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## Changing Street Names in Belgrade as a Reflection of the Political and Ideological Development of Serbia in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century\*

**Abstract:** *This article aims to analyze the political, ideological and historical background of the process of changing street names in Belgrade since the fall of communism, with special emphasis placed on the alterations done during the administration of the Serbian Progressive Party (2013–2021). Since the early 1990s, almost every regime change has introduced different interpretations of the national past and present, significantly influencing the Belgrade toponyms, thus making the politics, history and public memory closely intertwined and mutually dependent.*

**Keywords:** toponyms, Belgrade, Serbian Progressive Party, politics of memory, anti-Yugoslavism.

### Introduction

The early 1990s marked a crucial turning point for Serbia, which was not marked solely by the disintegration of Yugoslavia and the wars that followed this process. The main political and ideological change encompassed the abandonment of the old communist narrative of the *brotherhood and unity* forged during the common struggle of all Yugoslav nations for freedom and revolution in the Second World War. This narrative

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was replaced during the first wave of the nationalist reinterpretation of the past, which put aside the old communist remembrance policies, especially in the wake of the key events that completely transformed the country – the Serbian elections in December 1990 and the start of Slobodan Milošević's dominance in a new multi-party system,<sup>1</sup> as well as the beginning of the violent breakup of Yugoslavia in 1991.<sup>2</sup> However, the old-new authorities did not completely renounce their claim to the legacy of the partisan struggle in World War Two,<sup>3</sup> but they reduced it to the antifascist fight of the Serbian people against the genocide committed by foreign occupying forces and other Yugoslav nations (especially Croats) that collaborated with them.<sup>4</sup>

Such interpretations left their mark on Belgrade toponyms as early as 1991. Most streets named after the NOB participants remained, but the most prominent leaders of the communist regime were no longer desirable in the new memory politics. The National Assembly of Serbia issued a recommendation in July 1991, which stated that streets should not bear names after the individuals who “were responsible for the economic destruction of Serbia”, those who “participated in the disintegration of Serbia, which resulted in the violent Albanisation of Kosovo and Metohija and the expulsion of Serbs and Montenegrins from the province”.<sup>5</sup> The recommendation was swiftly implemented, and Belgrade lost some landmarks related to multinational socialist Yugoslavia, communism and the Non-Aligned Movement. They were replaced by “more suitable” national leaders from various historical periods before WWII,<sup>6</sup> but many of the old urban toponyms survived, which perfectly coincided with the efforts of SPS (Socialist Party of Serbia) to combine the ideologies of socialism and nationalism.

The new wave of re-examining the past came after the democratic changes in October 2000 and the overthrow of Slobodan Milošević. The question of the past abuses of human rights under non-democratic governments did not place only the regime from the 1990s under the spotlight, but the repression under communism as

<sup>1</sup> In July 1990 the former *League of Communists of Serbia (Savez komunista Srbije)* changed its name to the *Socialist Party of Serbia (Socijalistička partija Srbije – SPS)*, which reaffirmed Milošević as its leader and kept its hold on the vast financial resources and property from the old one-party regime.

<sup>2</sup> Dubravka Stojanović concludes that this was the first wave of the nationalist representation of the past, which served its purpose as Milošević's ideological and psychological preparation for the wars against other Yugoslav nations and republics. Its main goal was to demonize the enemy and offer an image of the Serbian nation as a permanent historical victim of other ethnic groups and great powers. See in: Dubravka Stojanović, “Revisions of Second World War History in Contemporary Serbia”, *Serbia and the Serbs in World War Two*, eds Sabrina Ramet, Ola Listhaug (London : Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 247–248.

<sup>3</sup> Until then known simply as *National Liberation War (Narodnooslobodilačka borba – NOB)*.

<sup>4</sup> Jelena Đureinović, *The Politics of Memory of the Second World War in Contemporary Serbia: Collaboration, Resistance and Retribution* (London : Routledge, 2020), 53–54.

<sup>5</sup> Nebojša Dragosavac, „’Prepakivanje istorije’ masovnim preimenovanjem beogradskih ulica”, *Politička upotreba prošlosti : o istorijskom revizionizmu na postjugoslovenskom prostoru*, eds Momir Samadžić, Milivoj Bešlin, Srđan Milošević (Novi Sad: AKO, 2013), 333.

<sup>6</sup> Srđan Radović, *Grad kao tekst* (Beograd : Biblioteka XX vek, 2013), 194–197.

well.<sup>7</sup> Even though the new governments did not have a clear view of how to face the difficult past of the 1990s, there was a clear consensus among the political leaders of the time regarding a firm anti-communist stance. In the following years, the politics of history of the new democratic authorities were characterized by a sharp discontinuity from the earlier decades, most notably regarding the official portrayal of the events of World War Two. Fighters and commanders of the Yugoslav Army in the Homeland, also known as *chetniks*, became the *ideal antecedents* for the new regime. Having promoted the view of Milošević's era as the continuation of the communist regime, democratic political elites aimed to position themselves as liberating Serbia from the communists, and therefore, adequate historical connection could be found in the chetnik movement.<sup>8</sup>

Serbia was not an isolated example, having in mind that the process of decomunization in many European post-socialist states was shaped by different practices – the trials against former leaders, the renaming of the streets, the destruction or neglect of old monuments, implementation of various transitional justice mechanisms, as well as the rise of nationalism, historical revisionism and the equalization of communism and fascism under a common totalitarian framework.<sup>9</sup>

These currents were evident in Belgrade back in 1997 when the president of the *Democratic Party* Zoran Đinđić was elected mayor of the city, but its full effects became visible only after the events that occurred in October 2000. The communist legacy was wiped from all major landmarks in the Serbian capital from that point on. The Belgrade Assembly issued the *Decision on the Naming of the Streets and Squares* in March 2001 and a new Commission, mostly made up of scholars, artists and politicians, began the work on its implementation.<sup>10</sup> Commission members, experts and politicians alike, agreed on the priorities – “unjustified decisions based on a unilateral view on history” that were introduced by “previous non-democratic regimes since 1945” should be amended in the spirit of a new democratic movement, which meant that hundreds of urban toponyms from the old city center (mainly municipalities of *Stari grad*, *Vračar* and *Savski venac*) should recover their former designations and that New Belgrade (constructed during the SFRY) is the appropriate place for toponyms that bear the names of partisan heroes and people linked to the history of socialism.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Небојша Владисављевић, *Успон и пад демократије након Петог октобра* (Београд : Архипелаг, 2019), 105–106.

<sup>8</sup> Đureinović, *The Politics of Memory*, 6, 13.

<sup>9</sup> Cynthia M. Horne, *Building Trust and Democracy: Transitional Justice in Post-Communist Countries* (Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2017).

<sup>10</sup> „Odluka o utvrđivanju naziva ulica i trgova na teritoriji Grada Beograda”, *Službeni list Grada Beograda* br. 7/94, 16/98, 3/2000, 3/2001 i 12/2004, [http://demo.paragraf.rs/demo/combined/Old/t/2004\\_07/t07\\_0075.htm](http://demo.paragraf.rs/demo/combined/Old/t/2004_07/t07_0075.htm); Radović, *Grad kao tekst*, 220.

<sup>11</sup> Vušković, „Imena opet kao nekad“, *Danas*, 8. 4. 2002; Radisavljević Jočić, Gordana, „Istrazivanje: Ko, kako i zašto menja imena ulica u Beogradu“, *MediaSfera*, 7. 6. 2021, <https://mediasfera.rs/2021/06/07/istrazivanje-ko-kako-i-zasto-menja-imena-ulica-u-beogradu456789/>.

However, this principle was not strictly followed. As Srđan Radović shows in his work, the prime targets of this “odonym re-engineering” between 2000 and 2008 were roads related to the NOB and the workers’ movement, but the process of renaming was rather chaotic – some street recuperated their old titles, others were named after recently deceased public figures, medieval rulers, mythical creatures or according to other unspecified criteria. It all eventually revealed that the process of spatial memorialization was deeply rooted in its political and ideological nature.<sup>12</sup> The true nature of the complex relationship between politics and history became fairly evident in the Serbian capital, but this process brought to the surface some other issues. The need to profoundly erase the traces of the legacy of the earlier epoch (ethnification of anti-fascism, changes of the national holidays and the names of streets, schools and other public institutions) also displayed the intertwining between history, state policies, national identity and public spaces.<sup>13</sup>

### **Serbian Progressive Party in Belgrade – Early Years**

In 2012 Serbia experienced its first major political transformation since the fall of Milošević. A new government was formed with the participation of SPS and the Serbian Progressive Party (*Srpska napredna stranka – SNS*), a moderate and pro-EU wing that split from the extreme right-wing Serbian Radical Party (*Srpska radikalna stranka – SRS*) led by President Tomislav Nikolić and Vice-President Aleksandar Vučić. The SNS-SPS coalition was further consolidated in the following year, and it continued implementing some of the most important policies inherited from the previous governments led by DS – a commitment to the EU accession process and the initial efforts to make an agreement with the Kosovo authorities (Brussels agreement in 2013). However, certain non-democratic trends started to appear, especially following the absolute electoral majority achieved by SNS in 2014. Increasing authoritarianism and the concentration of power in the hands of one figure (Aleksandar Vučić),<sup>14</sup> marginalization and efforts to fragment the opposition, takeover, or reduction of independent institutions’ functioning (*Ombudsman of Serbia* and *Commissioner for Information of Public Importance and Personal Data Protection*), repression

<sup>12</sup> Срђан Радовић, *Београдски топоними* (Београд : Етнографски институт САНУ, 2014), 138–147.

<sup>13</sup> Nataša Govedarica, „Zemlja nesigurne prošlosti: Politike sećanja u Srbiji u periodu 1991–2011. godina“, u: *Re:vizija prošlosti: Politike sjećanja u Bosni i Hercegovini, Hrvatskoj i Srbiji od 1990. godine*, prir. Darko Karačić, Tamara Banjeglav, Nataša Govedarica (Sarajevo : ACIPS, 2012), 232–233.

<sup>14</sup> Since 2012 Aleksandar Vučić held some of the most important political positions in Serbia. He was the first vice-president of the Government (2012–2014), prime minister (2014–2017) and president of Serbia since 2017.

of media freedom, an increase of political corruption, as well as the production of artificial crises and early elections as sources of maintaining power.<sup>15</sup>

Regarding ideology and its introduction into the public space, SNS-led authorities did not initially introduce radical changes. Only a few street renamings in Belgrade gained wider public attention before 2019, but the change of government did attribute to the redefinition of criteria. Nevertheless, two phenomena became distinguished – the disappearance of the Yugoslav toponyms from the road plaques and the increased significance of external factors. Roads designated after non-Serbian toponyms from former Yugoslavia were the first to be renamed (streets such as *Zagrebačka*, *Pohorska*, *Ohridska*), but the names of Soviet and Yugoslav officers and politicians (as long as they were ethnic Serbs) were no longer undesirable.<sup>16</sup> The practice of removal of the urban landmarks connected to the joint Yugoslav past was not new. Since its dissolution, one of the most dominant views on the former multiethnic country in the Serbian public was centered around Yugoslavia's portrayal as a "utopian project" in which the Serbs had invested everything, and eventually gained little to nothing. Such impressions were shared by numerous political establishments, to varying degrees, and were incorporated into the practices of street renaming since the early 1990s.<sup>17</sup> Despite the longevity of these ideas, the erasure of Yugoslavia from the Serbian capital gained vigor only after SNS took political power in the city.

Furthermore, Serbian foreign policy proved to be influential when it came to the spatial redefining of the city. Remaining firmly on the EU accession path was directly connected to the adoption and implementation of the new European normative remembrance model which favored the specific anti-totalitarian stance (equidistance from both fascism and communism as profoundly repressive ideologies and political systems). The adoption of this model, accepted by all governments since 2000, further enabled the process of downplaying and erasing Yugoslavia, the trans-ethnic

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<sup>15</sup> Florian Bieber, *The Rise of Authoritarianism in the Western Balkans* (London : Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 46–47; Vladislav Jević warns that drastic limitations of political competition and public debates have brought Serbia back under the threshold of democracy (Владисављевић, *Успон и пад демократије*, 324), Spasojević and Stojiljković state that the European Union's response to such trends included the preference of stabilitocracy over democracy in Belgrade, mostly due to its own internal problems (Dušan Spasojević, Zoran Stojiljković, *Između uverenja i interesa: ideologije i organizacija stranaka u Srbiji* (Beograd : Fabrika knjiga, 2020), 100–104).

<sup>16</sup> Ана Вуковић, „Избрисане Корнатска, Лошињска, Ријечка и Шибењичка улица“, *Политика*, 22. 12. 2021, <https://www.politika.rs/scc/clanak/495152/Izbrisane-Kornatska-Losinjska-Rijecka-i-Sibenicka-ulica>; „Ukinuta Zagrebačka ulica u Beogradu!“, *Telegraf*, 17. 9. 2014, <https://www.telegraf.rs/vesti/beograd/1230556-ukinuta-zagrebicka-ulica-u-beogradu>; *Zagrebačka* became the *Street of Koča Popović*, a participant in the Spanish Civil War and the Second World War in Yugoslavia, as well as the secretary of foreign affairs and the vice-president of socialist Yugoslavia during the 1950s and 1960s.

<sup>17</sup> Radović, *Grad kao tekst*, 196.

liberation of the region during the Second World War, as well as the fifty years of peaceful coexistence among former Yugoslav republics.<sup>18</sup>

On the other hand, Russo-Serbian rapprochement gained momentum in 2009 during the joint military parade that marked the 65th anniversary of the liberation of Belgrade in WWII. That was when the Russian suggestions regarding the return of streets and boulevards named after the Soviet generals and liberators were taken into consideration by Serbian authorities.<sup>19</sup> This trend was further emphasized in the next joint parade in Belgrade in 2014.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, the image of a balanced Serbian foreign policy (“between the East and the West”) was reflected best in the newly constructed *Belgrade Waterfront* (*Beograd na vodi*). Two main streets of the new urban area bore the names of Nikolai Kravtsov, a Soviet hero from the Second World War, and the US president Woodrow Wilson. The interesting fact about this specific case is that the naming of the streets was formulated as Vučić’s personal suggestion and later adopted by the city and the state officials without any deliberations.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, the fact that such initiatives came from Vučić as a *citizen* (not as the *President of the republic*) was a sign of a deeper personalization of the Serbian political scene. The process of centralization of the historical politics in the hands of a single political party and its leader becomes evident if the decades-long institutional legacy of the semi-presidential system in Serbia is also kept in mind, as well as the personalization of the political life that accompanies it and the strengthening of such trends during the SNS rule.<sup>22</sup>

### **The Culmination of Odonym and Urban Changes (2019–2021)**

A new wave of the reorganization of urban toponyms began in 2019, this time under the ideological pretext of the post-2012 authorities. The previous reorganizations of toponyms in Belgrade paved the path toward the acceleration of the new

<sup>18</sup> Ana Milošević and Tamara Trošt, “Introduction: Europeanisation and Memory Politics in the Western Balkans”, *Europeanisation and Memory Politics in the Western Balkans*, edited by Ana Milošević and Tamara Trošt (London : Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 6.

<sup>19</sup> Миле Бјелајац, „Култура сећања на савезништво у Другом светском рату кроз називе улица, тргова и спомен-обележја“, *Ослобођење Београда: зборник радова*, ур. Александар Животић (Београд : Институт за новију историју Србије, 2010).

<sup>20</sup> “Balkan Transitional Justice | Changing Belgrade Street Names: A Sign of the Times”, *Balkan Transitional Justice*, 27. 8. 2016, <https://www.researchingbalkans.com/blog/2016/08/27/changing-belgrade-street-names-a-sign-of-the-times/>.

<sup>21</sup> „Ulica Nikolaja Kravcova i Bulevar Vudroa Vilsona otvoreni u Beogradu na vodi“, *RTS*, 15. 11. 2019, <https://www.rts.rs/page/stories/sr/story/125/drustvo/3738679/ulica-nikolaja-kravcova-i-bulevar-vudroa-vilsona-otvoreni-u-beogradu-na-vodi.html>.

<sup>22</sup> Marko Mandić, Pavle Nedić, „Karakteristike i funkcionisanje polupredsedničkog sistema u Srbiji“, *Godišnjak Fakulteta političkih nauka Univerziteta u Beogradu*, god. XV, br. 26, 2021, 95–97.



changes that were about to be implemented. This period was characterized by the disappearance of streets named after people and landmarks from non-Serbian territories of former Yugoslav republics almost in its entirety. These trends further brought to light the complex relationship between SNS and nationalism. Florian Bieber claims that nationalism might not be a constitutive force of most competitive authoritarian regimes (such is the case in Serbia), but it continues to be an important resource of governance.<sup>23</sup> While this approach may be significant when we look into the broader aspects of such regimes, other experts point out the fact that nationalism and populism were frequently used by SNS-led governments within the official politics of memory on WWII and the wars of the 1990s.<sup>24</sup> Within the official political discourse, these wars are frequently fused together to create a narrative of Serbian victimhood throughout the 20th century, but also to minimize the accusations of war crimes committed against non-Serbs, and to introduce new ways of commemorating and interpreting the recent past. Additionally, a vast set of new practices of remembrance, starting with the Operation Storm commemoration in 2015, addressed the question of the Serbian victims from Croatia (from both 1940s and 1990s) and thus increased their visibility in the public sphere and their significance for the regime.<sup>25</sup>

With these processes in mind, some previously implemented practices were reflected again on the capital city's streets, albeit with increased intensity starting from 2019. Non-Serbian toponyms from Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina continued to disappear from the urban landscape. Vučić's initiatives were once again instrumental in enabling and hastening the decision-making, this time evident by the unanimous institutional acceptance of the naming of roads after Dobrica Ćosić and Milorad Ekmečić.<sup>26</sup> One of the key institutions in charge of the matter was the Commission for Monuments and the Naming of Streets and Squares in Belgrade. Andrea Radulović,<sup>27</sup> the president of the Commission, adequately summarized the true nature of its ideological background. After praising Vučić's proposal regarding Ćosić and Ekmečić, she added that Belgrade should no longer have streets named

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<sup>23</sup> Bieber, *The Rise of Authoritarianism*, 124.

<sup>24</sup> Jelena Đureinović, *Memory Politics of the 1990s Wars in Serbia: Historical Revisionism and Challenges of Memory Activism* (Beograd : Fond za humanitarno pravo, 2021), 18–22.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 28–29.

<sup>26</sup> Ćosić (writer and politician) and Ekmečić (historian) are often perceived as some of the most prominent contemporary intellectuals and national figures. Streets previously named after Zadar and Travnik began to bear their names in 2019. „ĆOSIĆ I EKMEČIĆ DOBIJAJU ULICE U BEOGRADU Imena dvojice akademika umesto gradova iz Hrvatske i BiH“, *Blic*, 20.2.2019, <https://www.blic.rs/vesti/beograd/cosic-i-ekmecic-dobijaju-ulice-u-beogradu-imena-dvojice-akademika-umesto-gradova-iz/g1w2z28>.

<sup>27</sup> Andrea Radulović – Management Studies graduate from the “Braća Karić” University in Belgrade. She has been a member of the Main Board of the *Serbian Progressive Party* and in 2014 she was elected Deputy Speaker of the City Assembly of Belgrade. In 2018 she became president of the *Commission for Monuments and the Naming of Streets and Squares in Belgrade*.

after the geographical designations from former Yugoslavia and that their existence became obsolete after the dissolution of the SFRY.<sup>28</sup> This statement could be seen as the epitome of the official dominant vision of the urban reorganization carried out by SNS throughout the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

At the same time, another decision of the city authorities caused widespread public disapproval – the intent to erase the toponym assigned to Stjepan (Stevan) Filipović, an ethnic Croat and a Yugoslav partisan who was executed by the Nazis, and replace it with the name of Emil Perška, a famous football player from interwar Yugoslavia. Having been perceived as undesirable on two grounds (as a Croat and a communist), Filipović's partial removal was not accompanied by a thorough examination to find a suitable replacement. For that reason, Perška was simply selected from a previously existing list of accomplished persons who were next in line to be mentioned on a road plaque. The Commission and the Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government approved the change through bureaucratic channels without much deliberation or public consultations. However, several months later the experts pointed out Perška's affiliation with the ustaša movement and his position as a police officer of the fascist Independent State of Croatia (*Nezavisna Država Hrvatska – NDH*) during the Second World War.<sup>29</sup> The city authorities did not issue an official apology or a detailed explanation. Instead, they only acknowledged that there had been an oversight in the procedure.<sup>30</sup> Additionally, the decision was quickly revoked, and the road was given a more neutral name.<sup>31</sup>

Nevertheless, the city and state officials showed no intention of modifying their memorialization agenda related to the Belgrade toponyms, despite the growing criticisms coming from the academic and opposition circles. On the contrary, the process continued with new vigor the following year. In July 2020 Goran Vesić, deputy mayor of Belgrade and a high-ranked SNS official, drafted a proposition that included a wide change of streets named after Yugoslav (most of them being Croatian) toponyms, justifying it with the need to name the roads after “friendly nations and individuals that have contributed to the mankind” and called for Serbs to “stop being masochists” by keeping the street plaques that contain the designation of territories “where everything

<sup>28</sup> The shift of priorities and the absence of the former staunch anti-communism was shown when the Commission also decided to name another street by Branko Parać Relja, a fighter of the NOB; „Ove dve ulice sada će nositi imena Dobrice Ćosića i Milorada Ekmečića“, *Telegraf*, 4.3.2019, <https://www.telegraf.rs/vesti/beograd/3038552-ove-dve-ulice-sada-ce-nositi-imena-dobrice-cosica-i-milorada-ekmecica>.

<sup>29</sup> Ksenija Jelesijević, „Srpski istoričar: Neprihvatljivo da ulica u Beogradu nosi ime Emila Perške“, *Mondo*, 27. 11. 2019, <https://mondo.rs/Info/Beograd/a1253905/Dejan-Ristic-Ulica-Emila-Perske.html>

<sup>30</sup> „Saopštenje Komisije za spomenike i nazive trgova i ulica Skupštine Grada Beograda“, *Grad Beograd*, 27. 11. 2019, <https://www.beograd.rs/lat/beoinfo/1767872-saopstenje-komisije-za-spomenike-i-nazive-trgova-i-ulica-skupstine-grada-beograda/>

<sup>31</sup> „Sporna ulica Emila Perške dobija naziv Taraiška“, *Politika*, 28. 11. 2019, <https://www.politika.rs/sr/clanak/442901/Sporna-ulica-Emila-Perske-dobija-naziv-Taraiska>



related to Serbs was obliterated a long time ago”.<sup>32</sup> The proposal included around 15 odonyms,<sup>33</sup> but the use of a harsh vocabulary against the opponents of the initiative wasn’t uncommon in the matter of the political discourse of the ruling party. The terms such as “national traitors”, “thieves”, and “foreign agents” were frequently used to demonize the opposition parties, as well as the independent media and civil society. On the other hand, the nationalist rhetoric with similar tones served its purpose during a confrontation with politicians from the region (most frequently Croatian), thus completing the circle of negative portrayal of the *Other* as the ultimate enemy of the Serbian nation.<sup>34</sup> Such fate met some of the intellectuals who opposed naming a street after Blagoje Jovović, a member of the chetnik movement and the assassin of the leader Ante Pavelić, the leader of the NDH. Their criticism revolved around the opposition to normalizing political assassination in public spaces and Jovović’s participation in chetnik units that collaborated with the Italians and Germans during WW2. In return, Vesić confronted them by saying that they were “a fake elite that prefers Pavelić over Jovović”, “a minority that terrorizes the majority” by “imposing their attitudes onto everyone” and propagating an opinion that “Serbs should not have their own history and national heroes to be proud of”.<sup>35</sup>

Throughout recent years, Goran Vesić proved to be one of the main instigators of urban reconceptualization of the Serbian capital city. Under Vesić’s watchful supervision, this process did not encompass only the mere (re)construction of roads, buildings and squares. It also involved discovering and inventing public spaces where memory, history and national identity could be intertwined within the new ideological framework. The symbolic characteristics of the public space are frequently determined by the type of collective national memory that the political elites are trying to impose.<sup>36</sup> That is why Vesić specifically chose the events such as the opening of large squares and the erection of monuments dedicated to the most important Serbian

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<sup>32</sup> „Vlast u Beogradu planira da promeni imena ulica dobijena po toponimima iz SFRJ“, *NI*, 26. 7. 2020, <https://rs.n1info.com/vesti/a623470-vlast-u-beogradu-planira-da-promeni-imena-ulica-dobijena-po-toponimima-iz-sfrj/>

<sup>33</sup> Some of the streets that were meant to be renamed were the following: *Porečka, Hvarska, Hrvatska, Splitska, Podravska, Bjelovarska, Šibenička, Ljubljanska, Bledska, Bosanska, Mariborska, Celjska, Lopudska, Murska, Zenička*. Vesić further confirmed that *Sarajevska* had also been on the list and that president Vučić’s personal plea to keep the street name was crucial in changing his mind; „Vesić: Vučić tražio da ostane Sarajevska ulica“, *Nova S*, 28. 7. 2020, <https://nova.rs/vesti/drustvo/vesic-vucic-tražio-da-ostane-sarajevska-ulica/>

<sup>34</sup> Spasojević, Stojiljković, *Između uverenja i interesa*, 113–114; Bieber, *The Rise of Authoritarianism*, 47.

<sup>35</sup> „Vesić o ulici B. Jovovića: Istorijska i ljudska Pravda“, *Večernje novosti*, 30. 7. 2020, <https://www.novosti.rs/vesti/politika/905809/vesic-ulici-jovovica-istorijska-ljudska-pravda>; „NAROD REKAO ŠTA MISLI: Osvanuo mural u budućoj ulici Blagoja Jovovića“, *Srbija Danas*, 4. 8. 2020, <https://www.srbijadanas.com/vesti/beograd/osvanuo-mural-u-ulici-bлагоја-jovovica-u-zemunu-2020-08-04>.

<sup>36</sup> Radović, *Grad kao tekst*, 30–31.

medieval rulers to define the true ideological background of such endeavors. Like on many other occasions, he insisted that their political opponents and all the regimes prior to 2012 made Serbia weak and Serbs feel ashamed of their history. Then he added that Vučić succeeded in making the nation feel proud of its past and its rulers (whether medieval or contemporary) and that the erection of such monuments<sup>37</sup> was actually the “final victory of Serbs in Serbia”.<sup>38</sup> By combining two crucial elements – intolerance towards the opponents (historical or modern) and the emphasis on the return to the “true and proud” Serbian history and public memory – Vesić managed to define the ideas that were incompatible with the new vision of the past. According to Olga Manojlović Pintar, such social cohesion, based mostly on national exclusivism, presented a pathway toward the construction of a new historical calendar where there would be no place for the legacy of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – national equality, socialism and Yugoslavism. Those ideas had already been marked as the “greatest Serbian delusions” of the past century by many writers, artists and scientists, while SNS decided to follow their footsteps by embracing the new ideological discourse.<sup>39</sup> That was how the Serbian Middle Ages and the genocide against the Serbs in the Second World War were converted into crucial historical points of reference for the new politics of the past introduced by the SNS, especially after 2019. Moreover, the most important element of such a remembrance narrative proved to be the rediscovery of the “long forgotten and neglected Serbdom”. Yugoslavism, its archrival, was meant to gradually disappear from Belgrade’s national memory and landscape.

The same rhetoric was used by Vučić, this time to explain contemporary events. He repeated the claim that the policy of silence, forgetting and decades-long appeasement towards others was finally over, that the issue of genocide against the Serbs in the NDH would no longer be marginalized. Then he added that this topic would be thoroughly examined now that Serbia was becoming strong again. According to him, the remembrance of the persecution was meant to serve a dual purpose – prevention of new mass crimes against the Serbs (such as those in the Jasenovac concentration camp and during Operation Storm<sup>40</sup>) and the preservation of the national identity, culture, tradition and memory.<sup>41</sup> The speech was made in April 2020, on the occa-

<sup>37</sup> In this case he talked about the monument of the Grand Prince Stefan Nemanja.

<sup>38</sup> „Goran Vesić: Ponosan sam na Savski trg i spomenik Stefanu Nemanji“, *Info24*, 17. 2. 2021, <https://info24.rs/goran-vesic-ponosan-sam-na-savski-trg-i-spomenik-stefanu-nemanji/>.

<sup>39</sup> Olga Manojlović Pintar, „Pogled s prozora: Još jednom o spomeniku Stefanu Nemanji“, *Vreme*, 21. 1. 2021, <https://www.vreme.com/vreme/pogled-sa-prozora/>.

<sup>40</sup> *Operation Storm (Operacija Oluja)* was the name of the military offensive of the Croatian Army that began in early August 1995. The military action was conducted against the forces of the Republic of Serbian Krajina (Republika Srpska Krajina), the breakaway state Serbs from Croatia established in 1991. The offensive marked the end of the war in Croatia. Around 200.000 Croatian Serbs left their homes or were forcibly exiled as a result of *Operation Storm*; Мари-Жанин Чалић, *Историја Југославије у 20. веку* (Београд : Clio, 2013), 402.

<sup>41</sup> D. D., „Aleksandar Vučić: Predugo ćutanje o genocidu nad Srbima u NDH“, *Danas*, 27.4.2020.

sion of the anniversary of the prisoner breakout from the Jasenovac concentration camp, and it turned out to be one of the catalysts for the intensified memorialization endeavors in 2020 and 2021 related to the genocide in the NDH. Those endeavors were numerous, and they encompassed different public spheres,<sup>42</sup> but such type of politics of memory also manifested itself through new toponyms.

The old practices continued, this time with Yugoslav public spaces being replaced by those that commemorated the Serbian suffering in the NDH – the *Croatian Street* became the *Street of the Glina Victims in 1941* and the *Coast of the Victims of Jasenovac* was introduced on the left bank of the Sava River in New Belgrade, directly facing the recently constructed *Belgrade Waterfront*.<sup>43</sup> Just like on previous occasions, the old patterns of non-democratic decision-making remained. The work of the Commission for Monuments and the Naming of Streets and Squares was additionally marginalized in public. In 2020 and 2021 it was reduced to acclamation and celebration of the leaders' choices (Vučić and Vesić) regarding toponyms, thus revealing the functioning of the new mechanism of *state capture*.<sup>44</sup> The elaborations of such decisions remained a combination of historical arguments, the official ideology and the way it's implemented, the necessity to honor the victims of genocide and the reflection of the current tensions between Serbia and Croatia. Harsh confrontations with the opponents (whether real, imaginary, past or present) of the dominant memory discourse and politics of identity became just another manifestation of the decline of democratic dialogue and the establishment of *competitive authoritarianism*, which further enabled the concentration of political power within one party and its leader.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Jelena Đureinović defined it as the “industry of memory” and underlined its main components; “The state actors as memory agents use diverse cultural and media formats to distribute the historical narrative to the broadest population. Political actors disseminate the narrative through cultural production, including film and publishing, large-scale events with audiences, and live broadcasting and streaming. Inequality is of the essence of the industry of memory, because access to resources and means of production is not equal but very restricted to the memory actors close to the government who promote the hegemonic narratives about the past. The memory activists who work against the industry of memory do not have access to such resources and such a broad reach in society.” (Đureinović, *Memory Politics of the 1990s Wars in Serbia*, 26–27).

<sup>43</sup> Sonja Ćirić, „Pretvaranje metropole u provinciju“, *Vreme*, 13. 1. 2022, <https://www.vreme.com/vreme/prevaranje-metropole-u-provinciju/>.

<sup>44</sup> Florian Bieber concluded that, unlike earlier times, the countries of the Western Balkans continued to have independent institutions, but their ability to act as checks and balances became severely curtailed. At the same time, informal power structures and ruling parties have been able to take control over state institutions (Bieber, *The Rise of Authoritarianism*, 114).

<sup>45</sup> Владисављевић, *Успон и пад демократије*, 334.

## Conclusion

The political development of Serbia and the change of Belgrade odonyms have been significantly intertwined in the past three decades. Each government incorporated its values, ideological standpoints and views on national history into the urban landscape of the Serbian capital. The early 1990s were marked by fewer changes in street names, unlike in other post-communist countries, but the regime changes in 2000 and 2012 introduced more profound alterations. The democratic authorities that came to power after October 2000 altered road designations on several occasions, mostly driven by their firm anti-communist stance. Another shift of political power occurred in 2012 with the SNS-SPS coalition forming the government, which also brought a change in ideology. The influence of populism and nationalism on the official politics of memory was evident in the case of Belgrade odonyms and the process of decision-making in the matter became just another reflection of the decline of democracy in the country. Former anti-communism was being slowly replaced by anti-Yugoslavism as the main driving force behind such changes in the Serbian capital, especially between 2019 and 2021.

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## Резиме

МА Димитрије Матић

### Мењање имена београдских улица као одраз политичких и идеолошких промена у Србији почетком XXI века

Политички развој Србије и промене београдских одонима у протекле три деценије били су у великој мери паралелни и међузависни процеси. У овом периоду, скоро све власти у Србији настојале су да престоницу трансформишу у складу са сопственим вредностима, идеолошким погледима и специфичним тумачењима националне историје. Раних деведесетих година преименовање београдских улица није било масовно, насупротив праксама у другим посткомунистичким државама, али су смене власти 2000. и 2012. године довеле и до значајнијих промена на овом пољу. Демократски режими који су наступили након октобра 2000. године мењали су уличне ознаке у неколико наврата, најчешће у складу са својим чврстим антикомунистичким опредељењима. До нове промене владе дошло је 2012. године, када су владајућу коалицију склопиле СНС и СПС, чиме је дошло и до поновног превредновања прошлости. Утицај популизма и национализма на званичну културу сећања нових политичких елита био је приметан у случају београдских одонима, док је процес доношења одлука у вези са именима престоничких улица постао још један одраз стања демократије у Србији. Један од најважнијих идеолошких мотива за промену назива улица постало је антијугословенство, уместо некадашњег антикомунизма, док се процес преименовања у складу са новим начелима посебно интензивирао након 2019. године.

**Кључне речи:** одоними, Београд, Српска напредна странка, политика сећања, антијугословенство.