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**RUSSIA AND THE BALKANS: SHARING INTEGRATION  
EXPERIENCE**

It would not sin against the truth to say that there are very few up to none alliances with so strong, permanent and close ties between mates as Russia with its Balkan allies used to have. Prolonged history of relationship between Slavic Orthodox culture mainland and islands knew both – times of ascents and painful moments of misunderstanding. However, historical kinship, which had been felt even more keenly within some tension in interaction, had always made the sides to succeed in straightening all controversies out. There might be a discussion on where this amazing spiritual connection originally comes from as many of the brightest researches taken interest in Balkan or Russian problems had brought up this question somehow and offered their explanations. But this oversteps the scope of survey, so far there comes nothing more than saying that the “Greek” story, inseparably linked with Greek Orthodox Christianity, is undoubtedly one of the most euphonic: “...Since at least the eighth and ninth centuries A.D. close ties have existed between Russia and Greece, at least in the perception of Russians”<sup>1</sup>.

Whether or no Balkan region has always been an issue about which Russia and Russians demonstrate constant concern and high level of involvement. With regards to historical period of more than 100 years’ prescription it is quite often to see: “Russian involvement with the Balkans has run very deep and developed into a central theme of Russian foreign relations”<sup>2</sup>. Start of Russian involvement in and penetration of the Balkans “on strategic

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<sup>1</sup> Nicholson J. Russia and the Balkans// PELLA. *The Journal of Hellenic Diaspora*, September (1992), p. 49.

<sup>2</sup> Lederer I. (ed.) *Russian Foreign Policy. Essays in Historical Perspective* (London: Yale University Press, 1962), p. 418.



concerns”<sup>3</sup> is traced back to the reign of Peter I. There is no difficulty to catch that major perception of Russia-Balkans phenomena from the outside rests on three foundations: religion, power and what is now called geopolitics. Although it is gratifying that in writings of than longer than better time ago there were still alive and present definitions like “spiritual and cultural connection between Russia and the Balkan people”<sup>4</sup>, which in our days became a rarity. Today it seems to be beyond a good form to operate concepts of historical ally or on the contrary – a rival, traditional support or confrontation, and so on – all which used to be very common and organic before, not so far in the past.

Connection of Russia and the Balkans became formed not with categories of “political profit and conjuncture”, “economic pragmatism and benefits” only, as well as there should be a doubt whether it could be originally born purely “on pragmatic and rational basis”<sup>5</sup>. Today we talk less about our unity of the faith, mutual sympathies and understanding, and more about pragmatic cooperation and mutual benefits. It does not seem to be the best source to bring up reliable long-run relationship like the one Russia and the Balkans still have. This tie has been time-proved and devolved to descendants, who are to decide how to handle it in accordance with both, great background and future planning.

Forthcoming Anniversary of the beginning of the World War I this year gives a good chance to remember what have really laid in the base of Russian-Balkan relationship for years of time. Hundred years ago special attitude towards the “united by faith and the blood” Slavs, participation in Serbian destiny did not require vast wordy explanations. Famous Manifesto by Nikolai II from 1914 July 20 had offered a very short, but clear to all and every Russian and overall shared motivation of Russian entry into the war: “following our historical vows”. In the document defense of “unfairly offended kindred to Us country” was equated with “protection of the honor, dignity, integrity of Russia and its status among Great Powers”<sup>6</sup>. Some aspects of the Manifesto have so much in common with current state of affairs. Remarkable in the context of

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<sup>3</sup> Jelavich B. *Russia's Balkan entanglements, 1806-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 2.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. P. 35.

<sup>5</sup> Вучич, Александр. Сербия хочет сохранить то, что ей принадлежит. Interview. Voice of Russia (23 May 2013), [http://rus.ruvr.ru/2013\\_05\\_23/Aleksandr-Vuchich-Serbija-hochet-sohranit-to-chto-ej-prinadlezhit/](http://rus.ruvr.ru/2013_05_23/Aleksandr-Vuchich-Serbija-hochet-sohranit-to-chto-ej-prinadlezhit/)

<sup>6</sup> Манифест Николая II о вступлении России в войну, 20 июля 1914 г. <http://rusarchives.ru/statehood/06-113-manifest-nikolay-ii.shtml>

today's geopolitical reality looks an appraisal of demands made of Serbia as “a fortiori unacceptable for a Sovereign state”. Fortunately, deliberately or not unclaimed and mistreated today categories of traditional support and historical ties are still a very significant part of modern geopolitics, no matter if they are paid close attention or completely ignored in on-going geopolitical rhetoric.

Skeptics may say it is all about the Balkan allies' geographical location, which leads to their customary role as Russian “outpost” in the Balkan region and moreover – in Europe. It is true, but it is only one part of a game. When pointing out their geopolitical status and potential role for Russia, someone should not skip the reverse of the medal: the Balkan allies serve as an “outpost” for Russia as well as Russia serves as an “outpost” for them – within the region and moreover – Europe, Eurasia and the World. So, time-proved unity works to momentary good too. Besides, and this applies to aforementioned above outside view, reducible to religious, power and geopolitical factor combination, it hardly comes out of those ones only, even taking into consideration current geopolitical situation with all global trends and general tension upon the whole number of questions, that now are treated as international ones and become defenseless against outside meddling in those. Any background could be subjected to revision and criticism, even such solid one which has laid under secular friendship between Russia and the Balkans, but it seems to be crucial for both sides that sources of this activity, initiators, be directly related to the issue they evaluate. Common historical memory, origins and experience, special attitude that hardly can be theoretically learned, should insure against hasty shifting priorities in favor of momentary conjuncture.

Events which initiated cited Manifesto were at the very beginning of chain of tremendous geopolitical shakes that XX century brought for the World. Yet, neither shift of political regimes, nor profound review of ideologies, nor state structure basis' destruction itself were of the power to change perception of the Balkans and its people in Russia and Russia and Russians in the Balkans. Even in 1990s, when vast majority of Russians lost their interest to country foreign policy against a background of shocking social and economic transformations, which took a real effort from people to survive and adapt somehow to new reality, uncharted waters for all and every “born in the USSR”, involvement in Balkan problems had held out.

Good illustration to this would be public opinion in Russia on confrontation between Serbia and community of the West powers which took place within this dramatic period inside Russia. Public support of Serbs remained constant and unconditioned. Opinion poll in the second half of 1998

displayed high familiarity of Russians on geography and chronic of the conflict: only 14% did not show any interest to it, at the same time sympathy of 22% of well-informed responders were found on the side of Serbs (to compare: 5% – for Albanians)<sup>7</sup>. General political apathy led to the result showing that more than a half interrogated Russians for that time demonstrated lack of sympathy neither of the sides – 59%. However, escalation of the conflict changed situation with public opinion dramatically. The dynamics went as following: NATO bombing of Yugoslavia caused “no special feelings” of 4% only, 1% approved the action, 2% pointed “understanding”, 81% total stated their indignation and deep concern (53% and 28% accordingly)<sup>8</sup>.

Posterior polls demonstrated the strength of derived indexes, including data upon sentiments of Russians towards Serbs. Even widely cited public opinion poll upon sovereignty of Kosovo in September, 2008 (experts unanimously called it the direct sequent of recent recognition by Russian Federation the independence of Abkhazia and Yuzhnaya Ossetia<sup>9</sup>) did not become an exception. Then, during the time run from March to September the number of interrogated Russians ready to support separation and recognition of Kosovo when asked grew from 15% up to 31%. However, dominate tendency of “greater sympathy with Serbs” remained the same. Also, it should be mentioned that the number of opponents of such separation and recognition reduced just slightly – from 41% down to 38%<sup>10</sup>. On the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of bombing Belgrade only 16% of citizens considered that Russia shouldn't get involved in Yugoslavian crisis<sup>11</sup>, while the overwhelming majority had displayed great confidence that Russia should have come out as mediator in negotiations and to strive for peaceful settlement of Kosovo issue. Just a little bit behind are located indexes, presented the variation of full-scale humanitarian, military and other kind of help.

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<sup>7</sup> Consolidated data out of All-Russia public opinion polls 1998–1999, [www.wciom.ru](http://www.wciom.ru).

<sup>8</sup> Данные Всероссийского опроса ВЦИОМ. 28. 02. 1999 (?), [http://wciom.ru/zh/print\\_q.php?s\\_id=520&q\\_id=37432&date=28.02.1999](http://wciom.ru/zh/print_q.php?s_id=520&q_id=37432&date=28.02.1999)

<sup>9</sup> Побочный эффект, *Время новостей*, 22 сентября 2008, № 174.

<sup>10</sup> Данные Всероссийского опроса ВЦИОМ. 13–14. 09. 2008, <http://wciom.ru/index.php?id=269&uid=10738>.

<sup>11</sup> NATO protiv Yugoslavii: desyat let spustya// Hranitel (Mediaportal o bezopasnosti. 25 marta 2009 g. <http://www.psj.ru/news/detail.php?ID=16121>.

In this context words said by then Russian Prime-Minister in Narodnaya Skupschina in March 2011 during official visit to Serbia gave the general purport of Russian special attitude to Serbia, Serbs and Balkan problems. It was told that there is no political force within local party spectrum which stays indifferent or opposing to traditional friendship or further development of relationship between the countries. Adherence to both is truly “absolute public consensus”<sup>12</sup> in Russia.

This special attitude affects many areas of life inside Russia and outside – on international politics level: for instance, in many respects it secures Russian position upon Kosovo issue. As for interior influence, outcomes of opinion polls give permanent perception of Serbian doings as “weakening Russian positions in the Balkans” (with average index – 20%)<sup>13</sup>. Russian withdrawal from the Balkan Peninsula has been perceived very oversensitively inside the country up to now, and interpreted as the loss of international image and defeat from NATO and US. Many experts draw parallels between doings in Serbia in the end of the 1990s and rapid growth of anti-Americanism in Russia during next years<sup>14</sup>, and even more – with made correction of Russian foreign policy in a long-range outlook. Others disagree and find signs of future reorientation of Russia long before military aggression against Belgrade<sup>15</sup>. Arguing they apply to Yeltsin’s Team declarations dated by 1993-1994 upon Russian special interests in the “near abroad” as well as to the President effort obtaining enlarged authority for Russia to provide peace and stability on Post-Soviet area”<sup>16</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> V.V. Putin vstretilsya s rukovodstvom Narodnoi skupschiny Respubliki Serbii. 23. 03. 2011, [https://putin.ru/russian\\_news/67-putin-news-lines/17759-vvputin-vstretilsya-s-rukovodstvom-narodnoy-skupshini-respubliki-serbii.html](https://putin.ru/russian_news/67-putin-news-lines/17759-vvputin-vstretilsya-s-rukovodstvom-narodnoy-skupshini-respubliki-serbii.html).

<sup>13</sup> Consolidated data out of All-Russia public opinion polls 2003–2010, [www.wciom.ru](http://www.wciom.ru).

<sup>14</sup> Kruzich J., Lundberg E. Anti-Americanism: Sources, Depth and Implications (the second of a series of open discussions). *Report presented on 2<sup>nd</sup> Forum on Contemporary Developments in Russia*. US Embassy-Moscow. October 11, 2012; ВЦИОМ: Все меньше россиян дают позитивную оценку отношениям с США. – *Взгляд*, 25 февраля 2013.

<sup>15</sup> Sherr J. Russia and the West: A Reassessment. *The Shrivenham Papers*, 6 (January 14. 2008). Defense Academy of the United Kingdom.

<sup>16</sup> Шевцова, Л. Одинокая держава: почему Россия не стала Западом и почему России трудно с Западом. М.: РОССПЭН, 2010, с. 98.

In any case, in 2000 expert group for Russia of House of Representatives of the 106<sup>th</sup> United States Congress presented data about menacingly break-neck fall of benevolent attitude of Russians towards the US: from 70% (at the moment of W. Clinton acceded the Presidency) down to 37%<sup>17</sup>. According to the expertise the US President became one of the least popular in Russia, “yielding to Saddam Hussein only” in this respect. Westernized analysts still less willingly, than to the point west ones, admit the role of Balkan problems in reorientation of Russian foreign politics. They mostly avoid to use word combination “traditional support” when describing Russian-Balkan relationship, meanwhile it is in frequent usage and harmonious perception in literature and mass-media. However, giving due to the facts, though in own interpretation, researches state: “Kosovo crisis facilitated consolidation of Russian traditionalists and revival of old myths and emotions in public conscience. The Balkans in general and Kosovo in particular indeed had become an instrument and an occasion at the same time for Russian traditionalists to go back into Soviet geopolitical niche”<sup>18</sup>. In other words, the Balkans played their part in Russian final choice for independent foreign policy as a long-awaited result of seeking processes for its own strategic vision and geopolitical niche.

No doubt, geopolitical map of the entire World had been changing together with on-going status changes of the Continent dominant player and depending on those, even when it was all about loss of former superpower. Consequences of such loss, including territorial ones, continue to exert significant influence on the dynamics of geopolitical processes in Eurasia up to the current moment. However if at the turn of the centuries it might have seen, conditionally speaking, one-way reshaping of Post-Soviet space, especially in Europe, to the end of the first decade of the 2000s process of reorganization has got complicated by foreign politics’ mobilization and, the most important, declared reorientation of a player, who had kept itself aloof before – Russia.

For the “west partners” it means that strategic task of containment of their east neighbor’s potential stops being on the periphery and “Russian factor” again becomes one of the most significant in international politics. Anxious reaction of many countries of Western community towards any attempts of

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<sup>17</sup> *Коммерсантъ*, 22 сентября 2000, № 177.

<sup>18</sup> *Шевцова, Л.* Одинокая держава: почему Россия не стала Западом..., с. 111.



Russia making its foreign politics' activity more intense<sup>19</sup>: starting from public discussions upon theoretic aspects and declarations of intents and ending with practical steps about one or another question. Combination of these factors determines the essence and fairly constitutes geopolitical reality nowadays.

For Russia and the Balkan allies, as well as for the whole Europe though, common per topicality and urgency level, per concernment of principal in results, per involvement extent and discussion potential is the problem of organization of the Post-Socialist area. Since recently it has become possible within this problem layout to take into consideration another development model, alternative to the one previously thought as the one and only possible form of safe and attractive in all senses being and settlement. With all skepticism and on-going debates around its further destiny, the idea of Eurasian Union has deprived the European Union of prerogative of no alternative, what means uncompetitive, offer for realization of Post-Soviet states' integrity claims. Nowadays, the EU candidate status indeed is just one of the opportunities "to change the international image"<sup>20</sup> for interested and concerned Balkan states.

Speaking on alternative ways of modern development, it is appropriate to mention that choice "Europe vs non-Europe" had been posed as strategic need in different times for Russia as well as for the Balkan countries. For Russia it fairly is more about a traversed path, for many of the Balkan states – one of the most vital. At least, this is the way how it has been proffered to the Balkan society all over the region by both, supranational agencies and mass-media, on one hand, and appropriate ruling elites, on another. The media keep broadcasting as a spell declarations and statements from the category of "there is no much time to wait", "we will be next to join European Union"<sup>21</sup> together

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<sup>19</sup> Frydenborg B. *Why Russia is the Tea Party of International Politics?* <http://www.policymic.com/> (September 3, 2013); Larrabee S. Russia, Ukraine, and Central Europe: The Return of Geopolitics, *Journal of International Affairs*, vol. 63, 2 (Spring/Summer 2010): Rethinking Russia, 33-52; Schultz W. *Russia: back to superpower?* Euronews (01 March 2012).

<sup>20</sup> Marinkov S. *Serbia: Reactions and attitudes towards EU candidate status* (Local Democracy Agency Central Serbia), <http://civiltrustbuilding.eu/ctb/serbia-reactions-and-attitudes-towards-eu-candidate-status/>

<sup>21</sup> Serbian Prime Minister: *We will be next to join European Union*, CNN. (03 October 2013). <http://www.cnn.com/2013/10/03/business/serbian-prime-minister-dacic-eu-membership/>

with the conviction about “irreversibility of going to the EU”<sup>22</sup> or “no alternative to the EU membership”<sup>23</sup> and so on. Forcing haste is usually explained with economic reasons as for Serbia by the Prime-Minister, whose statements are cited above: 25% unemployment rate, 65% GDP to compare to 1989<sup>24</sup>, lack of foreign investments for the reason of Serbia not having become “a part of modern World”.

In the light of aforementioned above upon Serbia, it is interesting to notice that evaluation of economic situation has no objections from observers of “The Economist”, where some of presented data had been published, although analysts come up with higher rate of unemployment – 27%<sup>25</sup>. Besides, they pay attention to the fact of effort concentration by local politicians on election fight only, as a result of that the majority of Serbs have nothing else to do but to share hopes of another official A. Vucic for economic skills of “given” as a government advisor former chief of the IMF D. Strauss-Kahn. By the way, in contrast to the Head of Serbian Government, “The Economist” sees rather well an alternative model to European integration, analysis of Russian initiative rarely spares mentioning the new integration project<sup>26</sup>.

There is no special need to dwell in details on dominant interpretations of different development vectors in Europe itself as well as in major outside actor – the USA. They are reducible to simple schemes: going with Europe is forward development within democracy (progress), going without Europe is break-neck reverse movement, isolation and regress. “Way without Europe” automatically becomes a way against Europe (EU) and its partners. Separately goes the worst, if to talk about perception and evaluation, version, which is a variety of the way without Europe and out of Europe, complicated with an alternative community of states creation.

Famous statement of the US Secretary of State H. Clinton, made in Dublin in the end of 2012 and called for perhaps the entire palette of possible feedback in Russia – from loud indignation to quiet confidence, sounded as

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<sup>22</sup> Dačić expects "historic day for Serbia, EU"// [http://www.b92.net/eng/news/politics.php?yyyy=2013&mm=06&dd=27&nav\\_id=86770](http://www.b92.net/eng/news/politics.php?yyyy=2013&mm=06&dd=27&nav_id=86770).

<sup>23</sup> There is no alternative to EU membership – PM Ivica Dacic, *In Serbia* (27 June 2013).

<sup>24</sup> Nasty fight ahead, *The Economist* (28 September 2013).

<sup>25</sup> Preening, *The Economist* (28 September 2013).

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.



quintessence of negative attitude of West community to initiatives of such kind<sup>27</sup>. To remember the story: the US Secretary of State not only gave her appraisal of the project (as an attempt to the Soviet Union restoration), she also stated that the United States would figure out effective ways to slow down or prevent it. According to choice note by analysts, this did not sound like talking to an ally<sup>28</sup>, while at the time the US and Russia were not just allies, but in process of so called “reset” of two-sided relations in order to correct previously made mistakes in shaping the partnership.

Russian geopolitical “turn” from priority partnership with European Union hasn’t also happened momentarily. Quite recently, in 2005, there were still many hopes and expectations caused by apparent break-through in relationship between Russia and entire Europe. Then, “optimistic scenarios of how will cancellation of visa regime go, how will harmonization of legislation go, what institutional forms may take declared “strategic partnership between European Union and Russia”<sup>29</sup>. “Today, – says former Minister of foreign affairs of Russia, nowadays President of Russian International Affairs Council I. Ivanov, – the amount of optimists in Moscow and Brussels has significantly decreased”<sup>30</sup>. Guiding line or base to form equal and mutually beneficial relationship between Russia and European Union within declared strategic partnership are still same as confirmed during summit Russia-EU 2005 “road maps”, which in their time had presented the ground for those big hopes.

“Time of renovation”, which result was the Joint declaration about starting negotiations upon New Base agreement between Russia-EU in June 2008, soon was relieved with a pause, “as it seemed, a technical one, concerned with moving to the final phase of parallel negotiating process on Russian accession to WTO”<sup>31</sup>. However, before as well “negotiating process had been interrupted twice because of the reasons, having had in a better case just indirect relation to the subject of negotiations”<sup>32</sup>, – considers the permanent

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<sup>27</sup> Clover Ch. Clinton vows to thwart new Soviet Union, *Financial Times* (06 December 2012).

<sup>28</sup> Lozansky E., Sieff M. Don’t Fear a Eurasian Union, *The Moscow Times* (02 July 2013).

<sup>29</sup> Иванов, И. Россия и Европа – возможен ли прорыв в отношениях? – *Международная жизнь*, 2012, № 1, 2–3.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. P. 3.

<sup>31</sup> Чижов, В. Стратегическое партнерство Россия–ЕС: еврокризис – не повод для передышки. – *Международная жизнь*, 2012, № 6, с. 28.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

representative of Russia to the EU V. Chizhov. Without hiding disappointment, the Russian side concluded: “We are not ready to give up the balance of interests. Approaches, based on the attempts to obtain one-side additional concessions from Russia, do not suit us”<sup>33</sup>.

In this context it is worthy to mention that experience of Serbia, “where following the Euro-Atlantic vector had required Belgrade not for the political concession and reputation expenses only”, but “had leaded to the loss of a part of historical motherland”<sup>34</sup>, was actively called for in Russian expert and political environment within discussion about situation around the project of strategic partnership of Russia and European Union. Not mere euro-sceptics but activists of closing in with Europe have objectively evaluated reached level of cooperation between Russia and European Union as inadequate to potential and status of both sides. So far, long and rather complicated way towards Europe had rightly been packed into short expert conclusion: belonging to European culture and mentality does not mean that “because of them our fate is tightly bound up with Europe only”<sup>35</sup>.

On the meeting of ambassadors and permanent representatives of Russia to international organizations in July, 2012 the President V. Putin said about missed opportunities: “Together with Europe we could set ambitious goals, much more ambitious than are setting today”<sup>36</sup>. At the same time he did not pass over growing of “tension and uncertainty elements” in the field of international relationship, in particular for the Russian Federation, in silence. On the meeting had been also raised a theme of “shortage of new models of development against a background of an erosion of leadership of traditional economic locomotives (such as the USA, EU and Japan)”<sup>37</sup>. Up to that moment – January 1, 2012 – start to the project of Common economic space of Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan had been already made. The start was forestalled with

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Пономарева, Е.Г. Балканы как зона (дез)интеграции. – *Развитие и экономика*, 2013, № 5, с. 82.

<sup>35</sup> Лукьянов, Ф. Европа возвращается к Америке. – *Россия в глобальной политике*, 18 июля 2013.

<sup>36</sup> Путин, В. Выступление на Совещании послов и постоянных представителей РФ при международных организациях, Москва 9 июля 2012. – *Международная жизнь*, 2012, № 7, с. 6.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid. P. 2.

resonance article by V. Putin, published in “Izvestia” in October, 2011 and to the point had presented the new integration project to the reading public<sup>38</sup>.

Content of the article, its authorship – all this together gave a ground to interpret offered alternative model of integration and development exceptionally from the viewpoint of political will of an acting leader, not of objective territorial, economic and, of course, political reasons. Taking into consideration available splits between Russia and west states community upon a number of current issues, to aforementioned above motivation of brought forward initiative were added Russian geopolitical ambitions and ambitions in the field of international security – this formulation was worked out on the “Heritage Foundation” seminar under speaking name “Russia’s Eurasian Union could endanger the neighborhood and US interests”<sup>39</sup>. At the same time “unhandy” factors are completely taken out of focus: long-term trade and economic relations, common business projects, history and culture gravitation (as with Belarus, as example), common past and memory, common borders, at last. As for the states-members themselves, these factors are the ones laid under their decision to join, not the aspiration to assist the overlook of geopolitical status of Russian Federation. In aversion the fact of appearance of an alternative integration model, the role of sovereign Kazakhstan in initiation of this kind of integration side by side with Russia has been forgotten or deliberately ignored. Public opinion has been constantly ignored as well; by the way, in the CES states it has been systematically monitored, as well as in some countries that have not joined the Common economic space yet.

In December, 2006 results of already the 6<sup>th</sup> wave of polls of population of Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Ukraine were presented to public. The results were presented by International Agency named “Eurasian monitor”, however the researches themselves were accomplished by different research organizations of various parentages. The idea to unite former Soviet republics was supported by 51% of respondents in Russia, 45% – in Ukraine, 36% – in Belarus, against were 22%, 25% and 32% accordingly. In joint union of Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Ukraine respondents expressed willing to live as following: 21% people of Russia, 32% – of Belarus, 23% – of Kazakhstan, 34% – of Ukraine. On the same question about European Union positive responses were gotten as following: 14% – in Russia, 21% – in Ukraine, 18% – in

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<sup>38</sup> Путин, В. Новый интеграционный проект для Евразии – будущее, которое рождается сегодня. – *Известия*, 4 октября 2011.

<sup>39</sup> *The Moscow Times* (02 July 2013)

Belarus, 15% – in Kazakhstan<sup>40</sup>. Every year the Russian public opinion research center (WCIOM) conducts monitoring of Russian and other CIS states' citizens. According to 2011 data, 48% of Russian citizens would support creation of integration community on Post-Soviet area<sup>41</sup>. It should be mentioned that version of restoration of the USSR on voluntary and equal basis became an absolute leader to compare the Custom or Eurasian Unions.

Most of all, that's why "intensification of integration processes on the CIS space" was called by V. Putin as "the core of our foreign politics"; it should be added – "independent foreign politics"<sup>42</sup> as it is very important aspect of modern international conditions. There experts who put a question harder: "to integrate or to lose a sovereignty", assuming that "out of Eurasian partnership – either on the West or on the East – there are no chances for countries of the former USSR to keep their independency"<sup>43</sup>.

Fighting for sovereignty is also a part of geopolitical reality of our time. As well as fights for monopoly on ideas and models of development. Eurasian Union is challenging the sole right of the West states community to determine ways, conditions and success of further development of other states, first of all, the ones of Post-Socialist area. Such as historical allies of Russia in the Balkans, Serbia is the first to be mentioned among them. Readiness to struggle for sovereign right to decide Serbian state and people's fate freely and independently, to choose and stand for own way of being, Serbia had to prove in the most severe conditions.

Many analysts agree that "compromise and equal dialogue from the West towards Serbia have become impossible as far back as 1991"<sup>44</sup>. Serbs have much behind themselves: experience of living in hard frames of long-term sanctions (1584 days!), of almost persistent political "blackmail, threats, global anti-Serbs' propaganda campaign"<sup>45</sup>, direct international aggression in 1999 and

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<sup>40</sup> *Русский Вестник*, 22 декабря 2006.

<sup>41</sup> ВЦИОМ Пресс-выпуск. № 1884.

<sup>42</sup> *Путин, В.* Выступление на Совещании послов и постоянных представителей РФ при международных организациях, Москва 9 июля 2012..., с. 4, 5.

<sup>43</sup> *Бордачев, Т.В.* Евразийский Союз: интеграция ради суверенитета. – *Ведомости*, 2 октября 2013, № 181 (3443); Объединаться или потерять суверенитет. – *Россия в глобальной политике*, 4 октября 2013.

<sup>44</sup> *Филимонова, А.* Путин: битва за Сербию. – *Фонд стратегической культуры* (24 марта 2011) <http://www.fondsk.ru/pview/2011/03/24/putin-bitva-za-serbiju-2549.html>.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

its terrible consequences. This was a charge for sovereignty, for external governing refusal. For the country-successor of socialist Yugoslavia, one of the initiators and activist of Non-Aligned Movement, what was a unique experience, it is two, three times more difficult to give up its own sovereignty, to get used to the thought about its loss, unavoidable already at the stage of negotiations about possible integration to the European Union.

Public consensus, about which representatives of involved agencies of the EU talk so much conformably to Serbia, has been nowadays reached at least upon one point. Standing up for the independency and sovereignty of the country euro-sceptics and uncompromising sticklers of hard line towards integration with EU agree that today Serbia again is facing the necessity to make a choice of what will be its future<sup>46</sup>. It is good that in order to make a better choice for Serbia and the whole region local intellectuals ask themselves, public and State “a fundamental question – as far do interests of the USA and West Europe meet”<sup>47</sup> the interest of the Balkans themselves.

In conditions of the crisis and problems, which the EU is experiencing – economic, social, demographic, cultural – this question in Serbia and for Serbia, and even wider, in and for the Balkans, is getting new sounding and topicality. Current situation more than ever is disposing to diversion from hasty decisions, to weighted analysis and open discussion upon alternative integration models. It is still the right time to re-evaluate common background and future plans. Russian allies in the Balkans have similar baggage of successful long-term economic and trade relations as other members of forthcoming EAU have, even closer than with some of the members cultural, ethnic and religious ties. There is already a high-potential platform for common business projects (“South Stream”), which indeed promises to economically unite Russia and the whole Balkan region and strives for the right to meet expectations of it as a “flagship project” for most of the states involved<sup>48</sup>, while “the ability of the West to dominate world economy and politics continues to diminish”<sup>49</sup>. Russian

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<sup>46</sup> Bataveljic D. *Serbia on the way towards a larger European Union*, Проблеми на националната и международната сигурност. Т. 3. Велико Търново: «ИВИС», 2012, с. 50.

<sup>47</sup> Стоянов Ж. Сигурността на Балканите и Западните стратегии, Проблеми на националната и международната сигурност..., с.15.

<sup>48</sup> Попомарева Е. *European Union vs. “Gazprom”: in labyrinths of energy politics*, Центар за стратешке алтернативе <http://www.strateskealternative.rs/?p=2090>.

<sup>49</sup> Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation (12 February 2013), <http://ppt.ru/texts/index.phtml?id=69615>.

economical presence is not limited by energy sector only: “some assumptions can be made on the basis of the various Russian investments that have taken place in many Balkan countries”<sup>50</sup>. There are much more that could be done, especially in the field of agriculture and another ones that will not be ever developing within the European Union. While Russia is not on the very top of investors list for the Balkans, financial aid provided from here goes for reconstruction and development of national productions in contrast to flows coming from the West as a compensation for these productions not to be reconstructed and developed.

Russian Concept of the Foreign Policy 2013 to compare with such of year 2008<sup>51</sup> reflected many changes that have happened in the entire World for the last several years. There is definitely at least something that applies perfectly to the possible status of Russian relationship with Balkan states and to their planning for better future: “The world is experiencing a period of transition..., which opens the possibility for new economics and financial systems, new alignments in collective security and shifts in political development”<sup>52</sup>. The word for Russian historical allies and friends in the Balkans.

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<sup>50</sup> Petrillo E. Russian foreign policy towards the Balkans: which perspective? *ISPI (Istituto per gli studi di politica internazionale) Analysis*, 169 (April 2013), p. 4.

<sup>51</sup> Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation (15 July 2008), <http://www.kremlin.ru/acts/785>.

<sup>52</sup> Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation (12 February 2013), <http://ppt.ru/texts/index.phtml?id=69615>.