

ANA BRNABIĆ

Speaker of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia

Thierry de Montbrial, Founder and Executive Chairman of Ifri and the WPC

I will launch the discussion immediately, starting with you, Madam Brnabić. What are your reactions to this bold idea of putting the same approach to foreign policies of quite different countries in the same basket? We are moving now from West to East, starting with you.

Ana Brnabić, Speaker of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia

Thank you very much. I am very pleased to be at the World Policy Conference again. I remember well, I think it was in Morocco, when I was there as the Prime Minister of Serbia, as you have said, in a panel discussion with Edi Rama, the Prime Minister of Albania. He is still the Prime Minister of Albania. My initial thought, when I thought about this conference, is that since then, which was probably 2018 or 2019, the world has actually grown to become a much more complicated place when we compare the two years. In that respect, countries that are, I would say, smaller in terms of numbers, and Serbia has about 6.8 million people, find themselves under great pressures, as you have said, to align. Serbia is in a quite unique position because EU accession is our strategic priority. It is our strategic goal, and we have a very ambitious target that was set by our President, Mr. Aleksandar Vučić, to actually complete all of the reforms, internal reforms, to be ready for alignment by the end of 2026, which is extremely ambitious. Now, that does not mean to say that we will become members in 2027. It is highly unlikely. However, then, the timing rests upon the individual EU member states, but we will complete our homework by the end of 2026.

At the same time, Serbia is a successor to the former Yugoslavia, which was one of the founders of the Non-Aligned Movement. Therefore, we have, through generations, I think, kept very, very close connections with all of the countries in the Non-Aligned Movement, and our former Minister of Foreign Affairs and former President of the UN General Assembly, Vuk Jeremić, is here with me. As a Minister of Foreign Affairs, he led that kind of foreign policy for Serbia as well, which I think is very positive.

Now, not to be very theoretical, I will just point out some of the things that show how successful Serbia has been and is in terms of spreading our connections in order to build a more resilient economy and a more resilient country. If you look at our number one trading partner in goods, it is Germany, by far. If you look at our number one trading partner in services, it is the United States of America, by far, because of our strong ICT sector. If you look at foreign investments, a bit more than 65% of foreign investments comes from the European Union. However, in the past three years, the number one foreign investor individually has been the People's Republic of China. Therefore, you have Germany, the United States, and China.



If you look at the biggest exporters from Serbia, those are two Chinese companies, Zijin and HBIS, which owns our steel mill. Therefore, you can see that we have actually very successfully managed to build the different connections, economically, but also politically, in order to build a more resilient country, which is providing the best possible results for our people, for our nation. Because if you look at only the time of the great challenges during the Covid pandemic, Serbia was one of only 10 countries in the world, according to the World Bank, that increased employment during the Covid pandemic and was number one in the world in terms of the number of jobs created during the Covid pandemic. All of this means that we will continue to work towards the EU accession, but at the same time, we will try to serve as a bridge rather than as a battleground for different competing interests in the world.

Thierry de Montbrial

Thank you very much and thank you also for reminding us that Serbia is in legal terms the follower of the former Yugoslavia and for also reminding us that Yugoslavia was one of the founding members of non-alignment. We never repeat enough that history matters. It matters a lot.

Ana Brnabić

It is true.