



UNIVERSITY OF SARAJEVO
FACULTY OF POLITICAL SCIENCE
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND DIPLOMACY

**„The role of right-wing populism and international patronage on
democratic backsliding in Serbia 2012 - 2020“**

- Master Thesis -

Candidate:

Omanović Imela, 1095/II-PiR

Mentor:

prof.dr. Kapidžić Damir

Sarajevo, March 2022.



FACULTY OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND DIPLOMACY

**„The role of right-wing populism and international patronage on
democratic backsliding in Serbia 2012 - 2020“**

- Master Thesis -

Candidate:

Omanović Imela, 1095/II-PiR

Mentor:

prof.dr. Kapidžić Damir

Contents

1. INTRODUCTION.....	6
2. METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK.....	8
2.1 Research problem	8
2.2 Subject of research	8
2.3 Research objectives	9
2.4 Hypothesis System	9
2.4.1 General research Hypothesis	9
2.4.2 Specific Research Hypothesis.....	10
2.5 Social and Scientific research objectives.....	10
2.6 Key terms.....	11
2.6.1 Right-wing politics	11
2.6.2 Populism.....	11
2.6.3 International patronage	12
2.6.4 Democratic backsliding	12
3. RIGHT WING POPULISM, INTERNATIONAL PATRONAGE AND DEMOCRATIC BACKSLIDING – HOW TO PUT IT TOGETHER?	14
3.1 POPULISM / RIGHT WING	14
3.2 International patronage.....	17
3.3 Democratic backsliding.....	20
4. POLITICAL COUNTRY RETROSPECTIVE	22
4.1 SFRY.....	22
4.2 The 90's	23
4.3 Serbia at the beginning of the 21st century.....	24
4.4 SNS and the 2012 – year of change.....	25
4.4.1 Genesis of the functions: Aleksandar Vučić	25
5. CASE STUDY – THE ROLE OF RIGHT-WING POPULISM AND INTERNATIONAL PATRONAGE ON DEMOCRATIC BACKSLIDING 2012-2020	28
5.1 BTI-transformation Index	29
5.2. Varieties of Democracy.....	35
5.3 World Press Media	38
5.4 Vulnerability Index	41
5.5 Perception Corruption Index.....	42

6. ANALYSING THE ROLE OF POPULISM AND INTERNATIONAL PATRONAGE	44
6.1 Populism's role under a magnifying glass.....	44
6.2 International patronage.....	47
6. CONCLUSION.....	54
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	56

FIGURE CONTENT:

Figure 1:BTI transformation Index: SERBIA	29
Figure 2: THE STRUCTURE OF THE ASSEMBLY OF SERBIA IN 2016	33
Figure 3: THE STRUCTURE OF THE ASSEMBLY OF SERBIA IN 2020	34
Figure 4: World Press Media Index.....	39
Figure 5:Corruption Perception Index	43

TABLE CONTENT:

Table 1: V- DEM ANNUAL REPORT 2017 for 2016 year	36
Table 2: V-DEM ANNUAL REPORT 2021 for 2020 year	36
Table 3: Vulnerability dimensions for Vulnerability Index.....	41

ABBREVIATIONS:

SNS- Srpska Napredna Stranka

EU – European Union

SRS- Srpska Radikalna stranka

V-Dem - Varieties of democracy

BTI- Bertelsmann Transformation Index

SFRY - Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia

DS – Demofratska Stranka

SPO – Srpski pokret obnove

SPS - Socijalistička partija Srbije

URS - Ujedinjeni Region Srbije

DSS - Demokratska stranka Srbije (DSS)

DS – Demokratska Stramla

DOS – Demokratska Opozicija Srbije

US - Ujedinjena Srbija (US)

SVM - Stranka Vojvođanskih Mađara

BIRODI – Biro za društvena istraživanja

1. INTRODUCTION

During the last two decades, we can see the tremendous growth and support that European populist parties are receiving, especially when we are talking about far-right populist parties. The best example is given by the image of the Hungarian Government, with Viktor Orbán at the top, but when we are talking about our region – Western Balkans – the most rigid example of merging democracy and autocracy at the moment is the one in Serbia. Serbia is currently at the crossroads between East and West, with an aspiration towards Europe, but still under the great influence of Russian policy. In the last few years, according to a new report by Freedom House, Serbia has been in a steady decline in democracy, and last year it had the largest decline in democratic points compared to other Western Balkan countries, even from 3.96 to 3.89 – by percentage these points make 48.21% democracy percentage. Looking it as timeline, according to the Bertelsmann Transformation Index, in the report of 2012, Serbia was pointed with 8.05 points as a democracy in consolidation, while in the report of 2020 the score was 6.95 points which described it as a defective democracy.

The main goal of this thesis is to investigate whether right-wing populism and international patronage had a role, i.e., whether they had an influence on democratic backsliding of Serbia in the period of 2012 to 2020.

According to the articles that are a part of the project Reshaping European Democracy, in Europe, as well as around the world, democracy is retreating, and autocracy is gaining. Although the democratic backsliding is mostly related to the elections in countries, violation of basic human rights and freedom, what is beyond is more complex. In Europe, we are also witnessing the rise of populist right-wing parties, which is especially visible after the last European Parliament elections. In examples such as Hungary and Poland, we can see the rhetoric and actions they are taking that run counter to the principles of democracy and the EU. In the latest report, a Western Balkan country - Serbia was characterized as a candidate for accession to the European Union, but what is important to mention is the sharp decline that Serbia has experienced in all democratic Indices starting from 2012. In 2012, Srpska napredna stranka (SNS) a populist political party became the ruling party of Serbia, a relative new party founded in 2008 as a result of separation from Srpska radikalna stranka (SRS) – a far right political party. In that period, Aleksandar Vučić was the Minister of Defence of

Serbia. In 2014 he became the Prime Minister of Serbia, and later in 2017 he became the President. With the arrival of Aleksandar Vučić on the political scene came also a completely new method of approaching politics and the role of right-wing populism and international patronage.

In order to explain right-wing populism as clearly as possible, it was necessary to present in more detail the very structure of government within Serbia, with an emphasis on SNS, as well as the role and characteristics of various global powers such as Russia, China and the supranational European Union within Serbia.

This master thesis will try to investigate changes in government in the period from 2012 to 2020 that have brought the possible backsliding of democracy, with reference to right-wing parties and analysis of campaigns and propaganda. Also, the emphasis will be put on the election process itself, the quality of the opposition, free media and human rights, through Indices which measure democracy, and populism itself, which is one of the basic means of establishing and preserving power by the leading party in Serbia, the SNS. Focus will be placed on Aleksandar Vučić and his fields of political activity in Serbia. Furthermore, as mentioned before, Serbia is at the crossroads between East and West, the international patronage is played on a geopolitical level between Russia, China and EU. The influence of China is seen in the economic support, providing with Chinese defense and security equipment, technology and investments. The influence of an authoritarian state, such as Russia makes international patronage in the context of close political and military cooperation. On the other side there is the EU – integration into which Serbian authorities have marked as a strategic priority of the state. Depending on the course of the research, I will try to clarify what role it has on international patronage and in what way it affects Serbia.

2. METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Research problem

The basic problem in this thesis essentially is based on the analysis of the role of right-wing populism and international patronage on democratic backsliding in Serbia in the period from 2012 to 2020.

In this context the research problem question would be: **Do right wing populism and international patronage have an impact on democratic backsliding in Serbia in period from 2012 to 2020?**

By answering the question, I will try to clarify:

Whether and to what extent right-wing parties have an influence within government structures in Serbia;

b) The influence of international patronage on decision-making;

c) The Presence of opposition parties in Serbia;

d) The role of elections in the period 2012 - 2020

e) Freedom of speech, freedom of the media

2.2 Subject of research

The subject of research in this paper is right-wing populism and international patronage as possible reasons for democratic backsliding. It sought to examine their role in democratic decline in Serbia in a given period i.e., whether they affect it as such. Since these are current stories not only in the domain of our region but also in world politics, it seemed interesting to find out what effects right-wing populism has in democratic society.

Research on this topic was approached disciplinary, in the context of political science, the scientific, theoretical and research values – qualitative and quantitative analysis.

2.3 Research objectives

The aim of this thesis is to show the very role of right - wing populism and international patronage in Serbia's democratic decline. In addition, the paper seeks to penetrate the mechanisms and strategies used by Aleksandar Vučić, as well as the tools employed by the Government of Serbia. Furthermore, the choice of these two aspects was international, and stemmed from my interest in just studying democratic regression as well as illiberal democracies in the EX-YU area. Reading various articles related to these aspects for a certain period of time, while at the same time being interested in this area, led me to the conclusion that these two spheres (right-wing populism and international patronage) would be the basis for studying democratic backsliding. For my master thesis, I used relevant and interesting data from several famous sources which are very important when it comes to researching certain state from any part of the globe.

Those famous sources are V-Dem (Varieties of democracy), Bertelsmann Transformation Index (BTI), World Press Media Index, Corruption Perception Index, Vulnerability Index.

All of the mentioned sources provided data for the Republic of Serbia in period of 2012 - 2020.

I believe that the selected Indices presented in this paper within the qualitative analysis as well as a number of sources within the quantitative analysis are sufficient for research of this type because Index data grounded in analysis by scientists around the world is able to provide representative research results.

2.4 Hypothesis System

2.4.1 General research Hypothesis

The general hypothesis is related to the question posed and it is:

Right-wing populism and international patronage led to quicker democratic backsliding in Serbia in the 2012-2020 period.

2.4.2 Specific Research Hypothesis

H1: International patronage significantly legitimizes non-democratic political decisions within Serbia

H2: SNS uses populism to create public opinion about other participants in political life. International patronage had led to a change in the internal political scene of Serbia

H3: The right-wing populism of the SNS marginalizes the opposition or pushes them out of parliament.

2.5 Social and Scientific research objectives

The social objectives of this research are getting acquainted with the essence of concepts such as populism, right-wing politics, democratic backsliding and the overall situation in Serbia. It can be compared to today's situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina and it can help people pay attention to all faces of politics. This work can be used for educational purposes and to serve researchers, students, but also the society as a whole. It can serve as a basis for further analysis and expansion of the circle of democratic backsliding in Serbia. It is important to mention the need for constant recording and study of this topic due to its fluidity.

The scientific objectives of this research are to investigate and discover something more about right wing populism and international patronage and their influence on democracy in general. The objective is also to find out can those two elements have an impact and change politics to such a drastic measure, in this case, the politics of Serbia. The relevant literature and Indices will help me to explain if that is actually possible. As focus of my master thesis is put on Serbia, I will use literature and try to understand how right-wing populism and international patronage are reflected and seen in Serbia.

2.6 Key terms

2.6.1 Right-wing politics

According to the Britannica, right refers to a portion of the political spectrum associated with conservative political thought. The term applies to conservatives and emphasizes notions such as tradition, authority, nationalism. The right is called conservative (backward), often a reactionary political force that usually declares itself as a defender of traditional values, national and state interests, etc. The right-wing parties are committed to preserving the old system or establishing old, surviving social relations. With such an orientation, the right opposes all innovations and reforms in society, everything that is new, modern and advanced. In contrast, the left in politics advocates new, advanced ideas strives for social reform, greater equality and understanding among peoples and nations, fights against surviving social relations that hinder development. It fights for democracy and the establishment of a new, more advanced and modern social order. (Britannica, 2021)

2.6.2 Populism -

The term populism is often very hard to describe in practice, because it is used to denote political movements, parties, ideologies and even a leader. In *Populism: Its Meaning and National Characteristics* written by Ghita Ionescu and Ernest Gellner (1969) it is stated: “There can, at present, be no doubt about the importance of populism. But no one is quite clear just what it is. As a doctrine or as a movement, it is elusive and protean. It bobs up everywhere, but in many and contradictory shapes.” (Ionescu and Gellner, 1969)

Populism is like a transnational actor, it cuts not just across geographical borders and historical eras, but also ideological. Looking in context of Europe it starts to intensify since the '80s with the target on national minorities and immigrants and implies an exclusionary right-wing variant of populism. For instance, in Latin America, populism in recent years has been mostly associated with an inclusionary vision of society, while in the United States, populism has been associated with a variety of economic ideologies and political parties. (Gidron and Bonikowski, 2013)

This master thesis will use the definition of populism as an ideology which is suggested by Cas Mudde in a series of studies that focus primarily on European right-wing populist parties.

According to Mudde populism is “a thin-centered ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogenous and antagonistic groups, *the pure people* versus the *corrupt elite*, and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people“ (Mudde, 2004)

For a better understanding of populism itself, it is necessary to take into account the space, culture, time and context in which it occurs.

2.6.3 International patronage –

Richard Rainer in his work ‘Politics of Gratitude’ – Bridging Ontologies: Patronage, Roles, and Emotions (2020) pointed that scholar of international relations are not developed within the discipline of IR the research program for the phenomenon of patronage between states. First because of adoption of narrow perspective of studies based on patronage between states, since they have only pursued the development of a *conceptual framework*. Second, for Rainer patronage is potentially seen as *an instrumental strategy* used by states in order to obtain *benefits* from the relationship.

2.6.4 Democratic backsliding –

Democratic backsliding just like democracy has so many definitions in the context of reasons of which it occurs, institutional and economic correlations. Nancy Barneo pointed that democratic backsliding is something that is frequently used but rarely analyzed. Also, she pointed out a question „What concrete actions transform one regime to another?“. Referring to the fact that backsliding of democracy can take us to different endpoints at different speeds. Democratic backsliding occurs when trivial component of democracy is questionable, it means that the freedom of speech, freedom of the press is under attack. The opposition has no room to challenge the government, to propose alternatives and solutions to the current regime. Free and fair elections are devalued, the rule of law is weakened and all government is based on politics of the current regime.

Fortuitously, only one full democratic breakdown has occurred so far. In Serbia, autocratization has gone so far that democracy is no longer upheld, even in its most limited. In

another instance of slow-moving developments where the government changed its nature in an incremental fashion over many years, Serbia has become an electoral authoritarian state. (Lindberg, 2018)

2.7 Method of research

This paper employs mixed methods and case study design. Case study design refers to analysis of Serbia from 2012 to 2020 which will be performed to show the role of right-wing populism and international patronage, while mixed methods stand for combining qualitative and quantitative research component. The second method, by using Indices data and information from relevant literature, will make this paper more relevant.

For the purpose of the research, the analysis of secondary data sources was used, which includes domestic and foreign literature that is relevant to the subject of research. The literature is supplemented by our own research regarding the collection of information from certain Indices that measure Democracy and democratic Values.

I will use the latest available for different indices, which will provide a better insight in the subject of research:

1. Bertelsmann Stiftung's Transformation Index (BTI)
2. Varieties of democracy (V-Dem)
3. World Press Freedom Index
4. Vulnerability Index
5. Perception Corruption Index

3. RIGHT WING POPULISM, INTERNATIONAL PATRONAGE AND DEMOCRATIC BACKSLIDING – *How to put it together?*

3.1 POPULISM / right wing

In order to explain populism, it is important to mention that the term populism is interpreted and understood differently. The term "populism" is controversial. Discussions about it did not lead to a precise and generally accepted definition. Usually, the mention of populism includes the elements that, according to Peter Wiles, make up the "syndrome of populism" (Wiles, 1969).

It is necessary to mention only some of over twenty elements of the possible definition of populism: isolationism, glorification of force, moralism, the mystical connection between the leader and the people, anti-militarism, anti-migration, etc. Although most authors have a completely different understanding of the term populism, what most of them agree on is the fact that the understanding of the concept itself is significantly influenced by the context in which we observe it, as well as the fact that a certain space carries with it certain cultural characteristics. It is differing from country to country, from region to region, and so does the understanding of populism itself.

Considering that there are *conflicting definitions* of populism, Margaret Canovan gave priority in her research to typology over the search for definition. It distinguishes two types of populism with certain subspecies; these are: *agrarian populism* (farmer radicalism, peasant movement and agrarian socialism of intellectuals - populism) and *political populism* (dictatorial, democratic, reactionary and political). One of the conclusions of Margaret Canovan's research - that populism is a "historical category" formed by the mutual relations of actors and events.“ (Canovan, 1981) (Canovan, 1999)

For her definition of populism as ‘the shadow of democracy’ Margaret Canovan became acclaimed, a powerful metaphor which she used to refer to the deep mechanisms of democratic systems. Populism is set in a wider framework that refers to the nature of the western state. (Poulsen, 1986)

For Mudde populism is „a thin-centered ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogenous and antagonistic groups, *the pure people* versus the *corrupt*

elite, and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people“ (Mudde, 2004).

At the very beginning of the 21st century, with the increase of populist parties, researchers sought to explore the meaning and nature of this phenomenon, in order to arrive at common features of populist parties and movements, this is especially important for the area of Europe where there has been an increase in populist parties.

Six features of populism in Europe for Paul Taggart are: Representative politics that in principle forms populism as a political form, the politics of heartland as a conception of the fatherland as something sublime to which we approach more emotionally than rationally. Empty heart politics which metaphorically presents the spectrum of political orientations that use populism flexibly, depending on the phrase “fill an empty heart” - lack of essential ideas. Chameleonic politics or the adaptation to given situations, populism and the sense of crisis - a fertile ground for populism, because it feeds on a strong sense of crisis and lastly, self-limiting – an idea as the basis around which populist narratives are formed (Taggart, 2003).

Different forms of populism have inspired authors to take different approaches to the study of this phenomenon, and different approaches have led to the attribution of different properties to populism: from the *other face of democracy* and the *shadow of democracy* (Canovan, 1999), through the *spectre of democracy* (Arditi 2004) to the *mirror of democracy* (Panizza 2005). What they all have in common is that they relate populism to democracy and its weaknesses.

The social and political context, especially in times of economic crisis and nowadays the COVID-19 pandemic, gives impetus to populism and is therefore often seen as a symptom of the crisis of democracy.

Furthermore, populism can be studied as a type of party organization, a political discourse, a political-communication style, and as a political ideology. (Grbeša, Šalaj, 2018)

Populism is the product of populist actors and parties, both right-wing and centrist and left-wing. The use of the term "populism" or often called something "populist" in political discourse is used in a derogatory sense, to denote political actors who act demagogically, who tend to make unrealistic and false promises in order to gain the support of citizens. This could be seen in Donald Trump (a right-wing populist) and in his promises about health care, immigration. Populists often employ the use of direct instruments, democracy and the concept of *dangerous others* (Šalaj, Grbeša, 2017).

In this context, the emphasis is on religious, sexual and national minorities, as well as certain international organizations such as NATO, the EU and the UN.

Right-wing populist parties, at least the ones in Europe, Hungary, Croatia and Poland for example, have a relatively open xenophobic rhetoric, and in their agendas, it is possible to see outlines of anti-immigrant policies, and on the example of Hungary and Poland - euroscepticism.¹

Right-wing populist parties share three key defining features: populism, nativism, and authoritarianism. There is a certain sentiment towards plebiscitary democracy i.e., the conduct of national referendums, and it is related to their attitudes towards political elites. Populism refers to a negative attitude towards elites, who have betrayed honest people. Therefore, the right-wing populist parties present themselves as true representatives of the people against the corrupt elites. (Mudde, 2007) (Rydgren, 2009) Elites can be perceived in a political and /or economic sense but the key is the perception of elites in a moral sense. Therefore, right-wing populists, even when they win power, have an anti-elitist attitude towards the morally corrupt elites they identify in civil society organizations, the media, cultural workers, and the European Union. Nativism implies intolerance towards "dangerous others". The definition of *dangerous others* varies among right-wing populist parties and may include immigrants, indigenous minorities, religious and / or sexual minorities. Authoritarianism implies a strict regulation of the social order and emphasizes the observance of law and order. It also presupposes harsh punishments for offenders and those who deny the authority of the order and its leaders. (Mudde, 2007) (Backlund and Jungar, 2019)

In addition, one of the key elements of right-wing populism, related to the feature of authoritarianism, implies charismatic authoritarian leadership and a centralized party organization.

The concept of populist democracy could be applied to describe the state of democracy in Serbia. While in countries with a long tradition of democratic political culture, developed state and social institutions, populism can in principle have a warning, corrective role to balance between liberal and democratic elements of representative democracy - in countries of illiberal unconsolidated democracy populism cannot have such a role because there aren't developed institutions, democratic culture and established democratic practices.

¹ According to the Britannica euroscepticism means European political doctrine where political leader advocates disengagement from EU. Also, political parties that espouse a euroskeptic viewpoint tend to be broadly populist and generally support tighter immigration controls etc. (Ray 2014)

On the contrary, in such conditions, populism has proven to be a serious obstacle to the establishment or consolidation of key elements of representative liberal democracy. The example of Serbia confirms that. (Lutovac, 2017)

3.2 International patronage

In order to define international patronage, it is first necessary to define what patronage itself is. Patronage is the support or help and protection of someone. This support can be in the form of health care, financial aid, etc. (Cambridge Dictionary, 2021)

By analogy, in this context then international patronage would represent at the international level two states, in which one represents the state of the Patron, which helps, militarily, economically or politically, while the other state represents the one being assisted. For example, America, Russia and China nowadays pursue and base their foreign policy on the acquisition of *client countries*. In Southeast Europe, China has attracted client countries into its sphere of influence.²

For Richardo Rainer, scholars of international relations are not developed within the discipline of IR the research program for the phenomenon of patronage between states. First because of adoption of narrow perspective of studies based on patronage between states, since they have only pursued the development a *conceptual framework*. Second, mostly because patronage is potentially seen as *an instrumental strategy* used by states in order to obtain *benefits* from the relationship. (Rainer 2020)

Patronage is a pervasive feature of international politics, an instrument historically used by Great Powers and their foreign policy based on the *acquisition of client states* (Sylvan and Majeski in Rainer, 2003). Which means that patronage between sovereign states, although a ubiquitous feature of modern international relations, is still not so much explored.

Furthermore, in his recent work too, Richardo Rainer believes:

“One of the main reasons why patronage has never been considered is the Westphalian narrative of international politics, which has contributed to casting a shadow over the

² In international relations, the sphere of influence is exclusivity (in economic, cultural, military form) of a state or organization in specific area.

study of interstate patronage, emphasizing pervasive foundational premises. First, it presupposes that the structure of international politics has flattened under the effect of *anarchy*. Second, it argues that the Westphalian state is impermeable to the authority of other states. Third, it sustains that international gift are not of sufficient value when it comes to explain interstate alliances. Taken together, these premises converge in a parsimonious theoretical framework which treats patronage as an epiphenomenon in contemporary international politics“.(Rainer, 2021)

The new era in the history of international relations, as well as all major theories based on the modern international system is a product of the Peace of Westphalia of 1648, where the foundations of a sovereign state were laid, as well as the birth of an international system called "modern". What is important to mention is that this peace represents a transition from "hierarchy to anarchy". The concept of “anarchy“ is mainly defined as the “absence“ of a Global State (Milner, 1991) .

For instance, Frances Rochstein explained patron-client relations as “form of politics in which ties between leaders and followers are personal. The patron grants favor in return for political support, material goods, and other services (...) patron-client relations often occur between members of different classes“(Rochstein, 1979).

Having in mind the state as a unit, the patron-state as well as the client-state have their own personal interests. Also, in most cases this relationship is established between states that are unequal in power, where the patron-state represents the Great Power and the client-state the small state. Taking this into account, Kenneth Waltz claimed that structure of international politics is vis-à-vis major states as major actors defined (Waltz, 2010). This means that he excludes small states, even though they are sovereign and, according to the Westphalian narrative, equal, and includes Great Powers who complement "anarchy" with what they want.

In the area of Southeast Europe, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, unlike most non-Western players, China has capacities and a strategic vision, which is manifested through a major Chinese branding initiative, i.e., through the Belt and Road project, which put the Balkans on China's radar. Vuk Vuksanović thinks “that this is a way for China to physically connect with Europe through its infrastructure projects - but that there are some other implications because some countries are candidates for EU membership“. (Maglajlija, 2021) Therefore, The Western Balkans, and especially Serbia, are interesting to a power like China, primarily because of its geographical location, a suitable ground for expressing its soft power but also the satisfaction of its strategic goals and interests that are important in international politics.

This implies mutual benefit in most cases, cause according to Veenendaal, the focus of a patron is to obtain the client's political support in form of a vote (Veenendaal, 2014)

In the literature, patronage is often synonym with clientelism, but the main difference between patronage and clientelism

“It comes down to the type of favor that the patron distributes; public-sector jobs in the case of patronage and material benefits such as money, food, or a house in the case of clientelism. In any case, both patronage and clientelism are conventionally associated with either premodern, traditional jurisdictions, or with newly democratizing countries that do not (yet) have a consolidated political-institutional system. In representative democracies, patron–client networks are generally organized and managed by political parties.” (Veenendaal, 2014)

Wingrod for instance, defines patronage more as a social bond in the anthropological sense as an „analysis of how persons of unequal authority, yet linked through ties of interest and friendship, manipulate their relationships in order to attain their ends“(Weingrod, 1968).

Kitschelt and Wilkison pointed out that patron intentions can be pure or something else „Either deal with the client honestly, or when required dishonestly (...) by ignoring tax regulations, building coed, anti-squatter legislation, proper procedures for charging for water and electricity by giving favorable legal judgments“(Kitschelt and Wilkinson, 2007).

An example of this can be found in Serbia, which in 2020 gave a Chinese investor 75.8 million euros in state grants, and the environmental impact assessment study enabled the construction of the company "Linglong" in Zrenjanin, and that time violated the Law on planning and construction and the Environmental Impact Assessment Act, avoiding legal procedures and thus allowing Chinese investors to build without a building permit.

Therefore, international patronage represents the relationship of two states (Patron-Client), one of which represents the Great Power and the other the microstate. This relationship includes a various spectrum of instruments of power, from military, political, economic dependence from state to state. Both countries are mostly working to satisfy their own interests.

3.3 Democratic backsliding

Just like a notion is *democratic*, *democratic backsliding* has many definitions too. To explain what democracy is not, I will explain what democracy is. The easiest way to explain democracy is to explain it „as a system of government in which power is vested in the people and exercised by them directly or through freely elected representatives“(Dahl, 2021), but in using it more complex we need to mention trivial components of democracy like laws, policies, institutions, freedoms, freedom of speech, opposition and etc. Democratic backsliding occurs when trivial component of democracy are questionable, it means that the freedom of speech, freedom of the press is under attack. The opposition has no room to challenge the government, to propose alternatives and solutions to the current regime. Free and fair elections are devalued, the rule of law is weakened and all government is based on politics of the current regime. For Stephan Haggard and Robert Kaufman, democratic backsliding is “the incremental erosion of institution, rules and norms that results from the actions of duly elected government“ (Haggard and Kaufman, 2021).

Nancy Barneo in “On democratic backsliding“ (2016) analyzed what might bring to democratic backsliding

“Where backsliding involves rapid and radical change across a broad range of institutions, it leads to outright democratic breakdown and to regimes that are unambiguously authoritarian. Where backsliding takes the form of gradual changes across a more circumscribed set of institutions, it is less likely to lead to all-out regime change and more likely to yield political systems that are ambiguously democratic or hybrid. Democratic backsliding can thus constitute democratic breakdown or simply the serious weakening of existing democratic institutions for undefined ends.“

Furthermore, Ellen Lust and David Waldner also emphasize drastic changes that can be fatal to democracy and conceptualize democratic backsliding as: “a change in a combination of competitive electoral procedures, civil and political liberties, and accountability, and that backsliding occurs through a series of discrete changes in the rules and informal procedures that shape those elections, rights, and accountability“ (Lust and Waldner, 2015)

There are six families of theory and each have factors that are correlated and contributed to democratic backsliding that Lust and Waldner have identified. Each of the theories have own way that could contribute to the occurrence of democratic backsliding:

- International factors
- Political leader
- Political culture
- Political institutions
- Political economy
- Social structure and political coalitions.“ (Lust, Waldner, 2015)

Democratic backsliding occurs when undemocratic regimes become more repressive, and most democratic governments suffer from backsliding by adopting tactics to restrict speech and weaken the rule of law, as well as new rights that are limited in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Interestingly, the IDEA report: 2021, for 2020 - pandemic year states that: "The number [of countries] moving towards authoritarianism is three times greater than the number moving towards democracy." (IDEA, 2021) Also, the report, which analyzes and measures democracy and its progress or decline, records some particularly worrying democratic names that have occurred in world countries such as India, the United States, but also EU member states, which I also mentioned in the section Populism; Hungary, Slovenia and Poland.

For the 5th year in a row, countries that have turned to authoritarianism surpass the number of those where the quality of the democratic process is improving. IDEA expects this trend to continue in 2021, with a provisional group estimate of 98 democracies, 20 *hybrid* governments (including Russia) and 47 authoritarian regimes (including China).

Serbia, for instance, is one of the 10 countries with the greatest decline in democracy. (IDEA, 2021)

4. POLITICAL COUNTRY RETROSPECTIVE

4.1 SFRY

In order to understand the politics in Serbia in general and what might be the reasons for the possible democratic backsliding one needs to understand and know what might have created the fertile soil for it. While investigating about Serbia, I found many articles and books with information about Serbia and government systems from centuries ago but for this work the relevant period will be from 1974 and onward. Namely, Serbia in that time was one of the six republics of Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and what is more important to mention is the SFRY Constitution of 1974. Political events were a precursor to the adoption of the Constitution which marked the beginning of the federalization of the country.

It additionally strengthened the protection of the self-governing system from state interference and additionally strengthened the representation of republics and provinces in all electoral and political bodies. According to the constitution, republics are defined as states and self-governing communities. Most objections to the Constitution came from the FR of Serbia, due to the formal granting of autonomy to its provinces of Kosovo and Vojvodina. During the lives of Tito and Kardelj, this was not very pronounced. Occasionally the federal authorities would be asked to convince the provinces with their authority to correctly interpret the Constitution, according to which FR Serbia was a sovereign republic with an appropriate degree of autonomy for its provinces. At the beginning of 1987, after persistent efforts of the leadership of the FR Serbia, the Presidency of the SFRY initiated the adoption of more than 130 amendments in the Assembly of the SFRY. After the victory of Slobodan Milošević at the 8th session of the Central Committee of the Serbian Sports Confederation in September 1987, the new Serbian leadership demanded the repeal of the existing constitution. (Hrvatska enciklopedija, 2021)

4.2 The 90's

The first democratic³ parliamentary elections after the Second World War in Serbia took place on December 9th, 1990 (Miladinović 2020). “The political life in the first year of the renewed multiparty system in Serbia was marked by three political parties - the Democratic Party, the Serbian Renewal Movement and the Socialist Party of Serbia, led by Dragoljub Mićunović (DS), Vuk Drašković (SPO) and Slobodan Milošević (SPS)“ (Kojić, 2020)

The announcement of the elections was preceded by the adoption of the new Constitution of Serbia, despite the opposition of the newly formed opposition parties, which advocated that the constitution be adopted only after the forming of the multi-party parliament, following the example of most post-communist states. However, in the 1990 July referendum, the majority of voters said that the highest legislative act should be adopted first, so that Serbia became the only republic in the SFRY that passed the constitution in a one-party parliament, before calling multi-party elections. The first President of the Republic of Serbia was Slobodan Milošević in the period 1990 – 1997. As Serbia's president, Milošević had continued to dominate the new Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, which had been inaugurated in 1992 and consisted of only Serbia and Montenegro. He maintained power by his repression of political opponents, his control of the mass media, and the opportunistic alliances he formed with parties across the political spectrum, including Jugoslovenska levica, the party led by his wife. (Allcock, 2019) As Antonino Castaldo pointed out, Slobodan Milošević dominated Serbian politics during the 1990's and that was because of two important reasons that also explain the rise of competitive authoritarianism. First is the strength of the SPS, which inherited the personnel and infrastructure of the Savez Komunističke Srbije – in 1990 and replaced communist ideology with Serbian nationalism and the second is a little amount of pressure from the West because Milošević was perceived as a useful person for solving the Balkan wars in 90's. (Castaldo, 2020) “Having served two terms as president of Serbia, Milošević was constitutionally barred from serving a third term. He retained power, however, by having the federal parliament elect him to the presidency of Yugoslavia in 1997.“ (Allcock. 2019)

In 2000, Demokratska Opozicija Srbije (DOS) was established, a coalition of 19 political parties that were in opposition to the regime of the President Slobodan Milošević.

³ the first multi-party elections in Serbia

Regardless of the political differences, sometimes dramatically opposite, they were united by a common goal - Slobodan Milošević and how to overthrow him.

The leaders of the coalition were the Serbian Renewal Movement with Vuk Drašković as the leader, Zoran Đinđić's Demokratska stranka (DS) and Vojislav Koštunica's Demokratska stranka Srbije (DSS).

The unification of the opposition was preceded by years of repression by the regime of Slobodan Milošević, the war in the former Yugoslavia, poverty, and months of demonstrations by citizens and students in 1996/97, the falsification of the results of the local elections, the bombing of Yugoslavia, the murder of political opponents - journalist Slavko Ćuruvija and the former prominent communist official Ivan Stambolić.

4.3 Serbia at the beginning of the 21st century

The year 2000 for Serbia was a turning point in. The elections in 2000 triggered a democratic transition. “In the 2000 elections, Seven Parties ran independently, and the only coalition was the Demokra, an ideologically and programmatically heterogeneous group that united 18 parties and movements, and was led by the DS and the DSS. According to all expectations, the Democratic Opposition of Serbia achieved a more than convincing victory.” (Kojić, 2020)

The new republican government was elected on January 25th, 2001, and the Prime Minister became the leader of the DS, Zoran Đinđić. The seventh government since the re-establishment of multi-party system in Serbia, and the first in the post-Milošević era, consisted of 18 political parties, with seven vice presidents and 19 ministers. (Kojić, 2020)

“At the beginning of the 21st century, Serbia experienced progress and, as pointed above, the elections in 2000 produced a democratic transition, but several governments comprised of former components of the DOS coalition struggled to create a Serbian democracy that ultimately proved defective. The still unstable political system survived under the constant threat of Vojislav Šešelj's far right Serbian Radical Party, as the largest party.” (Castaldo, 2020)

The beginning of the century marked a new change of government, thus opening the possibility of a new Serbia whose foundations will be built in a democratic society.

4.4 SNS and the 2012 – year of change

After the political collapse of the "radicals" and the conflict between Tomislav Nikolić, the deputy president of the Radical Party and the leader of the Radical Party, Vojislav Šešelj, Tomislav Nikolić resigned in September 2008. At that time, Aleksandar Vučić stood out as the general secretary who also resigned from all party duties, and together with Tomislav Nikolić, he founded the SNS a moderate and pro-EU political group (Castaldo, 2020) on October 21st, 2008.

In 2011, the Serbian Progressive Party formed a coalition with Velimir Ilić's New Serbia, which included several smaller parties. This coalition represented the biggest opposition to Boris Tadić's Democratic Party government. In the 2012 elections, the SNS nominated Tomislav Nikolić, who in the second round with 49.5% of the vote, won against Boris Tadić who had 47.3% of the vote. “Thanks to a populist electoral campaign centered on the failure of the previous government to tackle corruption and improve the economy, Nikolić won.” (Castaldo, 2020). In regards to the parliamentary elections, the list of the Serbian Progressive Party remained in the first place with as many as 73 seats. Nikolić's victory helped the SNS form a new Serbian government. Ivica Dačić's Socialists, as the real winners of the elections because they won 44 seats (third place in terms of votes), refused to extend cooperation with the Democratic Party and make an alliance with the SNS and the United Regions of Serbia Mlađan Dinkić, who agreed that Ivica Dačić be the Prime Minister of the Government. Thus, on July 27th, the new Government of Serbia was elected and in it the Serbian Progressive Party occupied most of the ministries, the most important of which is the Ministry of Defense, headed by Aleksandar Vučić. (Istinomer, 2021)

4.4.1 Genesis of the functions: Aleksandar Vučić

Aleksandar Vučić's political career dates back to 1993, when he became a member of the Serbian Radical Party, when he was elected to the Serbian Parliament. At the same time, in the early 1990s, he was a journalist for the Bosnian Serb propaganda channel “Kanal S“, based in Pale. The first serious engagement began in 1998, when he was elected Minister of Information in the new Serbian government, and it is important to mention that during his

tenure, journalists who were against Milošević and his regime were punished, both by fines and by certain prohibitions.

After the 2008 conflict between Vojislav Šešelj and Tomislav Nikolić, Aleksandar Vučić resigned from all duties and soon after, together with Tomislav Nikolić, became the main leader of the SNS, with the function of deputy president of the party. The most significant event in the political career of Aleksandar Vučić, which later marked the new era in Serbia was in May 2012. SNS formed a new Serbian government with the Ujedinjeni Region Srbije (URS) and the Socijalistička partija Srbije (SPS), and in July of the same year, Aleksandar Vučić was elected First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense.

Namely, in 2014, after the early national elections, a new government was formed by the coalition SNS, SPS -PUPS, Ujedinjena Srbija (US) and the Stranka Vojvođanskih Mađara (SVM).

Aleksandar Vučić became the new Prime Minister of the Republic of Serbia. “Serbia began to show serious signs of possible democratic backsliding that corresponded to Aleksandar Vučić’s rise to power. Starting from the year when Vučić first assumed the premiership.” (Castaldo, 2020) In 2017, at the presidential elections, Vučić won 2,012,788 votes out of a total of 6,724,949 registered voters, thus winning more than 50% of the vote and becoming the new president of Serbia, already in the first round. (Republička izborna komisija, 2017)

4.5 Road to the EU

The European Union represents the political, economic, intergovernmental, supranational community of European states. It was created in 1951 between the frequent states of Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, France, Germany and Italy as a result of the process of cooperation and integration. The European Union was formally established by the Maastricht Treaty on November 1, 1993. Today, this supranational community has 27 members and 5 candidates, including Serbia. (Gabel, 2021)

Serbia's national interest and strategic priority is membership in the European Union, believing that joining the EU encourages reforms. For Serbia, the EU is the most important investment and trade partner, which is crucial for the economic stability of the country. (Ministarstvo spoljnih poslova Republike Srbije, 2021)

On April 29th, 2008 between European Union and Serbia was The Stabilization and Association Agreement signed.

After this, in 2009, the Council of the European Union published a document for the countries of the Western Balkans, which enabled the entry into force of the visa-free regime with the European Union. In 2009, Serbia applied for membership in the European Union, and in 2010, the EU Council of Foreign Ministers decided to start ratifying SOSIP with Serbia. The European Parliament ratified it on January 19th, 2011, and the ratification process was finally completed in 2013. In March 2012, the European Council decided to grant Serbia the candidate status for membership in the European Union. "With the decision of the European Council on the opening of accession negotiations from June 28th, 2013, the most demanding phase of European integration will begin - membership negotiations, which will result in full harmonization with the system, values and legislation of the European Union." (Ministarstvo spoljnih poslova Republike Srbije, 2021)

By 2020, a total of eleven intergovernmental conferences between Serbia and the EU have been held, at which the following negotiating chapters have been opened:

- Chapter 32 – Financial Control
- Chapter 35 (Other Issues)
- Chapter 23 (Judiciary & Fundamental rights)
- Chapter 24 (Justice, freedom and security)
- Chapter 5 (Public Procurement)
- Chapter 25 (Science and research) - temporary closed;
- Chapter 20 (Enterprise and Industrial Policy)
- Chapter 26 (Education and culture) – temporary closed;
- Chapter 7 (Intellectual property)
- Chapter 29 (Customs Union)
- Chapter 6 (Company Law)
- Chapter 30 (External Relations)
- Chapter 33 (Financial and budgetary provisions)
- Chapter 13 (Fisheries)
- Chapter 9 (Financial services)
- Chapter 4 (Free movement of capital).
- The Office for European Integration of the Government of Serbia has officially ceased to exist, and on June 26, 2017, the Ministry for European Integration was established. (Beogradska Otvorena škola, 2021)

5. CASE STUDY – THE ROLE OF RIGHT-WING POPULISM AND INTERNATIONAL PATRONAGE ON DEMOCRATIC BACKSLIDING 2012-2020

As mentioned in Nations in Transit 2020 in the Balkans, years of increasing control over the state, abuse of power and strongman tactics employed by Vučić Aleksandar brought the country over the edge – because Serbia is no longer categorized as a democracy. Furthermore, the Nations in Transit points that „This change comes at a time when the EU’s accession process is mired in disagreements and no longer serves as a lodestar for democratic reform, and when the politics of the great powers and transactional diplomacy are turning the Balkans into a geostrategic chessboard. The increased presence of authoritarian powers like Russia, China, and Turkey in the region has spurred some reengagement by the United States, but it too has increasingly focused on backroom deals, deemphasizing any shared commitment to democracy“ (Csaky, 2020)

By examining Serbias’s reports on the official web page of the BTI, it could be seen that the country is characterized as a defective democracy, a market economy with limitations, and a country with moderate governance. (BTI - transformation Index, 2021) A clear image of democratic backsliding is visible in most major indices of democracy.

Many criterias and indicators within different Indices represent a fertile ground for the emergence of populism and international patronage, but also their product.

5.1 BTI-transformation Index

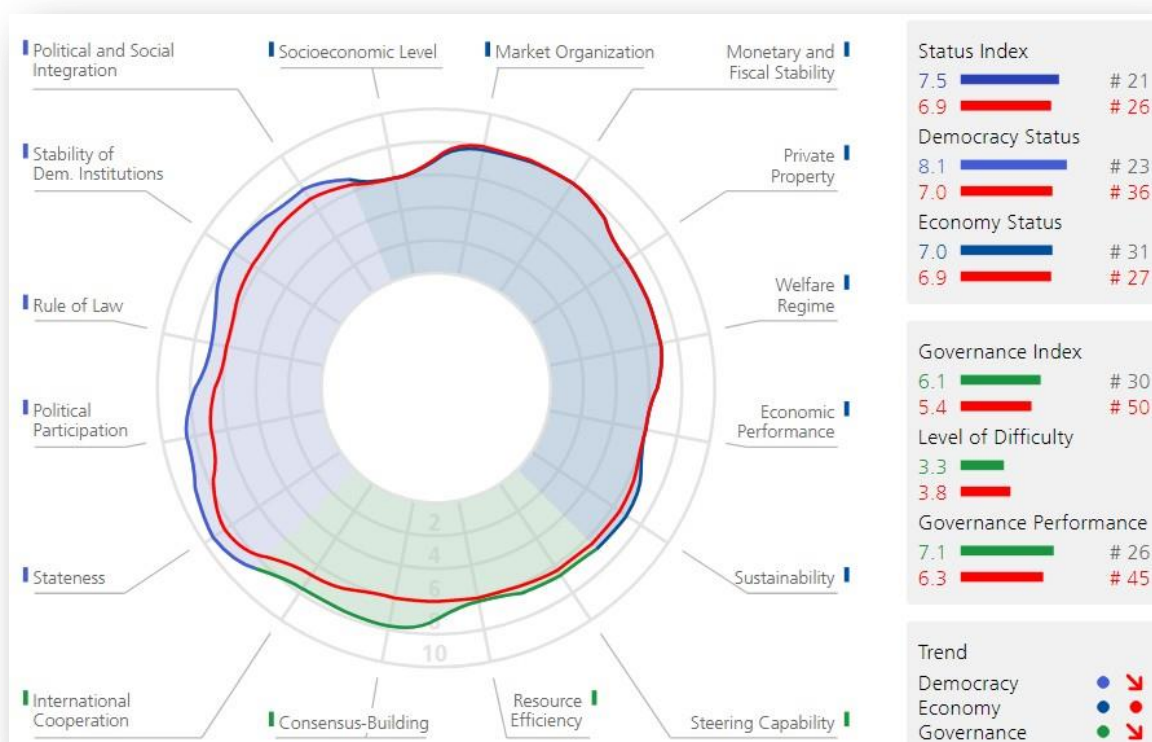


Figure 1:BTI transformation Index: SERBIA

source: <https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-dashboard/SRB>, date of access: 05.12.2021

On Figure 1. below Serbia BTI- transformation index for 2012 and 2020 year is presented. The blue lines explain the year 2012 and the red lines explain the year 2020 .

In comparison, the democracy status⁴ for 2012 was at 8.1, placing it at number 23 out of 128 countries in the category of democracies in consolidation. While in 2020 we can see a decline in every aspect, the democracy status is 7.0 which placed it as a defective democracy. There are 5 criteria for this and each with specific indicators : Stateness (monopoly on the use of force, state identity, no interference of religious dogma, basic administration), political participation (free and fair elections, effective power to govern, association/assembly rights, freedom of expression) rule of law (separation of powers, independent judiciary, prosecution

⁴ The Democracy Status describes where country stands on its way to democracy. It is composed of 5 criteria evaluated on a 1-10 scale. (BTI - transformation Index 2021)

of office abuse, civil rights), stability of democratic institutions (performance of democratic institutions, commitment of democratic institutions) and political and social integration (party system, interest groups, approval of democracy, social capital). Each of these criteria have indicators. (BTI - transformation Index, 2021)

Stateness criteria in Serbia 2012 was pointed by 9.3, while in 2020 by 8.5. The monopoly on the use of force as one of the indicators for stateness in Serbia in 2012 was pointed with 9 and in 2020 it was 8. Serbia has the monopoly on the use of force over its territory as it is written in the Constitution, but there is an exception for the formerly autonomous province of Kosovo, the status of which is a controversy. The Kosovar parliament made a declaration of independence in 2008, which Serbia opposed. So, Serbia continues to proclaim it as part of the state, even if it doesn't have any control over the territory.

An interesting fact is that with the year 2018, almost 110 countries (23 EU member states) recognized Kosovo's independence, but Kosovo is not a member of the UN Security Council, because Russia and China⁵ refuse to accept it. Nowadays, the two states have more likely a bigger role in Serbia. Criteria Political participation comparing 2012 with 2020 had a huge decline, from 8.5 to 7.0 for example, the indicator of free and fair elections in 2012 was at 9.0 points, and for 2020 it was at 6.0. Also, the association/assembly rights from 9 fell down to 8, same happened with the freedom of expression, it fell from 7 to 6. Since 2012, a total of 7 elections have been held, i.e., four national elections and two presidential elections. (Bartelsmann Stiftung, 2021)

The last elections for national deputies of the Republic of Serbia in 2020 were postponed due to the global pandemic that caused a state of emergency. What is important to mention are the civil protests that took place before the elections were called.

At the time, many parliamentary and non-parliamentary parties boycotted the elections, ultimately resulting in the lowest turnout in Serbia's national elections since the introduction of the multiparty system in 1990.

„The largest opposition coalition, the Alliance for Serbia, boycotted the election, citing lack of conditions for their free and fair conduct, leading to the lowest turnout ever in the elections for Serbian parliament. The junior coalition partner in the government, the Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS), won 10, 9% of the vote, while the threshold of 3% was crossed only by Serbian Patriotic Alliance (SPAS) of Aleksandar Šapić, the mayor of Novi Beograd, who won 4, 2% of the vote (..) it is confirmed that only SNS, SPS and SPAS will have MP's in the next

⁵ Two permanent members of the U.N. Security Council

parliament, alongside the national minority parties. The turnout remains undetermined, between 47% and 49%, which would make it the lowest percentage in Serbia since the establishment of a multi-party system in 1990.“ (EWB, 2020)

In 2017, presidential elections were held in which Aleksandar Vučić won with a total of more than 55% of the votes in the first round. The Council of Europe gave Observation of the presidential election. In the report, like most of the opponents of media representatives and non-governmental organizations, they pointed to the general problems regarding political and media freedoms in Serbia during the rule of Aleksandar Vučić and the right-wing SNS party. “Many presidential candidates and representatives of NGO's and the media community informed the delegation about the unequal media treatment of the presidential candidates. The presidential candidates' activities were relatively fairly covered in the programmes of public media services, on the first channels of the Staterun Radio and Television of Serbia (RTS) and Radio and Television of Vojvodina (RTV). Aleksandar Vučić was the most represented presidential candidate in the electronic and printed media, including the front pages of daily newspapers.“ (GODSKESEN, 2017) Also, the uneven media coverage of the election campaign, which is in favor of the candidates from the ruling coalition, was pointed out.

In this case, it is worth mentioning the research conducted by Biro za društvena istraživanja (BIRODI), taking the results of the monitoring of PINK, PRVA, B92, RTS1, N1 and HEPI televisions in the period of 20 days starting from March 3 - with the key conclusion that *the key media protagonist* was Aleksandar Vučić, and during the campaign itself, the media had less and less critical views of him, and he was represented 250 minutes more than the other candidates.

„The Assembly observation delegation identified a number of irregularities and shortcomings during the whole electoral process of the presidential election. Serbia therefore needs to improve its electoral legal framework, as well as certain electoral practices, taking into consideration the lessons of past elections, in order to increase the citizens' confidence in democratic elections.“ (GODSKESEN 2017)

Speaking about democratic institutions, both indicators for stability of democratic institutions experienced a drop in the performance scale from 7 to 6 and the commitment to democratic institutions fell from 9 to 7.

In regards to this, in the 4th. Article of the Constitution of Serbia, it states:

“The Government system shall be basen on the divison of power into legislative, executive and judiciary. Relation between three branches of power shall be based on balance and mutual control. Judiciary power shall be independent.“

(Constitution of the Republic Serbia, 2006)

In practice this is very much different. Although the role of the president is mostly ceremonial, in relation to the executive branch of government, in practice, the prevailing power of the president has put this institution at the forefront, as the main policy and decision-maker. This domination is also present over the judiciary branch.

This was especially indicative with the proposed constitutional amendments that deal with the judiciary and increase political influence on the procedure for electing judges. Most relevant actors to some extent accept democratic institutions as legitimate. This situation is constantly threatened by the intentions of President Aleksandar Vučić, who in practice yields more power than the Constitution stipulates. The president influences all other branches of government and sets himself up as a central focal point in decision-making and policy-making, not forgetting to mention the central figure of Aleksandar Vučić for important decisions such as changing the criminal law and pursuing a negotiating policy with the Government of Kosovo. This imperiles the system of checks and balances, institutions and the rule of law. It also paves the way for the slow rise of the authoritarian regime in Serbia. (BTI - transformation Index, 2021)

Although the constitution guarantees the independence of the judiciary branch, the courts remain vulnerable to corruption and political influence.

The constitutional provision *the judiciary is independent* indicates that in adjudicating the court is obliged only by law and other sources of law. In other words, this provision prohibits other state bodies, e.g. To the Government, the National Assembly, the President of the Republic, to interfere in the work of the courts. In the process of Serbia's accession to the EU, Chapters 23 and 24 were opened in July 2016, and the independence of the judiciary is one of the key topics in this process. Although there is a consensus among the Serbian professional public that the constitutional framework for the judiciary has a number of shortcomings and that it allows politics to influence the judiciary in at least three ways by electing judges to the first three-year term; the judiciary which then elects all judges to permanent terms.

The European Commission's report for Serbia 2020 notes that the extent of political influence on the judiciary remains a matter of serious concern. It is further stated that state officials, as well as members of the Assembly, continue to regularly give public comments on ongoing investigations and court proceedings, as well as on individual judges and prosecutors. (European Commission, 2020)

Furthermore, in the BTI report for 2021 the conclusion is that checks and balances are challenged. „The executive branch largely controls the legislative process, sidelining opposition lawmakers through the frequent use of accelerated legislative procedures and late changes to the legislative agenda. The judiciary is not free of political influence and it is further plagued by inefficiency, nepotism and corruption.“ (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2021)

The executive branch is much more powerful and dominates the legislature and the judiciary. “Thus, this is mainly because of practices of the ruling party SNS that weakens the constitutional system of check and balances.“ (BTI - transformation Index, 2021)

The role of the National Assembly has been degraded in relation to the position of President. An analysis of the convocation since 2012 shows the number of deputies who separated the most from the parties on whose lists they entered the National Assembly in the period from 2016 and onwards.



Figure 2: THE STRUCTURE OF THE ASSEMBLY OF SERBIA IN 2016⁶

⁶ source: <https://sanapress.info/2020/06/26/izbori-2020-spp-ima-sansu-za-cetvrtog-poslanika-sda-ostala-na-dva/>,

date of access: 12.12.2021



Figure 3: THE STRUCTURE OF THE ASSEMBLY OF SERBIA IN 2020⁷

By analyzing and comparing Figures 2 and 3, taking into account that the assembly consists of 250 deputies, we can see that the Serbian Progressive Party as a right-wing party has more mandates than all other parties together. That's why we can say that the Serbian National Assembly has an *opposition without opposition*.

As a result, the opposition is becoming increasingly invisible, with the impossibility of any action within the institutional framework. Due to that, the majority of the opposition left the assembly hall on December 7, 2018, during the vote on the budget, because they were not allowed to speak in the plenum.

"Opposition deputies argued that leaving the parliamentary sessions was because the opposition's law drafts were not put on the agenda, and that the amendments were rejected. It seems that it was the practice of the ruling majority to submit a large number of identical amendments, which their deputies read in the Assembly, thus spending limited time for discussion and practically preventing the opposition from speaking.“ (Cvetković, 2019)

⁷ source: <https://sanapress.info/2020/06/26/izbori-2020-spp-ima-sansu-za-cetvrtog-poslanika-sda-ostala-na-dva/>,
date of access: 21.12.2021

In correlation with indicators above, approval of democracy dropped from 9 to 7. The BTI report for 2021 pointed out that citizens generally accept democratic norms and procedures and accept the constitutional framework, but what is important to mention is that less citizens in Serbia believe in the real power of democracy and institutions, as do other Balkan people in general.

The 2018 and 2019 protests against the rule of Aleksandar Vučić were held for three months in most cities in Serbia, with the fact that the SNS is only an offshoot of a long autocratic tradition dating back to the Milošević era, and that change should affect not only the President and the government but also the complete system.

„Serbia has the lowest level of confidence in the ability of three of the five institutions surveyed to perform executive oversight (audit authority – 39%; civil society – 45%; and media – 36%).“ (Balkan Barometar, 2019)

Furthermore, the BTI report states that “According to a recent survey by the Center for Research, Transparency and Accountability on Citizen Participation in Democratic Processes, support for *ruling powers* has decreased (from 61% in 2007 to 43% in 2018), while support for democracy as the best possible system of government in Serbia has increased (from 44% to 51%).“ (BTI - transformation Index, 2021)

Although citizens' trust in existing democratic institutions in Serbia is low, trends point to the potential for improving the overall state of democracy in the future. The fact of distrust in democracy at the moment speaks of the revolt of citizens, the opposition, the media, especially reflecting on the protests *One in 5 million*. Anti-government protests began in November 2018 under the slogan *Stop with the bloody shirts*, after one of the opposition politicians, Borko Stefanović, was beaten in Kruševac. (Ilić, 2019)

5.2. Varieties of Democracy

Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) offer us a whole new approach when it comes to measuring democracy. It consists from five, very important principles of democracy: liberal, electoral, participatory, deliberative and egalitarian. In the country report, the V-Dem data shows that Serbia holds very low scores for each of the major aspects of democracy and that the nation's development has been slow, with little progress made. The V-Dem Liberal Democracy Index (LDI) captures both liberal and electoral aspects of democracy based on the 71 indicators included in the Liberal Component Index (LCI) and the Electoral Democracy Index (EDI).

The EDI reflects a relatively ambitious idea of electoral democracy lwhere a number of institutional features guarantee free and fair elections such as freedom of association and freedom of expression. (V-Dem Institute, 2021)

On Table 1. the V-dem index during the period of 2016 is shown. This year is important because of many things - first because of the National Assembly elections held, and then because of the campaign related to the 2017 presidential elections. This year serves as a comparison before the era of President Aleksandar Vučić.

Table 1: V- DEM ANNUAL REPORT 2017 for 2016 year⁸

Liberal Democracy Index (LDI)	91/179 (1 being best, 179 being worst)
Electoral Democracy Index (EDI)	100
Liberal Component Index (LCI)	86
Egalitarian Component Index (ECI)	75
Participatory Component Index (PCI)	85
Deliberative Component Index (DCI)	90

Table 2: V-DEM ANNULA REPORT 2021 for 2020 year:⁹

Liberal Democracy Index (LDI)	119/179 (1 being best, 179 being worst)
Electoral Democracy Index (EDI)	125
Liberal Component Index (LCI)	119
Egalitarian Component Index (ECI)	61
Participatory Component Index (PCI)	78
Deliberative Component Index (DCI)	101

⁸ url: https://www.v-dem.net/media/filer_public/b0/79/b079aa5a-eb3b-4e27-abdb-604b11ecd3db/v-dem_annualreport2017_v2.pdf date of acces: 15.12.2021

⁹ url: https://www.v-dem.net/static/website/files/dr/dr_2021.pdf date of acces:15.12.2021

Analyzing 2016 and 2020 there is a huge decline in all indices. By ranking, Serbia in 2016 was ranked 91st out of 179 countries, but for 2020 year it is 119th out of 179.

In this report, Serbia is characterized as an Electoral Autocracy, and the scores indicates that the country sees a movement backwards from one level to another. In the 2020 election, Aleksandar Vučić's SNS won the most seats in the National Assembly.

These elections were significant because of many things, primarily because of the boycott of the opposition, then because of the lowering of the electoral threshold, which was previously lowered by the government from 5% to 3%, which is considered a passivation of extra-institutional resistance and reduces the possibility of pluralism, even if 21 lists of candidates were confirmed. (V-Dem Institute, 2021) Due to the boycott of the National Assembly before the pandemic, and then the boycott of the elections, because the opposition parties demanded the postponement of the elections until equal and fair conditions are provided, Serbia recorded a significant drop in the criteria of clean elections, freedom of expression and efficient parliament.

Antonino Castaldo pointed out that "Since 2012, SNS has used its electoral strength to dominate political institutions and exploit state resources to hinder the opposition's chances of winning elections. While falling short of outright repression, these measures have tilted the playing fields against the opposition, thereby allowing Vučić to stay in power without needing to resort to massive electoral fraud" (Castaldo, 2020)

For example, the Freedom of expression and alternative sources of information are quite questionable because mainstream media, the most influential ones are pro-government, supported by Aleksandar Vučić and the SNS.

There is no impartial novelty in most public spaces, which is best illustrated by the fact of false reporting on protests in pro-government media. During his eight years in power, Vučić, in various positions in the government and then as president, has taken control of the country's largest media, to which his critics have no access.

5.3 World Press Media

According to the Constitution of Serbia, Article 50, freedom of the media is guaranteed:

„Everyone shall have the freedom to establish newspapers and other forms of public information without prior permission and in a manner laid down by the law. Television and radio stations shall be established in accordance with the law. Censorship shall not be applied in the Republic of Serbia. A competent court may prevent the dissemination of information through means of public informing only when this is necessary in a democratic society to prevent inciting to violent overthrow of the system established by the *Constitution or to prevent violation of the territorial integrity of the Republic of Serbia, to prevent propagation of war or instigation to direct violence, or to prevent advocacy of racial, ethnic or religious hatred enticing discrimination, hostility or violence*. The law shall regulate the exercise of right to correct false, incomplete or inaccurately imparted information resulting in violation of rights or interests of any person, and the right to react to communicated information“ (Constitution of Serbia, 2006)

Also, the article 51 of the Constitution guarantees the right to information;

„Everyone shall have the right to be informed accurately, fully and timely about issues of public importance. The media shall have the obligation to respect this right. Everyone shall have the right to access information kept by state bodies and organizations with delegated public powers, in accordance with the law.“ (Constitution of Serbia, 2006)

Serbia has demonstrated a backward trend, according to the World Press Freedom Index 2020, the ranking for Serbia is 93 out of 180 countries. On the picture below, Serbia's ranking starting from the year 2013 is shown.

Following these results, since the 2016 preparation of the new media strategy, it has fallen by 34 places on this scale.

Attacks on journalists, pressures, threats, censorship, false reporting, populism, which has become the center of media reporting, have greatly contributed to this.

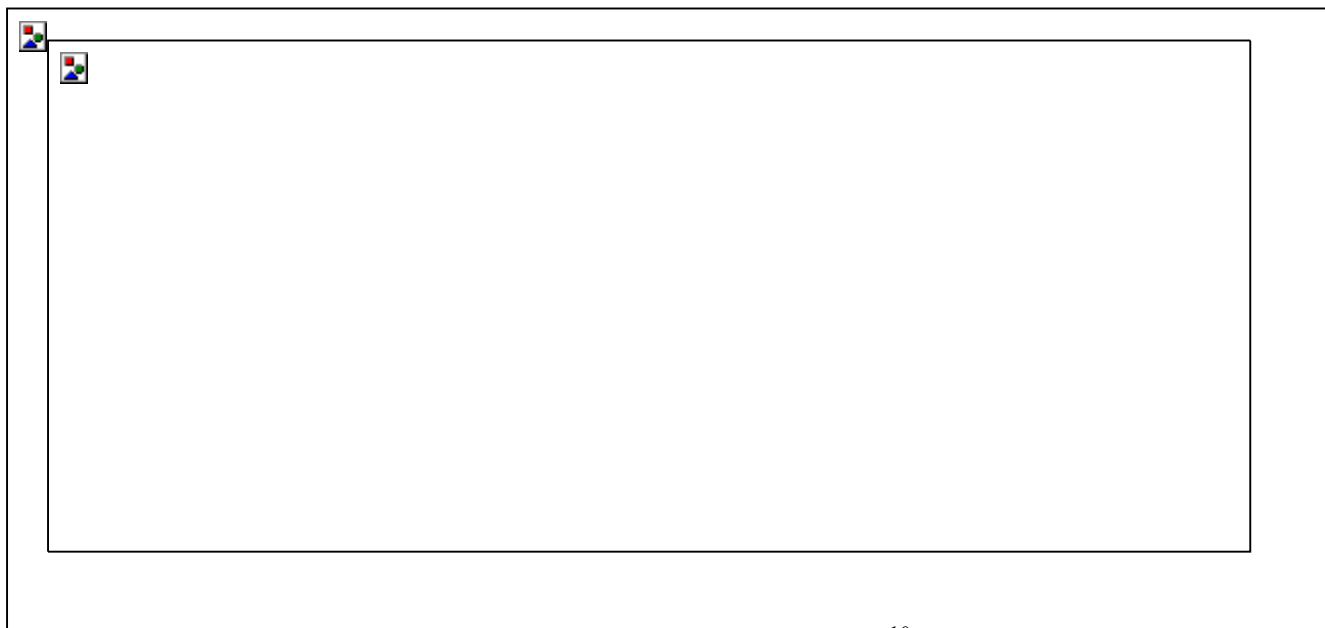


Figure 4: WORLD PRESS MEDIA INDEX;¹⁰

The most influential media are those that receive most of their revenues from the state budget, namely RTS with national coverage and RTV with regional coverage, due to the growing economic ring, non-transparent distribution of money to the media - investment is still strongly influenced by the state.

As written in report

“Due to the persistent lack of capital, the state still has a significant role and influence in the media market. It controls the media through ownership, but predominantly through various models of government funding. Public funds are distributed arbitrarily and non-transparently, most often in favor of the pro-government media, without clear and measurable criteria, public control and evaluation.” (Media Ownership Monitor, 2020)

The selective approach to various debts to pro-government and non-governmental media is evident from the example when in 2019 PINK TV received over 1.52 million dinars in debt

¹⁰ source: <https://rsf.org/en/serbia> date of access: 15.12.2021

due to debt delay, and in addition Pink received at least 1.28 billion dinars in export loans from the state. This pro-government television has had preferential treatment for years, sometimes regardless of the regulations. Pink managed to postpone the payment of taxes for years, so the Tax Administration enabled debt rescheduling in a total of 93 installments in four years. Due to the economic ring and the dependence on state funding, most media in Serbia are propagandists and an instrument of the ruling party. (srbin.info, 2019) This is visible during the national elections in 2020, when Aleksandar Vučić is both the President of Serbia and the President of the SNS, and with controversial videos he helped the electoral list of a political party whose president is achieved the best election result. Also in 2017, during the presidential elections, when at the same time both the prime minister and the presidential candidate he got many more "minutes" on national broadcasters than his opponents.

The media reform launched in 2015 regarding the state's exit from the media and the transition from budget to project financing brought the status quo, due to incomplete transparency of ownership and after the privatization of the media. "By media privatization in some regions they bought more media at once, as was the case with entrepreneur Radoica Milosavljević and the Copernicus Cable Network, both close to the ruling Serbian Progressive Party (SNS)." (Gotev and Poznatov, 2019)

So, one of the main problems of the media in Serbia is the huge influence that the ruling parties have on state and private media. In this way, selective reporting seeks to show who is a friend of Serbia and who is not. In addition, the media presentation of cooperation and friendship is reflected primarily in the pro-government and state media, and others are the media funded by Russia and China. According to the public opinion poll of the Belgrade Center for Security Policy (BCSP) from 2020, the majority of the population considers Russia and China as the most important foreign policy priorities, and does not imitate Serbia's EU membership. Continuous broadcasting of the contents of the Serbian edition of the state information radio and the Sputnik portal presents a picture of the international situation daily: A biased, subjective and complementing Russian-Serbian relations and Russian support of Serbia regarding the Kosovo issue. Also the pro-government media aims to capitalize from the ruling coalition by increasing their popularity in Serbia. On the other hand, they made China one of the most popular foreign policy actors in the eyes of Serbia. First of all, close ties with the political elite in Serbia and then the positive representation of China in the Serbian media. Chinese international radio is broadcast through a Serbian radio station owned by Aleksandar Mitrović - the son of Željko Mitrović, an associate of Aleksandar Vučić.

In the media, Chinese projects are presented as an inspiration in the economy and crucial, not to mention how some things are put at risk such as environmental and labor standards. (Vuksanović, 2022)

5.4 Vulnerability Index

The "Vulnerability Index" analyzes eight Central European and Western Balkan countries which includes Serbia. This Index showed that Serbia is most vulnerable to China and Russia. On a scale from 0 to 100, where 0 is the most resilient and 100 the most endangered. It is assessed through five key dimensions: “ political landscape, political landscape, public administration, information landscape and civic and academic space.” (Novaković, Albahari, Bogosavlević, 2021). With the total index result of 55, Serbia represents the most neglected country among these eight, and the report shows that challenges are significant for the country regarding four elements, out of a total of five. This was also mentioned in the previous sections, and it concerns political competition and the lack of legitimate opposition since the boycott of the 2020 elections. (Novaković, Albahari, Bogosavlević, 2021)

Table 3: Vulnerability dimensions for Vulnerability Index¹¹

Vulnerability dimension	0/100
Public attitudes	61
Political landscape	66
Public administration	51
Information landscape	53
Civic and academic space	46

¹¹ source: https://www.globsec.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Vulnerability-Index_Serbia.pdf date of access: 20.01.2022

Furthermore, it is stated that: "society in Serbia is particularly sympathetic to Russia and China, antagonistic to NATO and ambivalent towards the European Union." (Novaković Albahari, Bogosavlević, 2021)

One of the goals of China's soft power is to be present and to enable China to have influence over the region when needed. It is important to mention that the Communist Party of China is the power center of the country itself.

Serbia is considered as a bridge for China towards Europe, it represents one of the key ways for non-European geostrategic players to reach the European market and manage to place their products outside their borders and their reach. So, the main goal in her entire project is the European Union and entering the European market.

The success of Chinese power in Serbia is based primarily on the support provided by Serbia. This has been especially visible since 2016 after the visit of the Chinese president and the purchase of the Ironworks in Smederevo, and this Sino-Serbian narrative of friendship erupted mostly during the COVID pandemic.

The Chinese investment with which the Smederevo Ironworks and RTB Bor were bought, in addition to the economic interest of the Chinese state and private business, removed a huge burden from the shoulders of Serbia.

In comparison, the relationship between Serbia and Russia, unlike the relationship between Serbia and China, is somewhat *more intimate* because Russia presents itself as the mother protector of Orthodoxy in Serbia. In addition, Russia (also China) as a permanent member of the UN Security Council holds the power of veto, which is very important given the fact that Russia will veto the UN Security Council in case any solution to Kosovo's status is proposed that would allow the province to unilaterally declare independence. Russia has primarily a political interest, the most important thing for it is to keep NATO as far away from itself as possible, and to gain members who are not part of it, or at least to remain neutral. The Orthodox population sees it as their protector.

5.5 Perception Corruption Index

„The Corruption Perception Index ranks countries around the world based on how corrupt their public sectors are perceived to be. The results are given on a scale of 0 to 100, where 0 is highly corrupt and 100 is very clean.“ (Transparency International, 2022). The index was created on the basis of 13 surveys in the business sector and expert assessments. Serbia for instance has a score of 38 which brings it to 94th out of 180 countries. In 2012, that

rank was 80. “Statistically, this numbers do not represent a significant change, rather, it might indicate stagnation regarding progress to reduce corruption.” (Zúñiga, 2020).

On the Figure 5, we can see the timeline from 2012, when the SNS came to the political scene of Serbia and all 8 years of rule.

The significant decline of the Index for Serbia began in 2018, when the Serbian government began to put pressure on increasing its influence over the judiciary. At the same time, the government is working to reduce public access to information by removing state-owned companies from the list available to the public. At the same time as the government claims to support media freedom, journalists' associations have difficulty getting involved in drafting Serbia's new Media Strategy.

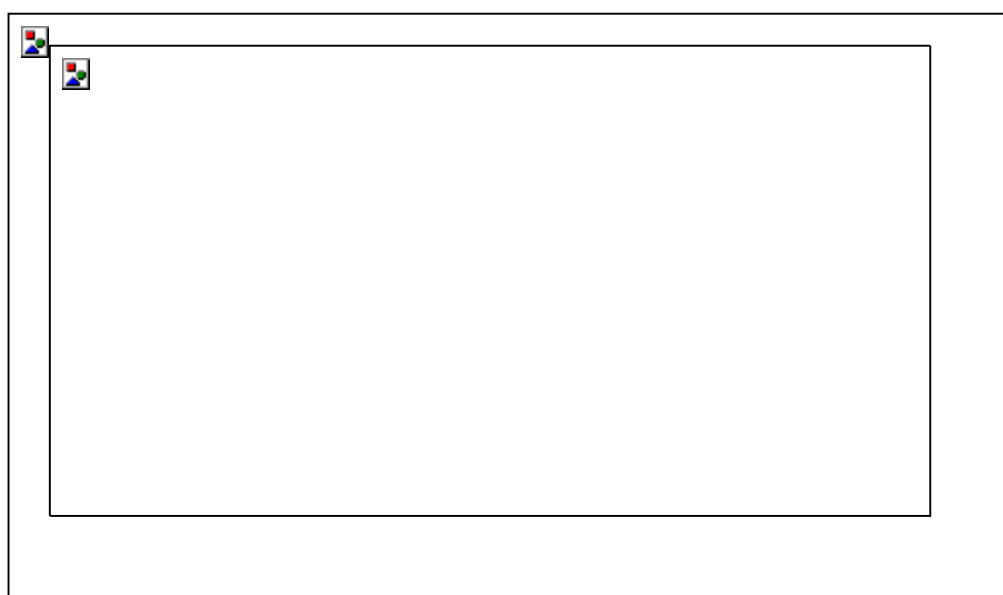


Figure 5: Corruption Perception Index ¹²

“The consolidation of the SNS’s power over the executive, legislature and judiciary has been accompanied by different forms of abuse of power in an already highly corrupt political system“ (Ninua, 2014). High corruption in the state is a threat to transparent democratic procedures, respect for human rights, the free market, political pluralism and political freedoms.

In addition to numerous consequences, it also has an extremely negative impact on economic growth.

¹² source: <https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2020/index/srb> date of access: 22.01.2022

A document published by the Fiscal Council of Serbia in 2019 states that Serbia's economic growth is below its potential level, primarily due to weak institutions - especially the rule of law and corruption control.

Moreover, the results of this research work show that approximately half of the lag in Serbia's economic growth can be explained by high corruption and weak rule of law.

Thus, it is clearly stated that corruption disrupts market conditions and directs surplus funds of the economy towards unproductive corrupt activities. (Petrović, Brčerević, Gligorić, 2019)

6. Analysing the role of populism and international patronage

6.1 Populism's role under a magnifying glass

BIRODI, in it's report, has stated that in Serbia, a *populism industry* prevails. A system in which the media “are the means of promotion, propaganda and retaliation in the service of personal power“ (Gavrilović, 2020.)

At the Fourth Tribune within the cycle "Nije Filozofski Ćutati“ held on February 28th, 2019. at the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade, Dubravka Stojanović stated that the most accurate assumption is a diagnosis that says that populism is an autoimmune disease of democracy "It is a disease that uses democratic institutions, that uses democratic tools to actually destroy them." Describing the current situation in Serbia brings with it and offers many words such as populism, autocracy, dictatorship, totalitarianism (Stojanović, 2019)

An undemocratic political culture, not as developed institutions, a constant atmosphere of economic and political crises, for right-wing populist parties like the SNS could not be a more fertile ground.

A leader like Aleksandar Vučić has no obstacles in suppressing pluralism, silencing critical thinking and restricting media freedom, because media help, financial dependence and political influence are on his side. The impossibility of the opposition to present themselves fully on the political scene of Serbia shows the way in which institutions are treated as a personal service instead of the public good, the use of populism and alike.

The ruling regime in Serbia is highly centralized around one party, SNS and one man, Aleksandar Vučić, who holds tight control over the media and the judiciary and is under constant pressure to stifle civil liberties.

The role of populism in the democratic decline of Serbia is reflected in the announcement of the fight against crime and corruption, which raised high expectations with the coming to power of SNS. It has greatly affected the rating of the party and then Prime Minister Aleksandar Vučić.

Nevertheless, the SNS gradually incorporated individuals from the previous regime and some of the holders of important political functions (primarily from the DS and DSS) into its ranks. Essentially, the SNS is waging a strong fight against the "false elite" and trying to present it as self-proclaimed, non-national, anti-state and hostile. By using all media channels, they abound in potential antagonism between the elite and the people, where the leadership of the SNS is on the side of the people where it fights against the elite that "does not want to see the successes of the current government."

Aleksandar Vučić's populist approach and use of state media seeks to portray the opposition as foreign mercenaries, enemies of the state

“First of all, I think that our opponents have a huge political advantage, they have so much money so that they can waste that money. They have tycoon media, running a campaign 24/7. They have no fear, they have no fear of victory, ours is to say that we will fight.” (objektiv.rs, 2021)

Also, the protests organized in 2019 are for the SNS and the ruling structure only a poorly staged protest by the opposition, to which Vučić reacted through all pro-government media, calling the protesters “divljaci”(savages).

Barbara Životić, a journalist from Studio B, who reported on the protest, saying that

"a very small number of people gathered (..) pushed and hit each other with umbrellas, it was expected at such protests (..) of course that the main financier was Đilas (..) it was quite disorganized " (Barbara Životić, 2018)

This statement initiated the populist approach in which Aleksandar Vučić is presented as a protector of the state and a hero in the media. which is reflected in media reporting, e.g., two tabloids in 2018 had mentioned the words *war* and *conflict* on the front page 265 times, while tabloids like Kurir, Alo, Informer, Blic, Telegraf as a pro-regime of real problems, make a media spectacle with headlines like:

„Amerikanci pune Kosovo džihadistima iz Sirije “(The Americans are filling Kosovo with jihadists from Syria), „Plaćenici iz Ukrajine pale Beograd “(Mercenaries from Ukraine set fire

to Belgrade), “NATO će nam ubijati decu još 150 godina “(NATO will kill our children for another 150 years), „Ustaše prete Vučiću“ (The Ustashas are threatening Vučić), „Ameri hteli da ubiju Vučića “(The Americans wanted to kill Vučić). (Vučić, Radojević, 2020)

The goal of this media approach is absolute support for the SNS regime, that is, Aleksandar Vučić, as well as settling accounts with the opposition. Aleksandar Vučić and the entire SNS infrastructure use the media to create an opinion about the opposition, which confirms H2 of this master thesis, namely that:

SNS uses populism to create public opinion about their participants in political life.

The evidence starts from the statements of Vučić in pro-government media like:

“Za njih su uvijek laki izbori, a mogu da budu laki samo za one koji na njima gube“ (Elections are always easy for them, and they can only be easy for those who lose) (Informer 2018),“ Oni žele da predstave Srbiju crnom, kroz mržnju kao da su 90-e godine. (...) Suština svega je da njihove glave I mozgovi ne mogu da izađu iz 90-tih“ (They want to present Serbia in black, through hatred as if it were the 90s. (...) The essence of everything is that their heads and brains can't get out of the 90's) (Tanjug, 2020)“Nije problem ono što opozicija misli, nego to što ne misli na Srbiju“ (The problem is not what the opposition thinks, but because it doesn't think of Serbia“) (Tanjug, srpskainfo, 2018)

Daniel Albertazzi, a researcher of populist theories at the University of Birmingham, believes that "this is one of the few examples of European populism, which shows that populism always comes with something." (Albertazzi, 2017)

On the other hand, mentioned in the section Populism, one of the features of populism is chameleonic politics mentioned as one of the 6 characteristics that define populism.

This can be seen in the example of SNS, a party that speaks from the right with elements of ideological and radical past, and on the other hand is marked as a pro-European party that strives for European values, as evidenced by the example of Ana Brnabić who is part of the LGBT population on the place of the Prime Minister in Serbia, where traditional norms prevail. Also, this chameleonic policy is visible in the coalition of the SNS, which includes a conglomerate of parties from the extreme right to the extreme left.

This means that the SNS does not have a clear ideological and programmatic concept, but operates on the principle of "catch all". (Bunić, 2018).

Pro-European parties, and Eurosceptic, anti-NATO, pro-NATO parties are in the SNS range and create uncertainty regarding the issue of relative values, which can also include issues of European integration as well as Kosovo and Metohija.

Serbia is the only country in Europe, besides Belarus, that has a one-party parliament.

Since coming to power in 2012, the National Assembly in Serbia has been without opposition because the ruling SNS has systematically limited the opposition's ability to play any role in decision-making.

In 2016, laws were put on the agenda that would be proposed only by close "friends" of the ruling structure, while in 2019, two proposals outside the SNS were accepted, but were eventually rejected again.

In order to limit the oversight of its decisions and proposal, the SNS excludes the opposition from the National Assembly by presenting amendments that waste time in the debate. For example, in 2018, the SNS submitted as many as 340 amendments to the law, which were initially considered crucial, but in the end did not vote for them.

Also, the SNS is forcing the adoption of laws by urgent procedure, although it is a process that is used in emergency situations, according to data provided by Otvoreni parlament in 2018 amendments to laws adopted by urgent procedure was as much as 64.4%, while in 2019, it was 44%. (Otvoreni parlament – analize i statistike, 2021)

By owning the media, propaganda and populist campaigns, the SNS has made the opposition invisible, which confirms my H3 hypothesis:

The right-wing populism of the SNS marginalizes the opposition or pushed them out of parliament.

The parliamentary opposition in Serbia has been trying for a long time to fight for fair and equal treatment in the Assembly, which it considers one of the one-party parliaments next to Belarus, which is why it chose the boycott of the Assembly in the 2020 elections. (Csaky, 2020).

Having in mind all of the presented facts it is clear that the one-party Assembly is just what the ruling coalition wants to maintain in the future.

6.2 International patronage

Taking into account that Serbia, according to all parameters and Indices, is falling behind, especially in the sphere of institutions and the rule of law, a vacuum is being created that

allows foreign influences in the country due to these weaknesses. Problems such as weak institutions, corruption, inefficiency of judicial systems are fertile ground for embezzlement by foreign actors in search of self-interest.

The Vulnerability Index shows that Serbia is most vulnerable to China and Russia. According to the Freedom House report, Russia ended up as a consolidated authoritarian regime with 20/100 points, and China with 9/100 is at the bottom of the list of democratic states. (Freedom House, 2020)

The advantage of the deals that Serbia concludes with China, Russia and similar countries is that the entire procedure is non-transparent, through personal agreements, without tenders, competitions and other bidders.

Serbia has an agreement with the government in Beijing, according to which Chinese projects are not introduced through a tender. Thus, in 2020, China won the job of wastewater treatment in Belgrade without a tender.

Looking at this situation as a patron-client relationship, Serbia acts as a client in many cases, a subordinate state, while on the other hand, China and Russia act as a patron of the state, but with mutual benefits. Serbia is very much in favor of Russia and China because of investments, but also their importance in the Security Council as permanent members with veto power.

In 2008, Russia voted against Kosovo's entry into the UN, and China in 2018 at the General Assembly supported Serbia and voted against Kosovo's entry into the international police organization Interpol. „China has become one of the ten largest trading partners of the countries in the region, thus changing the pattern of economic relations with them.“ (P. Simić, 2015)

This all resulted in establishing the 1+16 policy, a China's cooperation with European countries in which Serbia plays an active role. (J. Simić, 2015)

Basically, the foundation of Chinese influence is the economic power of China and the fact that it is an economy presented through billions of dollars, which trades and invests all over the world. The negative consequences concern the view of how China does business. Companies and banks related to China have an influence on state policy. Secrecy, lack of transparency and corruption are an integral part of the way Chinese companies do business and that negatively affects vulnerable democracies around the world.

It is important to note that “most of the money invested by China is not investments at all, but loans. And other arrangements that the Serbian authorities agreed with the Chinese (..) Unlike investments, loans must be repaid, and with high interest rates.” (Marković, 2019)

Chinese Huawei, one of the world's leading high-tech manufacturers, in cooperation with the Serbian Ministry of Internal Affairs, has deployed surveillance cameras throughout Belgrade and the beginning of joint patrols of Serbian and Chinese police in Serbia. It is a company that the United States and some European countries accuse of political and industrial espionage. (Clark, 2021)

According to the Corruption Perception Index, the corruption is a huge problem in Serbia which might bring illegal actions, procedures that would directly undermine the rule of law, and then the very democracy of the state.

An example of this can be found in Serbia, which in 2020 gave a Chinese investor 75.8 million euros in state grants, and the environmental impact assessment study enabled the construction of the company "Linglong" in Zrenjanin, and that time violated the Law on planning and construction and the Environmental Impact Assessment Act, thus avoiding legal procedures and thus allowing Chinese investors to build without a building permit.

Chinese companies in heavy industry in Bor, Smederevo, Zrenjanin and Kostolac pose a threat to the environment and raise air pollution to enormous levels. In addition to endangering the health of a large number of people in Serbia and beyond, they are becoming a threat to democracy and sovereignty, because of them, laws are being changed or manipulated with and existing violations are being ignored.

General favoring of foreign investors in Serbia is a well-established practice of passing new laws or amending existing ones to meet the needs of foreign companies, and ignoring violations of the law by foreign investors and violations of their own laws.

The analysis of the Regulatory Institute for Renewable Energy and the Environment (RERI) shows a weakening of legal obligations and circumvention of legal regulations for Chinese investments in Serbia. The analysis covers three main investment problems:

- „1. Serbia's new Public Procurement Law weakens transparency and is more open to abuse;
2. The government often declares projects, particularly Chinese investments in polluting industries, to be of national interest so that it can apply laws flexibly;
3. Government authorities often attempt to avoid complying with requests for information in whole or part under the Law on Access to Information.“ (Renewable Energy Research Institute *RERI*, 2020)

The Law on Public Procurement, passed in 2019, negatively affected regulations in the field of environmental protection, access to information of public importance and fair competition. In that way, the citizens were denied access to information of public importance, and the Government of the Republic of Serbia was released from the responsibility to answer the requests and questions of the interested public.

The Law on Special Procedures, which was adopted in 2020, repealed the provisions of the Law on Public Procurement and enabled the Government to announce tenders and contractors for the construction of the Belgrade-Zrenjanin highway without obligation.

Also, the position of workers coming from China is specially regulated and they are not subject to the current domestic Law on Employment of Foreigners, but the Law on Ratification of Social Security Agreements between the Government of the Republic of Serbia and the Government of the People's Republic of China.

In Act 7. stands:

„An employee who is employed by an employer established in the territory of one Contracting Party in the territory of the other Contracting Party to perform work for him shall be subject exclusively to the legal regulations of the first Contracting Party during the first sixty calendar months. employed in the territory of the first Contracting Party. 2. If the secondment lasts longer than the period referred to in paragraph 1 of this Article, the competent authorities of the Contracting Parties or the authorities authorized by them may agree to extend the period for another 24 months, taking into account the circumstances and type of employment.“ (Zakon: o potvrđivanju Sporazuma o socijalnoj sigurnosti između Vlade Republike. Srbije i Vlade Narodne Republike Kine, 2018)

This means that for workers from China who have been sent or will be sent to work in Serbia that will last 60 months or the first five years (with the possibility of extension), the domestic Labor Law will not apply, but the laws of the employer's country, i.e. Chinese laws.

Representatives of the company "Hestil Srbija", which includes the Smederevo Lakes in 2017, demanded a change in the domestic Labor Law, which would give them greater authority.

Furthermore, the executive violates its own, domestic laws in order to meet the needs of foreign investors. The company "Linglong" received a building permit from the City of Zrenjanin for the first phase of construction, and the procedure for issuing a building permit

was conducted outside the law due to the lack of environmental impact assessment procedure, which is mandatory in such cases. the law becomes a priority over all others.

Article 15 of the Law on Environmental Protection provide

„The competent authority may not issue an approval for the use of natural resources without the consent of the project of protection and rehabilitation of the environment during and after the use of natural resources.“ (Zakon o zaštiti životne sredine, 2017)

On the other hand, Russia is building its relationship with Serbia through political and military cooperation. 86% of the population believes that Russia is a friend of Serbia, according to a survey conducted by the Institute for European Affairs in 2020. (Institut za evropske poslove, 2020)

Throughout history, Serbia has always had strong and *emotional* ties with Russia, because of the culture, religion and similar language they share.

Russia is showing its first steps towards friendship back in 2008, when Kosovo declared independence. Although many Western states recognized it, Russia refused to recognize it, thus supporting Serbia's territorial integrity. Since the Kosovo issue is a huge problem in Serbian politics, Russian support is an overture to good relations and the general perception of 86% of the population who consider it a "friendly" state. „The Russian Federation is today present in Serbia in various ways, through its media like *Sputnik* and non-governmental organizations such as *Zavetnici* and *Obraz*. Today, very often nationalist groups are connected with Russia in some ways. “(Aghayev, 2017)

In 2015, Britain prepared the resolution on Srebrenica, recognizing the massacre as an act of genocide, which in 2007, the International Tribunal qualified the actions of Serbia as *genocide crimes*. When looking back, the 90s war broke out between Bosnian and Serbs and more than 100.00 people were killed, and more than two million were expelled. Of the 15 members of the Security Council, ten voted in favor of the resolution, Nigeria, Venezuela, Angola and China abstained, and by voting against the resolution, permanent member Russia blocked the adoption of the resolution. (Nichols, 2015)

Political cooperation between Russia and Serbia is largely based on the same view on the Kosovo issue. On February 17th, 2008, at an emergency session of the Parliament, Kosovo declared independence from Serbia. (Antonenko, 2007)

The first country to recognize Kosovo's independence was Costa Rica, followed by Afghanistan. They were followed by the United States, France, the United Kingdom, Albania and Turkey. At the same time, Kosovo's independence has not been recognized by Bulgaria, Greece, Cyprus, Slovakia, Romania, China and Russia.

„Presidents Vladimir Putin and Tomislav Nikolić in Sochi 2013 signed the declaration on strategic partnership between Russia and Serbia. Between the two states a visa-free regime exists.“ (Aghayev, 2017)

Russia and Serbia, within military cooperation, have joint military exercises. Moscow has sent two ultra-modern missile systems to Serbia for military maneuvers. According to the Russian Ministry of Defense, S-400 anti-aircraft systems and Pancir mobile anti-aircraft missiles are being used for the first time in exercises outside Russia.

Trade, investment and the support in context of Kosovo is what Serbia gets from Russia, but taking out Kosovo, Serbia's reliance on Russian gas is the only major brawn from Moscow. (Reid, 2020)

The benefits for Russia come in the form of preventing the spread of NATO

“Considering the history of Serbia's relations with NATO, it is clear that it is a country where Russia can most easily find fertile ground for preventing NATO from completely integrating this part of Europe.“ (Petrović, 2010) The crisis caused by the coronavirus pandemic provided an excellent opportunity for Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić to intensify verbal attacks on the EU and to play on the map of China and Russia, since he stated that international and European solidarity do not exist and that it was strong only on paper. (Vučić, 2020)

Here again, the pro-government media played a big role. They are the voice of the government and also the main sources of spreading distrust towards the European Union and pro-Russian and pro-Chinese propaganda, which is a paradox if we keep in mind that the government has an intention to enter the European Union.

My hypothesis H3:

International patronage had led to a change in the internal political scene of Serbia

is incorrect and I reject this, since through analysis and research it has shown that the international patronage of Russia and China in this case has a mutual benefit with the current Government of Serbia. The government of Serbia and Vučić, through populist approaches, try to justify the influence and patronage of China and Russia on the country, furthermore, international patronage is not a flaw of Vučić's government, but strengthens it even more. During 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic Vučić welcomed contingents of Russian (Sputnik V) and Chinese (Sinofarm) considering these two states as fraternal states that have proved to be true friends in difficult times. (Maksimović, 2021)

Even after the donation of vaccines from China, a billboard was placed with a picture of Chinese President Xi saying “Hvala Brate Si, jedino nam ti pomažeš“ ("Thank you brother Xi,

only you help us”), vaccines served as "salvation to citizens", but also additional internal political marketing of Vučić as a leader, and on the other hand Russia and China as "friends for centuries".

Although the EU is a strategic goal and the entry of the EU is of national interest, the best indicator of how far it is from membership is the Indices that classify it into more authoritative regimes. This has created the possibility of embezzlement not only for internal actors, but also for external actors, just like Russia and China. China and Russia are specific primarily in terms of political system, and then the fact that Xi Jinping lifted the term limit, so he can rule for life, and the fact that Putin can rule for a long time by changing the constitution, these countries are a good example and model that Vučić follows.

My hypothesis H1:

International patronage significantly legitimizes non-democratic political decisions

The BTI report states: “Although the government has claimed to have banned foreign business tycoons from interfering in the policy-making process, they continue to influence political decision-making through informal channels.“ (Bartelsmann Stiftung, 2021)

Bypassing, ignoring and violating regulations and procedures that are legally required for all investments are just one of the examples where China's international patronage influences political decisions. Part of the responsibility lies with the Government of the Republic of Serbia and other bodies, creating a favorable environment for investors, selectively applying laws and regulations.

6. CONCLUSION

Populism and international patronage as concepts are still vague, insufficiently researched and not concrete. They cover a variety of definitions, factors. What is necessary for both is to always take into account the specific circumstances in which it occurs and present it depending on the case.

Through the Indices of Democracy, the democratic decline of Serbia in the period from 2012-2020 was noticed. Corruption, weak institutions, pro-government media, insufficient quality opposition, politically motivated judiciary, as well as the privatization of the state by the SNS are the circumstances under which populism and international patronage occur. The public appearances of the SNS leadership are rich in emphasizing the antagonism between the elite and the people, where they side with the people against the elite that "will not see the successes of the current government".

The strongest instrument used by the SNS is the media as a flow of populist narratives.

SNS and the current situation satisfies almost all 6 features from Paul Taggart. Faces like chameleonic politics, sense of crisis, observation of the homeland are very emotionally presented in this paper indirectly. In addition to this, the use of media and narratives strengthens international patronage by China and Russia, whose presence in the country the Serbian elites use to promote themselves, strengthen control, and continuously maintain a state of democratic backsliding.

First of all, the paper provides an overview of Serbia and the democratic situation in the period from 2012 to 2020, and fulfills the tasks set in the research problem.

- a) The influence of international patronage on decision-making;
- c) Presence of the opposition in Serbia;
- d) The role of elections in the period 2012 – 2020
- e) Freedom of speech, freedom of media

The essence of this master thesis is based on question: Do right wing populism and international patronage have an impact on democratic backsliding in Serbia in period from 2012 to 2020?

Specific hypothesis H1 is correct because international patronage really requires non-democratic political decisions, such as changing the law, breaking the law, passing the law. H2 is partly true because the SNS uses public opinion to shape the image of the opposition in an attempt to portray them as elites, traitors, not caring about ordinary people. The part about

international patronage that leads to change in the political scene is incorrect. The hypothesis was rejected, since with the International Patronage of China and Russia, Aleksandar Vučić himself at home as a leader who managed to establish a friendly relationship with the two powers.

H3 is also correct due to the fact that SNS is trying to marginalize the opposition with all available means, starting with the fact of changing the election threshold, election campaign and media representation of parties and candidates, and the role in the National Assembly and the possibility of influencing anything.

Finally, my general hypothesis “Right-wing populism and international patronage led to quicker democratic backsliding in Serbia by the period 2012-2020.“ is true, because SNS, through populism and international patronage, not only achieved faster democratic backsliding, but also strengthened and continuously maintained it in the political system of Serbia.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Aghayev, Elvin. 2017. "Relations between Russia and Serbia." *Russian Federation European Researcher* 4-8.
- Albertazzi, Daniel, interview by Aleksandra Popović (N1). 2017. *Danijel Albertaci: Vučić je redak primer evropeidnog populiste* (12 November).
- Allcock, John B. 2019. *Slobodan Milošević*. Accessed November 5, 2021. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Slobodan-Milosevic>.
- Anders Backlund and Ann-Cathrine Jungar. 2019. "Populist Radical Right Party-Voter Policy Representation in Western Europe." *Journal of Representative Democracy* 393-413.
- Antonenko, Oksana. 2007. "Russia and the Deadlock over Kosovo." *Survival* 91-106.
- Arditi, Benjamín. 2004. "Populism as a Spectre of Democracy: A Response to Canovan." *POLITICAL STUDIES: National University of Mexico (UNAM)* 135-143.
- Barbara Životić. 2018. *Studio B - Panorama: Barbara Životić: live*. Beograd: B92.
- Barneo, Nancy. 2016. "On Democratic backsliding." *Journal of Democracy* 19.
- Beogradska Otvorena škola. 2021. *Hronologija odnosa Republike Srbije sa Evropskom unijom*. <https://eupregovori.bos.rs/hronologija-odnosa-srbije-i-eu.html>.
- Berto Šalaj i Marijana Grbeša. 2017. "Šta je populizam i kako ga istraživati?" *Društvena istraživanja :časopis za opća društvena pitanja* 321-340.
- BORDERS, REPORTERS WITHOUT. 2020. *2020 World Press Freedom Index*. Accessed February 2, 2021. <https://rsf.org/en/ranking#>.
- Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia. 2021. *RIGHT - portion*. June. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/right>.
2021. *BTI - transformation Index*. Accessed november 29, 2021. <https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-dashboard/SRB>.
- BUNIC, OLIVER. 2018. *Deset godina SNS: Šta treba da znate o ovoj partiji u 100 i 500 reči*. 22 October. <https://www.bbc.com/serbian/lat/srbija-45941609>.
- Canada, Royal Military College of. 2021. *ELECTORAL INTEGRITY PROJECT*. Accessed February 1, 2021. <https://www.electoralintegrityproject.com/>.
- Canovan, Margaret. 1981. *Populism*. London.
- Canovan, Margaret. 1999. "Trust the People! Populism and the Two Faces of Democracy." *Political Studies*, 47 2-16.
- Castaldo, Antonino. 2020. "Back to Competative Authoritarianism? Democratic Backsliding in Vučić's Serbia." *Europe-Asia Studies* 1617-1638.

- Clark, Mitchell. 2021. *Leaked documents link Huawei to China's domestic spying in Xinjiang*.
<https://www.theverge.com/2021/12/14/22834860/huawei-leaked-documents-xinjiang-region-uyghur-facial-recognition-prisons-surveillance>.
- Court, The Constitutional. 2006. *Constitution of The Republic of Serbia*. Belgrade.
- Csaky, Zselyke. 2020. *Dropping the Democratic Facade*. Washington: Freedom House.
- Cvetković, Ljudmila. 2019. *U parlamentu Srbije o opoziciji bez opozicije*. 1 April. Accessed November 26, 2021. <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/parlament-srbija-opozicija-vlast-bojkot/29853920.html>.
- Dahl, Robert A. last edit 2021. *Democracy*. March. Accessed November 13, 2021.
<https://www.britannica.com/topic/democracy>.
- Ellen Lust and David Waldner. 2015. "Unwelcome Change: Understanding, Evaluating, and Extending Theories of Democratic Backsliding." *USAID* 1-115.
- enciklopedija, Hrvatska. 2021. *Leksikografski zavod Miroslav Krleža, 2021*. 12 Decembar.
<http://www.enciklopedija.hr/Natuknica.aspx?ID=29463>.
- European Comission. 2020. "COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT:Serbia 2020 Report." Brussels.
- EWB. 2020. *Serbian parliament left without clear opposition as the ruling party wins partially boycotted elections*. 22 June. Accessed November 25, 2021.
<https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2020/06/22/serbian-parliament-left-without-clear-opposition-as-the-ruling-party-wins-partially-boycotted-elections/>.
- Gabel, Matthew J. 2021. *European Union*. 28 October. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/European-Union>.
- Gavrilović, Zoran. 2020. *POPULISM OF INDUSTRY*. Biro za društvena istraživanja.
- Georgi Gotev Maja Poznatov. 2019. *Serbia's media privatisation leaves bitter aftertaste*. September.
<https://www.euractiv.com/section/enlargement/news/serbias-media-privatisation-leaves-bitter-aftertaste/>.
- Ghita Ionescu and Ernest Gellner. 1969. *Populism: Its Meaning and National Characteristics*. New York: Macmillan.
- GODSKESEN, Ingebjørg. 2017. *Observation of the presidential election in Serbia (2 April 2017)*. Norway: Bureau of the Assembly.
- Graziano, Luigi. 1976. "A Conceptual Framework for the Study of Clientelistic Behavior." *European Journal of Political Research* 149 - 174.
- Group of authors - OUTBOX CONSULTING . 2019. *BALKAN BAROMETER 2019 / Public opinion / Analytical report*. Sarajevo: Regional Cooperation Council.
- Herbert Kitschelt and Steven I. Wilkinson. 2007. *Citizen-politician linkages: an introduction*. Cambridge, Cambridge: UK: Cambridge University Press.

- HOUSE, FREEDOM. 2020. *Freedom House scores*. <https://freedomhouse.org/>.
- IDEA, International. 2021. *THE GLOBAL STATE OF DEMOCRACY 2021*. Strömsborg: International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance. Accessed November 18, 2021. <https://www.idea.int/gsod/>.
- Igor Novaković Natan Albahari Jovana Bogosavlevic. 2021. *GLOBSEC: Vulnerability Index of Serbia*. International and Security Affairs Centre.
- Ilić, Anja. 2019. *New wave of protests in Serbia – opening new horizons?* 11 January.
- Informer. 2018. *VUČIĆ O OPOZICIJI: Izbori su za njih uvek laki jer na njima stalno gube!* <https://informer.rs/vesti/politika/390186/vucic-opoziciji-izbori-njih-uvek-laki-jer-njima-stalno-gube>.
- Institute, V-dem. 2020. *Autocratization Surges–Resistance Grows DEMOCRACY REPORT 2020*. Gothenburg: V-Dem Institute.
- Institut za evropske poslove. 2020. “ISTRAŽIVANJE JAVNOG MNJENJA – STAVOVI GRAĐANA SRBIJE PREMA RUSIJI.” Beograd.
- International, Transparency. 2021. *CORRUPTION PERCEPTION INDEX 2020*. Accessed February 1, 2021. <https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2020/index/nzl>.
- . 2022. *CORRUPTION PERCEPTIONS INDEX*. <https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2021>.
- ISTINOMER. 2021. *ISTINOMER*. <https://www.istinomer.rs/akter/srpska-napredna-stranka-sns/>.
- Knopff, Rainer. 1998. “„Populism and the Politics of Rights: The Dual Attack on Representative Democracy“.” *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 31(4): 683 - 705.
- Kojić, Nikola. 2020. *Izbori 2000: Debakl Miloševića i Šešelja, Vuk ispod cenzusa, DOS "brojao" do 176*. March. Accessed November 3, 2021. <https://rs.n1info.com/vesti/a576572-izbori-2000-debakl-milosevica-i-seselja-vuk-ispod-cenzusa-dos-brojao-do-176/>.
- . 2020. *Na današnji dan pre 30 godina održani prvi posleratni višestranački izbori*. December. Accessed November 3, 2021. <https://rs.n1info.com/vesti/a681320-prvi-visestranacki-izbori-u-srbiji/>.
- Lindberg, Staffan I. 2018. “The Nature of Democratic Backsliding in Europe.” *CARNEGIE EUROPE*. 24 July. <https://carnegieeurope.eu/2018/07/24/nature-of-democratic-backsliding-in-europe-pub-76868>.
- Lust, Ellen. 2019. *The Middle East*. 15. SAGE.
- Lutovac, ZORAN. 2017. “POPULIZAM I DEMOKRATIJA U SRBIJI*.” In *POPULIZAM*, by Centar za politikološka istraživanja i javno mnjenje, 49-65. Beograd: INSTITUT DRUŠTVENIH NAUKA, Centar za politikološka istraživanja i javno mnjenje.
- Maglajlija, Vedrana. 2021. *Utjecaj Pekinga na Balkanu: Kina je zabila zastavicu u zapušteno dvorište Evrope*. 20 November. <https://balkans.aljazeera.net teme/2021/11/20/uticaj-pekinga-na-balkanu-kina-je-zabila-zastavicu-u-zapusteno-dvoriste-evrope>.

- Maksimović, Sandra. 2021. *Vuksanović: Vaccines as a means of promoting partnership with China and Russia*. <https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2021/03/04/vuksanovic-vaccines-as-a-means-of-promoting-partnership-with-china-and-russia/>.
- Marija Vučić and Vesna Radojević. 2020. *Najmanje 945 lažnih vesti na naslovnica četiri tabloida u 2019*. <https://www.raskrikavanje.rs/page.php?id=557>.
- Marijana Grbeša, Beto Šalaj. 2018. *Dobar, loš ili zao? Populizam u Hrvatskoj*. Tagreb: TIMpress.
- Marković, Tomislav. 2019. *ALJAZEERA*. <https://balkans.aljazeera.net/opinions/2019/11/7/duznicka-diplomatija-srbija-u-celicnom-zagrljaju-kine>.
- Media Ownership Monitor. 2020. "Serbia."
- Miladinović, Aleksandar. 2020. *Prvi moderni višestranački izbori u Srbiji: Šta je odlučilo prvi „praznik demokratije“*. December. Accessed November 2, 2021. <https://www.bbc.com/serbian/lat/srbija-55240178>.
- Milner, Helen. 1991. "The Assumption of Anarchy in International Relations Theory: A Critique." *Review of International Studies* 67-85.
- Ministarstvo spoljnih poslova Republike Srbije. 2021. *Politički odnosi Srbije i EU*. <https://www.mfa.gov.rs/lat/spoljna-politika/eu-integracije/politicki-odnosi-srbije-i-eu>.
- Mudde, Cas. 2007. *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe*. Cambridge University Press.
- Mudde, Cas. 2004. "The Populist Zeitgeist." *Government and Opposition* 541-563.
- . 2016. "The Study of Populist Radical Right Parties: Towards a Fourth Wave." *UNIVERSETET I OSLO*. 1 November. Accessed 11 9, 2021. <https://www.sv.uio.no/c-rex/>.
- Nichols, Michelle. 2015. *Russia blocks U.N. condemnation of Srebrenica as a genocide*. 8 July. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-bosnia-srebrenica-un-idUSKCN0PI1W620150708>.
- Ninua, Tinatin. 2014. *Serbia: Overview of political*. Transparency International. .
- Noam Gidron Bart Bonikowski. 2013. "Varieties of Populism: Literature Review and Research Agenda." *Scholar at HARVARD*. https://scholar.harvard.edu/files/gidron_bonikowski_populismreview_2013.pdf.
- objektiv.rs. 2021. *OBJEKTIV*. <https://objektiv.rs/vest/861183/predsednik-vucic-o-opoziciji-imaju-novac-i-medije-nase-je-da-kazemo-da-cemo-se-boriti/>.
- Panizza, Francisco. 2005. *Populism and the Mirror of Democracy*. London - New York: Verso.
- PARLAMENT, OTVORENI. 2021. "OTVORENI PARLAMENT - ANALIZE I STATISTIKE." *OTVORENI PARLAMENT*. <https://otvoreniparlament.rs/statistika/zakoni-po-hitnom-postupku>.
- . 2020. *OTVORENI PARLAMENT- sazivi NS 2012-2020*. Accessed December 5, 2021. <https://otvoreniparlament.rs/>.
- Pavle Petrović, Danko Brčerević, Mirjana Gligorić. 2019. *ZAŠTO PRIVREDNI RAST SRBIJE ZAOSTAJE?* Beograd: Fiskalni savet Republike Srbije.

- Petrović, Žarko N. 2010. *Russia Serbia Relations at the beginning of XXI Century*. Beograd: ISAC Fund.
- Pippa Norris, Max Grömping. 2019. "Electoral Integrity Worldwide." Sydney .
- Poulsen, Niels Bjerre -. 1986. "Populism - A Brief Introduction to a Baffling Notion." *American studies in Scandinavia* 27-35.
- Press, Cambridge University. 2021. *Cambridge Dictionary*. Accessed November 20, 2021.
<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/patronage>.
- Rainer, Ricardo. 2020. "'Politics of Gratitude' – Bridging Ontologies: Patronage, Roles, and Emotions." *E-INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS*. 20 November. <https://www.e-ir.info/2020/11/08/politics-of-gratitude-bridging-ontologies-patronage-roles-and-emotions/>.
- Ray, Michael. 2014. *Euroskepticism*. 14 January. Accessed November 17, 2021.
<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Euroskepticism>.
- Reid, Ernest A. 2020. "Third Rome or Potemkin village: Analyting the Russia's Power in Serbia 2012-2019." *Nationalities Papers(2021)* 728-737.
- Renewable Energy Research Institute (RERI) . 2020. "A Legal Memo on Chinese investments in Serbia."
- REPUBLIČKA IZBORNA KOMISIJA. 2017. "REZULTATI IZBORA." Beograd.
<https://www.rik.parlament.gov.rs/>.
- Richardo, Rainer. 2021. "nterstate Patronage and the Westphalian Narrative ofInternational Politics." 1-6.
- Rochstein, Frances. 1979. "'The Class Basis of Patron-Client Relations.'" *Latin American Perspectives* 6 25-35.
- Rydgren, Jens. 2009. "Reviewed Work: Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe by Cas Mudde." *American Journal of Sociology* 1551-1553.
- Šalaj, Berto. 2012. "'Savremeni populizam".' *Analiz Hrvatskog politološkog društva* 21-49.
- Šalaj, Berto. 2013. "Demokracija i populizam: doktor Jekyll i gospodin Hyde." *Demokracija i postdemokracija / Milardović, Anđelko ; Jožanc, Nikolina (ur.)* 129-152.
- Simić, Jasminka. 2015. "Koliko je daleko Kina?" *IZAZOVI SPOLJNE POLITIKE SRBIJE* 37-43.
- Simić, Predrag. 2015. "Odnosi Kine i Jugoistočne Evrope:kontinuitet i promene, Biseri sa zrnima pirinča." *Zbornik radova* 11-24.
- srbin.info. 2019. "BECAUSE OF THIS, YOU WILL BE IN PRISON": Millions from the pockets of citizens are suitable for SNS media. 31 October.
- Stephan Haggard, Robert Kaufman. 2021. "The Anatomy of Democratic Backsliding." *Journal of Democracy* 27-41.
- Stiftung, Bertelsmann. 2021. "Serbia Country Report 2020." Bertelsmann Stiftung's Transformation Index (BTI) 2020, Gütersloh.

- Stojanović, Dubravka. 2019. *Nije Filozofski ćutati*. Comp. University of Belgrade.
- Taggart, Paul. 2003. "The Populist Turn in the Politics of the New Europe." *International Conference of the EU Studies Association conference*. NASHVILLE: University of Sussex. 1-20.
- Tanjug. 2018. *srpskainfo*. <https://srpskainfo.com/vucic-nije-problem-ono-sto-opozicija-misli-vec-sto-ne-misli-na-srbiju/>.
- . 2020. *Vučić o BOJKOTU IZBORA: Dio opozicije živi u prošlom vijeku*. 20 February. <https://srpskainfo.com/vucic-o-bojkotu-izbora-dio-opozicije-zivi-u-proslom-vijeku/>.
- UNDP. 2020. "The Next Frontier: Human Development and the Anthropocene." New York.
- V-Dem Institute. 2021. *Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem)*. Accessed February 2, 2021. <https://www.v-dem.net/en/>.
- Veenendaal, WOUTER P. 2014. "The Relevance of the International Patron-Client Model." *Foreign Policy Analysis* 1-17.
- Vučić, Aleksandar. 2020. *Vučić: Srbija u ratu protiv nevidljivog i opakog protivnika*. Comp. RTS.
- Vuksanović, Vuk. 2022. *RUSIJA I KINA PRIJATELJI I BRAĆA ZAROBLJENE DRŽAVE*. Beograd: Beogradski centar za bezbednosnu politiku. <https://www.balkancrossroads.com/big-brother-serbian-media-on-russia>.
- Waltz, Kenneth. 2010. *Theory of International Politics*. Illionois: Long Grove.
- Weingrod, Alex. 1968. "Patrons, Patronage and Political Parties." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 10 (4) 377-400.
- Wiles, Peter. 1969. "A Syndrome, Not a Doctrine: Some Elementary Theses on Populism." In *Populism - Its Meanings and National Characteristics*, by edited by G. Ionescu and E. Gellner. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson.
2017. "Zakon o zaštiti životne sredine." https://www.paragraf.rs/propisi/zakon_o_zastiti_zivotne_sredine.html.
2018. *Zakon: o potvrđivanju Sporazuma o socijalnoj sigurnosti između Vlade Republike Srbije i Vlade Narodne Republike Kine*. Beograd, June. <http://www.parlament.gov.rs/upload/archive/files/lat/pdf/zakoni/2018/2828-18-lat.pdf>.
- Zúñiga, Nieves. 2020. *Serbia: Overview of corruption and anticorruption changes in the last 10 years*. Bergen: TI.
- Глаголева Н.Н., Матвеева О.П., Радосавлевич М. . 2015. "Перспективы развития взаимной торговли Российской Федерации и Республики Сербии: региональный аспект." *Вестник Белгородского университета кооперации, экономики и права*. 104.