- What new threats are identified by the new strategy and which old ones are overcome?

### What is the national interest of the Republic of Serbia?

The new proposed strategic document explicitly and unequivocally states that national interests represent a "lasting need and aspiration of the Republic and citizens", and that their givenness is based on universal and national values, that is, based on the Constitution and heritage of the Serbian people, but also of all other citizens living in Serbia.<sup>3</sup> The Strategy lists national interests of the Republic of Serbia: preserving sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity; maintaining internal stability and security; the preservation of the Serb people and national minorities and their cultural, religious and historical identity; maintaining peace and stability in the region and the world; European integration and membership of the European Union; economic development and overall prosperity.<sup>4</sup> **Survival** is the central value of the most national interests

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<sup>1</sup> The formal adoption of the document has not yet been finalized, as parliamentary confirmation is expected.

<sup>2</sup> Paraušić, A., Stojanović, F. (2017). Geopolitički elementi u strateškim dokumentima u oblasti bezbednosti i odbrane Republike Srbije. *Vojno delo*, 3/2017, 87-99.

<sup>3</sup> NSS 2019, p 14.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, pp 14-15.

that has to be included in the NSS.<sup>5</sup> One study found that the most important national interest of the Republic of Serbia since 2007 is related to the **physical survival of the state** - protection of the territorial integrity of the Republic of Serbia.<sup>6</sup> Thus, in both strategic documents (old and new one), the preservation of sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity, that is, the preservation of Kosovo and Metohija within the borders of the Republic of Serbia, is singled out as the most important (national) interest of the Republic of Serbia.

Unlike the new Strategy, the former NSS included much broader areas of social life - protection of citizens' property as well as the protection of the environment and natural resources. One could get the impression that the Serbian national interests in the former Strategy are only declaratively determined, without serious analysis, policy creators' perception of the state needs and the way of actions. If we try to analyze the state of the environment in the Republic of Serbia, especially through the criteria of the European Commission regarding to Chapter 27,<sup>7</sup> we will notice that Serbian made limited progress in further alignment with the *acquis* and on strategic planning.

Considering that Serbia proclaimed a military-neutral concept in 2007, through a parliamentary resolution, referring to non-alignment with existing military alliances, the security policy just took the shape within the new NSS. The explanation of the NSS notes that a key commitment in drafting new Strategy was military neutrality and European foreign policy orientation. This is also the biggest difference with the former Strategy.

National security policy in both documents is presented as part of the overall national policy. However, there are some differences. In old NSS, implementation of national security policy creates the preconditions for the overall development of the Republic of Serbia, while the protection and pursuit of national interests are left aside. The new NSS, however, gives attention to pursuing of national interests. Furthermore, there is a big difference in the concretization of security policy. In the 2009 Strategy, national security policy is structured through basic commitments, goals, principles and elements. However, a more detailed analysis of the content given reveals that in the 2009 NSS national security policy is not concrete, but too descriptive and extensive. The table below summarizes the national security policies within the 2009 National Security Strategy and the new National Security Strategy (2019).

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<sup>5</sup> National Security Strategy (2009) – (English) – Available at: <http://www.voa.mod.gov.rs/documents/national-security-strategy-of-the-republic-of-serbia.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> Lipovac, M., Dimitrijević, I. (2017). Nacionalni interesi Republike Srbije: analiza ekspozicija mandataru Vlade od 2007. do 2017. godine. Srpska politička misao, 3/2017, 71-97.

<sup>7</sup> The April 2018 Report of the European Commission on Serbia's progress in the field of the Environment (Chapter 27) states that some progress has been made, however, there are no significant differences from the 2016 report. This would mean that for two years, Serbia has not made any progress when it comes to environmental issues <https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/20190529-serbia-report.pdf>.

National Security Policy (2009)		National Security Policy (2019)	
Objective	Mechanisms of achieving objectives	Objective	Mechanisms of achieving objectives
Priority objectives of foreign policy in the protection of the interests of the Republic of Serbia	Persistence in diplomatic efforts to defend its constitutional order, the acceleration of the process of European integrations and the development of good neighborly relations and regional cooperation in the Western Balkans	Preservation of the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of the Republic of Serbia	In order to preserve sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity, the Republic of Serbia shall realize the following objectives: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- deterrence against armed threats and effective defense;</li> <li>- preservation of the Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija within the Republic of Serbia;</li> <li>- strengthening the reputation and international position of the Republic of Serbia;</li> <li>- prevention and elimination of separatist action.</li> </ul>
The priority of economic policy	The objectives of economic policy are the development and achievement of economic stability of the state and creating conditions for foreign and domestic investments, as well as all other forms of development of international cooperation, including cooperation with the international financial institutions. Achieving the goals of economic policy creates the conditions for improving the living standard of citizens and reduction and elimination of all negative economic and social consequences of transition.	Preservation of internal stability and security of the Republic of Serbia and its citizens	In order to preserve the internal stability and security of the Republic of Serbia and its citizens, the following objectives are realized: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- protection of human and minority rights and freedoms of citizens;</li> <li>- the rule of law and the further development of democracy and democratic institutions;</li> <li>- improving the security of citizens, the state and society;</li> <li>- normalization of opportunities and relations in the Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija;</li> <li>- efficient public administration.</li> </ul>
The objectives of the defense policy	The objectives of the defense policy of the Republic of Serbia arising from strategic orientation is efficient system of defense, peace and a favorable security environment and integration into European and other international security structures. The Republic of Serbia is committed to active participation in the processes of cooperation and joint action with other countries and entities of international relations in the construction of national, regional and global security.	Preservation of the Serbian people and national minorities and their cultural, religious and historical identity	The preservation of the Serbian people and national minorities and their cultural, religious and historical identity, as a national interest of the Republic of Serbia, is achieved through the achievement of the following objectives: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- development of demographic potential;</li> <li>- national unity and the development of cultural, religious and historical identity;</li> <li>- improving the position of national minorities;</li> <li>- improving the position and protection of the rights and interests of diaspora and Serbs abroad;</li> <li>- protection of cultural and historical property of significant importance for the Republic of Serbia and its citizens.</li> </ul>
The objectives of Internal security policy	Internal security policy provides protection of the democratic political system, human rights and freedoms, public order and peace and the citizens' property security and other social values. In achieving internal security policy, legislative, executive and judicial bodies work together, with effective policies in the economic, social and health care fields, as well as other areas that have an impact on internal security.	Preserving peace and stability in the region and the world	The national interest of the Republic of Serbia is to preserve peace in the region and in the world, and it will be realized through the realization of the following goals: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Contribution to the development of international relations in accordance with internationally undertaken commitments;</li> <li>- contributing to the maintenance of international peace and security;</li> <li>- respect for international law and the promotion of mutual trust;</li> </ul>

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- contributing to strengthening regional stability and improving good neighborly relations;</li> <li>- Strengthening comprehensive bilateral relations with all countries, while respecting mutual interests;</li> <li>- strengthening of active participation in the work of international organizations.</li> </ul>
Policy of Protection of Human and Minority Rights	The policy in the field of human and minority rights of the Republic of Serbia is based on the provisions of the Constitution, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities of the Council of Europe and other ratified international treaties.	European integration and membership of the Republic of Serbia in the European Union	<p>European integration and membership in the European Union are national interests and strategic commitments of the Republic of Serbia. The national interest is pursued by achieving the following objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- shaping a modern and developed society based on common European values that are part of Serbia's national identity and historical heritage;</li> <li>- achieving internal readiness for EU membership;</li> <li>- enhancing national security and defense through the process of European integration</li> </ul>
Social Policy objectives	The main goal of social policy is satisfying the needs of citizens, protection of their rights and improvement of their security. In addition, the goals of social policy of the Republic of Serbia are focused on providing social protection, reducing unemployment, improving working conditions, education and continuous training of human resources. In social policy, special attention is paid to increasing the birth rate, improving the demographic structure and the protection of the family. By the achievement of the projected goals of social policy, the care of an individual, his personal security, and thus the overall security of the state is improved.	Economic development and overall prosperity	<p>Economic development and overall prosperity of the Republic of Serbia and its citizens is achieved through the following goals:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- improving the standard of living of citizens;</li> <li>- economic progress;</li> <li>- the protection of natural resources and goods of general interest and the preservation of a healthy environment;</li> <li>- promotion of education, scientific and technological development;</li> <li>- improving economic and energy security.</li> </ul>

### **Armed aggression remains a threat**

The nature of the security challenges, risks, and threats in the new NSS has hardly changed at all compared to the previous NSS. They have only replaced the hierarchy and prioritization. Furthermore, the “pessimistic view” is still present. Armed aggression, unlawful secession of Kosovo and Metohija, separatist aspirations, armed insurgency and terrorism all took place of the top five threats to the national security of the Republic of Serbia. Those challenges, risks, and threats are the result of an analysis of the current strategic and geopolitical environment, as stated in the Introduction of current NSS.

Admittedly, the explanation for the new Strategy clearly and explicitly emphasizes that "the basic security threat is the unlawfully and unilaterally proclaimed independence of Kosovo\*", while other dangers are classified under "other challenges and risks". When it comes to the Chapter 31, the hyper-securitization of Kosovo and Metohija can be an important obstacle.

The marginalization of corruption as a threat to national security is one of the serious weaknesses of the new Strategy. Within the former Strategy, corruption had an important place, bearing in mind the consequences of systemic corruption on the work of institutions, implementation of reforms, economic development, investments, etc. For the creators of the new Strategy, this problem seems to be overcome and marginalized as a threat.<sup>8</sup>

"Defeated policy for Kosovo"<sup>9</sup>, as the President of Serbia called it, can have different effects on what is going to happen, and therefore on the overall strategic thinking, i.e. pursuing the most important national interest. The creators of the new Strategy have developed the idea of what national interest might represent and how it can be achieved. They advocate a maximalist approach that does not accept the possibility of failure.

Qualitative content analysis of national security strategies has shown lack of methodological approach due to the drafting process of the most important strategic document. Determination of national interests does not rely on empirical researches and arguments. For example, there is no public opinion research or poll conducted by the state that shows citizens' security perception or public debate related to defining national interest.

However, the need of policy makers to redefine (old) strategic documents demonstrates that political elites are capable of recognizing the importance of strategic and doctrinal security deliberation. Higher level of transparency during adoption process was achieved through public debates organized in cooperation with civil society.

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<sup>8</sup> In February 2018, Serbia dropped from 42 to 41/100, ranking 77th among the 100 countries on the Transparency International list in terms of monitoring corruption perceptions. The Full interactive map is available at <https://www.transparency.org/country/SRB>.

<sup>9</sup> Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic said that his policy for Kosovo has suffered a defeat. He told a meeting of his Serbian Progressive Party's (SNS) top body that his policy of saving everything possible for Serbia in Kosovo had been defeated because the Serbs prefer to lose everything. "Serbs prefer crying over something that is far away than having something to hold," Vucic said. "The first round goes to the Serbia which cries, not the Serbia which wins," he added. Available at <http://rs.n1info.com/English/NEWS/a422648/Serbian-president-says-Kosovo-policy-has-failed.html>.