







# Weekly Briefing

**Serbia External Relations briefing:  
Cooperation with Russia (and China), the EU integration  
and the Kosovo issue  
IIPE**

## China-CEE Institute

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## **Cooperation with Russia (and China), the EU integration and the Kosovo issue**

### **ABSTRACT**

In the briefing we observe the following crucial foreign policy developments in Serbian policy: good relationships with Russia and China which have been confirmed in the course of February (I); the EU integration process – through observations on the EU Enlargement Strategy and the regional cooperation as a strategic goals (II), as well as the Kosovo issue (III). It can be said that general trends of Serbia's foreign policy from earlier periods have been confirmed in the course of February 2018.

### **I) SERBIAN GOOD RELATIONS WITH RUSSIA, CHINA CONFIRMED**

#### **a) Partnership with Russia**

A good relationship between Serbia and Russia has been confirmed in the course of February. The first of all, by the middle of the month, certain activities of strengthening economic cooperation between two states have been agreed. On February 13, 2018, the Prime Minister of the Republic of Serbia – Ana Brnabic, the Vice President and Minister of Trade, Tourism and Telecommunications – Rasim Ljajic, and the Minister without Portfolio in charge of Innovation and Technological Development – Nenad Popovic, have spoken with the the Russian Minister of Economic Development – Maxim Oreshkin. The talks have been conducted on how to improve the overall economic and trade relationships. It was pointed out that the Russian Federation was a reliable partner and a traditional friend of Serbia, and also one of the most important economic partners. The officials put a specific focus on the strengthening of infrastructure for innovations. Subsequently, Serbian Minister of Foreign Affairs – Ivica Dacic led the country's delegation at the 16th session of the Serbo-Russian

Intergovernmental Committee on Trade, Economic and Scientific-Technical Cooperation, held in Sofia on February 17th.

On February 21th and 22th, the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergei Lavrov with a delegation officially visited Belgrade on the occasion of a significant jubilee – 180 years since the establishment of diplomatic relations of two countries. Mr Lavrov and Mr Dacic confirmed a broad mutual consent on the most international issues. They validated the strategic partnership between Russia and Serbia. Mr Lavrov first attended the ceremony of laying the mosaic of the central dome of the Holy Sava Temple in Belgrade, a height of 65 meters, for which the Russian firm “Gazprom” donated four million Euros. The President of Serbia also met with a delegation of “Gaspromnjeft” in order to consider a business report of the NIS (Serbo-Russian energy company).

The further concrete steps of strengthening the cooperation have been taken by the end of February. The Serbian Defense Minister – Aleksandar Vulin received a donation from Russia of two million euros for the training of future pilots (February 23). The Minister Ivica Dačić opened the Center for Russian Studies at the Faculty of Political Sciences (FPN, February 25) of the University of Belgrade and announced further improvement of science and education relationship of two countries. At the end of the month (28 February) the Defense Minister Vulin spoke with Russia's Ambassador – Alexander Cepurin on the further development of the military and military-military co-operation.

### **b) Cooperation with China**

A Serbian cooperation with China has been confirmed in course of February 2018. The Serbian Minister for infrastructure – Zorana Mihajlovic, and the Chinese ambassador in Serbia – Mr Li Manchang talked on a development of the joint infrastructure projects. Further, a social security agreement between two countries has been announced (February 13th).

## **II) SERBIAN EU INTEGRATION PROCESS**

### **a) The EU Enlargement Strategy**

The EU Strategy for Western Balkans enlargement (February 6) suggested that Serbia could become an EU member from 2015th. This has been assessed by Serbia as a positive signal from the EU. The Prime Minister A. Brnabic has said she thinks the EU counts on Serbia as the next EU member. On the occasion of the European Commissioner for Neighborhood Policy and Enlargement – Johannes Hahn visit to Serbia (February 8), the Minister of European Integration – Jadranka Joksimovic also presented the Strategy as “a clear signal that the EU counts on Serbia”.

The EU has praised Serbia as an example of a responsible migration government. The EU's sectoral budget support contract worth 28 million euros has been signed on February 7th. Sixteen million of the amount has been devoted to the Serbian managing the migration crisis in line with all applicable international standards and the European values of humanity and solidarity. The Serbian Minister of Labor and Employment – Zoran Djordjevic met with the Head of the EU Delegation in Serbia – Sam Fabrizzi (February 5th) and they talked on the further successful cooperation on the migrant population currently living in the territory of Serbia and especially of the unaccompanied minors.

#### **b) Regional cooperation as a strategic goal of the Serbian EU integration confirmed**

##### *1) Relationship with Hungary*

Serbian Prime Minister Ana Brnabic led an official delegation in a visit to the Hungarian Prime Minister – Viktor Orban (February 9th). A joint session of the two governments has been held in Budapest. Two sides signed the 10 agreements on cooperation (mainly projects of the economic and technical nature in the area of infrastructure and environmental protection). The two states assessed their mutual relationship as one of the historical highlights. Finally, the two new border crossing-points have been opened between the two countries.

##### *2) Relationship with Slovenia*

A joint session of the two governments has been held on February 1st. The PM Ana Brnabic praised the excellent political and economic relationship of the

two countries as “the great friendship”. She said to the president of Slovenia Borut Pahor that Serbia still appreciates Slovenia's assistance in the process of the EU integration. Only ten days earlier, on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the unilateral declaration of Kosovo independence, the Slovenia president pledged that the five remaining EU members should recognize Kosovo. The PM Brnabic then answered that this Slovenian action does not contribute good neighbourly relations.

## *2) Relationship with Croatia*

The Serbian delegation led by the President of Serbia Aleksandar Vucic, has been on the official visit to Croatia on February 12th. The talks have been focused around continued cooperation on the joint cross-border projects, the renewed railroads from Belgrade to Zagreb, the rights of Serbs in Croatia, the cooperation in the education field, the status issues of the Serbian minority in Slovenia, and on resolving the other open issues. The economic cooperation of two countries has declared as a priority in their mutual relationship.

## **III) KOSOVO ISSUE**

The Serbian dialogue with Pristina has already been declared as a basis of a regional stability. A murder of the Serb politician – Oliver Ivanovic, in Kosovska Mitrovica on January 6th, has been a topic for contacts of two sides in a form of an exchange of information through the EULEX mission.

In this period, the two countries – Suriname and Burundi withdrew their recognition of the Kosovo independence, so that further activities have been taken by Serbian side on the further strengthening of concrete cooperation activities (in occasion of the official visits of Ivica Dačić to these countries on February 10th and 15th). The Minister Dačić also expressed a gratitude to Spain for its supporting Serbia in Kosovo issue. Besides, the Gambia has been asked by Minister Dacic to reconsider the Kosovo recognition on the occasion of the Gambian visit to Serbia (February 23rd). Minister Daci also attended at UN Security Council's meeting on Kosovo on February 6th in New York.

## **CONCLUSION**

Regarding the questions that have been considered in February 2018, we could conclude that the traditionally good Serbian relationship with Russia has been confirmed. An obstacle to the further cooperative development could be the sole European integration process. Namely, the process is conditioned by the foreign and security policy harmonization of Serbia with the EU. Eventually, the sanctions for Russia could be required from Serbia by European authorities. But this development remains to be assessed in the coming months.

The same dynamics follows the EU integration process and the Kosovo issue. The two issues are intertwined, mutually conditioned and exclusive ones. It is up to Serbian authorities to decide in which direction and toward which priority those issues could be handled in further development. Besides, we briefly described the other bilateral relations of Serbia with neighboring countries – Hungary, Slovenia and Croatia.

A cooperation between Serbia and China has also been traditionally confirmed in course of February 2018.