

Elections in Serbia 2022 and conflict in Ukraine

- Attitudes of electoral participants in online portals and on Facebook -

Belgrade, June 2022

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Commonly used abbreviations and acronyms

Ajmo ljudi – coalition “Come on people”

EU – European Union

FB – Facebook

FRY – Federal Republic of Yugoslavia

Moramo – coalition “We Must”

NATO – North Atlantic Treaty Organization

POKS – Movement for Restoration of the Kingdom of Serbia

PSG – The Movement of Free Citizens

SAD – United States of America

SNS – Serbian Progressive Party

SPO – Serbian Renewal Movement

SPS – Socialist Party of Serbia

SRS – Serbian Radical Party

US – United for the Victory of Serbia

Zavetnici – Serbian Party Oathkeepers

ZZV – Together for Vojvodina

Introduction and context

Political scene in Serbia has been divided over decades on foreign policy orientation – colloquially, parties have been classified as “pro-European” and “pro-Russian”. While the first ones see EU integration of Serbia as a strategic and priority goal of foreign policy, the other ones argue that Russia is natural and historical ally of Serbia and that EU integration should be abandoned. Since 2000 pro-European course has been consolidated in legislative and executive power, but good relations with Russia and China have been maintained – something that was called “four pillars of foreign policy” which was promoted by former president of Serbia Boris Tadić.¹ It seems that promotion of Russia and (increasingly) China as partners have grown under Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) as main ruling party which expanded to as much as hundreds of thousands of party members and a number of small partner organizations with different orientations when it comes to international relations. It should be kept in mind that SNS originated from a split with right-wing Serbian Radical Party (SRS) and that a significant segment of population has pro-Russian attitude, i.e. distrust towards the West in general.² On the other hand, parties of ex-government and their successors as well as some new political organizations clearly profiled as pro-European, while considerable (right-wing) part of the political spectrum hold pro-Russian positions. Foreign policy orientation is only one of many cleavages that divided political scene in the eve of regular presidential and Belgrade city council and snap parliamentary elections that were announced for April 3, 2022.

Electoral campaign started in circumstances of escalation of the Ukrainian crisis. The situation became additionally complexed on February 24 – the day when Russia launched military invasion on Ukraine. While the political right had clear pro-Russian agenda, pro-European opposition and especially government parties fell into a disadvantageous position – to take a stance in a way that would not provoke their potential voters on the one hand and that would be principled on the other hand and in a way that would not eventually hinder strategic interests of Serbia that relied, like it

¹ EU integrations had priority, but it included good relations with USA, Russia and China as well. Interview with (former) president Boris Tadić on foreign policy: “EU accession is our main goal”, Politika, 29.8.2009 [in Serbian]

² Research that was executed by CeSID through the project “Understanding Causes, Creating Future, An Initiative for Building Resilience to Disinformation” with support of International Republican Institute (IRI) in Spring 2021 showed significant pro-Russian and growingly pro-Chinese public opinion, but also in media, especially in context of the pandemic. [See](#): CeSID, “Public perceptions of the international position of Serbia”, May 2022 and “Content analysis”, June 2021.

was explained, on four pillars or, popularly said, on “two chairs” – the Western one and the Eastern one.

This report consists of two analysis – **analysis of media content** or more precisely said on attitudes of electoral actors present in online portals regarding the Ukrainian conflict and wider international relations and **analysis of Facebook pages** of parties, movements and leaders regarding the same topics.³ **Time period that was analyzed are two weeks** – from February 22 to 28, the week in which Russian invasion was launched and from March 25 to 31, which is the last week of electoral campaign. Aside findings of the both analyses, the report consists from presentation of key narratives as well, regarding various international actors which were actual during the electoral campaign.

Abstract

The analysis of media content, i.e. 8 selected portals, led to the following important findings:

- In the content that was the subject of the analysis, some portals gave more space to election actors than others when it comes to their views regarding the conflict in Ukraine and the consequences of that crisis in Serbia - the **Danas** portal is in the lead;
- **In two thirds of analyzed texts, actors of the list Together we can do anything – coalition around SNS – are represented;**
- Portals Danas, N1, Blic and to some extent RTS had a somewhat more diverse representation of different actors; other media almost exclusively provided space for ruling SNS and SPS;
- **The most represented topic in the analyzed texts is the conflict between Russia and Ukraine**, and then foreign policy of Serbia and its international positioning in the new situation. The topic with which the situation in Ukraine is also connected to a significant extent is Kosovo;
- Of the relevant international actors, most of the texts are related to **Russia - about half of the texts have a neutral sentiment, and as many as 38% have positive sentiment towards this actor**. Positive sentiments are especially present among the SRS and Zavetnici. Negative sentiments are present in texts which contains the views of the list Ajmo ljudi, Moramo and US;

³ Online portals were analyzed with Pulsar tool for social and media monitoring, while Facebook content was extracted with CrowdTangle. These tools and data were available to CeSID by courtesy of International Republican Institute’s (IRI) Beacon project.

- **Most of the texts in which Ukraine is a central actor have a neutral overtone** and 12% have positive and negative sentiment. Representatives of Moramo, Ajmo ljudi and US expressed positive sentiments towards Ukraine in the context of conflict. The negative ones were encouraged by Miša Vacić, SRS and to a lesser extent SNS;
- **Predominant sentiment was negative towards NATO** - most often mentioned in the context of the bombing of the FRY in 1999 and the situation with Kosovo. Negative sentiments were especially encouraged by representatives of right-wing parties - Dveri, Sovereignists, NADA and SRS, but also the ruling SNS and SPS;
- **When the EU is central actor, sentiments are divided** - most of them are neutral, but with a high share of negative ones, while one fifth is positive (in the texts related to the statements of the representatives of Ajmo ljudi, Moramo, US). Negative sentiments towards the EU are promoted by Zavetnici, Sovereignists, Dveri, NADA and SRS, but also SPS;
- **Dominant sentiment towards the United States and the West in general is negative;**
- **About a third of the relevant texts had as topic the issue of imposing sanctions on Russia by Serbia** - in the analyzed period, none of the actors explicitly stated the position that Serbia must impose sanctions on Russia;
- **Sanctions are most often mentioned in texts that have anti-Western and pro-Russian sentiments.** In such texts, election actors expressed opposition to sanctions.

The analysis of the election campaign on Facebook in the context of the Ukrainian crisis, for the same observed period (last week of February and last week of March), provided the following important findings:

- **The dominant topic in the texts was foreign policy**, i.e. the way in which Serbia should position itself in relation to various international actors;
- The electoral list that dealt with the Ukrainian conflict and wider international circumstances the most on Facebook is list **Sovereignists**.
- **Sanctions were mentioned in more than a quarter of posts on Facebook. All the mentioned posts, with exception of two related to the SPO, oppose the imposition of sanctions on Russia.** Most often, this topic was present in statements by Zavetnici, but also by Sovereignists, Dveri, NADA and SPS, and through one text, SRS;
- **Most of the publications that mention Russia have positive sentiment.** Pro-Russian sentiment was represented on the pages of the coalition of NADA, Zavetnici, Dveri, SRS, Sovereignists and SPS. Anti-Russian sentiment was especially present on pages related to the SPO, but also to ZZV and in one post on page of PSG, which is part of coalition US;

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- **Sentiments towards Ukraine are predominantly neutral.** Posts condemning the aggression and supporting Ukraine were found on the pages of the US, Moramo, Ajmo ljudi and SPO. The only post that contains anti-Ukrainian sentiment was found on the page I live for Serbia (Sovereignists list);
 - **As many as 72% of posts on Facebook in which the EU is a central international actor have negative sentiment.** The posts of the list Sovereignists, Zavetnici, SRS and Dveri stand out in negative sentiments towards the EU;
 - **Negative sentiments also dominate towards the United States** (6 out of 11 posts), on the pages of NADA and Sovereignists;
 - **Sentiments related to NATO are predominantly negative** and present primarily on the pages of SPS, Sovereignists, NADA, Zavetnici, but also SNS and Ajmo ljudi. The reference to the West was present only with a negative overtone (NADA, Sovereignists and Dveri);
 - Out of 10 posts with the largest number of interactions on Facebook, 6 belong to pages related to the SNS list - Aleksandar Vučić, Serbian Progressive Party and Vuk Drašković;
 - The key narrative that stood out towards **Russia** in the context of the conflict is that **it is the protector of Serbian interests**, especially related to Kosovo, and that it should not be blamed in the given circumstances;
 - When it comes to **Ukraine**, sentiments are predominantly neutral with only a few narratives that are pro or anti-Ukrainian;
 - The most present narrative towards actors such as **NATO, the West and the European Union** refers to "**constant pressures** for Serbia to harmonize its foreign policy", i.e. pressures that demand from Serbia to impose sanctions on Russia.

Narratives

In this section are presented various narratives noted during the analysis, which were supported and promoted by single or more political actors through media and social networks. Actors that represented some less present narratives are listed in brackets.



RUSSIA

Positive sentiments

- Russia is guarantor of Serbian interests in the region, especially when it comes to Kosovo and consequently Serbia should not resent;
- Serbia should not participate in fratricidal war, both peoples are close and “interference” of Serbia is not desirable;
- Good relations with Russia are necessary for economic and energetic reasons;
- Even closer alliance with Russia is needed (SRS, Vacić).

Negative sentiments

- Russia launched an aggression and breached international law;
- Russia as authoritarian country under dictator Putin (ZZV, SPO).




UKRAINE

Positive sentiments

- Ukraine is a victim of Russian aggression, territorial integrity must not be questioned;
- Solidarity with Ukrainian people is needed, as well as compassion for suffering of civilians and destruction.

Negative sentiments

- Ukraine is hypocritical, it did not condemn NATO bombing of FRY from 1999 in a clear way;
- Maidan revolution as synonym for installation of puppet regimes (Vulin - SNS);
- Historical validity of Ukrainian nation should be questioned (I Live for Serbia - Sovereignists).



THE WEST (EU, SAD, NATO)

Positive sentiments

- Serbia belongs to the EU;
- USA and EU provide aid to Serbia.

Negative sentiments

- The West is not consistent when it appeals to international law (comparisons with Kosovo);
- NATO bombing of FRY in 1999 should not be forgotten;
- Serbia is under unjustified pressure from EU and USA over sanctions;
- NATO is the most responsible for escalation of the Ukraine crisis (Sovereignists, NADA);
- Serbia was blackmailed to recognize independence of Kosovo in the new context;
- Political opponents denounced as NATO lobbyists (Vulin - SNS).

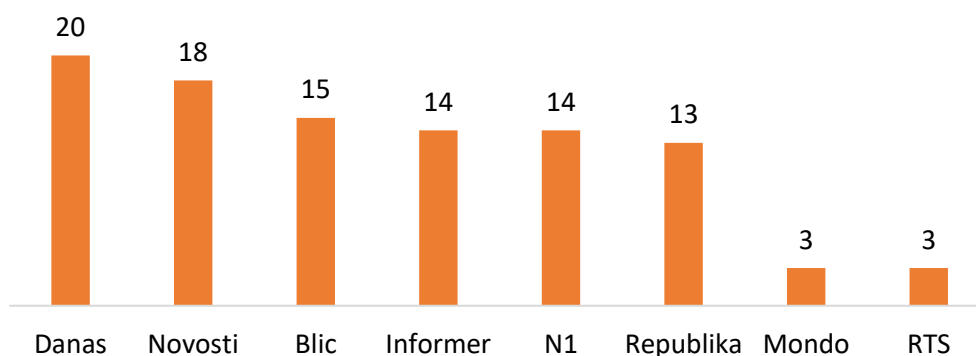
Online portals analysis

The analysis included 8 online portals that were selected according to different criteria in terms of their editorial policy and political and ideological affiliation. **The observed portals are the following: Blic, Danas, N1, Mondo, Večernje novosti, Informer, Republika and RTS.** The aim of the analysis was not to present a representative picture of media coverage of the whole Ukrainian conflict, but to show which electoral actors were present in the media in the context of this topic, with which sentiments towards different international actors and with which narratives. For the actors, all the electoral lists for the parliamentary elections were observed, as well as the presidential candidates who were tied to the adequate parliamentary lists that supported them.

The total number of relevant texts in which electoral actors present their views on the Ukrainian conflict and wider international circumstances is 301. Out of total number, 160 were published in the last week of February (53%) and 143 in the last week of March (47%), which is almost an even distribution. Tags from four categories or "baskets" were used for the analysis. Texts are firstly filtered whether they contain views of certain electoral actors (possibly one or more tags per text). Then, the dominant topic was determined (one tag per text). The third group of tags consists of sentiments towards international actors that can be positive, neutral and negative (one or more tags). Finally, the additional optional tag "sanctions" was placed on texts that spoke about Serbia's attitude towards the sanctions imposed on Russia due to the aggression against Ukraine.

The media content that was the subject of the research, in period from February 22 to February 28, as well as from March 25 to March 31, and which tackled the situation in Ukraine and Serbia's attitude towards the new crisis – provided several findings.

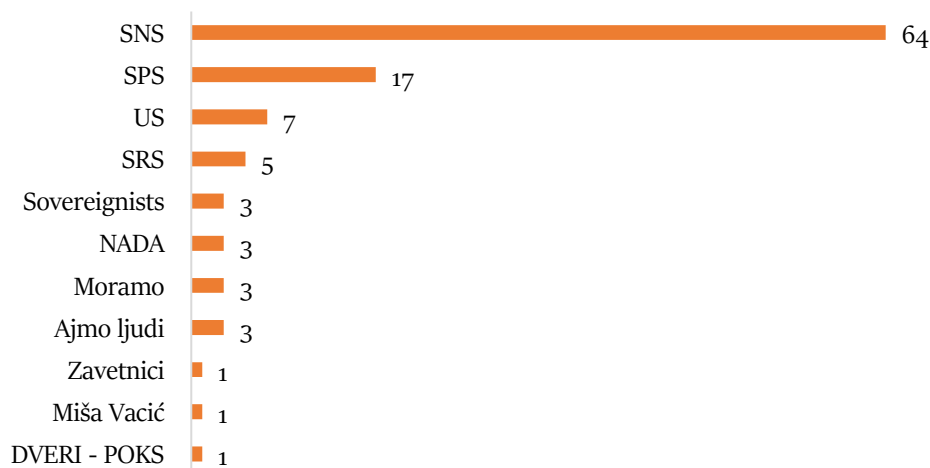
Chart 1.1. *Share by different portals in relevant media content related to Ukrainian crisis (in %)*



First of all, it should be started from presentation of online portals that dealt with this topic in the observed period. The first one is the portal **Danas**, which was represented in **20%** of the entire analyzed content on the topic of the attitudes of electoral actors towards the conflict in Ukraine. After **Danas**, the second one was portal **Večernje novosti** with **18%**, then online portal **Blic** with **15%**. **Informer** and **N1** share the next place, with a **14%** share in the analyzed content related to the conflict in Ukraine. **Republika** portal was represented with **13%** in the overall content, while the least active on this topic were the **Mondo** and **RTS** portals, with **3%** shares each.

The following data provided by the analysis is related to share of certain electoral lists or presidential candidates in the analyzed content for the last week of February when the conflict in Ukraine took place, as well as for the last election week, March 25-31.⁴ The research showed that the **actors of the Zajedno možemo sve list - officials of the Serbian Progressive Party and presidential candidate Aleksandar Vučić were represented in as much as two thirds of the analyzed content - 64%**. In second place was the list of the **Socialist Party of Serbia** with a representation of **17%** in the total content related to the conflict in Ukraine.

Chart 1.2. *Share of lists / candidates in relevant media content related to Ukrainian crisis (in %)*



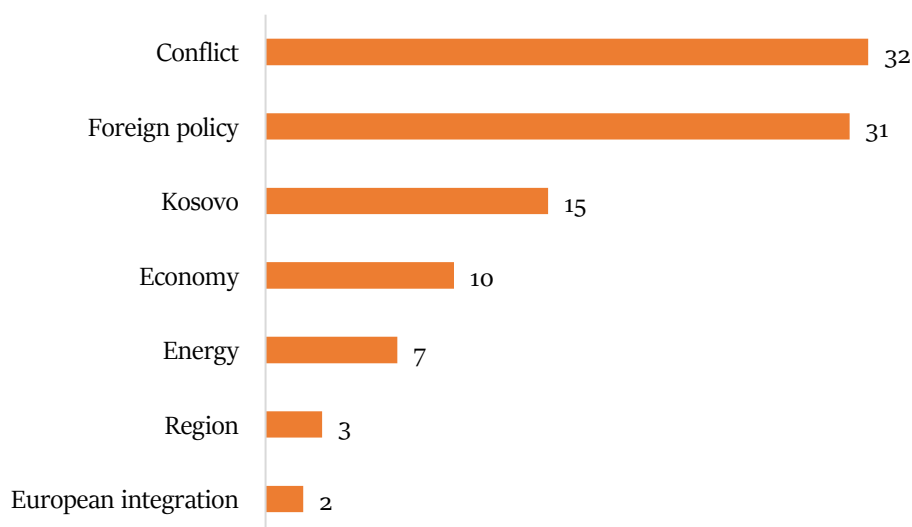
The **United Serbia** stands out with **7%** of the representation, followed by the **Serbian Radical Party** with a **5%** share in the relevant media content. The lists **Sovereignists**, **NADA**, **Moramo** and **Ajmo ljudi** have the same percentage of share in the total media content related to this topic - **3%** each. The lists **Zavetnici**, **Dveri-POKS** and the statements of the presidential candidate **Miša Vacić** have

⁴ It should be noted that situation which often happened is that several actors / officials of the mentioned lists were present within the same text, and for that reason the shares calculated in this way do not give a total value of 100%, which can be seen in the chart below.

1% of the overall share each. The list around SNS was the most represented in each media when it comes to the observed topic, which is not a surprise, considering that state officials could not bypass this topic as Serbia had to determine a position according to the crisis. However, it should be noted that *Danas*, *N1*, *Blic* and to some extent *RTS* had a somewhat more diverse representation of various actors, while other media (*Novosti*, *Republika*, *Informer*, *Mondo*) almost exclusively gave space to the ruling SNS and SPS.

The data obtained by analyzing the relevant media content in the observed period is that **the most represented topic in the analyzed texts was directly related to the conflict between Russia and Ukraine and the war - 32%**. In the second place, as the most represented topic was **the foreign policy of Serbia, i.e. its international positioning in the new situation and the crisis caused by the war in Ukraine - 31%**. **With a 15%** share in the analyzed texts in the observed two weeks, the topic of **Kosovo** was found, since the conflict in Ukraine, i.e. the issue of Donetsk and Lugansk, was an opportunity to restart the debate on the way Kosovo declared independence from Serbia. **In 10%** of the texts, the dominant topic was **economy** and economic implications for Serbia due to this conflict, i.e. increase in inflation and rising prices as a result of the situation in Ukraine. **Energy**, more precisely the crisis in energy supply as a result of the new situation in Europe, was **central topic in 7%** of the texts that were the subject of analysis. As a dominant topic, the Western Balkans **region** was present in **3%** of the analyzed texts, which are those texts that covered relations between countries of the region. **European integration** and the issue of the European path of Serbia in the current situation was the dominant topic **in 2% of the texts**.

Chart 1.3. Dominant topics in the analyzed media content related to Ukrainian crisis (in %)



In more than a third of the texts (35%), in addition to the dominant topic, there was also present the issue of the possible imposition of sanctions on Russia by Serbia. In the analyzed period, political climate was such that the representatives of the electoral lists were in most cases against imposition of sanctions on Russia, while some of the actors expressed a neutral attitude towards this topic. In the observed period, none of the actors explicitly stated the imposition of sanctions against Russia is something that Serbia must undertake immediately. The texts in which the topic of sanctions appeared were in most cases those texts that had foreign policy as the dominant topic.

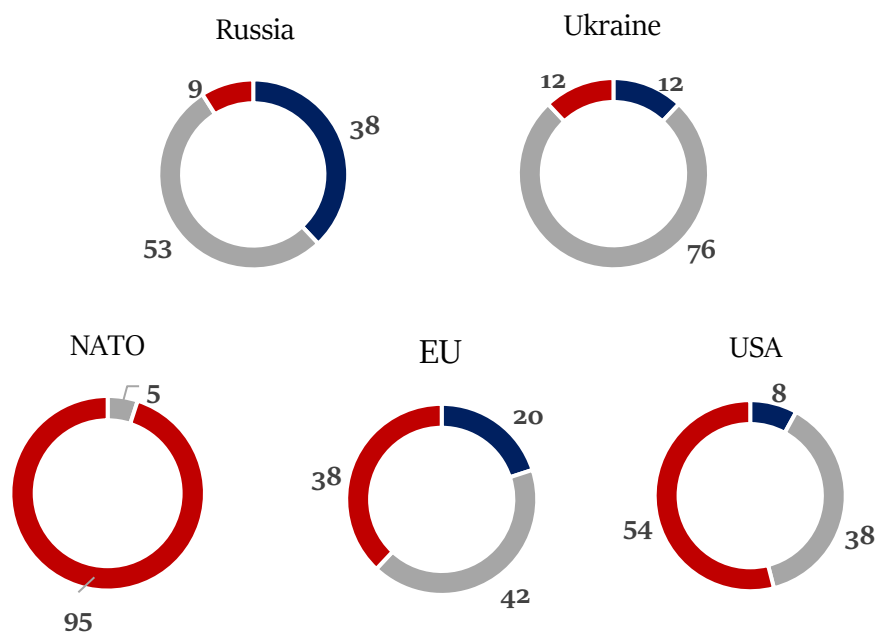
Sentiments towards international actors – online portals

Sentiments that were present in attitudes of electoral actors presented in media that are related to international circumstances in context of the Ukraine conflict vary for different lists and political groups. On graph 1.4 can be found sentiments for all lists that were present in media in last weeks of February and March.

Out of all relevant international actors, **the largest number of texts are related to Russia** – 207. Around half of texts with attitudes of electoral lists in which Russia was mentioned are neutral, while as much as 38% is positive – which is not a surprise for people that are familiarized with Serbia’s party system – but which indeed is a high percentage, considering the fact that Russia is aggressor in this conflict. In remaining 9% of texts Russia was mentioned with negative sentiment.

- **Positive sentiments** are especially present within SRS and Zavetnici (all texts in which these parties had opportunity to present their attitudes), Dveri-POKS (3 out of 4 texts), coalition NADA (70%), SPS (54%), but also to some extent in rhetoric of representatives of SNS (12%);
- **Negative sentiments** related to Russia are present in texts with attitudes of lists Ajmo ljudi (80%), Moramo (70%) and US (40%).

Graph 1.4. *Sentiments towards international actors – positive sentiments are in blue, neutral in gray and negative in red color (in %)*



Ukraine as central actor in the conflict was mentioned in 163 texts. Sentiments are predominantly neutral and balanced – as much as in 76% of cases it is mentioned in neutral context and in positive and negative context 12% each.

- **Positive sentiments** in media towards Ukraine in context of conflict were presented by representatives of Moramo (60%), Ajmo ljudi (50%) and US (30%);
- **Negative sentiments** were spurred by Miša Vacić (2 out of 3 texts), SRS (21%) and to a lesser extent by SNS (7%).

After protagonists of the conflict – Russia and Ukraine, the most mentioned actor was **NATO**, in 85 texts. Absolutely predominant sentiment is negative – NATO was almost exclusively mentioned in negative context, either in context of reminiscence of bombing of Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 1999 and situation with Kosovo or in context of escalation of the Ukraine crisis itself.

- **Negative sentiments** towards NATO had been promoted by right-wing, but also incumbent parties. Dveri spurred this sentiment in 3 out of 4 texts, Sovereignists in 6 out of 10, NADA in 3 out of 10 and SRS in 3 out of 14. When it comes to ruling parties, in almost a third of texts with SPS as protagonist this sentiment is present. Moreover, pillar of the government – SNS in a quarter of their media appearances related to the conflict or international relations in wider sense emitted negative sentiments towards NATO (48 texts on online portals).

The European Union was mentioned in 60 texts. Sentiments towards this actor are mixed – mostly neutral (42%), but with high share of negative (38%), while one fifth is positive.

- **Positive sentiments** towards the EU are linked to lists Ajmo ljudi (60%), Moramo (40%), US (20%) while only 3 out of 192 texts with attitudes of party or state officials from SNS promoted this kind of sentiment;
- **Negative sentiments** were promoted by right-wing lists when it comes to the EU – Zavetnici (2 out of 3 texts) Sovereignists (50%), Dveri (1 out of 4), NADA (2 out of 10), SRS (2 out of 14), but these sentiments existed in texts related to SPS as well (8 out of 52, i.e. 15%)

The United States of America as an independent actor was mentioned in just above 20 texts and predominant sentiments are negative, mostly as vehement response of government officials to the US ambassador in Kosovo who said that government in Serbia aligned with Russia in the conflict, but also over principles when it comes to Kosovo case on the one hand and Donetsk and Luhansk on the other hand. Aside these mentioned international actors, “the West” was also mentioned and mostly in negative context – by right-wing lists, but also some representatives of the government.

In table below, co-occurrence of positive and negative sentiments with dominant topics of texts is shown. Texts with pro-Russian sentiment are foremostly linked with foreign policy in a wider sense

and beside that with conflict itself as well as with Kosovo issue. On the other hand, anti-Russian sentiment was predominantly coincided with topic of the military conflict which included condemnation of the Russian aggression. That is exactly a topic which was base of pro-Ukrainian sentiment as well, while anti-Ukrainian was mostly present in context of Kosovo issue, i.e. “hypocritical” absence of clear Ukrainian condemnation of NATO intervention and separation of Kosovo from Serbia. Negative sentiments towards NATO were based on the same topics like pro-Russian attitude, i.e. on foreign policy, the armed conflict and Kosovo issue. Pro-EU rhetoric is lined with the military conflict and foreign policy, while anti-EU is based primarily on foreign policy, i.e. that Serbia should not rely on the EU. Finally, negative sentiments towards the West as a whole are primarily in context of Kosovo issue and foreign policy.

Table 1.1. Crosstabs: positive and negative sentiments with dominant topics (in %)

	Russia		Ukraine		NATO	EU		USA		West
	pro	anti	pro	anti	anti	pro	anti	pro	anti	anti
Economy	3	0	0	0	6	8	8	0	0	0
Energy	10	0	0	12	1	8	4	0	7	11
EU integrations*	4	0	0	0	0	8	13	0	0	0
Kosovo	19	5	0	53	23	0	17	0	43	45
Region	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0
Foreign policy	44	15	21	29	36	38	46	0	21	37
Conflict	20	80	79	6	31	38	13	100	29	8
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Sanctions	59	55	37	35	32	38	46	100	21	66

*There are only 5 texts with EU integrations as its primary topic

It should be noted that sanctions mentioned in texts were mostly present within anti-West (66% of all texts with this sentiment) and pro-Russian sentiment (59%). Obviously, actors expressed disagreement with sanctions in these texts. Although sanctions were mentioned also in 55% of texts with anti-Russian sentiments, there is no major political actor that opted for imposition of sanctions during the electoral campaign. Some actors underlined their condemnation of the aggression, expressed full compassion for position of Ukraine but also doubted that sanctions

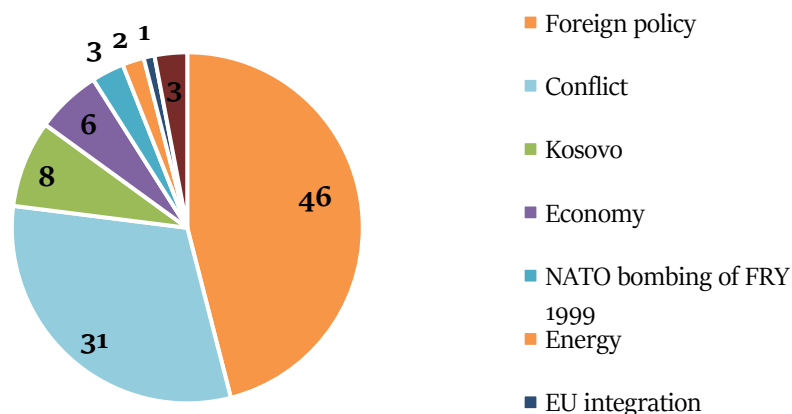
are adequate answer. For instance, Boris Tadić (Ajmo ljudi) and Zdravko Ponoš (US) said that they are in principle against sanctions as it in their opinion would not lead to an expected effect, but rather impoverish common people.

Electoral Campaign on Facebook in the context of Ukraine conflict

In addition to analysis of attitudes in selected media outlets, FB posts of political actors that participated in the elections were analyzed as well for period February 22-28 and March 25-31. FB pages that were included in the analysis as relevant are official pages of coalitions, political parties or citizens' movements, as well as prominent candidates of the lists. In aggregate, relevant pages had 1.056 posts in the last week of February, in which Russia launched the invasion, out of which 68 are relevant for the Ukrainian crisis and conflict as well as wider international relations in the giving context (6,4%). When it comes to the last week of March and finish of the electoral campaign, there are 1.688 posts in total, out of which 45 are relevant for the analysis (2,7%). **It should be noted that activities of electoral participants on FB was increased in the last week of the campaign, but interest in the Ukrainian conflict decreased – not only proportionally, but also in absolute numbers.**

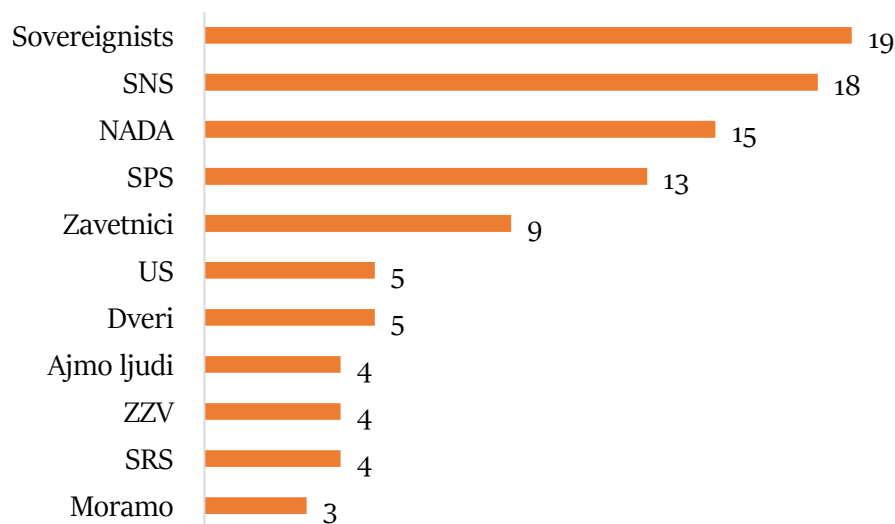
Among 113 relevant posts, the largest share (almost half) was relevant to foreign policy in a wider sense – which position should Serbia embrace in relation to various international actors. Around one-third of posts tackled conflict in Ukraine directly. Aside of these two expected topics, 8% of posts connected the Ukrainian conflict with Kosovo issue. In addition, a small share of posts referred to (in descending order) economic consequences, NATO bombing of FRY in 1999, consequences to energy market and EU integration in the giving context. While the last week of February was above average marked by the conflict itself, but also with comparison of Kosovo secession and Donetsk and Luhansk secession, focus in the last week of March significantly moved towards issues of international position (foreign policy) of Serbia in new circumstances (from 34% in February to 64% in March).

Graph 2.1. Dominant topic in posts (in %)



Electoral list that was relatively the most interested in Ukrainian conflict and (above all) wider international context was Sovereignists. On the second place is list around SNS, but it should be noted that this topic was significantly present primarily thanks to FB pages of SPO and Vuk Drašković, that are a small coalition partner of the list. If these two pages were to be excluded, list around SNS would only have 9 relevant posts (i.e. 8%), instead of 20. This topic was tackled through posts in a relatively high manner by lists NADA, SPS and Zavetnici. It should be noted that, with exception of SPO that cherished critical attitude towards Russia and positive towards the West and page of SNS and its leaders that were mostly neutral, other lists that tackled the issue mostly disseminated pro-Russian messages.

Graph 2.2 – Representation of lists in posts relevant to the Ukrainian conflict (in %)



In addition to dominant topic and lists, analysis distinguished posts that mention issue of sanctions to Russia over the invasion. **Sanctions were mentioned in 31 posts (27%)**. Although the sanctions became more actual topic in public during the April and May, findings showed that this topic was more present among relevant pages in the last week of February (19) than in last week of March. All relevant posts that tackle sanctions, with exception of two posts related to SPO, opposed introduction of sanctions towards Russia. This topic was mostly treated by Zavetnici, but also by Sovereignists, Dveri, NADA and SPS, and in one post by SRS.

In the following text, sentiments towards relevant international actors would be presented.

Sentiments towards international actors – FB posts

Ukraine

Generally, sentiments towards Ukraine in the observed posts were dominantly neutral – in the context of conflict, but without any bias. Posts that undoubtedly condemned aggression and expressed compassion and support for Ukraine and its people are present on pages of lists of US (4 posts), Moramo (3), ZZV (2), SPO (2) and Ajmo ljudi (1). The only post that contains anti-Ukrainian sentiment is on page I Live for Serbia (list Sovereignists) in which territorial integrity of Ukraine is questioned.

Russia

Most of the posts (57%) that mention Russia have positive sentiment towards this state, 17% is neutral, while remaining 26% are critically oriented towards Russia and openly criticise aggression. Pro-Russian sentiment was present on pages of coalition NADA (10 posts), Zavetnici (8), Dveri (5), SRS (4), Sovereignists (3) and SPS (1). Anti-Russian sentiment was primarily present on pages connected to SPO (8), but also on pages of ZZV (4) and one post on page of PSG, which is a part of US.

EU

Although focus on EU was lesser in comparison to Ukraine and Russia, the largest number of observed posts have negative sentiment (as much as 72%). When it comes to negative sentiment, list Sovereignists stands out (13 posts), then Zavetnici (5), SRS (2) and Dveri (1). EU was mentioned in neutral context only once, on page Aleksandar Vučić (SNS) and in positive context on pages around SPO (4), US, Ajmo ljudi and SNS (1 each).

USA

In aggregate, 11 posts were relevant to USA. Out of them, 6 have negative sentiment on pages of lists NADA (5) and Sovereignists (1). There were 2 neutral posts and both on pages of SNS, while 3 that had positive sentiment was on pages related to SPO.

NATO and „the West“

Sentiments related to NATO are predominantly negative and they are present primarily on pages of SPS (10), Sovereignists (8), NADA (7), Zavetnici (3) but also SNS and Ajmo ljudi (1 each). An only post with neutral sentiment when it comes to NATO was on page of candidate for president Zdravko Ponoš, supported by coalition US. The Alliance was mentioned in a positive context in 4 posts on pages around SPO. Reference on the West as a collective of a number of Western countries was used exclusively with a negative sentiment – and within coalition NADA (4), Sovereignists (2) and Dveri (1).

If two analyzed time periods compare (last weeks of February and March), following trends should be underlined: **(1)** as it was stated earlier in the text, number of posts regarding the conflict and new international context fell in March in comparison with February; **(2)** exception are *EU and NATO* – these two actors were even more mentioned in March; **(3)** focus that declined the most when it comes to an individual actor is on *Ukraine* – from 25 posts to 4; **(4)** decline in “pro” and rise in “anti” sentiment from February to March can be noticed on *Russia and EU*, respectively. These findings indicate a slight change in focus on other topics in finale of the electoral campaign. Also, focus from Ukraine itself switched to international circumstances and position of Serbia in conflict that increasingly started to be perceived as conflict between the West and Russia. Precisely because of that EU and NATO were more mentioned in the last week of March – mostly in negative context by right-wing and pro-Russian electoral lists.

It should be noted that each of the relevant posts has its reach, number of interactions and (if it is in video form) views, as well as performances with other posts of an observed FB page (overperforming

score).⁵ Out of 113 posts, 69 of them (i.e. 61%) had attention that was above average on corresponding pages. Highest overperforming score is 10x and it is related to a post on page Vuk Drašković that contains video of Milan Urošević, member of Presidency of SPO, in which he criticized Russian aggression on Ukraine on TV Happy. This post had 4.596 reactions and 145.982 total views. However, as it is already stated, overperforming score refers to posts on a single page – a high overperforming score does not necessarily means highest absolute number of reactions and views of a post between posts of various pages. Top 10 posts per number of interactions can be found in the following table:

Table 2.1. Ten posts with highest number of interactions

Page	Date	Topic	Sentiment	Overp. score	Interactions
Aleksandar Vučić	25.2.22	Conflict	ua-neutral	1,31	5.441
Vuk Drašković	27.3.22	Conflict	rus-anti	10,01	4.596
Zdravko Ponoš	22.2.22	Foreign policy	nato-neutral	2,81	4.325
Aleksandar Vučić	24.2.22	Conflict	ua-neutral	-1,2	3.466
Marinika Tepić	24.2.22	Conflict	ua-pro	1,93	3.217
Milica Đurđević	22.2.22	Foreign policy	rus-pro, eu-anti	1,31	2.725
Serbian Progressive Party	25.2.22	Conflict	ua-neutral, rus-neutral	4,04	2.438
Aleksandar Vučić	24.2.22	Foreign policy	usa-neutral, eu-neutral	-1,8	2.318
Saša Radulović	25.2.22	Conflict	west-anti, nato-anti, rus-neutral, ua-neutral	6,59	2.148

⁵ *Reach* refers to number of users that was reached with a certain content. *Interactions* represent a sum of all types of reactions (likes, etc.), comments and shares for a certain post. *Total views* represent number of times that a video had been seen on original page, but also from shares on private profiles and other pages. Overperforming score is metrics of Meta that shows to which extent a post is above or under average in comparison with other posts from observed page.

Serbian Progressive Party	31.3.22	Conflict	ua-neutral	3,03	2.097
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Out of 10 posts with highest number of interactions, as much as 6 (including top two) belong to pages related to SNS list - **Aleksandar Vučić, Serbian Progressive Party and Vuk Drašković**. It is not a surprise considering the fact that pages of SNS and its leaders have significant number of followers, but also that this list, in comparison to others, spent by far the most funds on promotion of its content on FB. The 6 posts are mainly with a neutral sentiment with exception of a post on page Vuk Drašković that is critically oriented towards the Russian invasion. Two posts are related to coalition US – Zdravko Ponoš and Marinika Tepić. Post on the first page contains neutral sentiment on NATO, while on the other there is a compassion for Ukrainian people that suffers in war and calls for cease of military conflicts. Pro-Russian and anti-EU sentiments could be found in post on page Milica Đurđević (Zavetnici) in which national interests of Serbia are tied to Russia. In a post on page Saša Radulović (Sovereignists) there are negative sentiments towards NATO, but also the West in general, in which these actors are blamed for inconsistency and escalation of the crisis.

Conclusion

Electoral actors could be classified in two broad groups when it comes their attitude to conflict in Ukraine – **one supported Ukraine and felt compassion for position of Ukraine** which consists of Moramo, US, Ajmo ljudi and some minor actors like ZZV and SPO. **They did not insist on this topic throughout electoral campaign.** Generally, these lists see EU integrations as priority of Serbia and did not promote negative sentiments towards actors from the West. Neither of major lists called for introduction of sanctions for Russia, with exemption of SPO, a minor partner of ruling SNS. **The other group was close to perspective of Russia or at least was pragmatically against any kind of condemnation of Russia** – this group was composed of right-wing lists NADA, Dveri-POKS, Sovereignists, Zavetnici and presidential candidate Miša Vacić, but to a significant extent ruling SPS as well. **This group of electoral actors insisted more on this topic than the first group.** Sanctions were mentioned exclusively in a negative context by opposing them. Pro-Russian narrative was accompanied by anti-Western and to lesser extent anti-Ukrainian sentiments. **SNS is “somewhere in between”** – it did not clearly cherish pro-Russian sentiments, but it actively opposed to sanctions; it often criticized the West over double standards and had been making comparison between separatism in Ukraine and Serbia (Kosovo); finally, SNS underlined support for territorial integrity of Ukraine and in the same time criticized Ukraine for vague condemnation of NATO for bombing Serbia in 1999. Only just after the elections some actors that had already leaned towards pro-Ukrainian sentiments announced support for (at least some of) sanctions to Russia – coalitions Moramo and US.

Some narratives that followed positive or negative sentiments were more frequent and more present among a number of actors and some were rare and related to single actor. **Frequent narratives** are the following: *any kind of opposition to Russia is unacceptable*, considering that it is a guarantor of Serbian interests, especially in Kosovo and in the wider region; *Serbia should not be involved in the conflict of two close nations*; that *territorial integrity of Ukraine must be respected* because that is the only consistent stance from perspective of international law; that *the West is inconsistent* when it defends territorial integrity of Ukraine, neglecting Serbia's; and finally, *Serbia is under unprecedented pressure from the West* to impose sanctions. Among rare narratives are the one that underline “dictatorial regime of Putin” as the main problem or that Ukrainian government is installed as puppet regime from the West after the “Maidan”.

There are no significant differences in narratives between online portals on the one hand, and FB on the other hand. The only notable difference lies in fact that right-wing parties have larger share of posts on FB regarding the topic in comparison with online portals. It should be noted that ruling SNS was drastically more present than others which was expected to some extent,

considering the situation in which state officials had to determine attitude of Serbia, but also it shows that space for other actors was narrow in media, especially in some media outlets.