

THE DIVERGENT FOREIGN POLICY PATHS OF SERBIA AND MONTENEGRO AFTER 2006

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Abstract

The foreign policy strategies of Serbia and Montenegro have developed separately since 2006 and the collapse of the state union, reflecting their unique political, economic, and social contexts. Although both countries share a common historical and cultural heritage, their divergent foreign policy paths have been shaped by different priorities, geopolitical positions, and relationships with major powers. Accordingly, this paper aims to explore the divergent approaches to conducting foreign policy, analysing key differences in the relations of Serbia and Montenegro with major international actors such as the EU, NATO, the USA, Russia, and China. Special attention is given to regional issues, particularly the status of the southern Serbian province (Kosovo and Metohija), as well as internal and external factors that have influenced the shaping of these divergent paths. The main objective of this paper is to scientifically examine and analyse the differences in the foreign policy orientations of Serbia and Montenegro, based on available academic sources and literature.

Key words: Serbia, Montenegro, foreign policy, Kosovo, great powers.

ДИВЕРГЕНТНИ СПОЉНОПОЛИТИЧКИ ПУТЕВИ СРБИЈЕ И ЦРНЕ ГОРЕ НАКОН 2006. ГОДИНЕ

Апстракт

Спољнополитичке стратегије Србије и Црне Горе развијале су се засебно након 2006. године и краха државне заједнице, одражавајући њихове јединствене политичке, економске и друштвене контексте. Иако обе државе деле заједничко историјско и културно наслеђе, њихови различити путеви у спољној политици обликовани су другачијим приоритетима, геополитичким положајима и односима са великим силама. Сходно томе, овај рад има за циљ да истражи дивергентне приступе у вођењу спољне политике, уз анализу кључних разлика у

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односима Србије и Црне Горе са најзначајнијим међународним актерима, попут ЕУ, НАТО, САД, Русије и Кине. Значајна пажња посвећена је регионалним питањима, посебно статусу јужне српске покрајине (Косова и Метохије) као и унутрашњим и спољашњим факторима који су утицали на обликовање дивергентних путева. Основни циљ рада садржан је у томе да се са научног аспекта сагледају и анализирају разлике у спољнополитичким оријентацијама Србије и Црне Горе, заснованим на доступним научним изворима и академској литератури.

Кључне речи: Србија, Црна Гора, спољна политика, Косово, велике силе.

INTRODUCTION

The dissolution of the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro in 2006 marked a key turning point, allowing both countries to independently articulate and conduct their foreign policies. From that moment on, despite their shared historical heritage and geographical proximity, Belgrade and Podgorica have demonstrated differing approaches to international relations and strategic orientations.

An analysis of available sources and previous research points to a clear divergence in strategic directions. According to some analyses, Montenegro adopted a relatively consistent foreign policy course focused on full integration into Euro-Atlantic structures, the European Union, and NATO (Đukanović, 2020, p. 98). This foreign policy approach views membership in these organisations as a key guarantor of national security, stability, and economic prosperity.

In contrast to that, Serbia has developed a more complex foreign policy strategy, often described as a multi-vector policy, or a 'balancing policy' between different centres of power, the European Union, the Russian Federation, the United States of America, and the People's Republic of China (Proroković, 2017, p. 416). At the end of 2007, it declared military neutrality (Resolution, 2007, point 6), thus distancing itself from formal membership in military alliances such as NATO (Savić, 2018, p. 124; Lazić, 2025, p. 14).

This multi-vector approach arises from Serbia's specific geopolitical position, historical circumstances, and perception of national interests, but it also brings challenges in maintaining coherence and credibility on the international stage due to the changing geopolitical landscape (Jović-Lazić, Lađevac, 2023, p. 46).

After the split with Montenegro, Serbia continued to pursue EU membership as its primary strategic goal. Soon after, it established a foreign policy concept based on 'four pillars,' simultaneously maintaining traditionally close relations with both Eastern and Western countries. In this context, the proclaimed 'pillars of Serbia's foreign policy' are important postulates that cannot be tied to a single government or individual actors (Petrović, Đukanović, 2012, p. 15). However, the foreign policy of

the Republic of Serbia, often described as a policy of ‘balancing’ or ‘sitting on multiple chairs,’ is frequently a subject of various debates.

Although committed to EU membership, Serbia maintains close ties with the Russian Federation, particularly regarding support in the UN Security Council on the issue of resolving the status of its Southern province (Kosovo and Metohija) and cooperation in the field of energy. At the same time, it is also committed to deepening its partnership with the People’s Republic of China.¹ The key and most sensitive element of Serbia’s foreign policy is the issue of Kosovo and Metohija, where Belgrade insists on finding a compromise solution while preserving its national interests. This issue is particularly emphasised in the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia (Constitution of RS, 2006) and the National Security Strategy (NSS, 2009, 2019). In parallel, Serbia formally maintains a position of military neutrality, rejecting membership in military alliances such as NATO, but cooperates with the Alliance through the Partnership for Peace program.² Domestic political factors, public opinion, and economic dependence on various partners further complicate and shape these foreign policy choices.

On the other hand, following its independence, Montenegro adopted an unequivocally pro-Western course. Its key foreign policy success was joining the NATO alliance in 2017, which Podgorica views as a guarantee of sovereignty and security. Integration into the European Union represents the second pillar of its foreign policy. In this regard, Montenegro has made significant progress in the negotiation process, although in recent years it has faced more serious challenges. Unlike Serbia, it has largely aligned its foreign and security policy with the EU’s common policy, including the imposition of sanctions on Russia (Proroković, 2018, p. 747). Although there are significant internal divisions regarding national identity and relations with Serbia and Russia, the official foreign policy orientation remains firmly directed toward Euro-Atlantic structures. In the economic context, the country relies on investments from the EU and other Western countries, particularly in the tourism sector.

¹ The strategic partnership relations between the Republic of Serbia and the People’s Republic of China, established in 2009, were further deepened in 2013 and subsequently elevated to the level of a comprehensive strategic partnership in June 2016. Serbia attaches great importance to cooperation with the People’s Republic of China within the framework of the cooperation mechanism between China and the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, as well as through the ‘Belt and Road’ initiative. The relations between the two countries are characterised by an intensive political dialogue and the exchange of visits at high and the highest political levels. <https://www.mfa.gov.rs/spoljnopolitika/bilateralna-saradnja/kina> (retrieved on March 15, 2025);

² The Partnership for Peace (PfP) program is a NATO initiative launched in 1994, aimed at strengthening trust and cooperation between the Alliance and other countries. The Republic of Serbia formally joined the Partnership for Peace program in mid-December 2006 by signing the Framework Document at NATO Headquarters in Brussels;

Historical Context: Diverging Paths

Understanding the divergent paths of the foreign policies of Serbia and Montenegro after 2006 requires an analysis of the historical context that immediately preceded and conditioned their separation. The period prior to the full independence of both states was marked by the existence of a joint state structure, the character and evolution of which laid the foundations for later differences in strategic orientations (Kim, 2006, p. 3).

Following the breakup of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY), Serbia and Montenegro formed the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) at the end of April 1992. This state entity functioned throughout the turbulent 1990s, a period marked by wars, international sanctions, and isolation. At the beginning of the 21st century, under significant international influence and the mediation of the European Union, which only seemingly advocated for regional stabilisation, a process of redefining the relationship between the two federal units began.

The result of these efforts was the Belgrade Agreement and the establishment of the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro in February 2003. This transformation did not merely represent a change of name but was an attempt to create more functional relations within a loosely defined state-legal structure. A key element of the Belgrade Agreement, which fundamentally predetermined the future of both member states, was the clause explicitly allowing each member state (Serbia and Montenegro) to initiate a procedure for changing its state-legal status after a minimum period of three years. This change could include the option of attaining full independence through the organisation of a democratic referendum (Kim, 2006, p. 4). The State Union thus had an embedded mechanism for its own dissolution, making it an inherently transitional entity.

The option provided by the Belgrade Agreement served the Montenegrin political leadership in exercising the right to secession. The referendum on independence held on May 21, 2006, marked the culmination of years of internal political processes and intense debates within Montenegrin society (Džankić, 2014, p. 173). This culmination was largely influenced by the position of the most powerful Western countries. The debates, which had intensified over the previous decade, revolved around fundamental questions of national identity, statehood, and defining the most favourable strategy for Montenegro's future. These debates manifested in clear political polarisation between the pro-sovereignty bloc, which advocated for full independence and accelerated Euro-Atlantic integration, and the unionist bloc, which favoured remaining in a joint state with Serbia. The referendum held in May 2006, in which independence was voted for "by a narrow and questionable majority and numerous irregularities" (Proroković, 2018, p. 744; Petrović & Đukanović, 2012, p. 13), marked the definitive end of the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro. This act not only gave rise to two new sovereign states in the West-

ern Balkans but also definitively opened the space for Belgrade and Podgorica to formulate and implement fully independent foreign policies.

The dissolution of the State Union found Serbia and Montenegro with different starting positions and priorities, which significantly influenced the shaping of their respective foreign policy agendas. For the sovereignist elite led by Milo Đukanović, the very act of gaining independence was inseparable from the goal of rapid integration into Euro-Atlantic structures, namely NATO and the EU. Independence was therefore seen as a prerequisite for achieving this vision. It implied freeing Montenegro from the foreign policy constraints imposed by the joint state, including the burden of unresolved issues such as Kosovo and Metohija and Serbia's complex relations with key Western actors.

On the other hand, Serbia, as the legal successor of the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro, continued its path toward the European Union, a process formally initiated as early as 2003. However, its foreign policy agenda has remained predominantly burdened by the issue of Kosovo and Metohija. The recognition of the so-called 'state of Kosovo' has been emphasised as a key obstacle and condition for progress toward EU membership. Lacking greater understanding from its Western partners regarding this issue, Serbia has turned to seeking support from major powers such as Russia and China.

In the contemporary international environment, marked by increasing multipolarity, relations with key global actors, both from the East and the West, have had a decisive influence on the formulation and implementation of the foreign policies of both Serbia and Montenegro. These established international relations inherently generate various forms of political pressure, but also leave, at least partially, room for manoeuvre for two states. Taking into consideration that, in addition to internal determinants, which, according to relevant theoretical frameworks (Vukadinović, 1970, p. 19), have a decisive impact on the shaping of state foreign policies, other factors also play a significant role, primarily the relationships with the most influential states on the global stage (Vukonjanski, Sekulović, 2019, p. 1175). In this context, a more detailed analysis of the formulation and implementation of Serbia's and Montenegro's foreign policy actions, in relation to Western and Eastern centres of power, will be presented in the following sections of this paper.

Foreign Policies Toward Western Centres of Power (EU and NATO)

As already mentioned, after the disintegration of the State Union, Serbia and Montenegro embarked on independent foreign policy paths. Despite their shared past, Belgrade and Podgorica demonstrated different approaches to key international actors and integration processes, primarily toward the EU and NATO.

After gaining independence, Montenegro adopted a foreign policy course whose foundations were firmly rooted in a pro-Western orientation (Đukanović, 2020, p. 98). The key goals were integration into the EU and NATO. This was a strategic imperative to ensure long-term security and economic prosperity through institutional ties with Western structures. The culmination of this orientation was Montenegro's accession to NATO in June 2017. This move faced strong opposition from Russia, which considered the expansion of NATO in the Balkans as disrupting the previously established geopolitical balance. Additionally, the accession also triggered internal divisions within Montenegro. Given the opposition from a segment of the population, particularly within the Montenegrin and Serbian communities, the authorities in Podgorica did not organise a referendum on that matter (Proković, 2018, p. 748).

Despite these challenges, Montenegro formalised its membership in the European security system through NATO membership. At the same time, the goal of EU membership remained a central foreign policy objective. For this reason, the EU is perceived as a key partner for economic development and democratic consolidation. For Montenegro, the strategic choices were not separate but complementary aspects of Euro-Atlantic integration. The United States provided crucial support for Montenegro's path to Atlantic integration, seeing it as primarily in their interest to strengthen their position in this part of the Balkan region. Their partnership is based on shared values and interests, including the promotion of democracy, the fight against terrorism, and ensuring stability in the region. U.S. support also extends to Montenegro's European integration process. In this way, Washington is a key ally of Podgorica in its pro-Western course.

Serbia's foreign policy after 2006 and the breakup with Montenegro is significantly more complex and characterised by ambivalence toward Western integration, a strategy of balancing between different centres of power, and the significant influence of the unresolved issue of Kosovo and Metohija (Lazić, 2025, p. 15). EU membership represents a strategic commitment for Serbia. However, the accession process has been slowed down and burdened by political conditionality, primarily related to the normalisation of relations between Belgrade and Pristina. Additionally, the normalisation process itself has been delayed, as the provisional Pristina institutions have not implemented the agreements reached in Brussels since 2013 regarding the formation of the Community of Serbian Municipalities. The conditionality has made the path to the EU for Serbia more uncertain and more related to political challenges compared to Montenegro. Serbia's attitude toward the NATO alliance has been somewhat distanced and determined by military neutrality, although since 2006 Serbia has been developing cooperation with the alliance through the Partnership for Peace program.

This relationship directly arises from historical heritage, namely the conflict in Kosovo in 1999 and the unlawful bombing of the FRY.

Unlike Montenegro, which saw NATO membership as a security guarantee, Serbia perceives NATO through the prism of that conflict, which has resulted in a policy of military neutrality and the absence of aspirations for membership. Although Serbia maintains diplomatic relations with the United States and seeks to elevate them to a higher level, they are inevitably coloured by its overall foreign policy strategy of balancing between the West and Russia (Konitzer, 2011, p. 103), as well as its complex relationship with the NATO alliance. The United States recognised the independence of the so-called 'Republic of Kosovo,' but at the same time supports the dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina, as well as Serbia's European path in principle. The absence of a more consistent alignment of Serbia within the Western security framework and its close relations with Russia make its relationship with Washington more complex than Montenegro's, which has more clearly defined strategic interests with the U.S., particularly in the domain of regional security.

Foreign Policies Toward Eastern Centres of Power (Russia and China)

The analysis of the foreign policy strategies of Serbia and Montenegro after 2006 reveals significant divergences, not only in their relations with Euro-Atlantic integrations but also in their approach toward key actors in the East, Russia and China. While Serbia actively nurtures and deepens its ties with Moscow and Beijing as part of its balancing policy, Montenegro, due to its fully pro-Western orientation, has a much more reserved and complex relationship with these two countries, particularly with Russia.

Serbia has developed and maintains strong and multifaceted relations with the Russian Federation in the form of a strategic partnership. This includes political, economic, and military cooperation, based both on shared cultural, religious and historical ties (Vukomanović, 2024, p. 2) and on specific mutual interests. Political support from Russia for Serbia is of particular importance in disputing Kosovo's independence (Velov, Debeljaković, 2018, p. 173; Jović-Lazić, Lađevac, 2023, p. 50). Economic cooperation is also significant, particularly in the energy sector due to securing energy security. Serbia is one of the few European countries that has not imposed sanctions on Russia (Proković, 2017, p. 416). The pro-Russian vector represents a key element of Serbia's foreign policy strategy, which aims at balancing between the West and the East (Konitzer, 2011, p. 103), allowing Belgrade, according to its own perception, to retain greater autonomy in foreign policy actions. At the same time, in recent years, Serbia has significantly deepened its economic and political ties with the People's Republic of China. This cooperation is manifested primarily through large Chinese investments in infrastructure (Proković, 2018, p. 616-623) and other projects within the Belt and Road Initiative (Todorović, Mrdaković, 2021, p. 671). The rapprochement with China further strength-

ens Serbia's multi-vector foreign policy approach, positioning China as another important pillar alongside the EU, Russia, and the U.S.

Unlike Serbia, Montenegro's foreign policy does not emphasise developing deeper ties with Russia and China. Although it maintains diplomatic relations with both countries, the level of engagement is noticeably lower and conditioned by its primary strategic orientation toward the West, membership in NATO and the aspiration to join the EU (Đukanović, 2020, p. 98). The relationship with Russia is particularly indicative of this dynamic. Historically, Russia was a key partner for Montenegro, with deep cultural, religious, and political ties that spanning centuries. However, after the decision to join NATO, relations deteriorated dramatically. Russia openly criticised Montenegro's membership in the Alliance, considering it an act that undermines regional geopolitical balance. Tensions culminated in accusations by Montenegrin authorities that Russian intelligence services were involved in a 2016 attempted coup aimed at preventing NATO accession (Spasojević, 2024, p. 20). Although these accusations were rejected by Moscow, they further strained bilateral relations and positioned Montenegro within the broader context of geopolitical rivalry between the West and Russia. Despite these tensions, Montenegro remained resolute in its commitment to Western integration. Regarding cooperation with China, Montenegro maintains diplomatic relations, but its involvement in Chinese initiatives, such as infrastructure projects, is significantly smaller in scale compared to Serbia and is always viewed through the lens of alignment with EU and NATO priorities.

Regional Policy and the Approach to the Issue of Kosovo and Metohija

In addition to the fundamental differences in orientation toward key global actors and Euro-Atlantic integrations, the foreign policies of Serbia and Montenegro show a deep divergence in their approach to the Kosovo issue, as well as in the articulation and implementation of regional policy. On the one hand, the issue of Kosovo and Metohija is a central state and national issue for Serbia, defining a large part of its foreign policy agenda. On the other hand, Montenegro has adopted a more pragmatic stance aligned with its Western orientation. Accordingly, their roles and approaches in regional cooperation reflect different strategic priorities and perceptions of their own position in the Western Balkans.

The official stance of the Republic of Serbia on the status of Kosovo and Metohija is based on the principles of territorial integrity and sovereignty, fundamental postulates of international law. This position is grounded in the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia, historical narratives affirming the continuity of statehood and the presence of the Serbian people in that area and it is also supported by significant domestic political consensus on this issue, rejecting the legitimacy of the unilaterally declared independence. However, the implementation of this policy takes

place in a complex international context, where the so-called 'Republic of Kosovo' is recognised by a significant number of countries, including most European Union member states and the United States. This situation represents a constant challenge for Serbia's foreign policy and is often identified as one of the key obstacles in the development of its relations with Western partners, particularly in the process of European integration.

The Republic of Serbia faces constant political and diplomatic pressures aimed at accepting the secession of Kosovo and normalising relations with official Pristina, which significantly shapes its foreign policy agenda and manoeuvring space on the international stage. The dialogue under the EU's auspices aims to reach a comprehensive agreement, but progress has been slow and burdened by frequent crises. The decision not to recognise the unilaterally declared independence of the so-called 'Republic of Kosovo' more strongly ties Serbia to the support of the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China in the UN Security Council and other international forums (Konitzer, 2011, p. 103).

Moreover, the issue of recognising Kosovo has a direct impact on Serbia's relations with neighbouring countries in the Western Balkans, including Montenegro. Given that most of Serbia's neighbours, except for Romania and Bosnia and Herzegovina, have recognised Kosovo's independence, this issue burdens bilateral relations and, to a certain extent, complicates regional cooperation and stabilisation processes in Southeast Europe.

The Montenegrin government, led by Milo Đukanović, with the support of Western mentors, recognised Kosovo's independence in October 2008. In doing so, it stirred up the domestic political scene. The most intense reactions came from pro-Serbian parties and the Serbian population in Montenegro, who saw such a political move as a betrayal of the traditional brotherly nation. This act further cooled already very poor relations with Serbia. The authorities in Montenegro explained this policy as motivated by pragmatism and alignment with the views of Montenegro's key Western partners, the USA and leading EU members, and as a confirmation of its Euro-Atlantic orientation (Đukanović, 2020, p. 98). In official statements, the Montenegrin side emphasised the key motives for recognition as contributing to regional stability, improving mutual trust, and resolving open issues in the region. After the initial act of recognition, the establishment of full diplomatic relations aimed at further developing bilateral cooperation, which further strained relations with Serbia. Despite this, certain issues, such as border demarcation, retained the potential to initiate occasional political debates between the two sides.

When it comes to regional relations in a broader context, although both countries participate in these initiatives, their roles and approaches differ significantly. Due to its size, geographical position, and economic potential, Serbia is often perceived as a central actor in the Balkans. Montenegro, as a smaller country and a NATO member, primarily shapes its

regional policy through the lens of Euro-Atlantic integration. Montenegro has already made its foreign policy choice, with NATO membership and a focus on the EU. It aligns its regional policy with the principles of good neighbourliness within the EU perspective, while Serbia's approach to this policy is burdened by historical heritage and an open territorial issue.

Additionally, their security policies significantly differ in regional positioning. Montenegro builds its security policy through NATO membership, while Serbia does so through the prism of military neutrality. These differences are not merely technical but reflect divergent views on their own place in the region and the international community. Regional cooperation in the Western Balkans, despite various initiatives, is currently limited in scope (Đukanović, 2015, p. 355). These divergent views decisively influence their bilateral relations, particularly regarding the resolution of the Kosovo-Metohija issue, as well as the dynamics of relations with international partners.

*The Limitations of Structural Realism:
the Case of Serbia and Montenegro*

The empirical example of Serbia and Montenegro, as two neighbouring countries that, despite significant historical, cultural, and geographical similarities, as well as comparable structural positions as small states in the Balkans, pursue diametrically opposite foreign policies, presents a challenge to the fundamental tenets of the theory of structural realism. According to this influential theoretical school, states in similar structural circumstances within an anarchic international system should, under the pressure of systemic factors such as the distribution of power and the 'security dilemma,' exhibit convergent patterns of behaviour aimed at maximising their own security (Simić, 2002, pp. 66-67).

However, the divergent paths of Belgrade and Podgorica, primarily manifested through Montenegro's membership in the North Atlantic Alliance (NATO) versus the proclaimed policy of military neutrality of the Republic of Serbia, as well as Montenegro's full alignment with the European Union's Common Foreign and Security Policy compared to Serbia's strategic commitment to balancing relations with various global centres of power, provide significant arguments that challenge the exclusive application of structuralist explanations in analysing state behaviour. This divergence supports the arguments of critics of structural realism (Desch, 1998, p. 167), who argue that state behaviour is not always, nor exclusively, determined by stimuli arising from the international structure (Stajić, Lazić, 2015, p. 27).

Furthermore, the fact that such fundamental foreign policy decisions are predominantly influenced by other elements, such as domestic political dynamics, the perceptions and preferences of ruling elites, different interpretations of national interest and identity, as well as historical legacy, further supports the analytical value of alternative theoretical

frameworks. Specifically, this case study strongly supports the validity of approaches such as neoclassical realism, which emphasises the role of domestic factors as ‘intervening variables’ that mediate between systemic pressures and specific foreign policy outcomes (Ripsman, Taliaferro, Lobell, 2016, p. 59). The analysis of Serbia and Montenegro’s foreign policies thus suggests that a complete understanding of their choices requires considering the complex interaction between the international environment and the specificities of the states themselves.

*The Issue of Identity and the Position
of the Serbian Community in Montenegro*

Based on the results of the referendum held in May 2006, Montenegro became an independent state. With the adoption of the Constitution in 2007, it officially declared itself as an “independent and sovereign state with a republican form of government,” as well as a “civil, democratic, ecological, and social justice state” (Constitution of Montenegro, 2007, Article 1). According to constitutional provisions, the official language is Montenegrin, while both Cyrillic and Latin scripts are equal. Serbian, Bosnian, Albanian, and Croatian are also used in official communications. During the Montenegrin independence process, the Serbian community in Montenegro exhibited significant resistance, articulating concerns regarding the formalisation of its legal and political status and expressing opposition to perceived policies of forced assimilation. That reaction intensified in 2008 with the recognition of Kosovo’s independence and the establishment of full diplomatic relations between official Podgorica and Pristina.

Further tensions were caused in 2017 by Montenegro’s accession to the NATO alliance, as well as the adoption of the Law on Freedom of Religion at the end of 2019, without any public dialogue on the issue or agreement with the Cetinje Metropolitanate of the Serbian Orthodox Church (Raduski, 2020, p. 45). The law caused mass protests from both the Serbian community and, in part, the Montenegrin population. Organised protests included several days of religious processions with the slogan “We will not give up the holy sites.” This crisis also had serious implications for the fragile diplomatic relations between the two countries. The specific reason for the mass protests was the provisions of the Law on Freedom of Religion, which foresaw the nationalisation of church property for which no proof of ownership existed prior to 1918 (Raduski, 2020, p. 46).

With the political changes that took place after the parliamentary elections in 2020 and the ending of the Democratic Party of Socialists and Milo Djukanović from power, these relations began to improve to some extent, but the process is still moving very slow. The Fundamental Agreement signed in early August 2022 between Montenegro and the Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC) in Podgorica guarantees the ownership of church properties and assets of the SOC in the country (Fundamental Agreement, 2022).

At the end of 2023, a population and property census were conducted in Montenegro. According to the results of the census, Montenegro has a population of 623,633 people. Of this number, Montenegrins make up 256,436 or 41.12%, Serbs 205,370 or 32.93%, Bosniaks 58,956 or 9.45%, Albanians 30,978 or 4.97%, Russians 12,824 or 2.06%, and Muslims 10,162 or 1.63%, while other nationalities make up less than 1% of the population. In the same census, regarding religious structure, 443,394 or 71.10% of the population identified as Orthodox Christian, 124,668 or 19.99% as Muslim, 20,408 or 3.27% as Catholic, and 14,260 or 2.29% as atheists. As for the linguistic structure, census data shows that 269,307 or 43.18% of people declared Serbian as their mother tongue. Montenegrin is the mother tongue for 215,299 or 34.52%, Bosnian for 43,470 or 6.97%, Albanian for 32,725 or 5.25%, Russian for 14,731 or 2.36%, and Serbo-Croatian is the mother tongue for 12,999 or 2.08%. Of the total population registered in Montenegro, 271,422 or 43.52% stated that they regularly speak Serbian, 225,956 people or 36.23% speak Montenegrin, 41,636 or 6.68% speak Bosnian, 27,979 or 4.49% speak Albanian, 13,783 or 2.21% speak Russian, and 9,421 or 1.51% speak Serbo-Croatian (Statistical Office of Montenegro - MONSTAT, 2024).

Regardless of the different paths taken after the separation in 2006, the results of the census will certainly play a significant role in addressing identity issues and the position of the Serbian nationality in Montenegro. Participation in power at all levels will contribute to improving their status and will also give a significant boost to improving overall relations between the two countries and establishing better conditions for regional cooperation. Certainly, this will not change official positions in their foreign policies, but there are indications that it may bring them somewhat closer, given their shared historical heritage and the ongoing geopolitical realignments.

CONCLUSION

The foreign policy orientations of Serbia and Montenegro without any doubt indicate divergent political paths after dissolution of the state union in 2006. Montenegro made a clear strategic choice to align itself with Western institutions, successfully achieving NATO membership and maintaining EU integration as a key priority, with strong support from the United States, while also facing opposition from Russia and internal contradictions and political divisions. Serbia, on the other hand, pursues a more complex and ambivalent foreign policy of ‘balancing,’ attempting to maintain good relations with both the West and the East. Its path to the EU has been slowed and conditioned primarily by the normalisation of relations and the recognition of the so-called ‘Republic of Kosovo,’ as well as the war in Ukraine and sanctions imposed on Russia. Its relationship with NATO is burdened by the past and expressed through the pro-

claimed military neutrality. In contrast, Serbia finds support for resolving the status of its southern province from Eastern partners, permanent members of the UN Security Council, Russia and China. This strategy allows Serbia a certain degree of foreign policy autonomy, but it can also generate perceptions of inconsistency among key international partners.

The existence of diametrically opposed foreign policies of the two neighbouring countries, which share a common historical heritage, supports the arguments of critics of structural realism that state behaviour is not always determined by stimuli arising from the structure of the international system. Moreover, the fact that such foreign policy decisions are clearly influenced by other factors, in addition to these structural elements, strengthens the validity of alternative theoretical frameworks within international relations, such as neoclassical realism.

The historical context preceding the collapse of the State Union shows that the divergence of foreign policies between Serbia and Montenegro did not occur suddenly, but rather as a result of processes that lasted for many years. The structure and temporary nature of the State Union, clearly defined internal divisions and contradictions, different visions for the future in Montenegro, and the specific burden of the Kosovo issue for Serbia, were key factors that laid the groundwork for the separation. The referendum held in 2006 was merely a catalyst that allowed these latent differences and varying priorities to fully manifest in the formation of two different, and in many aspects, opposing foreign policy strategies. Of course, in this process, the role of Western partners, who 'wholeheartedly' supported Montenegro's concept of independence, should not be overlooked. This concept was legally grounded in the highest legal act of the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro.

The aforementioned divergent strategies have not only shaped the international position of both countries but will also have, and continue to have, significant implications for the stability and geopolitical relations in the Western Balkans region. Understanding these differences is crucial for analysing current and future regional processes.

This fundamental difference in foreign policy directions not only reflects different internal dynamics and perceptions of national interests but also has significant implications for the stability of the Western Balkans and broader European integration processes. Understanding the multiple influences, including historical traumas and alliances, economic dependencies and opportunities, internal political struggles, the impact of external actors, and the formation of national identities through historical narratives, is essential for a comprehensive analysis of the foreign policy choices of both states.

The long-term consequences of this divergence require continuous monitoring and analysis of these processes. Issues such as regional cooperation, reconciliation, the resolution of open bilateral issues, and align-

ment with the foreign policy positions of the European Union remain key challenges for both countries. Therefore, future research should focus on more detailed examination of specific foreign policy decisions, analysis of the discourse of political elites and the broader public opinion, as well as tracking the concrete effects of divergent strategies on regional dynamics and the international standing of Serbia and Montenegro. Through a comprehensive approach, it will be possible to gain a fuller picture of the complexity of the foreign policy trajectories of these two closely related neighbouring countries, which, despite their proximity, are becoming increasingly distant due to their differing policies.

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ДИВЕРГЕНТНИ СПОЉНОПОЛИТИЧКИ ПУТЕВИ СРБИЈЕ И ЦРНЕ ГОРЕ НАКОН 2006. ГОДИНЕ

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Резиме

Спољнополитичке стратегије Србије и Црне Горе представљају сложен феномен проистекао из преплитања дубоко укоревених историјских наслеђа, различитих политичких и економских приоритета тих држава, те дистинктних геополитичких оријентација. Спољна политика Србије, са својим традиционалним везама према Истоку, наглашеним националним идентитетом и фокусом на очување територијалног интегритета, балансира између аспирација ка Европској унији и одржавања стратешких партнерстава са другим глобалним силама. С друге стране, спољна политика Црне Горе, изразито усмерена ка евроатлантским интеграцијама и афирмацији своје државне посебности након стицања независности, активно је била усмерена ка чланству у НАТО алијанси и интензивно је стремилa приближавању Европској унији.

Компаративном анализом спољнополитичких деловања Србије и Црне Горе, након 2006. године, утврдили смо да разлике у њиховим оријентацијама према спољној политици нису занемариве. Упркос сличностима које се огледају у заједничкој прошлости, геостратегијском положају, и уређењу, поменуте разлике обликоване су њиховим политичким и економским статусима, перцепцијама политичких елита, као и међународним односима. Сprovedено истраживање и анализа указују на кључне дивергентности у спољнополитичким стратегијама ових држава. Поред тога, могле би да подстакну, са научно заснованим чињеницама, на нове теоретске правце у промишљању међународних односа.

Значај овог истраживања лежи у његовом потенцијалу да расветли комплексне процесе обликовања спољне политике у малим државама Западног Балкана које су изашле из заједничке државне творевине. Компаративна анализа спољнополитичких путева Србије и Црне Горе нуди увид не само у специфичности њихових билатералних односа и регионалног деловања, већ и у шире динамике савремених међународних односа, утицај великих сила у региону и изазове европских и евроатлантских интеграција. Зато вај рад настоји да пружи аналитички оквир за разумевање како се историјско наслеђе, унутрашња политика и геополитичко окружење преплићу у креирању спољнополитичких стратегија, посебно у контексту држава које деле заједничку прошлост, али теже различитим будућим интеграционим путевима. Анализа је вођена релевантним теоријским концептима из области студија спољне политике и међународних односа, како би се идентификовани обрасци и разлике контекстуализовали у ширем теоретском дискурсу.

Резултати истраживања указују да ове кључне дивергенције нису само површинске, већ представљају индикатор дубљих разлика у стратешким приоритетима и националним интересима, обликованим специфичним историјским искуствима и савременим друштвено-политичким динамикама сваке државе. Ова студија случаја сугерише да емпиријски налази о дивергентним путевима Србије и Црне Горе представљају значајан допринос разумевању ограничења искључиво структуралистичких објашњења у теорији међународних односа, наглашавајући потребу за укључивањем нивоа анализе који се односи на унутрашње факторе и процесе доношења одлука.