

# NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY OF THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR HUMAN SECURITY

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**Abstract:** National Security Strategy is a document of the highest strategic importance in one state that defines core values, interests, challenges, risks and threats to national security, as well as the organization of the national security system and national security policy in order to secure and achieve national interests. The Republic of Serbia defined its strategic priorities for the first time when it adopted the first National Security Strategy in 2009, and updated them in the new National Security Strategy adopted in 2019. An important part of the first Strategy was the concept of human security, which was indication that the Republic of Serbia formally considered the needs and values of an individual on an equal footing with the values of the state. This Strategy was deemed to be an expression of determination of the Republic of Serbia to create conditions for improving human security in economic, health, political and other aspects and through transparency, rule of law and responsibility. However, the new Strategy does not explicitly mention human security as a specific part of the integral concept of national security. Furthermore, it introduces several novelties that are in contrast with the prevailed human-centric mission of the previous strategy, and these novelties are focused towards territorial integrity, sovereignty and other state-centric issues. Bearing this in mind, the questions arising are: why this strategic turn was made and what are to be the implications of this change for human security. The main hypothesis is that the strategic turn to state-centrism instead of the human-centric approach promoted by the previous National Security Strategy was made because it corresponds to the global trend of revival of nationalism and sovereignty. However, this indisputably leaves room for criticism because people are the most important factor in the equation of integral national security and disregarding them in the national security strategies and policies can be problematized on multiple levels.

**Key words:** strategy, national security, state-centrism, security threats, human security, human rights.

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## INTRODUCTION

The National Security Strategy of the Republic of Serbia defines strategic priorities and “is the highest strategic document whose implementation is designed to protect national values and interests of the Republic of Serbia from challenges, risks and threats to security in all areas of social life” (National Security Strategy of the Republic of Serbia, 2019). This Strategy determines not only the core values and threats to them, but also the complete organisation of the national security system and allocation of national resources in supporting the national security goals. This means also that all national security policies and sub-strategies must derive from it and support it. For that reason, it is of highest importance for any state to create an overall security strategy that would comprise all the most important dimensions that affect security in one state. It must unavoidably include military, political, economic, environmental and societal dimension on both state and individual level. Humans and their security must be properly addressed by national security strategies and policies. Since there is no human security system, national security system is still the main responsible for protection and well-being of people living in one state, and some international mechanism for human security protection can be, and are included only when individuals require protection from the arbitrary power of the state (Trobbiani, 2013). Human security, as **an** “approach to national and international security that gives primacy to human beings and their complex social and economic interactions” (Gregoratti, 2007), must be integral part of national security strategy so the national resources can be allocated to the purpose of improvement of human security and human life conditions in one state. Since “national security is used to privilege the military sector and to divert enormous sums of money into armaments, while failing to protect citizens from chronic insecurities of hunger, disease, shelter, crime and environmental hazards” (Thakur, 2004), the need for human security component to be clearly incorporated in strategies of national security is even more prominent. Some of the national security strategies or policies around the world are examples of national political elites’ aspirations to promote people-centred national security approach, like 2017-2022 Philippines National Security Policy and National Security Strategy 2018 (aimed to empower and secure the well-being of the Filipino people (Gorospe, 2018), National Security Policy 2013 of Papua New Guinea, The 2008 Liberia National Security Strategy and National Security Strategy of Peru 2013 (DCAF: Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance, 2020).

The National Security Strategy of the Republic of Serbia 2009 contained some elements of human security approach to national security, which, as a very first national security strategic document, gave hope that national security orientation of the Republic of Serbia might be another human-centric one. It stated that the “implementation of international standards in the area of human security significantly contributes to achieving the goals of national security (National Security Strategy of the Republic of Serbia, 2009: 28), which indicated that human security is considered as a prerequisite for national security. This Strategy gave importance to creating conditions to develop and improve human security through economic, environmental, health, political and any other aspect important for the well-being of individual and the community (Ibid), and it seemed that the national security focus of the Republic of Serbia in the future will be to a greater extent directed towards the security of the people.

However, the National Security Strategy of the Republic of Serbia 2019 shows some inconsistency in representation of human security component comparing to the previous Strategy adopted in 2009, and it opened some debate about the reasons why human security changed its status in the new national security strategic document and what the potential reasons are for that change, despite of the declarative commitment to human security and human development in most democratic states from the 1990s onwards.



## NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY OF THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA 2019 AND HUMAN SECURITY DIMENSION

Ten years after, in 2019, the Republic of Serbia adopted the new National Security Strategy, but the first thing to be noticed is that there is no explicit mention of human security in it. The Strategy declares commitment to protection of human and minority rights, without specifying any obligations in promoting human security.

Starting from the strategic environment analysis, all of the challenges listed are put in the context of the security of the state, with little or no implications for human security. For example, climate change and the growing deficit of natural resources are mentioned as challenges for international peace because it is estimated that they will result in an increased number of conflicts over energy and other natural resources (National Security Strategy of the Republic of Serbia, 2019). However, there is no mention of what kind of consequences people might face in relation to these potential conflicts and what the state should do to reduce risk for individual safety and security caused by natural resource depletion or climate change. The same can be said about the assessments of the consequences of economic underdevelopment in Southeast Europe, which is perceived in the Strategy not predominantly as a potential threat to human development, conditions of living and welfare, but rather a threat to state stability, since it is “conducive to the strengthening of religious extremism, primarily extreme Islamism, which results in the spread of radical Islamic movements, whose activities can cause destabilization of the region” (Ibid).

In this Strategy, there is a strong discrepancy between the selected and proclaimed values and defined interests, as interests should be the expression of vital values. The interests in this document are more state-centric oriented, opposite to the dominantly human security based list of vital values. The core national values in this document are freedom, independence, peace, security, democracy, rule of law, social justice, human and minority rights and freedoms, equality and equity of the citizens, tolerance, transparency, solidarity, patriotism and a healthy environment. The main national interests are: maintaining the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of the Republic of Serbia; keeping internal stability and security; preserving the existence and protecting Serbian people wherever they live, as well as national minorities and their cultural, religious and historical identity; maintenance of world and regional peace and stability, European integration and EU membership; economic development and overall prosperity; environmental protection and the protection of natural resources of the Republic of Serbia (Ibid).

This inevitably leads to the detriment of human security, as values are to be “protected by the achievement of national interests” (Ibid). National interests are of the highest importance since the National Security Policy is to be implemented according to the defined interests. Among them, only two interests are genuinely human security oriented: preserving the existence and protecting Serbian people wherever they live and the identity of national minorities and economic development and overall prosperity. So, the National Security Policy’s goals arising from these national interests are the only ones tackling with the issues of human security, but they definitely do not cover all the dimensions of human security. These goals include development of demographic potentials in order to increase the birth rate and decrease the mortality rate and improve social and medical protection of citizens, national unity and development of cultural, religious and historical identity, improving the position of national minorities, improving the position and protection of the rights and interests of the diaspora and the Serbs abroad and the protection of cultural and historical assets important for the Republic of Serbia and its citizens, the improvement of living standards and quality of life, economic progress, the improvement of education, as well as the scientific and technological development. There has been



a word also about the improvement of economic and energy security, but more from the national stability perspective than from the perspective of people's well-being. Finally, the Strategy 2019 does not continue with the commitment expressed in the previous Strategy 2009 to "improve the role and position of women in decision-making processes and strengthen state mechanisms for ensuring gender equality" (National Security Strategy of the Republic of Serbia, 2009), which is, from the human security perspective, a great omission.

Among about twenty key identified security challenges, risks and threats, only problems of demographic development, epidemics and pandemics of infectious diseases and natural disasters and technical-technological accidents (related to the health of citizens) deal with human security. In the context of the current crisis caused by the Covid19 pandemic, it is very important that the National Security Strategy of the Republic of Serbia 2019 recognized epidemics and pandemics of infectious diseases as a security threat, but the big drawback is that it did not anticipate its consequences for the individuals. Namely, the Covid19 implications for human security are at least twofold. In addition to posing threat to physical security of individuals, the Covid19 pandemic also has potential to be misused as a weapon in the hands of world leaders if framed as bioterrorism, which keep populations in fear, so the fight against Covid-19 "has provided the world's leaders with a legitimate reason to further limit civil freedoms in democracies as well as in more authoritarian regimes" (Rullán, 2020).

Other perceived threats and risks are those connected with the consequences they can leave on the political, economic system, economy, stability of the state and territorial integrity. Moreover, some of the identified threats and risks that obviously affect people are securitized and perceived rather as a state and social stability issue than a human security issue, like, for example drug addiction, which is defined as "a growing social problem that is getting a form of a security problem and affects the increase in the number of serious crimes" (National Security Strategy of the Republic of Serbia, 2019). The Strategy 2019 also fails to include some very important aspects of personal security like domestic abuse, which is a decades-long problem in the Republic of Serbia and represents a threat to individual's physical security. Also, it does not tackle excessive air pollution, which according to the *Report on the state of the environment in the Republic of Serbia for 2018*, in 77% was caused by RM10 particles originating from thermal power plants, food, chemical and mineral industries (Report on the state of the environment in the Republic of Serbia, 2019). These particles can cause many health issues like acute mortality, impairment of lung function and in exacerbating airways diseases such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and asthma (Gilmour et al, 1996). The Strategy 2019 also does not tackle the issues of privacy and personal data protection and it should, as we are living in the era of mass biometric state surveillance (SHARE Foundation, 2020), which is even more provocative and troublesome if we take into account that even the Strategy recognizes the foreign intelligence organizations illegal and concealed actions as a threat (National Security Strategy of the Republic of Serbia, 2019), also without mentioning the implications of that threat for human, or more precisely, personal security of the citizens of the Republic of Serbia.

Professing of military neutrality also does not benefit human security in any way, because the strategy obviously seeks to compensate for military isolation by strengthening its national capacities. Namely, the concept of total defence is introduced, which only further instrumentalizes all spheres of society, putting them in the function of defending the country. By conceptualizing total defence, it moves away from the concept of human security, all the more so because it mentions the concept of total defence in the context of "increasing the number of citizens trained to defend the country" (National Security Strategy of the Republic of Serbia, 2019).



As for the National Security System, it comprises, according to the Strategy 2019, the defence system, the internal security system, the security intelligence system and other entities important for national security. Internal security system is designed to respond to threats affecting people from human rights violations, including “the protection and rescue of people and goods from the consequences of natural and other disasters, including the measures of recovery from these consequences” (Ibid). The Strategy does not precise any other way how the national security system is supposed to protect people from everyday insecurities stemming from political, economic, societal and other spheres of life. Last, but not least, the absence of principles of impartiality and political neutrality in the functioning of the national security system in the Strategy 2019, which should guarantee no political pressures on the institutions of the national security system, can compromise, among others, human security, especially its personal component.

The purpose of the human dimension in the concept of the national security is to promote human values and well-being, so the interests and security policies can pursue human needs and improve living conditions, equally in terms of physical self-preservation and in terms of increasing the quality of life and human dignity. Human security component in the national security strategy is necessary because national security in its traditional form is not sufficient to ensure, protect and improve individual safety, and putting aside human security can have huge implications for the national security and regional peace.

## REVIVAL OF STATE-CENTRISM: WHY IS HUMAN SECURITY STRATEGICALLY SIDE-LINED?

The strategic orientation and choices of the Republic of Serbia have always been deeply interconnected with and dependent on its strategic environment. The Strategy 2009 relies to a greater extent on the European Security Strategy from 2003 and on its conception of security threats. The European Security Strategy 2003 demonstrated EU’s commitment to promote human security through mainstreaming human rights issues, including ESDP missions (European Security Strategy, 2003: 22). Mary Kaldor, Mary Martin and Sabine Selchow confirm in their policy analysis from 2008 that human security is a “European strategic narrative” that can help increase EU’s coherence, effectiveness and visibility, and thus strengthen the position of the EU in world affairs (Kaldor, Martin, Selchow, 2008). They claimed that human security approach and lexicon could serve as a “symbolic signpost in the development of the EU’s strategic culture, reconciling the Union’s normative and value-driven tradition with a quest for effectiveness” (Ibid).

The EU Global Security Strategy that replaced the European Security Strategy 2003 also expressed intent to “foster human security through an integrated approach” (Shared Vision, Common Action - A Stronger Europe: A Global Strategy for the European Union’s Foreign and Security Policy, 2016). However, in the last decade, there has been some “increase of discourses about national security and nationalism in Europe, especially starting from the financial crisis 2008” (Wodak, Boukala, 2015). The second milestone in Europe’s falling to populism was migrant crisis that escalated in 2015. This crisis affected the European Union, but the Republic of Serbia also, as it is a transit state of migration flows, and this crisis definitely put human security in another perspective. Migration policies in response to migrant flows in Europe brought back national security predominance and created in some cases even risk and insecurity for people (Nyberg Sørensen, Kleist & Lucht, 2017: 50).



Connecting migrants and refugees with international terrorism and economic and social problems that could potentially be caused with their arrival, was a main populist narrative of the right-wing parties in the EU (Kaya, 2018; Maguire, 2015:81, Toscano, 2015: 172). This led to the securitization of migration and enlightened the problem of state sovereignty again, bringing into focus the nation-state and national security rather than people and human security (Estevens, 2018). By securitizing migration, immigrants became also a threat for EU's ontological security (Benveniste, Lazaridis & Puurunen, 2017: 64), and a modern nation state in Europe "sacrificed" immigrants in order to "create the illusion of power [...] as the prime source of political power lies in the capacity to reduce people's subjectively-felt uncertainty" (Lochocki, 2018: 19).

Xenophobic populist rhetoric is causing human insecurity because it implies control measures and deterring migration before protecting the human rights of the refugees (Grabbe, Groot, 2014: 43). Instead of being treated as a humanitarian problem of people fleeing war, political instability and in some cases extreme poverty, migrations were reframed as security problem, which called into question the European's declarative human-centred foreign policy and once more confirmed that the issues of national security were are still given priority over human security.

Migrations are one of the most important, but not the only reason for the rise of populism and prevail of national over human security. Kelly M. Greenhill finds that nationalism in Europe is deeply rooted and that migration crisis has "provided more fuel for fire that had already been stoked back to life by the Great Recession, the Eurozone crisis and myriad other stresses and strains on the common European project" (Greenhill, 2016: 332). Territorial disputes that brought back territorial and sovereignty issues at the table are unlawfully and unilaterally proclaimed independence of Kosovo and the annexation of Crimea, and these are very important events for understanding the national security shift. In addition to that, Zsolt Enyedi points out to five reasons and factors of populism rise that are distinctive for Central and Eastern Europe: combination of victim mentality, self-confidence and resentment against the West, the transformation of neighbour-hating nationalisms into a civilizationist anti-immigrant platform, the delegitimization of the civil society and the return to the belief in a strong state, the resurrection of the Christian political identity, and the transformation of populist discourse into a language and organizational strategy that is compatible with governmental roles (Enyedi, 2020). As for the Visegrad countries, migration crisis "contributed to the mainstreaming of nationalism and xenophobia of the right parties previously focused mainly on the Roma issue, anti-Semitism, anti-communism, anti-establishment" (Stojarová, 2018: 41).

Opposite to expectations, the growth of populism is on the rise even in the United States after the election of Donald Trump as the President, which has the strongest implications for human security of the immigrants. Trump's words towards immigrants have been perceived as dehumanizing, since he, on many occasions, accused the immigrants from Mexico of being criminals and "encouraged police to be more violent in their handling of those suspected of crime" (Scott, 2019). His executive orders on border policy are found to be "offensive for the dignity and threaten the rights of immigrants and refugees both in the United States and globally" (Centre for Migration Studies, 2017), with several controversial decisions that undermine human rights, including the expanded use of detention, limits on access to asylum, enhanced enforcement along the US-Mexico border, and the construction of a 2,000 mile border wall (Ibid).

The revival of state-centrism caused by populist growth is happening in both Europe and the United States. When the European Union and the USA, as champions of democracy and human rights that are expected to be human security role models, send a message that the national values are above human values and needs, it does not seem surprising that the rest of the world, especially those parts that



had been under autocratic rule for a long time, or that are in some transitional period, now turn back to state-centrism, aggressive nationalism and military and border issues, things that were supposed to be outdated in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## CONCLUSION

The National Security Strategy of the Republic of Serbia 2019 is less human-centric oriented than it should be, and definitely less human-centric oriented than its predecessor. Downgrading human security, however, can have negative effects not only for national security, but for international and regional security and peace. Moreover, some very important human security issues that cannot be perceived as purely national question, like migration and refugees, are being securitized in Europe, and given lower priority in comparison to some state-centric issues. Securitization of humanitarian issues, as a consequence of a populist rise across the Europe and the USA, especially in the last decade, moved focus from human security and human development to the national issues like border control, protectionism, cultural and religious isolationism. This has already been causing ethnic and religious clashes in multicultural Europe, which can, in perspective, create insecurity for all the people living there. There is less human security in public discourse, as well as in practice, and the absence of human security in the foreign policy interests of the great powers is evident.

This might be the interpretation of the human security “fatigue” of small states, including Serbia, especially bearing in mind that they tend to follow the path of the great or at least regional powers. Human security discourse is replaced with some particular discourses integrated in the concept of the national security like human rights, quality of life, social standards, etc. One of the common conclusions is that “it will become increasingly difficult to sustain an enduring, reliable national security framework without a strong response to that conditions that create human insecurity” (Vietti, Scribner, 2013). So, instead of securitizing humanitarian issues and prioritizing territorial disputes, armed rebellion and less probable military aggression, the focus should be on human-centric national strategies and foreign policies (of the great powers above all) aimed at improving human development in all parts of the world, so the people can be the strength of the state, not a security issue.

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