

(DE-)CONSTRUCTING SERBIAN RUSSOPHILIA IN THE CONTEXT OF THE CRISIS IN UKRAINE

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Abstract

On the background of the Ukrainian crisis, the relations between Russia and the Euro-Atlantic community reach a new critical point. The article aims to follow the way in which this tension unfolds in the Serbian society. It starts with identifying the types of discourses related to the idea of „friendship/brotherhood” between Serbia and Russia. The selection of discourses is composed of statements belonging to officials from Belgrade, the political parties and the civil society. Using the poststructuralist approach, this study starts from the idea that international relations and a state’s foreign policy are strongly connected with the meanings attached to concepts or ideas. Such meanings are not given by a certain objective historical evolution, but can be constructed or deconstructed by the political, intellectual, social elites within a community. The discourses, collected from the November 2013 - April 2016 period, will be analysed with the Foucauldian Discourse Analysis method. Firstly, we will see *how* the idea of friendship between Serbia and Russia is constructed or deconstructed by several selected elite groups (how the different discourses are organized) and secondly, *if* the particular types of discourses imply certain specific foreign policy positions, justified by the elites as being directly linked. Conclusions indicate that Russophilia is a powerful legitimization tool, even in a context where this approach creates missed opportunities. On the contrary, emotional arguments prevail and strictly rational foreign policy decisions can be easily antagonized as breaking the norms of good international behaviour.

Keywords

Foucauldian Discourse Analysis, Poststructuralism, Russia, Serbia, Ukrainian crisis

1.INTRODUCTION

This article aims to follow the discourses of several selected elite groups¹ in Serbia from the November 2013-April 2016² timeline. The purpose is to identify the presence or absence of a nexus between the following elements: the concept of „friendship/brotherhood” between Serbia and Russia, the preferred position on the Ukrainian crisis and the concerns related to the foreign policy path Serbia should choose. The research deals with the challenge that the Serbian state is faced with, namely to pursue policies directed towards European integration while at the same time keeping a good relation with Russia. What contributes to the potential conflict between the two objectives is the escalation of the already tense relations between Russia and the Euro-Atlantic community as a consequence of the events in Ukraine. The Crimea annexation, especially, was perceived as illegal and immoral, and multiple states chose to implement economic sanctions on Russia (europa.eu). By choosing to have a similar policy, Serbia would have accomplished two main objectives: proving its willingness to be a member of the European Union and proving its deep commitment to the principle of territorial integrity – principle which proved to be the Serbia’s strongest argument in defending its position towards Kosovo. Instead of perceiving this context as an opportunity, the Serbian government chose to

¹ The discourse, in the framework of this approach, shows „what resources are available to individuals as they make sense of the world and themselves in the world.” (Wright 2003).

² The period was chosen in order to overlap with the events in Ukraine, that start with the demonstrations in Kiev in November 2013, culminate with the annexation of Crimea in March 2014 and continue with sporadic bursts of violence in Donbas. April 2016 is the date of the last parliamentary elections in Serbia.

officially support the territorial integrity of Ukraine while at the same time actively refusing to implement any type of sanctions towards Russia.

Although previous governments considered that pursuing policies directed towards both Russia and the EU was the best solution (Konitzer 2010, 3), recent events can generate stronger opinions (inside and outside the government) that would claim the need for Serbia to choose sides. The article does not have the intention to suggest that the sides in question are identical to the two sides of the Cold War. While some authors could argue that we have started to witness the emergence of a „new cold war”, this thesis does not stand to a more meticulous analysis and on the contrary can represent an ideological bias in interpreting foreign policy (Monaghan 2015, Marsh 2008). As opposed to the “cold war” period, when the world had two alternative centres of power, in present days unipolarity is contested in the name of multipolarity (Ambrosio 2001). The Russian opposition to the so called West¹, promoted through its soft power leverage, aims to diminish the omnipresence of Western influence, the alternative option being an international system with multiple regional powers (Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation 2013). Serbia is considered to be one of the countries in the Western Balkans where Russia’s soft power was most influent (Szpala 2014, Mitrovic 2016), but it is at the same time a country that is officially deeply committed to European integration.

Due to its recent history, Serbia is a fertile ground for the phenomenon of contested identities. NATO’s bombing has triggered strong anti-Western narratives that are still influential in contemporary society (Belgrade Centre for Security Policy 2012). Additionally, the so called EU enlargement fatigue left an impact on the reform progress. Foreign policy is, consequently, an issue that creates division in the perceptions of society, especially considering the fact that a consensus on whether Serbia should integrate in a Western or Eastern security regional framework fails to exist (McConnell 2009).

¹ The term „West” is being used in this article in order to point towards the common policies of the United States, NATO and European Union. Although fragile in front of critics, the concept has a high instrumental value, being used on a large scale, especially in contexts where the influence of these actors is being contested.

The article takes under consideration this specific element of Russophilia (friendship/brotherhood)¹ which belongs to the Serbian identity and aims to tackle it in the poststructuralist theoretical approach framework. What the research does not assume is that Russophilia has the strength to influence Serbia's foreign policy on a path that will endanger its official objectives. The Ukrainian crisis introduces this very novelty in this debate: an international context in which the self proclaimed interest of the Serbian state lays against the narrative of having good relations with Russia. The post-structuralist approach was chosen in order to grasp the identity issues that are connected to the foreign policy decisions (Ole Waever as cited in Fournier 2012, 27). The neo-realist assumption of self-interested nation states is not sufficient to analyse the reasons behind foreign policy decisions. This idea was previously underlined at a theoretical level by other scholars, inspired by the works of Michel Foucault, like Ashley, Der Derian, Shapiro (1989). Consequently, one of the main assumptions of the article is connected to the importance of identity factors in understanding the present case study. From this perspective, the meaning in general is culturally and historically specific (Wright 2003, Hutcheon 1988).

For this purpose, we have collected texts in a database where the idea is being developed, during the November 2013 -April 2016 time period. The actors² correspond to three segments of the Serbian elite: the government, the political parties, and the civil society. For the governmental sector we have collected discourses from the websites of: The President of the Republic of Serbia, the Government of the Republic of Serbia, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the

¹ Although the concept of „friendship“ has cultural connotations, as was previously noticed, it has the potential to bring relevant insight into foreign policy analysis. For example, Subotić (2013, 308) argues that there are „national security cultures“ that are determined by the relations with the historical friends and enemies which generate both opportunities and taboos. The concept of „friendship“ is also one of the core elements in Wendt's constructivist theory of international relations, where he argues that „friendship“ follows two simple rules: non-violence and mutual help.

² We chose the actors respecting the following criteria: for the broader political level, we chose parliamentary parties, starting from either the 2014 or 2016 elections or both. We preferred parties that entered the Parliament in 2016, rather than in 2012, considering that the growth of their electorate was caused by the good reception of their discourses in our period of interest. As for the civil society level we tried to maintain a certain equilibrium between the orientations of the NGOs chosen.

Republic of Serbia, the Serbian Progressive Party and the Socialist Party of Serbia. For the political parties sector we have visited the websites of: the Democratic Party, the Serbian Radical Party, the party „Enough is Enough” and the Serbian Movement „Dveri”. For the civil society sector we have looked into the websites of: the Serbian Orthodox Church, the NASI Movement, the Belgrade Forum for the World of Equals, the Centre for Euro-Atlantic Studies and the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia.

The method chosen to analyze the data and verify the hypothesis is the Foucauldian discourse analysis. The method focuses on the concepts of „power” and „knowledge”, as Michel Foucault defines them, mainly in his book *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (2004). International Relations scholars use discourse analysis to draw conclusions on the ways in which discourses produce socio-political relations and create identities, historical continuities and foreign policies (Fournier 2012, 24). The method was conceived for the analysis of a certain subject in a particular historical moment and we use it here to investigate the discursive practices related to the so called friendship between Serbia and Russia in the historical moment offered by the intensification of tensions between Russia and the Euro-Atlantic community, following the events in Ukraine. Therefore, the events in Ukraine have the role to temporarily demarcate the subject in the present study. The analysis is being conducted in five stages, according to the interpretation of Kendall and Wickham (1999) of the Foucauldian discourse analysis method. We will first construct a literature review related to the subject and continue by looking at which types of discourses can be found in the data gathered, how they are organized and how they relate to each other. In the next stages we will follow how these discourses are utilized, what subject positions they imply and how the knowledge created by the discourses relates to power (or how the existing narratives create either opportunities or taboos).

2.THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Concerning the case of Serbia and its identity in the post Cold War period, the researches of Filip Ejdus, Jelena Subotić and Veljko Vujačić have brought

important contributions. The analysis which follows builds on their input and aims to verify their conclusions in the light of the recent events. After the first phase of this stage other theories will be briefly mentioned, which can enlighten the interpretation of the collected discourses. Although controversial from an academic perspective, the cultural knowledge represents an appropriate interpretative repertoire according to the Foucauldian methodological framework.

A very relevant starting point for understanding Serbia's foreign policy is the research of Jelena Subotić (2015, 2013), where the scholar explains the discontinuity in foreign policy through the mechanism of selecting and deselecting certain elements that all belong to the hegemonic narrative of the state. In order to function, the state needs to consider both the physical security and the „ontological security“ issues, and to succeed it needs to prove it has continuity, while making changes. Elaborating on her conclusions related to the Kosovo issue, we could infer that Serbia would be able to use the same tools in the context of the Ukrainian crisis. In other words, aligning with the EU policy of imposing sanctions on Russia would not be out of question, even if Russophilia is indeed an important identity element. The fact that “brotherhood” with Russia is a very relevant element in defining Serbian identity (either by arguing for it, or against it) is further developed by Filip Ejdus, who specifically supports the thesis that “the crisis in Ukraine has amplified an existing tension between two powerful collective identity narratives in Serbia: one of belonging to Europe and the other of brotherhood with Russia” (Ejdus 2014, 349). Still, he argues that the so called neutral position of the Serbian government towards the Ukrainian crisis is strictly justified in terms of „rational pursuit of national interests“.

We cannot underestimate the concept of alterity when we consider identity issues. Diez (as cited in Ejdus 2007, 40) states that the very definition of identity is a „discursive construction of Other through articulating a difference“. For example, „Balkan perceptions of Europe shaped local narratives of collective cultural and social identity.“ (Mishkova 2013, 239). On the same pattern, Serbian perceptions of Russia can, in themselves, constitute arguments for a specific collective identity or another. In other words, Russian ideas and positions can be perceived in the Serbian society as their own ideas and positions. The

phenomenon is strongly related to the dynamic of identity and alterity. These views are worth being introduced in the discussion, since the possibility of them appearing in the discourses (directly or indirectly) exists.

In his paper about the thesis of „Serbian exceptionalism“, Veljko Vujačić (2003) finds four paradigmatic patterns of elaborating this idea. One of them integrates the element of Russophile anti-Westernism along with national populism and communism. Both pan-Slavism¹ and Eurasianism² have the antithesis towards the Western values as a major characteristic which is considered to be opposite of the local one (Slavic or related to the land). Still, Eurasianism emerges to oppose the narrowness of Pan-Slavism and to propose a broader perspective on understanding identity (Rubinstein 2000, 16). Taking in consideration the local values, the religious ones are certainly dominant, and in this regard the Eastern tradition of understanding Christianity has a central role. Another approach that places Serbia close to Russia - revanchism - is less founded on emotions, but keeps the element of opposing the West. According to this, the two states become natural allies in the context of a mutual interest to resist the imperialistic policies of the West, policies that equally affected the both of them starting with the 90s. Russia wishes to show strength on the international arena again, after being repeatedly humiliated, unjustly excluded from the global decision making process (highly relevant here being the bombing of Yugoslavia, without a resolution of the UN Security Council, where Russia was opposing), seen with condescension. Serbia, as well, wouldn't have any reason to miss the opportunity to become involved in balking the Western claims for global supremacy, the

¹ The solidarity between members of the community is rooted in their Slav characteristics (a common essence that goes beyond linguistic, religious or related to different historical experiences barriers) (Suslov 2012)

² Eurasianism is a geopolitical ideology, which starts from the assumption of the supremacy of geography as a defining element for a political community. The conflicts are happening between fleets and land armies, and the geography determines in which way the military power will be formed. Eurasianism appears to be an imperial type of nationalism and is, according to Laruelle (2008), the ideology that inherits a long tradition of thinking about the otherness of Russia and its relation with Europe.

West also being frequently accused of Serbophobia. In this regard, the presumed words of Madeleine Albright appear as a symbol for a more general attitude that belongs to the West: "We intentionally set the bar too high for the Serbs to comply. They need some bombing and that's what they are going to get." (Udovički and Ridgeway 2000, 333).

On the opposite side, the EU can manifest considerable power in relation to the candidate states, guiding them to reform their institutions and even values, and at the same time, offering them financial support, a very powerful incentive (Bretherton and Vogler 1999, 139). The definition of Europeanization states that the most important instrument to exert influence that the EU has is its policy of enlargement and its use of active leveraging, that compels domestic elites to induce reform (Vachudova 2014). According to Subotic (2011) Europeanization does not necessarily come with a large consent on European identity as a social value. In her article, she compares the cases of Croatia and Serbia, both in the process of Europeanization, but with a different European „state of mind". Still, in the context of the recent years, the possibility of a better shaped pro-European discourse is worth exploring.

3. DISCOURSES AND COUNTER-DISCOURSES ABOUT RUSSIA

In this stage of the research, the analysis focuses on what type of discourses the chosen actors use when they refer to Russia and the relation between Serbia and Russia. These samples of language will be identified, classified and compared in order to observe to what extent they belong to the category of Russophilia.

The idea of a special and strong friendship, a relation that would rather constitute a „brotherhood" is systematically constructed, by representatives of the institutions, leaders of political parties and members of the civil society. The discourse becomes more radical as we further ourselves from the institutional area. The most vocal actor that speaks on behalf of an institution, and brings arguments that can be put in the category of Russophilia, is the president of the

Republic, Tomislav Nikolić (in office since May 2012). He uses both pan-Slavist and revanchist arguments in his explanations about why Serbia is and should be close to Russia. Still, he often implies (using the terms of Wendt) that even if there is interdependency and homogeneity, there is no common fate, not in all circumstances. "Our policy is based on restoring old friendships and turning smaller friends into bigger ones... Everyone knows that I love Russia but I have never said that we should be tied to Russia." (Predsednik.rs 2014). His self-proclaimed Russophilia would not predict a certain position on the Ukrainian crisis. One of the events in this period that produced an entire wave of statements related to the most special friendship and brotherhood between Serbia and Russia was the military parade organized on October 16 2014, ceremony that marked the 70th anniversary of the liberation of Belgrade in World War II and had Vladimir Putin as a guest. In his speech, Tomislav Nikolić talks about „the unbreakable bond of brotherhood and friendship” that Russia and Serbia share and gives a series of arguments connected to this: the two countries „are linked by their roots, language, customs, creed, history, culture, exalted belief in freedom and heroism and lost generations that remember the wars the two countries fought alongside”, the economical development of Serbia is based on the Russian market and Russia has shown nothing but generosity towards a smaller and weaker country that can't offer too much in return. (Predsednik.rs 2014b).

Similar with this type of official discourse, is the discourse of the Serbian Orthodox Church. The same as the officials, the representatives of the Church offer themselves distinctions for their contribution to the strengthening of the friendship between the two people, suggesting the existence of an old and strong relation. Patriarch Irinej receives in April 2014 the Order of Merit of the second degree with swords „for bonding brotherly peoples of Russia and Serbia on the occasion of the century since the beginning of the Great War” (SPC 2014) and Patriarch Kirill receives the Diploma of Honorary Doctor of the Belgrade University, occasion with which he reminds the audience of the centuries-old ties of the two close Orthodox peoples, Serbian and Russian.(SPC 2014b). The discourse is further constructed by declared pro-Russian parties and a segment of the civil society. Here, the same ideas that we could find in the arguments of

the President and of the Church are emphasized through the use of more colourful language, in order to create a stronger discourse. The brotherhood of Serbia and Russia, given by their common features (faith, language, history etc.) becomes „brotherhood of blood” (SRS 2014). Russia and Serbia do not just share a common fate and a common struggle (especially concerning their joint participation in the world wars), but also the same goals of independence (Beoforum.rs 2015). The two countries do not only share important victories through the history, but also numerous similar injustices. The idea can be found in a speech by Irinej Bulović, bishop of Bačka “We hear a lot of moralizing ideas regarding the fact that Crimea reunites with its old country Russia, from whom it belongs through all the history until some moment, when somebody thinks to change it, and after that it becomes law, the same that happens with us thinking at our bitter experience.”(Beoforum.rs 2014). What is interesting is the recollection in the case of Crimea, the allegedly unjust system of Yugoslav territorial organization, instead of the more recent declaration of independence of Kosovo.

A more moderate view about the relation between Serbia and Russia is manifested by other actors from the institutional level and other representatives of the parties (the Serbian Progressive Party and the Socialist Party of Serbia). In this case, the emphasis is more on the mutual advantages given by the cooperation between the two countries. The fact that a friendship exists between Serbia and Russia is frequently mentioned, but no colourful language is being used in order to create a strong discourse in this regard. „Russia is our traditional friend and our membership in the EU doesn’t mean that our friendship needs to stop” (SPS 2014) is a quote from Ivica Dačić, one example of how the language is used in this case. Those who express moderate views towards Russia are highly criticized by both pro-Russians and anti-Russians. We have either the idea that „Russia relies on its strong alliance with Serb Progressive Party” (Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia 2015, 110) or the one that „we can expect from the marionette government of Aleksandar Vučić to totally go away from Russia and to join NATO through an emergency procedure” (Naši 2016) After the elections in April 2016, variations of the idea that Serbia is going in a wrong direction appear, either because it is going towards Europe, disregarding the

interests of the Serbian state (SRS 2016), or because it is going towards Russia, disregarding the interests of the Serbian state.

Finally, we will follow how the discourse of an existing friendship between Serbia and Russia is being deconstructed by some of the voices belonging to the civil society. This alternative is self proclaimed by the actors that are engaging in it marginally within society. „We find that the main Serbian voices are of strong and overt pro-Russia orientation.” (Centar za evroatlanske studije 2015). While in the previous cases Russia is considered to be the traditional ally of Serbia, the country that throughout their history has stepped in for Serbia, regardless of its own interests, in this case this argument is contested as being superficially created. Russia never saw Serbia as a friend, but as a tool to achieve its own political interests. Russia didn't step in to help Serbia in the Yugoslav Wars, like Milošević wrongly assumed, because it was only concerned with its own interests (Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia 2015, 148), like it is doing now, when it is using Serbia in its rivalry with the West, „like a puppet on a string” (Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia 2015, 148) for the re-establishing of the bipolar international system, not taking into account if all this brings destabilization to Serbia (Weinberg 2015, 10).

The process of deconstructing the idea of friendship between Serbia and Russia is mostly based on the strategy of presenting to the public an alternative history of the relations between the two countries. For example, when Ivica Dačić justifies the decision of the Serbian state not to impose sanctions on Russia for its role in the Ukrainian crisis, „because this country never imposed sanctions on Serbia” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia 2014b), on the CEAS website the following disclaimer appears „CEAS reminds the general public that the United Nations had introduced economic sanctions to the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) on May 30, 1992 on the basis of UNSC Resolution no. 757. The Resolution was adopted with thirteen votes for, without a single vote against, while China and Zimbabwe abstained. Russia is a permanent member of UNSC.” (Centar za evroatlanske studije 2014). Worth noticing in this context is the fact that, besides arguing for reciprocity, Dačić also implies something else: Russia is now confronting, as Serbia has already done, the lack of

understanding and abusive involvement of the West in their affairs. They need to support each other because of their common fate as well.

4.THE FUNCTIONALITY OF (DE) CONSTRUCTING THE POSITIVE RELATION WITH RUSSIA

This stage of the analysis is concerned with how the types of discourses identified and classified in the previous stage are being utilized. If previously we examined the language in terms of construction, now we will examine it in terms of functionality. We will look for the contexts in which the various actors use the discourses, for their purpose and we will see who has to gain and who has to lose from the use of certain approaches.

The discourses that are used by political power have the purpose to put the party or the coalition that governs the country in a positive light. The idea that Serbia is a friend of Russia is being presented as such to show a series of real advantages the Serbian society has because the government takes care to feed the friendly relationship: there are economical advantages as a direct result of collaboration with Russia and there is an extra assurance that Russia will remain on the side of Serbia in the Kosovo issue. From all the evidence that Serbia is benefiting from staying close to Russia, from an economical view point, the construction of the South Stream was by far the heaviest one. So, the news that the project is cancelled also brought forth a delicate political situation, not just an economical one. Prime Minister Aleksandar Vučić remains constant to his moderate stand, by showing himself to be displeased by the fact that he did not receive explanations “I didn’t know anything about this decision, even if during this year I met Putin three times” (Blic.rs 2014). On the contrary, president Tomislav Nikolić seems to know the answer “Russia would not stop constructing the South Stream if it wouldn’t be the EU” (Informer.rs 2014). He views the event that Russia cancels the South Stream in the logics of the existing friendship between the two countries – he trusts the Russians that they will not harm in Serbia in any way and attributes the responsibility to another part of the game.

By appealing to the emotional, the actors whom are promoting this idea are creating evasive criteria for the evaluation of their performance. They are avoiding analysis and potential criticism on their performance according to a series of effective accomplishments. In the case of the government, the postponement of the integration in the EU (official goal of the present government) can be justified with the discourse of the friendship with Russia (we are going towards the EU, but we will not compromise our friendships in order to arrive there), even if there is the possibility that the government is just being inefficient in applying the required reforms, without any connection with Russia. In a Foucauldian understanding, it can be argued that the construction of a pro-Russian discourse leads to the preservation of the governmental political power, through the means of introducing emotional criteria that can't be measured with precision, that obstructs the possibility of the officials being politically sanctioned for their lack of performance. The dynamics inside the Serbian Progressive Party are an interesting issue to observe, especially if we take into consideration the fact that the entire political stand of the party is suspected of a lack of genuineness (Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia 2013) (since the reasons of the change in orientation of the leaders of the party, former members of the Serbian Radical Party, are still blurry). The fact that the pro-Russian president of the Republic of Serbia and the more pro-European Prime Minister of it are commonly acting on the logics of „good cop – bad cop”¹ raises suspicions that they do not actually have a political orientation at all, but more likely, are trying to appeal to a variety of voters by using all types of discourses. In the political arena, the functionality of arguing for an existing friendship between Serbia and Russia is being used for both attributing responsibility and refuting blame. The stand for or against Russia was a crucial aspect in the political debates before the parliamentary elections in 2014 and 2016. At the broader political level, the opposition is using the same discourse of friendship

¹ A relevant example is the following: Tomislav Nikolić considers Gavrilo Princip a hero, following a pan-Slavist argumentation and appealing to the more traditional voters, while immediately after Alkesandar Vučić states that Serbia respects the sovereignty of Bosnia, appealing to the more pro-European voters; (Hurriyetdailynews.com 2014)

between Serbia and Russia in order to criticize the government which does not create a wise foreign policy. The fact that Serbia does not stand exclusively on the Russian side, but insists on becoming a member of the EU is constructed as proof that the officials do not respect the interest of the Serbian state. The European ambition can be seen as an anti-Russian stand, and Russia appears, as a friendly state, the guaranty of the interest of Serbia. A European path implies renouncing Kosovo, but not even this decision will stop the humiliation of the Serbian state, the West having plans of a Kosovo scenario for Vojvodina and Raska (SRS 2015) as well.

If the most radical pro-Russian actors are mainly denying the argument of the government that their moderate position is a good policy in respect to Kosovo (there is no use in trying to remain friends with the Russians if they are also going towards the EU), the pro-Western actors are concentrating on denying the supposed economic interest resulting from the relation with Russia (the real economic advantages are coming from the West). "The volume of economic exchange and size of grants that Serbia allegedly received from Russia are being exaggerated, as well as the level of energy dependence on Russia" (Centar za evroatlanske studije 2016, 14) and „EU is “the side” offering Serbia, and generally, all the Balkan countries, more security and prospects for economic recovery than Russia” (Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia 2015, 148). Also, the government is criticized by some opposition parties for using propaganda when they repeat the idea that they will never recognize Kosovo’s independence, while acting in an opposite way. Associating the good relations with Russia with the preservation of Kosovo as a non-independent state would be in the same category of propaganda. “Besides being in the interest of the Western powers, who are creating an independent state in Kosovo, this illegal usurpation of Kosovo is also in Russian interest. (...) The only legal justification for annexation of Crimea is an illegal precedent that Western powers made in Kosovo. With Russian blessing, since it never objected to Resolution 1244.” (Radulović 2016)

Especially at the civil society level, the process of constructing or deconstructing this type of discourse also has another use, one that is connected to the desired collective identity of the Serbian society. While pro-Russians seem to favour a

traditional Serbia, defined by its Balkan character and Eastern Orthodox values, pro-Europeans deconstruct the friendship with Russia as to renounce an unwanted identity. „Serbia has a stable electoral body of people who want to see Serbia in the West, who believe that all new identities, and not just the old, imposed ones, are what Serbia needs to go forward. This West is where the scientists, industry, sportsmen, etc. are (...) It is in this West where elementary human values reign, including the rights of the LGBTIAQ community.” (Milić 2013).

5.SUBJECT POSITIONS EMPOWERED BY THE USE OF DISCOURSES

The discourses related to the „friendship” between Russia and Serbia impose certain subject positions related to the foreign policy of Serbia. The neutrality of Serbia on the international stage is a predictable subject position when it is related to the special relation that already exists between Serbia and Russia. In the scenario where the friendship idea is constructed as a coherent and socially accepted narrative, the complete positioning of the state in the Western realm becomes impossible, this positioning coming together with taking decisions at the disadvantage of the Russian state. If the two states are friends, then the lack of loyalty justified by economical interests becomes an act of treason, something that would transform the Serbian state in an actor without political principles (that doesn't deserve, on the long term, not even the respect of its new allies). Like president Tomislav Nikolić puts it: „Serbia views Russia as its great ally, associate and partner and that it will not corrupt its moral by any bad behaviour towards Russia.” (Predsednik.rs 2014c). One month later he also states the following: „Serbia will not introduce sanctions against Russia these days and years, but it is aware that EU membership entails the obligation to implement joint foreign policies” (Predsednik.rs 2014d).

The events in Ukraine challenge the neutrality policy of the Serbian state. On one side, an alignment to the foreign policy of the EU would imply sanctions against

the Russian state, and on the other side this would mean going further away from a „friend“ state or from a state with which there are important mutual economic interests. In the context of these events, the voices that demand Serbia to choose a side are growing in sonority – both voices from inside and outside the Serbian society. It is interesting to notice that the Serbian officials are talking about pressure coming from the West and about understanding from the Russian side, the fact that Russia is satisfied with just neutrality being interpreted in the key of friendship. „The balanced policy of the Serbian government regarding the conflicts in Ukraine will face a test in the coming period as it is being met with opposition in countries that want Serbia to join the European Union quickly, Serbian Foreign Minister Ivica Dacic said. For that reason, it will be important to ensure that Serbia does not become the biggest victim of the tensions involving the United States, the EU and Russia“ (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia 2014). In the same vein, Prime Minister Vučić states that „Russia never blackmailed Serbia in any way and on the contrary acts like a friendly country“ (Srbijadanas.com 2015).

Pro-Western groups are criticizing the fact that the officials would expect their so called neutrality to be respected as such and in the same time to have the advantages of a state with a clearer position. „Serbian high officials (...) repeating the mantras about EU conditioning Serbia, neglecting the fact that the EU integration is not an obligation, but a democratically expressed will of the people“ (Centar za evroatlanske studije 2016, 14). They are against the idea that a small state like Serbia can create a foreign policy game in such a way as to gain from all the parts and are arguing for alignment to the foreign policy of EU, against Russia, which is not even a friend of Serbia.

By contrast, some political parties are positioning themselves firmly on the side of Russia, in the context of the events in Ukraine. Dveri, for example, is organizing a demonstration of support, in front of the Russian embassy, event where together with the members of the party, members of the pro-Russian civil society participate. The strong position against the EU is coming naturally in this context, one of the relevant slogans being „we are with you, not in the EU“ (Srbinfo 2014). Some of the arguments that appear with the occasion of the event are connecting Russia's fate to Serbia's one: Russia is fighting in Ukraine

against fascism, the same as Serbia did in Croatia in the 90s (Vladimir Kršljanin), Serbia was just the first victim of the Western policies, Russia being now another target (Mila Alečković), the Russians were always on the Serbian side and even voluntarily participated in Serbian wars, the West denigrated the international law in the context of the disintegration of Yugoslavia, the same as they are trying to do now (Srđan Nogo), the Russians are persecuted for speaking another language and using another script (Srbin.info 2014).

The positioning related to the recent developments in Ukraine does not only imply a stand on Russia's role in the crisis, but goes as far as identifying the causes and instrumentalizing these in the domestic politics of Serbia. The beginning of the destabilization in Ukraine can be argued to be either the state's violence towards the peaceful demonstrations, or the outbreak of a "coloured revolution" with the agency of the West. In this regard, Serbia, as a society where an Eastern-Western cleavage can also be found, can be seen as a potential ground for similar developments. The use of language is highly relevant in this case. Prime Minister Aleksandar Vučić used the phrase "Ukrainian scenario" when referring to the interest of other political forces in bringing this kind of destabilization in order to change the government through means other than elections. "I wish to the Ukrainian people all the best in the world, to choose their government by themselves as they wish to, and for no one else to get involved in this, and with regards to Serbia, I wish for the government to be replaced only due to elections." (Naslovi.net 2014) He suggests, consequently, that the Euromaidan was not spontaneous, but artificially created, using in his allegations arguments that are considered to belong to the Russian side. But he doesn't openly bring the argument to its end, which would be that the West is being involved in destabilizing the Balkans, a taboo position if we consider that he also has a pro-European orientation. For this reason, he is challenged to further explain how he used the phrase "Ukrainian scenario". "CEAS is asking Prime Minister Vučić to loudly and clearly state what exactly he means by "Ukrainian scenario". We hope that others will also understand how important it would be for democratic Serbia to have this out in the clear and join us." (Centar za evroatlanske studije 2016b).

The discourse that deconstructs the idea of friendship between Russia and Serbia is commonly encountered with a pro-European positioning and with a strong lobby for making all the required efforts to integrate Serbia as soon as possible in the EU. If there is no friendship between these two states, the fact that some segments of the society strongly believe there is, raises some questions – why do they think such a thing? And the answer comes naturally, considering the premises of the approach – Russia is using its soft power to manipulate Serbs into believing this, because of the interests involved (which are not the same with Serbian interests). So, if there is no friendship, it is rather dangerous to remain in Russia's realm of influence and Serbia should choose a different foreign policy, one that is oriented towards the West and based on Euro-Atlantic integration. Still, these positions do not come as the only possible ones here. The approach of the "Enough is enough" party is noteworthy in this context. While criticizing the idea that the Russian state is a friend of Serbia, the leader of the party, Saša Radulović, also argues against the integration of the country in the EU. The European Union is a structure that slows down the process of democratization and modernization, designed for countries which are not able to follow their own interests. Serbia needs to stand on its own, reflecting the successful models from Holland, Germany and Canada and avoiding falling in the trap in which Romania and Bulgaria already fell into (Mondo.rs 2016).

6. CONCLUSIONS

By looking at how the officials in Serbia are using language to legitimize their policies in the context of the Ukrainian crisis, a certain conclusion that challenges the existing literature appears. Along with the rational arguments (see Ejduš 2014), the emotional narratives also have an important role in their discourses. Arguments like: the duty of reciprocity, the morality of keeping friendships no matter the obstacles and the identification with the one alike as opposed to an „other“ are frequently mentioned.

Russophilia is a powerful narrative, which triggers in a way or another, the interest of all the selected groups we considered in the analysis. The discourse

that deconstructs this friendship takes shape as a counter-discourse. One of the most important arguments is that the actors that promote this orientation are careful to explain their positions in detail, while on the other side, it is common for the arguments to be merely mentioned, their mode of construction being considered obvious. The assumption that Russia was always at the side of Serbia during history is relevant and is usually accompanied by only some references to the two world wars and to the support Russia gave towards the Kosovo issue. When the idea is being deconstructed, and it is argued that Russia was not (too much) on the side of Serbia, the section of history that is considered is described and explained on close inspection. This approach shows that this second option is not very popular in society and needs further explanations to reach the audience.

The concept of „friendship” becomes a norm of good behaviour in international relations in the period we considered, for the selected groups. This phenomenon can also be noticed by looking at the deconstructive approach. In order to justify a more committed European or Euro-Atlantic foreign policy, an attempt to prove that the „friendship” with Russia do not exist is being made (as opposed to the attempt to prove that rational decisions should go beyond emotional factors). The article therefore confirms the observation that Russophilia is an element that belongs to the Serbian identity with the capacity of generating opportunities and taboos. We consider the confirmation relevant because the international context of the Ukrainian crisis generated a new situation in Serbia. Practices related to the friendship with Russia were not neutral anymore and on the contrary, created missed opportunities in the process of European integration.

The limits of the present study are related to the impossibility of finding explanations on what the real reasons behind the behaviour of the selected groups are. The purpose was narrower and limited to insight regarding how these specific actors are constructing their arguments (or avoiding doing it, which is as well worth exploring) and which statements are presented as natural and self-evident. Also, it is not a study of the opinions belonging to the Serbian society, but a study of the discursive resources that society has available in order to formulate opinions. This is the main reason the analysis wanted to go further

than the governmental level and encompass discourses of other elite groups, like political parties and civil society.

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