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**Title: Political status of Kosovo as strategic challenge for Serbia's integration with the European Union**

**Abstract**

In 2003 Serbia began the process of integration with the European Union. After eleven years on a difficult road to the transformation of political and constitutional contexts, Serbia received a chance to become a member of this Community. On the path to European Union membership, Serbia should to resolve a key challenge – regulate the political status of Kosovo. The European Union signaled Serbia's urgent need to work out this issue before it will complete the accession process and presents two main reasons for this necessity. One of these was the normalization of Serbia-Kosovo relations reducing the risk of renewed conflict and the second allowed a more lasting stability for the security in the Western Balkans.

The aim of this article is to indicate the position of Serbian, and Kosovo Albanian regarding the dispute over the political status of Kosovo, as well as the presentation of the process of normalization of relations between Serbia and Kosovo as a key mechanism for regulating the dispute. There will be identified strategic challenges emerging as a result of measures taken to tackle this problem. These may have a significant impact on the further dynamics of the process of Serbia's integration with the European Union.

**Keywords:**

Serbia, integration with the European Union, political status of Kosovo, Serbia-Kosovo negotiations, Kosovo, strategic challenges

## Introduction

In 2003 Serbia was recognized during the European Union (EU) summit in Thessaloniki as a potential candidate to be member of this Community. Five years later, Serbia signed with the European Union the Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA) and the Interim Agreement on Trade and Trade-related issues. In 2009 the Serbs government officially applied for European Union membership.<sup>1</sup> The political status of Kosovo during this period was still an unsolved problem that aroused controversy and caused increased tension between Serbs and Kosovo Albanians. Officially, Kosovo in accordance with Resolution 1244 of the United Nations Security Council that specified the conditions for ending the war in Kosovo in 1999, had broad autonomy while remaining an integral part of the territory of Serbia, but administered by the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo.<sup>2</sup> Nowadays the dispute around Kosovo status remain still unresolved and become major challenge for Serbia to finalize the accession process with the European Union. Used mechanism of negotiations under the auspices of the EU to normalize the relations between Serbia and Kosovo, and indirectly measure to resolve Kosovo status, has raised a number of doubts regarding its effectiveness, since it appears as the result of the dialogue a new challenges for Serbia as well as Kosovo in the regulation of relations between Belgrade and Pristina.

## The position of Serbs and Kosovo Albanians regarding the political status of Kosovo

Accepted arrangements in Resolution 1244 of the United Nations Security Council of a solution for the status of Kosovo did not satisfy either the Serbs or Albanians. The Serbs did not allow any consideration regarding the possibility of losing Kosovo. This area was considered the cradle of their statehood. Serbs refer to Kosovo as the *Serb Jerusalem* because it contains numerous medieval sacred sites. These represent for the Serbs both the creation of the Serbian state, and an important element for defining their national identity. Therefore, Kosovo is perceived as a holy place for Serbs. It is defined by Serbs as a *most precious Serbian word*.<sup>3</sup>

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1 European Commission, *European Neighborhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations, Serbia membership status*, [http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/countries/detailed-country-information/serbia/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/countries/detailed-country-information/serbia/index_en.htm) [access: 3.08.2016].

2 United Nation, *Security Council Resolution 1244*, <https://daccess-ods.un.org/TMP/2528744.33994293.html> [access: 3.08.2016].

3 M. Żakowska, *Uwarunkowania współczesnych konfliktów zbrojnych na przykładzie konfliktu serbsko-albańskiego w Kosowie*, Praca naukowo-badawcza, Akademia Obrony Narodowej, Warszawa 2016, p. 58-61.

According to the Kosovo Albanians, Kosovo should be granted independence, along with the disintegration of Yugoslavia that started in 1991, when the breakdown of the federation occurred. The conviction of Kosovo Albanians of the rightness to grant Kosovo independence strengthened the authoritarian policies of the Serbian authorities, especially the experience of political discrimination that they suffered by in the 90's during the reign of President Slobodan Milosevic. In response to the political repression the Kosovo Albanians created a parallel state - the Republic of Kosovo, manifesting to the international community that it can organize an independently functioning state. From that moment the independence of Kosovo was perceived by the Kosovo Albanians as the only possible solution to resolve with the Serbs dispute over the political status of the region.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, the lack of an expected by Kosovo Albanians clear settlement of this problem in the Resolution in 1244 of UN Security Council intensified their political frustrations. It also deepened the international community's position of unwillingness to support the concept of recognizing Kosovo sovereignty. This situation became for Kosovo Albanians an strong impulse to declare in 17 February 2008 unilateral independence of Kosovo.<sup>5</sup>

The decision concerning the proclamation of sovereignty by Kosovo has led not only to an increase tensions in relations between Serbs and Kosovo Albanians, but put Serbia confronting new challenge in the process of integration with the European Union. The vast majority of the EU countries have recognized Kosovo independence.<sup>6</sup> This resulted from the pressures on the authorities in Belgrade to accept Kosovo decision. However, the Serbian government clinging to maintaining the territorial integrity of the state was trying to prove illegality of Kosovo decision before the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in Hague. These actions were not successful, as the ICJ stated in its advisory opinion of 23 July 2010, that the decision on the declaration of independence by Kosovo is not contrary to the letter of international law.<sup>7</sup> The Serbian Parliament expressing their opposition to this opinion adopted a

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4 M. Żakowska, op. cit., p. 82-87.

5 D. Bilefsky, *Kosovo Declares Its Independence From Serbia*, [http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/18/world/europe/18kosovo.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/18/world/europe/18kosovo.html?_r=0) [access: 3.08.2016].

6 In 2008, from member states of European Union's only Spain, Greece, Cyprus, Slovakia and Romania oppose recognizing Kosovo, D. Bilefsky, *Kosovo Declares Its...*, op. cit.

7 International Court of Justice, *Reports of Judgments, Advisory Opinions and Orders*, [www.icj-cij.org/docket/files/141/15987.pdf](http://www.icj-cij.org/docket/files/141/15987.pdf) [access: 3.08.2016]. Also see *Kosovo Independence Move Not Illegal, say UN Court*, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-10730573> [access: 3.08.2016].

resolution at an extraordinary meeting, that stated Serbia will never recognize Kosovo's independence.<sup>8</sup>

Continuing the protest against the proclamation of sovereignty by Kosovo Serbian authorities has taken a series of diplomatic efforts aimed to limiting the number of countries recognizing Kosovo's independence, and block Kosovo's implementation of internal state policies. Moreover, the authorities in Belgrade refused to deal directly with the Republic of Kosovo, agreeing to contacts with Kosovo government only through the mediation of international representative of UNMIK and ELUEX<sup>9</sup>. The Serbian government solidified around keeping an isolationistic position in dealing with Kosovo, an attitude also represented by the Kosovar political elite. In their opinion, Serbia should unequivocally accept the independence of Kosovo, as well as agree to appear in Kosovo contentious issues including on the status of the Serb minority were regarded as the internal affairs of the Kosovo state, and settled within the framework established by Kosovo administrative authorities<sup>10</sup>.

The position of Serbia in relation to Kosovo has slowly changed under pressure from the state members of the European Union, which frequently signaled the Serbian policymakers that the granting of membership in the EU will depend on the normalization by Serbia relations with Kosovo.<sup>11</sup>

### **On the path to the normalization of relations between Serbia and Kosovo**

Under pressure from the European Union, Serbian authorities started talks in March 2011 with the representative of Kosovo's government. The primary objective of the dialogue was to build confidence between the parties, solving everyday problems in the Serbian and Kosovo

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8 *Serbia vows never to recognize Kosovo's independence*, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/jul/27/serbia-parliament-kosovo-independence> [access: 3.08.2016].

9 Serbia blocked the possibility of Kosovo's membership in international organizations. Also increased financial assistance to institutions organized by the Serbian minority in Kosovo in order to prevent the Kosovo authorities to control over the entire territory of the newly formed state. Moreover imposed a blockade on the movement of goods, and people with Kosovo documents. Also Serbian authority refused to recognize documents issued by Kosovar authorities, and to carry out flights to Kosovo over the territory the Serbia. M. Szpala, *Hostages to dialogue. The process of normalizing Serbian-Kosovar relations*, Center for Eastern Studies/ Commentary, No 214, 2016, p. 1-2.

10 *Ibidem*, p. 2.

11 S. Lehne, *Kosovo and Serbia: Toward a Normal Relationship*, p. 6, [https://www.carnegieendowment.org/files/Kosovo\\_and\\_Serbia](https://www.carnegieendowment.org/files/Kosovo_and_Serbia) [access: 4.08.2016]; *Germany's Angela Merkel ties Serbian EU hopes to Kosovo*, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-14631297> [access: 4.08.2016]; *How to EU Brought Serbia and Kosovo to a Deal*, <http://carnegieeurope.eu/strategieurope/?fa=54403> [access: 4.08.2016]. See also: *Clinton Urges Serbia to Open Talks with Kosovo*, <http://www.voanews.com/content/clinton-praises-serbia-for-move-toward-west-104789299/127891.html> [access: 4.08.2016].

Albanian relations, and reducing tensions in the Western Balkans.<sup>12</sup> The result of negotiations conducted in the period March 2011 to February 2012 was to sign a series of agreements including the agreement on public records, freedom of movement, and mutual recognition of documents, free movement of goods, an integrated system of border management (IBM), and the participation of Kosovo in regional assemblies.<sup>13</sup>

Among discussed issues during the negotiations there were controversies and tensions related to the rules on the movement of goods. This problem was caused by the actions of Serbia, which refused to import into its territory goods with Kosovo customs stamps and ban the transit Kosovo goods through the territory of Serbia. In response to the Belgrade decision, Kosovo's authorities introduced a similar embargo on Serbian goods. In addition, the government in Pristina in order to enforce the embargo ordered the deployment of special police units on the border with Serbia. This decision led to the outbreak of numerous protests by Serbs living in northern Kosovo. These became riots that were eventually stopped by the intervention of KFOR.<sup>14</sup> The contested issue of the movement of goods was finally resolved due to an agreement signed by both the authorities in Belgrade and Pristina, in which Serbia undertook to allow the transport of goods labeled the Kosovo customs stamps without signs of Kosovo's independence.<sup>15</sup>

An important step in the process of normalization of the relations between Serbia and Kosovo was concluded in December 2012. Two agreements were signed: the first one - on integrated border management, which provided for overseeing the Serb-Kosovo border with the participation of officials and police officers from Serbia, Kosovo and EULEX<sup>16</sup>; the second one - agreement about the creation in Belgrade and Pristina of offices of permanent envoys the so-called liaison officers.<sup>17</sup> The European Union recognized the agreements as significant progress

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12 *Serbia-Kosovo talks open under Ashton's watch*, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/global-europe/news/serbia-kosovo-talks-open-under-ashton-s-watch/> [access: 4.08.2016].

13 *Key agreements reached in Serbia/Kosovo dialogue*, <http://www.eubusiness.com/news-eu/balkans-us-serbia.kd1> [access: 4.08.2016].

14 P. Pacuła, *Kosovo: problemy terażniejszości, wyzwania przyszłości*, *Bezpieczeństwo Narodowe*, No 22, II-2012, p. 117. See also *Kosovo tense after deadly clash on Serbian border*, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-14303165> [access: 5.08.2016].

15 K. Hoxha, *Customs Stamps: Serbia's Choice, Kosovo's Chance*, <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/blog/custom-stamps-serbia-s-choice-kosovo-s-chance> [access: 5.08.2016].

16 European Forum for Democracy and Solidarity, *Belgrade and Pristina reach deal over border*, [http://www.europeanforum.net/news/1298/belgrade\\_and\\_pristina\\_reach\\_deal\\_over\\_border](http://www.europeanforum.net/news/1298/belgrade_and_pristina_reach_deal_over_border) [access: 5.08.2016].

17 K. Hoxha, *Kosovo, Serbia Liaison Officers to Start Work*, <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/kosovo-and-serbia-liaison-officers-ready-to-start> [access: 5.08.2016].

in the normalization of Serbia's relations with Kosovo. And European Council have decided to grant Serbia in the status of a candidate country.<sup>18</sup> The EU's decision was the culmination of observations the Serbia process of reform and change in foreign policy. Each were aimed at adapting the Serbian law to the EU requirements, and to fulfill the political criteria for accession. By receiving the European Union candidate status Serbia had the opportunity to obtain more financial resources under the EU pre-accession funds. This new position in the integration process has also reinforced the image of Serbia on the international arena.<sup>19</sup>

The turning point in relations between Serbia and Kosovo was the signing the Brussels Agreement (the so-called *First Agreement of Principles Governing the Normalization of Relations*). Its main objective was to facilitate the integration of the Serb minority living in municipalities in northern Kosovo with the administrative system of Kosovo. Under the agreement it was established that a special police commander and appeals court was formed for the Serb minority in Kosovo. In addition, both sides agreed that they will not block measures taking other side in the process of integration with the European Union.<sup>20</sup> The leading negotiator Catherine Ashton, the European Union High Representative, testified that through this agreement both of the participants *step away from the past, and take steps closer to Europe*.<sup>21</sup> Serbia, as opposed to Kosovo, has not ratified the agreement into binding law. However, the Serbian authorities did take a few steps toward implementing of the arrangements. They made the dissolution of the Serb minority assemblies it had created in northern Kosovo in order to allow the integration of the Kosovo Serb minority into the general population. In response, the Kosovo parliament passed an amnesty law pardoning any past acts of resistance to Kosovo authorities in order to facilitate the integration of the Serb minority in the north into Kosovar society.<sup>22</sup>

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18 European Council, *Serbia is granted EU candidate status*, [http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms\\_data/docs/.../128445.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/.../128445.pdf) [access: 5.08.2016].

19 M. Szpala, *Joy overshadowed by crisis. Serbia has been granted EU candidate status*, Center for Eastern Studies, <http://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2012-03-07/joy-overshadowed-crisis-serbia-has-been-granted-eu-candidate-status> [access: 5.08.2016].

20 *Serbia and Kosovo sign historic agreement*, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/apr/30/serbia-kosovo-historic-agreement-brussels> [access: 6.08.2016]; *Serbia and Kosovo reach EU-brokered landmark accord*, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-22222624> [access: 6.08.2016].

21 *Ashton Says Serbia, Kosovo Reach Deal*, <http://www.rferl.org/content/eu-serbia-kosovo-talks/24962271.html> [access: 6.08.2016].

22 *Dacic: First the agreement and the EU accession*, <http://www.balkan.eu.com/dacic-agreement-eu-accession/> [access: 6.08.2016]; *Kosovo Parliament to Ratify EULEX Deal*, <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/eu-kosovo-deal-to-be-ratified-by-the-parliament> [access: 6.08.2016]; *Serbia Pulls Plug on North Kosovo Assemblies*, <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/belgrade-dismantles-north-kosovo-assemblies> [access: 6.08.2016]; *Kosovo President Approves Controversial Amnesty Law*, <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/kosovo-president-decrees-amnesty-law> [access: 6.08.2016].

Constructive implementation by both sides the Brussels Agreement initiated that the European Union decided to launch accession talks with Belgrade,<sup>23</sup> and to start with Kosovo the negotiations of the Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA).<sup>24</sup> And in December 2015, the European Union opened the first two of the thirty-five chapters in the accession negotiations with Serbia, namely Chapter 32 on financial control, and Chapter 35 on the normalization of relations with Kosovo.<sup>25</sup>

## **Challenges for the normalization of relations between Serbia and Kosovo**

The previous reaction of the European Union to the course of normalization in the relations between Serbia and Kosovo appears to indicate that the level of progress of Serbia with the EU will depend on building positive relations with Kosovo. The elected after parliamentary election in April 2016 government led by Prime Minister Aleksander Vučić declared to continue the pro-European politics of Serbia.<sup>26</sup> However, it seems the Serbian authorities are confronting some serious challenges in order to fulfill their political promises. The first of these is the unresolved dilemma of the political status of Kosovo. In the political scene there are visible dissonance and conflict with regard to determining a clear position on this issue. Serbian policy makers on the one hand are promoting a pro-European policy of dialogue with Kosovo which suggests that they are ready to acknowledge its independence, while concurrently in official statements they are emphasize that Kosovo is part of Serbia. In the opinion of Przemysław Pacuła, this ambiguous stance stems from the fact that *the waiver of the right to the province of symbolic meaning in the history of Serbia is a decision of great political weight.*<sup>27</sup> Pacuła explains that *despite the pro-European oriented environment understands the irreversibility of the secession of Kosovo and the need to settle the issue as a condition sine qua non for future accession to the European Union, although they do not want to incur the political costs of its*

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23 *EU to launch accession talks with Serbia in January*, [http://www.europeanforum.net/news/1832/eu\\_to\\_launch\\_accession\\_talks\\_with\\_serbia\\_in\\_january](http://www.europeanforum.net/news/1832/eu_to_launch_accession_talks_with_serbia_in_january) [access: 6.08.2016], *Serbia starts EU membership talks*, <https://euobserver.com/enlargement/122809> [access: 6.08.2016]

24 *EU starts the Stabilisation and Association Agreement negotiations with Kosovo*, [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_MEMO-13-938\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-13-938_en.htm) [access: 6.08.2016].

25 M. Szpala, *The European Union opens the first chapters in negotiations with Serbia*, <http://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2015-12-16/european-union-opens-first-chapters-negotiations-serbia> [access: 6.08.2016].

26 *Serbia's PM wins election in endorsement of pro-EU policy*, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/apr/24/serbs-vote-in-election-seen-as-test-of-pms-pro-eu-path> [access: 7.08.2016]; *Serbia election tests pro-EU course of PM Vucic*, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-36112451> [access: 7.08.2016].

27 P. Pacuła, *Kosowo: problem terażniejszości, wyzwania przyszłości...*, op. cit., p. 122.

*adoption*.<sup>28</sup> The solution of Kosovo's status hampers the contradiction in views between liberal and pro-European-oriented government, and the ultra-nationalist opposition rejects that integration with the EU, and demands closer ties with Russia. Strongly opposed the option of recognition of Kosovo is representing the conservative views President Tomislav Nikolić, who believes that any decision on the political status of Kosovo should be decided by referendum.<sup>29</sup> Nikolić expresses concern that achieve by Serbia membership in the European Union depends on the recognition of the independence of Kosovo, which he says: *I hope that the recognition (independence) Kosovo will never be a precondition for Serbia's accession to the European Union, but if it is a condition of our membership in the EU, they not have to accept us*.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, he stated that if during the accession negotiation process will occur situations that Serbia will be forced to recognize the independence of Kosovo, in this moment Serbia refuses to be the EU member, and will be the only country reformed by 34 (out of 35) of the accession negotiations chapters.<sup>31</sup>

A different opinion about recognizing the Kosovo's independence by Serbia is represented by the authorities in Pristina. In their view, Serbia has already been recognized Kosovo's sovereignty as witnessed by the signing on 26 August 2015 a series of agreements in key areas that include on energy, telecommunications, and the Association of Serbian Municipalities. This position presented the current president of Kosovo, Hasim Taci. He mentioned that *Serbia in a way recognized Kosovo as an independent state*.<sup>32</sup>

In that August agreement representatives of both governments have adopted detailed arrangements for strengthening the rights of the Serb minority in Kosovo, and laying down rules for the establishment of the Association of Serbian Municipalities.<sup>33</sup> The Kosovo opposition is

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28 Ibidem.

29 L. Norman, *Serbia President Says Won't Recognize Kosovo as Price to Join EU*, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052702303796404579101491658824468>, [access: 7.08.2016]; I. Nikolic, *Serbian President Demands Kosovo Referendum*, <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/serbian-president-calls-for-kosovo-referendum> [access: 7.08.2016].

30 *Serbia: Jeśli Kosowo jest warunkiem, nie muszą nas przyjmować do UE*, <http://balkanistyka.org/serbia-jesli-kosowo-jest-warunkiem-nie-musza-nas-przyjmowac-do-ue/> [access: 7.08.2016].

31 Ibidem.

32 *Four agreements signed during Kosovo talks round*, [http://www.b92.net/eng/news/politics.php?yyyy=2015&mm=08&dd=25&nav\\_id=95216](http://www.b92.net/eng/news/politics.php?yyyy=2015&mm=08&dd=25&nav_id=95216) [access: 7.08.2016].

33 The agreement provides broad authority and the association of ten municipalities inhabited by Serbs, which concern the areas of health, education, urban planning, and economic development. Further, it sets out that conducted by the Serbs, in these areas activities may be financed by Serbian authorities. Also Serbian and Kosovo government agree that Association of Serbian Municipalities will have their own institutions (president, council and assembly). See *Association Community of Serb majority municipalities in Kosovo – general principles main elements*, [eeas.europa.eu/statements-eeas/docs/150825\\_02\\_association](http://eeas.europa.eu/statements-eeas/docs/150825_02_association) [access: 8.08.2016]. See also: M.J. Warren,



against the adoption of this agreement by the parliament, therefore the implementation of the agreement has been suspended, and the problem of the status of the Serb minority in Kosovo remains unresolved. According to the Kosovo opposition this agreement giving too much freedom to the Serb minority, deprive Kosovo authorities control over the areas inhabited by the Serb minority, as well as preventing the efficient management of the state. In opposition view, implementing this agreement could lead to obtaining Serbia's control over Kosovo's internal policy. In order to prevent this situation representatives of the opposition repeatedly paralyzed the work of parliament by dissolving tear gas. At the request of the opposition part of the arrangements was contested by the Kosovo Constitutional Court, which found that some of the provisions of the agreement are inconsistent with the Kosovo constitution. Also Kosovo Albanians supported the opposition by organizing a series of demonstrations against implementation of this agreement.<sup>34</sup>

For constructive resolve, this ongoing dispute between the Kosovo government and the opposition waits on a Serb minority in Kosovo. They expect that an establishment of the Association of Serbian Municipalities will stabilize and normalize their life, give them a sense of security, both economic and personal, and lead them to preserve their national identity. Currently, the Serbian minority is in a difficult political situation, because representing the Serbian state institutions in Kosovo have been dissolved by the Brussels Agreement, and in their place there has not been established useful counterparts. Moreover, functioning Kosovo institutions are not prepared for the integration of Serbs into society while preserving their national identity.<sup>35</sup> To end the dispute over establishing the Association of Serbian Municipalities, it is needed the preparation of numbers implementing legal acts. Further extending this dispute causes a block to the deployment of other, already adopted agreements. This continues to generate increased tensions between the Serbs and Kosovo Albanians.

For dynamics of the integration process of Serbia with the European Union a significant impact could have the lack of a clear interpretation by the Serbs and Kosovo government on the

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A. Zeqiri, *Decentralization or Destabilization? Striking an Ethnic Balance in the Balkans*, <https://theglobalobservatory.org/2016/07/kosovo-serbian-minority-decentralization-balkans/> [access: 8.08.2016].

<sup>34</sup>*Kosovo Opposition Builds Resistance to Brussels Agreements*, <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/kosovo-opposition-swell-ranks-against-brussels-agreements-01-12-2016#sthash.dHnVGVne.dpuf> [access: 8.08.2016]; *Kosovo, Serbia Failing to Implement Normalisation Deal*, <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/kosovo-serbia-failing-to-implement-normalisation-deal-12-01-2015> [access: 8.08.2016]; G. Delauney, *Why Kosovo's opposition MPs are tear-gassing parliament*, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34986909> [access: 8.08.2016].

<sup>35</sup> *Kosowo: Serbowie dalej czekają na utworzenie Związku Gmin Serbskich*, <http://balkanistyka.org/kosowo-serbowie-dalej-czekaja-na-utworzenie-zwiazku-gmin-serbskich/> [access: 8.08.2016].

arrangements of personal ID-cards. The debate about this issue was started at a time when Kosovo's authorities decided to close the border to residents of Kosovo who use Serbian parallel structures' issued ID-cards.<sup>36</sup> The decision sparked a series of protests of the Serb minority in Kosovo. After a difficult negotiations mediated by the European Union representatives, delegations of Belgrade and Pristina worked out a solution to monitoring traffic on the Serbian-Kosovo border. However, both parties in differing ways presented the outcome of this agreement, which raised some doubts how it could be implemented. Kosovo Minister for Dialogue Edita Tahiri, said that the European Union has introduced a transitional period for the cancellation of Serbian documents, and during this time the Serbs living in Kosovo must apply for their Kosovar counterparts. While the director of the Serbian government's Office for Kosovo and Metohija Marko Djurić denies this information, stating that the Serbian identity cards will continue to apply in the territory of Kosovo.<sup>37</sup>

Other issue stimulating the growth of tension in relations between Serbia and Kosovo is planned by the Serbian authorities to build the so-called settlement *Sunny Valley* for Serbs returning to Kosovo. The settlement is going to be built in the north of Kosovo and Metohija, between Kosovska Mitrovica, and Zvečan. It will be a place of residence for 1500 people. The project is a joint venture of the Serbian government, the Office for Kosovo, and Metohija, the Serbian Orthodox Church, and members of the local Serbs administration in Kosovo. Its implementation involves besides help Serbs return to Kosovo also assistance them in finding employment.<sup>38</sup> In the opinion of Marko Djurić the director of the Serbian Office for Kosovo and Metohija this project is a historic step that will enable the return Serbs to Kosovo, particularly Serbs who had to leave the region after end of the war in Kosovo in 1999. Instead the Prime Minister of Kosovo Isa Mustafa argues, that the project does not have legal permits to be carried out, therefore the construction of settlement will not be allowed to continue. Also some of Albanian media in Kosovo have strongly objected to build housing for Serbs, and have described

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36 *Kosovo bans usage of Serbian parallel ID cards*, <http://prishtinainsight.com/kosovo-bans-usage-serbian-parallel-id-cards/> [access: 9.08.2016].

37 *Kosowo: Nie będzie jednak blokady granic*, <http://balkanistyka.org/kosowo-nie-bedzie-jednak-blokady-granic/> [access: 9.08.2016].

38 *Kosovo Vows to Halt Serb Refugee Settlement*, <http://www.pravoslavie.ru/english/94932.htm> [access: 10.08.2016]; *“Słoneczna dolina” – projekt budowy osiedla dla Serbów wracających do Kosowa*, <http://balkanistyka.org/sloneczna-dolina-projekt-budowy-osiedla-dla-serbow-wracajacych-do-kosowa/> [access: 10.08.2016].

the move as a neo-colonial attempt by Belgrade to consolidate its influence over the Serb-majority in north Kosovo.<sup>39</sup>

It should be mentioned as well that the progress of normalization the Serbia-Kosovo relations, and advanced in the process of Serbia's accession to the European Union may be affected by recently closer ties between Serbian and Russia in area of military cooperation. Both parties signed in May 2016 plan of military cooperation which included purchasing from Russia new equipment for the Serbian army, and upgrading the Russian arms previously purchased by the Serbs. Further, there has been the establishment in Belgrade a center for the repair and maintenance of helicopters produced in Russia. Additionally, the opening of the production line of Russian weapons in Serbia, technological support, and further cooperation on the creation of the Serbian-Russian humanitarian center in Nis.<sup>40</sup>

The West may perceive the cooperation of Serbia with Russia as an *ambiguous signal sent to Europe* by the Serbians, especially after having imposed sanctions on Russia in response to its aggressive policy towards Ukraine. Because of this Belgrad can potentially lose its credibility as a stable partner for the European Union. The Serbian Prime Minister Aleksandar Vučić assurances that the purchase of Russian weapons is not related to the *reinforcement of Serbia*, but are intended for ensuring security in the face of *the reinforcement of Croatia by NATO*. Despite this, the Western perceives in Serbia's new rapprochement with Russia a potential and on-going threat to the stability and security of the Balkans region.<sup>41</sup> Also, the closer cooperation of Serbia with Russia indicates that it is possible by Serbian government could change its geopolitical orientation, and perilously turn toward a further strengthening of a strategic relationships with Moscow. This may happen in a situation when the accession conditions set by the European Union will be too harsh, namely when the EU will increase pressure on the Serbian authorities to accept Kosovo's independence.

Serbia on the long road to the European Union integration have support of Poland. The Polish authorities have expressed frequently acknowledgment for Serbia's political reforms to

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39 *Kosovo Vows to Halt Serb Refugee Settlement*, op. cit.

40 *Serbsko-rosyjska współpraca wojskowa w kontekście „balkańskiej zimnej wojny”*, <http://balkanistyka.org/serbsko-rosyjska-wspolpraca-wojskowa-w-kontekscie-balkańskiej-zimnej-wojny/> [access: 10.08.2016]; S. Ramani, *Why Serbia is Strengthening its Alliance with Russia*, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/samuel-ramani/why-russia-is-tightening-\\_b\\_9218306.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/samuel-ramani/why-russia-is-tightening-_b_9218306.html) [access: 10.08.2016].

41 *Ibidem*; I. Jovanovic, *Serbian Military Drill With Russia Annoys EU*, <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/eu-opposes-to-serbia-s-military-drills-with-russia-08-18-2015-1> [access: 10.08.2016].

speed up the integration process. Also, Poland is continuing this endorsement during the ongoing Polish Presidency of the European Union.<sup>42</sup> In view of the Prime Minister Alexander Vučić, Serbia can take advantage of the Polish experience in the accession process to the EU, especially in the field of economy and foreign investment.<sup>43</sup>

## Conclusions

Serbia is faces a numerous of challenges on the threshold of entry into the European Union, which regulation may have a significant impact on the degree of advancement of the process to become an EU member. The fundamental issue, that brings so much political and social tension, is the unresolved political status of Kosovo. The European Union insists that the matter should be finally disbanded prior to the official accession Serbia to the EU. The members of European Union appears to be hoping that the problem will be resolved during negotiations process between Belgrade and Pristina conducted under the auspices of EU representative.

However, during the negotiations process new problems emerge which becomes a new strategic challenges for Serbia in the integration process. A number of controversies bring up the establishing the Association of Serbian Municipalities, the recognition of ID-cards or construction of the settlements for returning Serbs to northern Kosovo and Metohija. Moreover, the future course of the process of Serbia's accession to the European Union may decide observed rapprochement of Serbia and Russia in the area of military cooperation, which arouses concern of the EU as well as NATO for the stability and security of the Balkan region.

The complexity and difficulties of these challenges meet Serbia in the integration process with the European Union requires more time frame to resolve these problems, yet that can also lead to delays of Serbia in closing the accession process. It appears there is a potential way of accelerating the Serbia's integration process through a renegotiation with the European Union the conditions regarding of Chapter 35 on normalization of relations with Kosovo.

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42 *Talks on Serbia's European Integration*, [http://www.msz.gov.pl/en/news/talks\\_on\\_serbia\\_s\\_european\\_integration](http://www.msz.gov.pl/en/news/talks_on_serbia_s_european_integration) [access: 11.08.2016]; *Nikolic, Vucic thanked Tusk for the support of Poland*, <http://inserbia.info/today/2013/06/polish-prime-minister-in-visit-to-belgrade-on-june-10/> [access: 11.08.2016].

43 *Serbia: prezydent Tomislav Nikolić žegna ambasadora Polski*, <http://balkanistyka.org/serbia-prezydent-tomislav-nikolic-zegna-ambasadora-polski/> [access: 10.08.2016]. See also *Poland - a good Example in the Implementation of Reforms and Use of EU Funds*, <http://www.seio.gov.rs/news.101.html?newsid=1913> [access: 10.08.2016].