




# Weekly Briefing

**Serbia Social briefing:**  
**The Think-Tank Situation in Serbia**  
**IIPE**

## China-CEE Institute

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## THE THINK-TANK SITUATION IN SERBIA

### *Abstract*

The work of think-tanks in Serbia is performed by numerous NGOs and a number of state scientific institutes. In this paper, we are dealing with NGOs, i.e. civil society organizations as representatives of the Serbian society.

Their position is regulated by the Law on Citizens' Associations, which was last amended in 2009. In one survey, it was counted that there are 15,700 non-governmental organizations with more than 4,200 employees, 4,500 honorary associates, about 150,000 volunteers and hundreds of thousands of members.

Data on civil society organizations in Serbia can be found in the Directory of Non-Governmental Organizations, on the website of the Organization of Social Activism ODA (<http://www.oda.rs/direktorijum-nvo>). Non-governmental organizations are classified according to two criteria: type of activity and place; and individual organizations can be searched by any part of the name.

NGOs in Serbia deal with issues related to politics and society. According to the results of the survey, about 60 percent of registered non-governmental organizations are engaged in social work, culture, media, or environmental protection, and more than two thirds have headquarters in Vojvodina or Belgrade.

Most NGOs have a budget of less than 20,000 euros, while each 10th organization has a budget of more than 100,000 euros. Despite of large number of NGOs, only some of them have a real impact on politics and society in Serbia.

Some of the main activities of the largest think-tanks in the past month will be presented as selected representative samples of the NGOs: the Belgrade Centre for Security Policy (with the Belgrade Fund for Political Excellence and the

European Movement in Serbia); the Center for Euro-Atlantic Studies; and the Public Policy Research Center.

### ***“Belgrade Security Forum” (BSF)***

Starting in 2011, the Belgrade Security Forum (BSF) is organizing international conferences at the highest level. It is organized by three large NGOs: the Belgrade Centre for Security Policy in cooperation with the Belgrade Fund for Political Excellence and the European Movement in Serbia. The BSF is supported, in many different ways, by numerous partners and donors, mostly from Western states and related organizations.

According to his own words, the BSF’s ambition is “to hold a firm place on the European map of major security events, right along with the Brussels Forum, GLOBSEC in Bratislava, or the Riga conference.”

The BSF’ stated mission is “to become a point of interaction between the regional security community and European and world leaders, intellectuals and opinion makers, as well as a place of creative exchange and provocative debate about the future.”

According to the mission statement, the purpose of the BSF is threefold: to bring the European and global security debate to the Balkans; to discuss Balkan security issues within the European and global security framework; and, to present Balkan achievements and dilemmas to the participants in the European and global security debate.

The Eighth Belgrade Security Forum have been held on October 17 – 19, 2018 under the title “Finding Answers Together to the New Normal.” The BSF was host of a conversation between Secretary General of NATO Jens Stoltenberg and President of the Republic of Serbia Aleksandar Vučić on 8 October 2018 (in Hyatt Regency Belgrade).

Other participants at the conference should be mentioned: Austrian President Alexander van der Bellen, Serbia's Prime Minister Ana Brnabić, European Commissioner Mariya Gabriel, Deputy Foreign Minister of Italy Emanuela Del Re, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic David Koneski, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs Matthew Palmer etc.

This is the most influential, most organized and best financially supported think-tank group in Serbia. At the same time, this is the most striking pro-Western, pro-European and pro-NATO lobby group in the country.

### ***“Belgrade NATO Week”***

According to the ideological orientation, the previous group of NVOs also includes the Center for Euro-Atlantic Studies (CEAS). This NGOs have organized the international conference titled “Belgrade NATO Week” on November 8 – 10, 2018, and gathered more than 100 participants and high level speakers.

The venue of this year's “Belgrade NATO week” was the building of the Serbian government, the so-called “Palace of Serbia”, which gives the conference an semi-official character. This year's event was organized with the support of the NATO Department of Public Diplomacy (NATO PDD) and the United States Embassy in Serbia.

The keynote speaker from the officials of the Republic of Serbia was Ivica Dacic, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia. The keynote speaker in front of the NATO Alliance was James Appathurai, Deputy Assistant of the Secretary-General of the NATO for Political Affairs and Security Policy and Special Representative for Caucasus and Central Asia.

The main topics at this year's conference were: the conclusions of the NATO Summit with a special emphasis on the Western Balkans; assessment of stability and security situation in the Western Balkans, including achievements and chances of euro-atlantic integration policies; challenges for the negotiations of

Belgrade and Pristina; “corrosive effects of disinformation campaigns”; regional security and defense cooperation in the Western Balkans; as well as opportunities and future plans for “cooperation between Serbia and NATO”.

Among the speakers at the conference have been included: Jeffrey Gedmin, senior associate of the College of Foreign Affairs of the University of Georgetown and visiting senior associate for the Future of Europe Initiative at the Atlantic Council of the United States; Sven Sakkov, director of the International Center for Defense and Security from Tallinn, Estonia; Anna Wieslander, director of Northern Europe at the Atlantic Council of the United States; Elisabeth Braw, associate at the European Policy Analysis Center (CEPA); and many others.

CEAS is an organization that openly lobbying for Serbia in NATO, although lacking results measured in public support for the idea, which is still extremely low.

### ***“Future of Work - The Future Is Now”***

There are also NGOs with less political and more social and economic subject matter. For the previous period we are listing The Public Policy Research Center, which on October 23 and 24, 2018 has organized the Conference titled “Future of Work - The Future Is Now”. The following questions were raised at the conference: Is the Serbian economy capable of making a qualitative leap and joining the countries that will be the winners of the technological revolution? Will technological progress bring better jobs to workers in Serbia or will it push them even deeper into the margins of the global division of labor? Is it better education path to better paid and decent work?

At the first annual conference on the future of work, these issues were discussed by experts of International Labor Organizations from Geneva, country leaders in digital change, successful companies like New Frontier Group, Microsoft, Coing, leading European and domestic experts, representatives of public administration and academia, trade unions and civil society.

## *Conclusion*

So far we are listed some representative examples of NGOs that recorded activity in the past month. In Serbia, there are still many NGOs and opposite ideological orientations, pro-Russian for example, but they are not as influential as the previous one and have rare activities.

To many citizens, those think tanks and NGOs are relatively new and global phenomena and a bit vague and mysterious one. Titles of this NGOs also contributed to confusion: they often contain terms such as: alliance, council, center, board or association.

Non-governmental organizations have, step by step, become a new political force which employees may be find in all power positions, and have financial benefits for thair work, although they are by definition a non-profit organizations. Some of them, for example, have thirty members and all are financially engaged in this organization.

Even on the Internet you can find a user guide titled “How to start your own business” and then an explanation is given about how to register a citizen association, non-governmental organization or think-tank.

Due to its connection with foreigners, especially from the West, there is distrust among the people towards the largest NGOs considered as multipliers of Western power in Serbia.