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Kosovo and Metohija or the European Union – a rhetorical dilemma in the Serbian political discourse

Abstract

As the loss of Kosovo has been *de facto* re-inflicted in recent years, the question should be raised as to how great an influence the Kosovo myth wields today. It is particularly interesting to consider the issue in the context of European integration and the fact that recognition of Kosovo and Metohija's self-proclaimed independence is usually stated as an essential condition and a key obstacle to Serbia's accession to the EU. It is an undisputable fact that Kosovo and Metohija and the Kosovo myth are a part of culture, history, religion, and folklore of Serbian people, and it is without doubt difficult to renounce all that, even if personal and

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collective prosperity is offered in lieu of it, which is deemed by a certain portion of the Serbian public to come as a result of the accession to the EU. The aim of this paper is to establish which portion of public opinion is willing to make such a sacrifice in relation to the current attempts at resolution of the Kosovo question. It is the authors' ambition to answer the following question: To what extent does the position on the status of Kosovo and Metohija influence the public opinion on Serbia's membership in the European Union? With an intention of answering the research question the authors rely on the data acquired through empirical-quantitative study *The Notions of the EU and Russia in the Serbian Public 2018*, Institute of Social Sciences Belgrade, where a structured *on-line* questionnaire was used as a means of data collection. The study results clearly indicate the popular support for Serbia's accession to the EU while at the same time the method of resolution of the Kosovo question deeply impacts the public opinion on Serbia's membership in the EU. A conclusion can be drawn that, if the public is presented with the choice between Kosovo and the EU, the certainty of citizens opting for the EU will rapidly decline.

Key words: Kosovo and Metohija, national identity, national myth, the European Union, European integration

Introduction

The issue of social identities has proved itself to be an important factor in understanding political processes and events owing to a significant leverage of group identities over various aspects of collective behaviour (Vasović 2010: 75). Along with personal characteristics the identity of an individual is also conditioned by social aspects, which considerably affect his or her self-determination through diverse types of group affiliations. The role of collective identity is to aid an individual in self-defining their place in the existing system of social relations (Vasović 2010: 82).

Certainly, one of the most consequential types of social identity is national identity which, accompanied by nationalism, has been for almost two centuries "the primary inducement of Europe's fate" (Vasović 2015: 74). The national identity, predictably, was

and remains an essential subject matter for various social sciences. However, there is no universal and generally accepted definition of national identity and there is no general consensus over what the main factors and components of national identity are. In the literature, most frequently, language, religion, culture (music, folk oral lore), territory, common features and values, physical traits, etc. are underlined as defining components of national identity (Милошевић-Ђорђевић 2005: 125). The majority of authors assert the crucial role that a common language and culture, accompanied by national myths, had in national and political homogenisation and development of the sentiment of national belonging (Vasović 2015). One of the most eminent world theoreticians of nation and nationalism, Anthony Smith, indicates the close connection between national identity and mythology. He considers myths, along with memories, values, and symbols, to be the four pillars of the very core of ethnicity which he called *ethnie* (Vasović 2015: 72). With respect to the fact that the national mythology plays a significant role in strengthening national sentiment and sense of collective belonging, the authors of this paper start with three propositions. First, the national myths, as one of the determinants of national identity, are deeply embedded in the collective consciousness. Secondly, myths possess the ability of swift regeneration, adaptation and transformation. Those qualities become prominent in the occasion of national identity crisis, or being in danger for various reasons, when myths easily revitalise and evolve from the passive collective historical memory to active initiators and determinants of social processes. Thirdly, in this paper, national identity is not understood as some primordial, invariable, deeply rooted, and innate human attribute, but, on the contrary, the dynamic nature of this phenomenon is acknowledged (Суботић 2011: 2-3). Therefore, it is important to mention adoption of the assumption that identity, whether personal or collective, is formed in “a specific socio-cultural milieu which is susceptible to the dynamics and passage of historical time” (Стојадиновић 2018: 10).

As far as Serbia is concerned, such role is certainly attributed to the Kosovo myth, which can be regarded as one of the pillars of Serbian national identity and sovereignty. This myth has existed for centuries in the collective consciousness of Serbian people, and in view of historical events of the several past decades and the fact that

the issue of resolution of Kosovo and Metohija's status has been marked as the most urgent national concern; it is hardly surprising that the myth has acquired a new intensity and topicality. In the first part of this paper, the authors indicate historical genesis of the Kosovo myth and a special place that it holds in Serbian national tradition. The question of the Kosovo myth is deliberated in the current macropolitical and socio-cultural context where it is being manifested. In the second part of the paper, the authors endeavor to provide answers to research queries through analysis of the data acquired by the empirical study *The notions of the EU and Russia in the Serbian public in 2018* conducted by the Institute of Social Sciences – Centre for politicological research and public opinion, which concluded that the final resolution of the status of the southern Serbian province has large impact on the attitude of Serbian citizens towards a potential membership in the European Union.

The Kosovo myth

National myths represent psychocultural narratives based on collective conscious, and as such they greatly influence the dynamics of social and political processes within a community. In that respect, national myths constitute “a conglomerate of various historical, religious and political ideas” used to provide a broader culture-based legitimacy for daily political interests and objectives, i.e. they are offered as culturally sustained justifications for collective actions. (Vasović 2015: 67-68). These myths can for centuries, in their latent form, continuously coexist in the conscience of the folk with almost no change in contents or structure level. But, if for some reason ethnic or national entity, among whose members the myth dwells, experiences crisis or a situation of intergroup confrontation and conflict, those myths abruptly revitalise and evolve from the passive collective historical memory to active initiators and determinants of social and political processes (Vasović 2015: 75-76).

In the case of Serbia, that function is undoubtedly delegated to the Kosovo myth, which is one of the pillars of Serbian national identity and sovereignty. In the Serbian folk culture Kosovo figures as a sacred place – a space refined by the characteristics of social identity, “a spiritual collective toponym, the centre of collective

cultural conscious” (Бошковић 2014: 479). Precisely on account of the fact that such a standpoint is entrenched in a certain segment of the population, the Kosovo myth has got a great mobilisation potential which can be instrumentalised for political purposes, if there is a will and need among political actors.

This myth was conceived immediately after the Battle of Kosovo itself as a peculiar folk response to the endured historical trauma. Thereupon, tales and legends of that fateful battle started to be recorded and passed down. It could be said that even then the first phase of the Kosovo myth creation commenced. It has been continuously present in the conscience of the Serbian people, or at least certain segments of it, since as far back as the 14th century. The very core of the myth was built around historical facts, while a complex set of historical circumstances throughout the following centuries has resulted in historical facts, which were initially recorded and interpreted in church chronicles, further, as Pešić notices, “fictionalised in the folk oral lore and transposed into epic structures through a technique of oral mediation” (Pešić 2019: 361).

This complex and long-lasting process shaped the Kosovo myth through various stages of its existence. In time, the religious, literary and political discourses on Kosovo converged on and permeated one another (Bakić-Hayden 2006: 126). Although the Kosovo tradition was constantly present, only in the 19th century did it take form of a fully developed myth. It is the period of strengthening nationalism in the Ottoman Empire and the Balkans, an occurrence that did not bypass the Serbian people either (Čolović 2017: 7). The then popular leaders and ideologists of Serbian nationalism, started to use the evocation of the Battle of Kosovo for political purposes, thus providing the Kosovo tradition, which had been already ingrained in the folk oral storytelling, a new function.

National liberation function of the myth instilled strength of Kosovo heroes into rebels in their revolt against the Ottoman government from the First Serbian Uprising onwards. The most famous reproductions of the Kosovo myth should be definitely sought in the folk epic poetry of the period, which would be collected and published by Vuk Stefanović Karadžić several decades later (Čolović 2017: 8). Unquestionably, these epic poems hold a

special place in the national conscience, so that without their recognition it would be difficult to properly understand history and culture of the Serbian people (Čolović 2017: 21). Kosovo is, as Bakić-Hayden states, “a paradigm of collective self-awareness, a central metaphor in subsequent interpretations of the most important historical events of the 19th and 20th centuries” (Bakić-Hayden 2006: 134).

It is important to mention that the Kosovo myth reduced in its intensity after the struggle for liberation of Kosovo and other territories inhabited by Serbian population ended. Upon the ending of the Balkan Wars and the First World War, the Kosovo myth simply could not retain the same role that it had in the previous century. Under new conditions, where the entire Serbian national corpus found itself in the same state and also unified with their other *South Slavic brethren*, the Kosovo myth underwent a certain transformation. Still, the Kosovo myth proved its multifarious applicability and perseverance by surviving and being evoked even in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, later the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, during the Second World War, both among Partisan and Chetnik fighters, and equally after the end of the war in the Second Yugoslavia. However, it was not until the eighties of the 20th century that the Kosovo myth experienced a true renaissance when it was made topical again amid growing nationalisms in the SFRY, ethnic tensions and crisis that sprung in Kosovo and Metohija and preparations for the commemoration of the 600th anniversary of the Kosovo Battle, by which the myth practically reached its culmination (Базић 2012: 267-268). The tragic breakup of the SFRY, and later on NATO aggression along with the creation of an international protectorate in the Kosovo and Metohija, then the failure of peacekeeping troops to protect Serbian interests accompanied by the strengthening of the Albanian separatist movement which culminated in the declaration of independence in February 2008, with support of a part of the international community, have kept this myth vital in the years that followed.

The Serbian people once again experienced the tragic loss of Kosovo. In his extensive study *Kosovski kulturološki mit (Kosovo cultural myth)*, Bošković, discussing the first loss of Kosovo after the Ottoman invasion, characterises that painful experience of the

Serbian people as a loss of cultural landscape. Underlining “the strength of the collective cultural and national identity which transforms the abstraction of a geographic area into a space of cultural landscape, a concrete place within whose boundaries the national and cultural map of a collective is being drawn”. This myth has evolved over generations “as a collective work of art” that had a function of an imaginary space where for centuries, during Ottoman occupation, the Serbian people survived. The author concludes that the Kosovo myth is “a spiritual projection of historical-spacial dimension of the Serbian people’s existence” which compensates for the loss of the real territory.

In his study *O srpskom političkom obrascu (Serbian Political Pattern)* Milan Matić emphasises the “essential components of a specific understanding and approach to politics and political issues, inherent to the Serbian people” (Матић 2000: 8). He underlines justice and righteousness, love of freedom and Orthodoxy as defining components of a collective political pattern in the Serbian tradition, which is in his opinion verified by the medieval laws such as Nomocanon of Saint Sava and Dušan’s Code and recent history, respectively (Матић 2000: 123). The veracity of these claims is corroborated not only by the Serbian literature of the 19th and 20th centuries but also the works of authors, such as Jovan Cvijić and Vladimir Dvorniković who analytically examined the Serbian political tradition. It is precisely via Dvorniković’s deliberations, that Matić has found the roots of conscious self-sacrifice of the Kosovo heroes to the “grand idea of spirituality”, which, at the time of Kosovo tragedy, had already been deeply rooted among the common folk, dating back to the period of the Nemanjić dynasty. Under the circumstances where the Serbian people were assigned a role of European Christian civilisation defenders against the onslaught of Islam, that spirituality inspired Serbs to fight heroically, and, if necessary, die as martyrs (Матић 2000: 32-42). The historical vertical of the Kosovo myth, *that indigenous Serbian Kosovo cult as a specific variant of heroic Christianity*, originated from that religious cultural concept (Матић 2000: 37). The Kosovo myth therefore “originated in the conditions of utter peril for the people, under invasion of a cruel Asian conqueror and acute need for general mobilisation for the purpose of defence and survival” (Матић 2005: 390). Nevertheless, although it initially served as

a response to immediate needs, the Kosovo myth has endured for centuries and traditionally has an important role in formulation of the Serbian political pattern.

As the loss of Kosovo *de facto* has happened once again in the recent years, the question arises as to how great influence the Kosovo myth exerts today. It is particularly compelling to envisage the issue relating to the European integration and the fact that recognition of the self-proclaimed independence of Kosovo and Metohija is often stated as an essential condition and a key obstacle to Serbia's accession to the European Union. When contemplating the situation, the following three facts should be taken into account. First, for the survival and reinforcement of the European Union, as well as its further expansion, it is important to establish and empower a common, even if very loosely defined, supranational European identity. That is obstructed by traditional understanding of the national identity widely spread in Serbia, which is based "on common cultural heritage, language, collective myths and memory, symbols and emotional kin ties", i.e. peculiarities that supranational identities do not possess. Such a traditional view of identity is often accompanied by a conviction that supranational identity endangers the national one and poses threat to its preservation (Vasović 2010: 84). Thus, the European identity is at times seen as a threat to the Serbian national identity. Secondly, the majority of EU countries supported, with the most powerful ones even actively lobbying for, the Kosovo declaration of independence, which is deemed by a large part of the Serbian public as nothing less than a hostile act directly aimed against interests of the Serbian people, i.e. the citizens of Serbia. Thirdly, it should be taken into consideration that one of the main morals of the Kosovo myth integral to its metaphysical-Christian segment and mainly used as a basis of the folk *ethics of Vidovdan* (Ђурић 1988), is the one of self-sacrifice that Knez Lazar opted for when he was forced to choose between earthly and heavenly kingdom, between transient and eternal life (Пешић 2018: 36). The question arises as to whether and how large a portion of the public in Serbia, consciously or not, draws parallels between a dichotomy EU-Kosovo, which is put in front of them, and the dilemma presented to the Knez Lazar? It is an irrefutable fact that Kosovo and Metohija along with the Kosovo myth are an inherent part of culture, history, religion and folklore

of the Serbian people, and, without doubt, it is not easy to renounce them, even if in return personal and collective prosperity is offered, which is deemed by a certain portion of Serbian public to be a potential benefit of the accession to the EU. In this paper we will endeavor to establish what percentage of the public is willing to make such a sacrifice regarding current attempt at a resolution of the Kosovo question.

The process of European integration and resolution of the Kosovo question as mutually conditioning processes

Upon the unilateral declaration of independence by self-government authorities in Kosovo and Metohija, the public had to tackle the following two issues. First, the traumatic exposure to the loss of a part of the territory which throughout centuries have been depicted as a “cradle of the Serbian people” and then acceptance of the fact that henceforth the process of negotiations over Serbia’s accession to the EU will be conditioned by resolution of *the Kosovo question*. Although, as previously stated on several occasions, in Serbian history the Kosovo myth has had a national liberation role, the role of the myth today is dubious and it is uncertain whether it will undergo yet another transformation in the process of the European integration.

Even though the saga of Serbia and the EU dates back to 2000, the first official step which marked the commencement of the negotiations was signing the Stabilisation and Accession Agreement (SAA) in Luxembourg, on April 29, 2008. As mentioned above, in the same year on February 17, the provisional self-government authorities in Kosovo and Metohija adopted the Declaration of Independence. This process of separation was supported by international community, first of all the USA and majority of EU states. The only outcome acceptable to Priština authorities is for Serbia to recognise Kosovo* as an independent, sovereign country.

Under these new circumstances, Serbia was coerced to accept European Union terms in order to make progress in the dialogue with the authorities in Priština. Thus Serbia gained the status of candidate country for the EU membership on March 2, 2012, only after the negotiations between Belgrade and Priština opened on

March 8, 2011.¹ The European Union took charge of the mediation in the negotiation process which was an obvious solution as both sides aspire to EU membership. The dilemma over whether Western powers intended to remove the United Nations from facilitation of the negotiations between Belgrade and Priština, if ever present, was finally resolved. The first round of dialogue started at a technical level, but in 2012 was upgraded to a higher level under the auspices of the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security and Vice-president of the European Commission. In March 2012, the Council of Europe granted Serbia a candidate status. The goal of *Brussels Agreement*² signed during the ninth round of the dialogue, held on April 19, 2013, in Brussels, is normalization of relations between Belgrade and Priština, and according to not only the Brussels officials but also Belgrade and Priština ones, represented a significant step ahead. By signing the Brussels Agreement in 2013 both Belgrade and Priština committed to not sabotaging the opposing side in the process of European integration.

The EU representatives aspire to find both the solution to Kosovo's* political status and relations between Belgrade and Priština within "a common European future", which both sides set as their strategic goals and objectives. There are two explanations as to the decision of policy makers in Brussels to adopt this approach. First of all, during the accession process, the EU exerts the maximum effort to prevent the "importation" of the ethnic conflicts that can be a threat to regional stability, and consequently to stability of the European Union itself. We will take the opportunity to briefly draw attention to the fact that the European Union insists on the candidate states resolving any contentious issues and mutual

- 1) In the *European Commission Opinion on Serbia's application for the membership of the European Union*, was a recommendation to the Council of Europe to grant Serbia a candidate status, the following is stated: "Serbia has considerably progressed towards fulfilling the political criteria set by the Copenhagen European Council in 1993, as well as the conditions of the Stabilization and Association Process, provided that progress continues and that practical solutions are found to the problem with Kosovo." (Pregovaračka poglavlja – 35 koraka ka Evropskoj Uniji)
- 2) The official title of this document is *Prvi sporazum o principima koji regulišu normalizaciju odnosa*. As the main goals of the Agreement we can highlight the following: dissolution of the parallel institutions in northern Kosovo* and integration of civil servants in the Kosovo* institutional framework, and offer to Kosovo Serb of a certain level of self-government through an Association/Community of Serb Majority Municipalities.

disagreements during the negotiation process, specifically addressing territorial disputes. If we take this fact into account, Serbia's journey to the candidate status will take longer than with the other post-communist states. In other words, the process of European integration is in Serbia's case further burdened by traumatic loss of a part of the territory. Secondly, despite their numerous differences and confrontations, both Serbian and Albanian side agree on the European Union not having an alternative, at least it is what highest officials on both sides repeat ad nauseam in their public appearances. It seems that the European officials estimated that both sides would be more motivated to participate and achieve better results if these two processes were mutually conditioning. How accurate this estimate is time will tell, but, without doubt, in spite of numerous successes of the cohesion policies in the membership negotiations, approaching the European Union does not possess such magical power when it comes to resolving the political status of Kosovo*. In literature, there are countless interpretations of the dialogue aim, i.e. the current negotiations, and majority of them concur that it is seeking normalisation of relations between Belgrade and Priština. Through "full normalisation of the relations between two sides, achieved within EU membership negotiations, in the case of Serbia, and negotiations on SAA, and afterwards EU membership, in the case of Kosovo, the ultimate goal, common to both Belgrade and Priština is to be reached: the EU membership" (Janjić 2013: 11). It is the estimate of the authors of this paper that the progress towards the EU membership has proved to be an efficient means of creating advantageous circumstances for dialogue and negotiations continuation (Janjić 2013: 13). The other group of authors surmises that the whole process of the relations normalisation, especially if attitude and engagement of the international community and the EU are taken into account, happens at the expense of Serbia and conclude that "a crawling acknowledgement of the secession of the province through the EU accession negotiations is taking place" (Јовановић 2018: 8).

The conditioning policies in the EU membership negotiations are no novelty; however, Serbia's position is unique as a mechanism for monitoring agreements implementation is weaved into the one of the negotiation chapters as a part of the dialogue between

Belgrade and Priština.³ By acquiescing to this fact, the government representatives of Serbia provided an official confirmation that the process of European integration and resolution of Kosovo and Metohija's status are processes of mutual conditioning. On the other hand, it cannot be negated that citizens of Serbia are confronted, as judged by some authors, with a false and dangerous dilemma "Kosovo or Europe" (Ебегр & Митић 2005: 142). Therefore, the motivation of the authors of this paper to pose a research question: *To what extent the viewpoint of the political status of Kosovo and Metohija influences the public attitude to Serbia's EU membership?*

The analysis of the public opinion

Upon providing a broader insight into the significance and dynamics of the Kosovo myth topicalisation, and, ultimately, correlating the European integration process and resolution of the Kosovo question, the analysis of the empirical study results is performed with the aim of establishing whether the public is aware of this correlation and whether the dilemma Kosovo or the EU still figures as one of the major rethorical questions in the political discourse of Serbia.

The Centre for politicological research and public opinion at the Institute of Social Sciences in Belgrade conducted a study entitled *The Notions of the EU and Russia in the Serbian Public*. The study is devoted to the viewpoints of Serbian citizens on international politics, and Serbia's relations with Russia and the European Union in particular. The quoted study relied on quantitative methodology, where a structured *on-line* questionnaire was used as a means of collecting the data. The respondents completed the questionnaire independently, on a computer, a smart phone or other device with Internet access. The questionnaire was made on pen-source platform LimeSurvey, installed on IDN server. The poll was conducted in October and November 2018. The respondents were asked to access the poll in two ways, so that the total sample consisted of two subsamples: email subsample and 'Snowball' subsample. The survey was done on a sample of 3,270 respondents in the Republic of Serbia.

3) The chapter in question is chapter 35 called "Other issues".

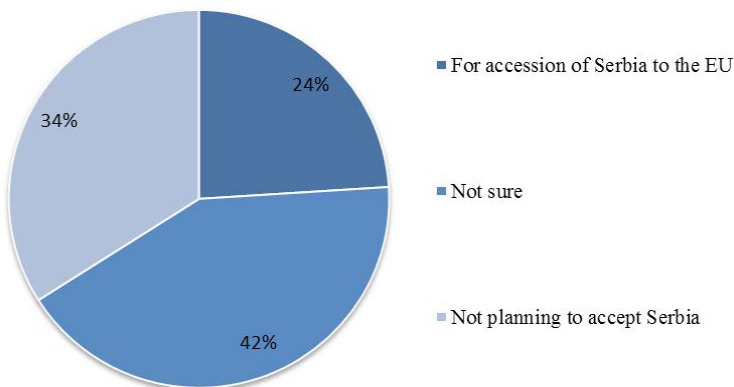
The underlying hypothesis, which was the basis of this paper, is that the question of Kosovo and Metohija affects the public opinion on Serbia's membership in the European Union. Therefore, this paper relies on the following propositions:

- The European integration process and the resolution of the Kosovo question are mutually conditioned;
- The prevailing public opinion is that Serbia is in favour of joining the EU;
- The Kosovo question has an impact on the public opinion on Serbia's EU membership;
- The EU support of Kosovo's secession affects negatively the public opinion on Serbia's EU membership.

The data are presented graphically and grouped according to the initial propositions.

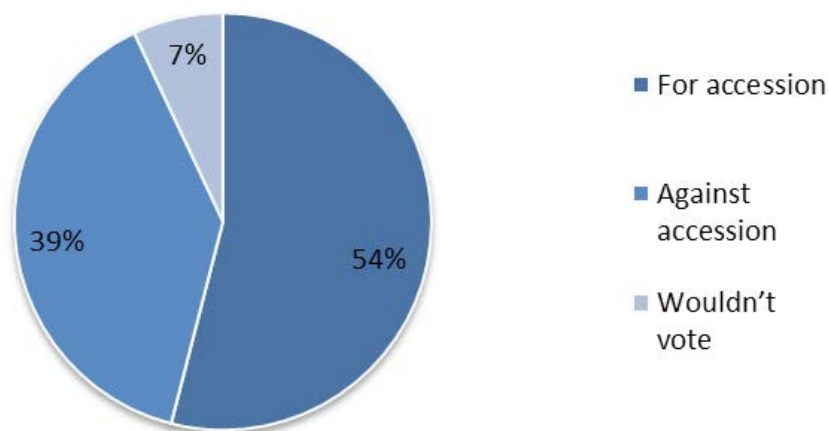
The survey results indicate that Serbian citizens do not perceive a clear intention of the European Union to allow Serbia's accession. To the question: *What is the position of the European Union on Serbia's accession?*, the majority of the respondents replied that the EU is uncertain of its decision to accept Serbia as its member. Furthermore, 34% of the respondents believe that the EU has no intention of allowing for Serbia's accession. The smallest percentage of the respondents assumes that the EU wants that (24% of them) (Chart 1).

Chart 1: *Position of the European Union on Serbia's accession*



The proposition that the public opinion is that Serbia is in favour of joining the EU has been confirmed. The survey results show that in the event of a referendum on Serbia's accession to the European Union, a little above a half of the respondents (54%) would vote for, while 39% would vote against. Only 7% of the respondents would not vote in the referendum (Chart 2).

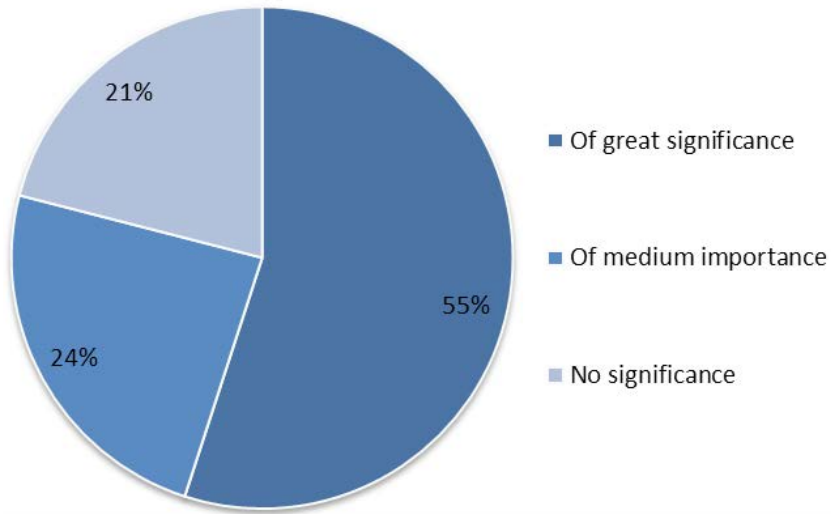
Chart 2: *Public opinion on Serbia's EU membership*



Similarly, 52% of respondents (29% of whom completely agree) view Serbia's accession to the European Union as a better solution than the preservation of status quo. Less than a half does not (40%), while 8% have no clear position on this issue.

It has become evident that 79% of respondents trust the EU policies on the issue of Kosovo and Metohija's independence seem of importance for the creation of their viewpoint of the EU, among whom more than a half (55%) thinks that it is of great importance. A fifth of the respondents (21%) believe that the EU policies on the issue of Kosovo and Metohija's independence have no impact on the creation of their viewpoint of the EU.

Chart 3: Significance of the issue of Kosovo and Metohija's independence



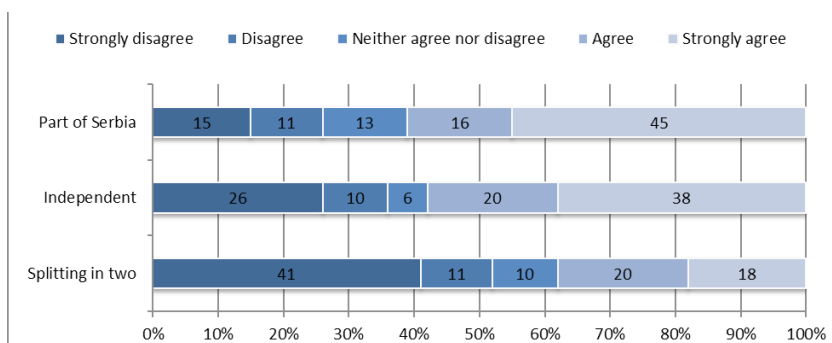
Along with the abovementioned, it should be emphasised that a perception of the current EU policies supporting the secession of Kosovo and Metohija – 94% of respondents endorses the proposition provided, 5% holds a neutral position, while merely 1% of the respondents states that the current policy is for Kosovo to remain within Serbia. These findings can be clear guidelines to all political actors that the process of European integration and resolution of the Kosovo question, i.e. negotiations on the relations normalisation, must not be presented as mutually exclusive categories. If the strategy of confronting the public with a choice between Kosovo and the EU is settled on, the level of uncertainty of citizens opting for the EU increases significantly. Thus, once more it is confirmed that EU membership is not a sufficient compensation for the recognition of Kosovo independence and that resolution of the Kosovo question still has potential to become “a blocking factor to a further process of consolidation of political situation” (Mojsilović 2010: 173) in the Republic of Serbia.

More than a half of the respondents (58%) have demonstrated resignation and belief that, no matter what is done concerning this

issue, Kosovo will become an independent state. It is disputable whether these findings can be interpreted as Serbian citizens' coming to terms with the situation and being aware of the fact that a predominant wish for Kosovo and Metohija to remain part of Serbia cannot be fulfilled, at least in the foreseeable future. None the less, a clear conclusion of this is that the citizens themselves are aware of the fact that Serbia is allowed very little room for manoeuvre in the negotiations on relations normalisation and that a return to a previous state of affairs is virtually impossible. Provided that Serbia recognised Kosovo's independence, it is highly debatable how drastic reactions of those most ardent opponents of Kosovo's independence would be.

The idea of partition of Kosovo and Metohija as a compensation for recognising Kosovo's independence has been publically proposed on several occasions by the high-ranking government officials, and during 2018 and 2019 such a partition has been anew put "in the ether" as one of the possible options. The respondents' answers indicate that division of Kosovo* into Serbian and Albanian parts is an acceptable solution to 38% of respondents. However, there is still a compelling majority (61% of them) which maintains that Kosovo and Metohija should remain part of Serbia (Chart 4).

Chart 4. *Public attitude towards the Kosovo question*



Through use of non-parametric method, *Chi-square* test (independent normally distributed data), a high correlation between the independence issue and EU membership has been established ($\Phi=0,669$).

Table 1: *Correlation between EU membership and the issue of Kosovo's independence*

| Attitude towards Serbian membership in EU | Attitude towards accepting Kosovo independence | | Total: |
|---|--|-----|--------|
| | Yes | No | |
| For Accession | 67% | 33% | 100 |
| Against accession | 2% | 98% | 100 |
| Total: | 37% | 63% | 100% |

Although the majority of respondents support Serbia's membership in the EU (54%), the situation changes if that membership is conditioned by the recognition of Kosovo's independence, with the percentage of those against joining the EU rising to 63%. A little more than a third of the respondents (37%) would support Serbia's accession to the EU even if the independence of Kosovo and Metohija was recognised. No less than a third of the respondents who would have voted for Serbia's accession to the EU (33% of them) would have abstained from voting in the referendum in case of it being conditioned by the recognition of Kosovo's independence, while two thirds (67%) would not have changed their mind even under these circumstances.

Conclusion

The study results have confirmed all four of the propositions provided. The first proposition of *the prevailing public opinion that Serbia is in favour of joining the EU* has been confirmed both in view of the fact that more than a half of the respondents would vote for accession and that the majority deems Serbia's EU membership to be better option than the preservation of status quo. The second proposition of *Kosovo's independence and Serbia's EU membership being mutually conditioned* has also been verified since there is a high correlation between these two positions. The third proposition of *the issue of Kosovo's independence having an impact on the public opinion on Serbia's EU membership* has been

also asserted by the fact that, when the public is confronted with a position that joining the European Union implies recognition of Kosovo and Metohija's independence, there is a significant drop in support for Serbia's EU membership. In support of this claim there are also findings that a third of the public, who would vote for the accession to the EU, would abstain from voting if the condition was recognition of Kosovo and Metohija's independence, which at the same time confirms the fourth proposition of *EU support of Kosovo's secession affecting negatively the public opinion on Serbia's EU membership*.

All of the above mentioned suggests that Kosovo and Metohija's status remains as an important factor in creating the public opinion on Serbia's EU membership. The results analysis has confirmed the underlying hypothesis that the Kosovo myth still figures as a determinant of Serbian citizens' political behaviour, particularly with regard to accession to the EU and the fact that final resolution of Kosovo and Metohija's political status and recognition of unilaterally declared independence are proffered as the key conditions for the long-awaited EU membership. These findings clearly indicate the policy of mutual conditioning, the EU or Kosovo and Metohija, will not speed the European integration process, but on the contrary it is more likely to significantly impede the process.

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