

EU's "Carrot and Stick" Policy Toward Serbia Ends, Brussels "Drops Carrot" from Equation

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After over two decades of keeping Serbia in a semi-colonial state, the European Union seems to finally admit that it sees the Southeast European country precisely as such – a semi-colony. For approximately 20 years, Brussels played the carrot and stick cards with Belgrade, forcing it to renounce important segments of its sovereignty in return for access to EU funds and markets.

The neoliberal economic framework that the EU insisted on devastated the country's hybrid market socialist economy and ruined domestic economic power, paving the way for the dominance of foreign investors and turning the country into yet another source of cheap labor for Western corporate interests. However, even while implementing such policies, disastrous for any country's economic (or any other form of) sovereignty, it created an image of growth.

And yet, the waning economic power of Brussels, resulting primarily from its suicidal subservience to Washington DC's Barbarossa-like push against Russia, is starting to affect the "carrot" portion of the EU's policy toward Serbia. Frustrated by the country's refusal to conform with the political West's clinically Russophobic frenzy, the bureaucratic empire is now resorting to using the "stick". With little to nothing left to offer, the EU is now threatening to scale back the benefits it gave Serbia in the last two decades to punish the country for its non-compliance in regards to the bloc's anti-Russian sanctions and policies. To make matters worse, Brussels insists that Belgrade should still continue renouncing parts of its sovereignty while the EU is rolling back the apparent benefits it previously gave in return.

What does Serbia get from all this? A geopolitically worthless shoulder tap that will not help the country in any conceivable way. On the contrary, it may very well ruin its centuries-old relationship with Russia, a country exerting no pressure on Serbia while helping it preserve what's left of its sovereignty and territorial integrity. For the political West, now effectively operating under a "you're either with us or against us" foreign policy framework, Serbia's

neutrality is seen as nothing short of hostile. Belgrade is forced to beg to stay neutral in the Ukraine crisis, but to no avail, it seems. Anything less than full compliance is unacceptable to the imperialist power pole. To show just how much, [the EU now considers Serbia's membership ambitions effectively dead](#), as the negotiations to join the bloc have become a mere formality, having been stalled for years.

Brussels now thinks Serbia should not be conditioned by the termination of accession negotiations, since “joining the EU is as realistic as going to Mars,” as Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung put it. The analogy is quite indicative of how the bloc sees Serbia's future and should serve as an eye-opener in Belgrade. Coupled with recent allegations that Serbia is “trying to destabilize the EU at the behest of Russia”, it's clear that despite how much sovereignty it renounces, how far it's ready to go against its national interests, the country will never be good enough to join the bloc. The question remains then, what's the point? Why would Serbia even want to join the EU? It seems the Serbian populace is well aware of this and it's not so keen on joining either.

The EU now realizes that stopping membership negotiations would effectively mean nothing to the Serbian people. Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung thinks that “the warnings about the possible freezing of accession negotiations are a blunt sword against Belgrade,” as the negotiations have been stagnant for years. “Their termination would not leave an impression on the Serbian population, which is critical of the EU anyway. In addition, even among the advocates of the EU in Belgrade, almost no one believes that joining the EU is realistic. Equally, Serbia could be threatened with a ban on access to Mars,” [the report states](#).

However, it's a different story when it comes to abolishing visa-free travel for Serbian citizens, a topic first mentioned by the European Commissioner for Internal Affairs Ylva Johansson. “It would greatly affect the Serbian economy, as well as the predominantly urban population that travels, as well as the authorities. It is the most lethal weapon in Brussels' arsenal,” the German paper commented. “If visas were introduced again, that sense of isolation would be like a nightmare again, which first ended when the visas were abolished in 2009. Anger due to a return to the dark times would certainly be directed against the Serbian government,” the report adds.

The previously veiled threats by Brussels seem to have become quite direct at this point, since the EU isn't just planning to get the “carrot” out of the equation (it effectively did already), but will also not hesitate using the “stick” now. What's more, the move is openly aimed against Serbia's political stability, as the EU expects to cause widespread discontent which, in turn, would result in exerting additional pressure on the Serbian government. Belgrade certainly could comply and start distancing itself from Moscow. It might even feign this while coordinating with Russia by implementing policies that would affect quite literally nothing.

For instance, it could impose sanctions on Russian sea shipping (Serbia is landlocked) or ban access to Russian airline companies, which can't reach Serbia anyway, as the country is surrounded by EU members which already did that. But the question remains, where does it stop? Will the political West ever be content enough to stop blackmailing and threatening the country? It might be politically unwise for the Serbian government to answer that (rhetorical) question, but it certainly isn't for the Serbian people.

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