11 State building and images of the democratic soldier in Serbia

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Introduction

Serbia is a newcomer regarding both its statehood and democracy. Its state rebuilding commenced following the break-up of Yugoslavia in the early 1990s. However, this process could not mature until the split with Monte-negro in 2006, when Serbia regained statehood after 88 years as a constitu-ent of Yugoslavia. Serbia's democratic transformation started after the Milošević regime was toppled in the 'Bulldozer Revolution' of 5 October 2000. Added to the tests facing all transition countries, Serbia has had to deal with a set of peculiar challenges. Since 2000, Serbia has been torn between two opposing ideologies: pro-Western democracy and ethno-nationalism. The tipping point of this ideological conflict was the assassina-tion of the country's first democratically elected Prime Minister Zoran Đinđić in an attempted *coup d'état* in 2003. Moreover, unlike other European post-Communist countries, Serbia has adopted the policy of military neutral-ity. Despite its declared wish to join the EU, Serbia has had ambivalent and at times tense relations with NATO. Finally, its historically and culturally significant southern province of Kosovo declared independence in 2008.

How does Serbia's democracy – burdened with such internal and exter-nal controversies – conceive of its military? We shall, in this chapter, explore the peculiar imprint of the Serbian democracy on its military organization and challenge the predominant assumption in civil–military relations theory which states that the societal sphere is liberal while the military sphere is inherently hierarchical and conservative (Huntington 1957). In contrast, barriers that divide the societal and military spheres are much more permeable.

The core argument in this chapter is that there is no single ideal of the soldier in democratic Serbia, although the government has developed a normative image of small professional 'postmodern' forces designed for new missions and international military integration (Moskos *et al.* 2000). However, this normative image is not in sync with the official threat per-ception or with the declared policy of military neutrality and is a burden on military reform and on civil–military relations.

First of all, we will outline the general political context of democratization and state building in which the quest for the new military identity is being undertaken. Second, the different ideals of the soldiers will be juxtaposed. Third, we will study institutions through which the normative models are being transferred to soldiers. Finally, we will present and discuss the results of our field study before drawing conclusions.

1 Democracy, state building and security sector reform

Democratization and state building are concurrent processes in Serbia today that have different and sometimes opposing logics, usually at the expense of democracy (Linz and Stepan 1996: 25). Nevertheless, Serbia can be considered a sub-consolidated elective democracy (Pavlovi and Antonić 2007; Pavlović 2008). Beneath the surface of formal rules and institutions, informal networks, clientelism and corruption prevent the consolidation of democracy; parliament is still a rubber stamp institution. The independence of the judicial system is undermined as much by corruption as by the excessively powerful executive branch. The greatest problem, however, is the continued existence of reserved domains in the economic and security sectors (Pavlović and Antonić 2007: 170).

Within the security sector, the first generation of reforms encompassing 'the establishment of new institutions, structures and chains of responsibility' (Edmunds 2004: 50) has been completed successfully (Hadžić *et al.* 2009). The normative framework was put in place together with institutions of democratic civil control.[1] The chief of staff was put under the direct command of the Ministry of Defence in 2004, paving the way for civil control of the armed forces. Since 2003, principles of democratic control have been introduced in all legal and strategic documents regulating the defence sector; and the construction of the normative framework was completed by 2009. Oversight mechanisms were established in parliament, the executive, civil society and within independent state agencies.[2] The police has been downsized and demilitarized and opened to the international community, and has become a service for citizens (Hadžić *et al.* 2009: 165).[3] The State Security Service has been separated from the Ministry of the Interior, renamed the Security Information Agency (SIA) and formally placed under democratic civilian control.

Nevertheless, Security Sector Reform (SSR) in Serbia is still only at the beginning of the second-generation reforms. In other words, the normative and institutional set-up created between 2000 and 2010 now needs to be put into practice. The civilian chain of command is not well defined, allowing civilian decision-makers a degree of subjective control that restricts the professional autonomy of the military and police (Hadžić *et al.* 2009: 32, 153–4, 188–90). Parliamentary control is still limited due to the rather weak position of parliament in Serbia's political system. The Defence and Security Committee has neither the political will nor the

resources to carry out its broad mandate concerning democratic oversight (ibid.: 279–91). The effectiveness of independent state agencies is being steadily undermined.

However, it is the unsettled territorial issues that remain the greatest challenge to the further consolidation of democracy in Serbia (Pavlovi 2007: 247). The good news is that the security dilemma created by the secession of Kosovo is no longer a military dilemma and the Serbian political elites do not regard the Kosovo issue as a problem that should be dealt with in military terms. Instead, they have opted for diplomatic and legal devices. However, the bad news is that this issue continues to generate security dilemmas at the political and societal levels (Buzan *et al.* 1998). Politically, the stability of political order and the very idea of the Serbian state are challenged by the unilateral secession of Kosovo, the province that is generally believed to be an inalienable element of Serbian national identity (Mitzen 2006; Steele 2008).

2 The normative model of the soldier in Serbia

The image of the democratic soldier put forth by the Serbian government largely conforms to the postmodern military model (Moskos *et al.* 2000: 14–32), but is constantly challenged by Serbia's historical legacy, political culture, political cleavages and public opinion. In this section, we will juxtapose these different ideals of soldiers.

2.1 Organization of the armed forces and security and defence policy

The Serbian Armed Forces (*Vojska Srbije*, VS), officially founded in 2006, are divided into commands, units and institutions and composed of Branches (Serbian Land Forces, Serbian Air Force and Air Defence, and Training Command), Arms (infantry, armoured units, artillery, engineering, air defence artillery missile units, aviation, river units, electronic reconnaissance and services) and Services (general and logistics). As of April 2008, the VS were 28,000 strong with about 4,500 officers, 7,500 non-commissioned officers (NCOs), 4,000 professional soldiers and 8,000 recruits. In 2007, the Military Academy in Belgrade opened its doors to the first female cadets, who will graduate and be promoted to the rank of officer in 2010. Currently there are about 171 women in uniform, of whom 15 are officers, 29 are NCOs and 127 are professional soldiers (Hadžić *et al.* 2009: 146). In total, women make up around 0.6 per cent of the professional military corps, far below the NATO average of 10 per cent.

Serbia is the only country in the Western Balkans where military service is still mandatory (consisting of either six months active duty or nine months civilian service). However, plans for the full professionalization of the armed forces and the introduction of an all-volunteer force have been

announced. The structural changes underway are in keeping with NATO standards, but no decision has been made to join the Alliance.

Serbia has been searching for a working definition of its security and defence policy since the break-up of Yugoslavia 20 years ago and the start of democratic transformation ten years ago. Despite internal problems, such as deep cultural and political rifts, separation from Montenegro and the secession of Kosovo, as well as external impediments, such as NATO intervention and Western endorsement of Kosovo's independence, a minimal consensus on security and defence policy has managed to surface owing to the concurrent processes of democratization and Europeaniza-tion. The main tenets of this emerging consensus will be briefly outlined in the following section (Table 11.1). The Serbian Armed Forces have three basic missions followed by a set of tasks (Strategic Defence Review 2006; Strategy of Defence 2009).

The policy of Serbian military neutrality was officially adopted by a parliamentary resolution of December 2007 in the wake of an anticipated unilateral declaration of independence by Kosovo (February 2008). To date, this resolution is the only official document articulating the policy of military neutrality. Neither the National Security Strategy nor the Defence Strategy – both adopted in 2009 – contain references to military neutrality or alliances. Both documents note the decreased probability of armed aggression, and refer to the illegitimate secession of Kosovo as the single most dangerous threat to Serbian national security.

Nevertheless, Serbia has been a passive member of the NATO Partner-ship for Peace (PfP) since December 2006. Serbia seeks EU membership and has declared its willingness to develop capacities to actively participate in the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). Serbia's contri-bution to peacekeeping has been modest, but seems to be growing.[4] Since 2002, it has provided five military observers for East Timor (2002–2005) and three military observers have been engaged in Burundi (2004–2006).

Table 11.1 The three basic missions of the Serbian Armed Forces

Military missions	Military tasks
Defence of the Republic of Serbia from external military threats	Deterrence, defence of territory and airspace
Participation in building and maintaining peace in the region and in the world	Participation in international military cooperation and in multinational operations
Support to civilian authorities in countering non-military threats to security	Assistance to civilian authorities in countering internal security threats, separatism, organized crime and terrorism; assistance in cases of natural or man-made catastrophes

In April 2010, the VS secured the participation of 34 individuals in four different UN operations: in Chad and the Central African Republic (CAR; United Nations Mission in the Central African Republic and Chad, MINURCAT), Congo (United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo, MONUC), Liberia (United Nations Missions in Liberia, UNMIL) and Ivory Coast (United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire, UNOCI). Serbia also participates in regional security cooperation through the Regional Cooperation Council, the South-Eastern Europe Defence Ministerial Meeting and the South-East Europe Clearinghouse. Finally, the VS participate in the State Partnership Programme with the National Guard of Ohio, initiated in 2006.

2.2 History and political culture

What are the main features of contemporary political culture in Serbia 20 years after the end of the Cold War? Some scholars stress traditional components characterized by the ideal of an organic community, a paternalist state–citizen relationship and the supremacy of collective or positive over individual or negative freedom (Podunavac 2008: 170–5). Others have rightly pointed to the rather ambivalent and pluralist character of Serbian political culture characterized as a tension between two groups of principles, one deriving from tradition and the other from the modern age (Matić 1993; 1998; 2000). These approaches, however, fail to take into consideration historicity and contingency of culture, especially under the conditions of the tectonic political shifts that shook Serbia after the end of the Cold War. Drawing on these insights, contemporary political culture in Serbia can be conceptualized as a tension between two diverging discourses: national-liberational and civic-democratic.

The national-liberational discourse claims a long tradition in Serbia. At its centre stands a narrative about the 500-year struggle of the Serbian people for liberation from foreign conquerors that encroached upon the territory of south-east Europe. The importance of the struggle against foreign enemies mutes alternative political discourses focussed on internal social emancipation (Matić 1993: 839). The long quest for collective freedom against much mightier enemies placed so-called *inat*, i.e. irrational defiance against all odds, at the centre of national-liberational practice.[5] The formative moments in the national-liberational interpretation of history are: the rise of the Serbian Church in the twelfth century and of the Serbian state in the fourteenth century; the defeat against the Ottoman Empire in the Kosovo Battle in 1389; the demise of the medieval Serbian Despotate in 1459; the two Serbian Uprisings in 1804 and 1815; the national liberation wars (two Balkan Wars and the First World War) in 1912–1918; the rejection of the Tripartite Pact with the Axis powers in 1941; the split with Stalin in 1948; and the defiance of NATO in 1999. The national-liberational discourse draws strongly on medieval mythology

revolving around motifs such as the Golden Age, the East–West divide, Heavenly Serbia, Kosovo Battle, the ideal of the warrior and the notions of victimhood, martyrdom, treason, conspiracy, salvation and charismatic saviours (Tismaneanu 1998; Anzulović 1999). The principal spokesmen for the national-liberational discourse today are members of the conservative intelligentsia, SOC and nationalist political parties.

Given its traditional connection to 'external liberation', the national-liberational discourse is very sensitive to security and strategic affairs. Its inherent distrust of foreign powers, especially Western ones, tunes its positions against military alliances or defence integration. This is further amplified by the fact that most EU and NATO member states have recognized the independence of Kosovo, the so-called 'cradle of the Serbian national identity'. In contrast, a special relationship is favoured with the geographically distant but culturally and politically close Russia. The national-liberational discourse tends to play down internal security challenges in favour of external security threats.

The contemporary civic-democratic discourse derives from more recent political developments and relatively short periods of democratic governance in Serbia.[6] The formative moments for the civic-democratic interpretation of history are the adoption of the liberal Candlemass Constitution (1835); the adoption of the Regents Constitution (1869); the student protests of 1968; the anti-Milošević demonstrations of 9 March 1991; the student rallies against the election fraud of 1996–1997; the 'Bulldozer Revolution' of October 2000; and the assassination of Zoran Đinđić, the first democratic prime minister, in 2003. The main axiomatic belief put forward by the civic-democratic discourse is that Europe and the West unequivocally represent the cultural, political and civilizational habitat of Serbia. Today, the main proponents of the civic-democratic discourse are members of civil society at large, non-governmental organizations and liberal and progressive intelligentsia. The civic-democratic discourse includes the basic assumption that Serbia's integration into the EU and NATO are the desired goals of its foreign policy. This discourse tends to 'de-securitize' external threats and 'securitizes' internal dangers such as organized crime, corruption and right-wing political movements.

Although both the national-liberational and civic-democratic discourses assumed their present form during Milošević rule, they relate and refer to different historic processes and are driven by different logics. While the civic-democratic discourse responds well to the internal pressures on individual rights and civil liberties, the national-liberational discourse carries the day when the nation is faced with external pressures and dangers. However, with the consolidation of democracy, a growing tendency has emerged for the two discourses to fuse into a hybrid mainstream national-democratic discourse.

2.3 Political cleavages

The main political cleavages in Serbia, like in many other unconsolidated democracies, are based primarily on 'symbolic and ideological conflicts', and related to social belonging and identity (Pavlović and Antonić 2007: 251). Pavlović and Antonić distinguish four positions within the Serbian political scene: reformist-civic radicals; reformist-civic moderates; national-conservative moderates and national-conservative radicals (2007: 257):

Reformist-civic radicals argue that an in-depth break should be swiftly made with the remnants of the old regime, and that it should include lustration. In addition to a great number of civil society organizations, the only political party that currently subscribes to this position is the opposition Liberal Democratic Party (LDP).

Reformist-civic moderates support swift comprehensive reforms that observe the established legal order and respect national identity and territorial integrity. Their foreign policy priorities are concurrent efforts to join the EU and preserve territorial integrity and Serbian sovereignty over the province of Kosovo. This is the position of the ruling Coalition for Democratic Serbia (ZES).

National-conservative moderates favour gradual reforms that are respectful of the rule of law, territorial integrity and Serbian traditional values.

National-conservative radicals share a firm conviction that the Miloševi regime was 'essentially democratic and patriotic' (ibid.: 269). Their discourse is deeply embedded in the national-liberational tradition, and is often anti-Western and prominently anti-American.

Since 2000, all governments have been composed of reformist-civic-moderates (Democratic Party, *Demokratska stranka*, DS; G17 PLUS) and national-conservative moderates (Democratic Party of Serbia, *Demokratska stranka Srbije*, DSS; Democratic Party of Serbia, *Nova Srbija*, NS; Socialist Party of Serbia, *Socijalistička partija Srbije*, SPS). The political spectrum of Serbia has experienced a centripetal discursive and policy shift since SPS participation in the government and particularly since the Serbian Radical Party (*Srpska radikalna stranka*, SRS) and the Serbian Progressive Party (*Srpska napredna stranka*, SNS) split in 2008. Most parties, with the exception of the far left LDP and the far right SRS, have moved towards the centre-right national-conservative position. All of this has had a stabilizing effect on the political environment and contributed to the emergence of the new mainstream national-democratic discourse, a hybrid form that blends civic-democratic and national-liberational ingredients.

2.4 Public opinion

Public opinion has an impact on the construction of the normative model of the military. Traditionally, the armed forces have always enjoyed enthusiastic

public support in Serbia. Figures for 1992–2000 show that this varied between 43 per cent in 1997 and 83 per cent in 2000 (Hadžić and Timotić 2006: 97). Support peaked following NATO intervention against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (*Savezna Republika Jugoslavija*, SRJ) and the subsequent resistance of top military leaders to defend the Milošević regime in October 2000. However, since 2000, public support for the military has steadily declined. This trend should largely be attributed to disillusionment with the democratic reforms in general. Nevertheless, the military still tops the list of the most popular institutions in Serbia, second only to the Serbian Orthodox Church. Public interest in military topics is also quite high, with about two-thirds of the population sharing this interest (Glišić 2006: 62).

Public support for the military is closely connected with the threat perception within a society (Moskos *et al.* 2000: 19–20). The polls conducted from 2002 to 2005 indicate that the most dangerous threat to national security was generally perceived as coming from potential inter-ethnic conflicts in Kosovo, Sandzak, Voivodina and southern Serbia (60.4 per cent), followed by organized crime (32.85 per cent) and economic instability (29.7 per cent).[7] Approximately one in ten Serbian citizens was fearful of potential NATO aggression, terrorism and regional war. When asked about the priorities of defence reform, most citizens gave preference to modernization of equipment (53.7 per cent), an all-volunteer force (58.3 per cent) and improvements in the economic standing of the armed forces (48.2 per cent). About half of the population supported conscientious objection (52.5 per cent), and more than two-thirds (67.6 per cent) responded that they would like to see this right implemented more strictly. In addition, most citizens supported democratic control over the armed forces (53.9 per cent), but only about one-third of them wanted the VS to participate in international military operations (33.0 per cent), and slightly less than one-third (30.2 per cent) were in favour of an all-volunteer military. Only two out of three citizens supported Serbia's participation in the UN (62.1 per cent). Although 70.1 per cent supported Serbia's membership in the PfP, only 33.4 per cent were in favour of NATO integration. This figure declined in the years that followed, particularly upon the adoption of the policy of military neutrality (December 2007) and the declaration of the independence of Kosovo (February 2008). In 2009, only 25 per cent of citizens were in favour of NATO membership (December 2009) while 65 per cent supported EU membership (January 2010) (*Politika* online; *Blic* online). Finally, the general public seems to be quite sceptical when it comes to the roles women and homosexuals could play within the military. Approximately three out of ten citizens doubt that homosexuals (33 per cent) and women (34 per cent) can make good soldiers (CESID 2008).

Applying the analytical concept proposed by Moskos (2000: 15) to the above data, it can be argued that the general public in Serbia favours a modern type of armed forces in terms of force structure (large army,

conscription), major mission definition (primarily defence of homeland) and public attitude towards the military (mostly supportive); a late modern type in terms of the assessment of women and homosexuals in the military (sceptical) and of conscientious objection (stricter implementation); but a postmodern type in terms of threat perception (ethnic violence).

2.5 Summary of the normative model

The Serbian polity is still ideologically divided between the civic-democratic discourse, which draws on more recent efforts towards internal emancipation, and the national-liberational discourse, which is informed by the historic struggle for emancipation from foreign conquerors and aggressors. This symbolic rift is still preventing the emergence of a national consensus on the role of the military in general and the norm-ative image of the democratic soldier in particular. Second, the Govern-ment of Serbia is trying to build a postmodern image of a highly professional soldier equipped with the heroic traditions of pre-Yugoslav Serbia. However, he/she should also be shaped and prepared for the security tasks of the twenty-first century such as peacekeeping, the fight against terrorism or providing support for civilian authorities in case of natural and man-made catastrophes. Third, this official ideal is strongly challenged by both the national-conservative part of the political spectrum and by a large portion of the general public. In their view, the ideal soldier should be a patriot warrior who defends the national territory and fights wars of liberation against foreign invaders and occupiers. Until Serbia comes to terms with the independence of Kosovo, such a national-liberational discourse will continue to impede the concordance between society, military and political elites.

3 Transfer of the normative model

We turn to the question of how the normative models of the military are transferred to the VS through education, training, advancement and con-flict resolution.

3.1 Military education

Military education is the key mechanism for the socialization of future officers who manage and steer the socialization of all other soldiers. It should also serve as a vehicle that carries wider societal norms into the officer's habitus, thus contributing to the integration of the military into civil society. As an integral part of the wider defence system, military edu-cation has been undergoing reform ever since the democratic changes of 2000, and more so since 2005.[8] The current reform process has been carried out in three phases: (1) building a better relationship with the

civilian higher education system (2006–2007); (2) accreditation of institutions in the military higher education system such as the Military Academy and the Medical-Military Academy (2007–2009); and (3) the establishment and accreditation of an umbrella Military University (2009–2010) (Marček and Jeremić 2009: 129).[9] The main tenets of the reform are upgrading the quality of education; focussing on the development of those educational profiles not available within the civilian system; synchronizing the military and civilian systems of higher education, particularly relating to the Bologna Declaration; securing the transfer of international best practices; and undertaking a thorough curriculum reform. Military education offers education at different levels, from the Military High School and Military Academy (undergraduate and graduate academic programmes) to Command Staff Specialized Training, General Staff Specialized Training and Reserve Officers Education.

The education of future officers and NCOs takes place at the Military Academy. Education for future officers, i.e. cadets, lasts four years for branch officers, five years for technical service officers and six months for reserve officers.[10] The academic programme for future officers offers general and specialized military courses, as well as hands-on training at the Academy and VS units. The Academy offers undergraduate and graduate programmes, including courses for specific purposes, as well as master and PhD degree programmes for career officers in all VS branches. Moreover, the academy is a research institution, performing both basic and applied research.

The Military Academy incorporates the Military High School (MHS), which was established in 1970 to educate would-be cadets. The MHS offers four-year secondary education courses. The school's graduates usually enrol in the academy to gain a higher military education degree. After graduating, officers may decide to take up further professional training in the Lower-Command Staff course for company-level commanders; the Command Staff course for battalion-level commanders; the General Staff course for brigade-level commanders; the Advanced Security and Defence course for high-ranking military, i.e. colonels or brigade generals; or civilian leadership positions in the security and defence sector (Jeftić and Vuruna 2009: 170; Marček and Jeremić 2009: 183). Finally, the Military Academy also offers further education for reserve officers with a bachelor degree from a civilian university in the form of a voluntary nine-month course.

3.2 Military training

Unlike the military education system, military training is not easy to access for public scrutiny. It is therefore more prone to diverge from general societal norms and values. This is exactly why it should be carefully studied in order to grasp the soldiers' collective and individual understanding of their role and function in a democratic society.

The training system has been undergoing a thorough reform in three significant respects since 2005. First, a new institutional set-up was introduced for military training in the VS. Competent institutions for military training were identified and their clear-cut responsibilities determined on the strategic, operational and tactical levels. Second, in 2007, the General Staff adopted the Training Doctrine, defining the common ground and foundations of the VS training system. Third, the former training programme was discarded because it was seen as rigid and outdated. A new training programme is now being devised according to NATO standards.

Moral education is an integral part of VS training. Its goal is to build up and strengthen martial morale. Military and political traditions are observed during training and all-important historical dates and events from the historical nation-building period are marked or celebrated within the unit.[11]

3.3 Advancement in the VS

The system of advancement is another important vehicle for the transfer of the normative model. It is a mechanism that not only socializes soldiers but also manages internal conflict resolution and deals with changes in soldiers' social position. In the 1990s, high-ranking officers (generals and colonels) outnumbered lower-ranking officers by a considerable margin, which was quite unusual. Slobodan Milošević had created this 'inverse pyramid' by rewarding officers' war time loyalty with swift and generous promotions. The military reform reduced this discrepancy to a certain extent. However, a disproportionate number of colonels and lieutenant colonels persist (Table 11.2).

Advancement in the VS is regulated by the Law on Armed Forces of Serbia (Art. 54–67). In an effort to downsize professional military personnel, the MoD adopted the Criteria for Professional Military in 2006. The set of professional military standards has been heavily criticized on the following grounds: (1) it does not give enough credit to command and managerial experience and language skills; (2) it favours graduate over non-graduate academic achievement; (3) the significance of the outdated service Grade

Table 11.2 Percentages of different ranks in the Serbian Armed Forces (VS), 2006

Rank	Serbia	NATO recommendation
Generals	0.30	0.60
Colonels	14.5	1.70
Lieutenant Colonels	24.40	8.30
Majors	13.10	19.80
Lieutenants, Captains	47.70	69.60

Source: Nikolić 2009.

Point Average (including GPA calculated on the basis of the ideological criteria used before 1994) is overrated at the expense of the more recent GPA model; and (4) it favours military higher education credentials over those earned from institutions of civilian education (Nikolić 2009).

3.4 Norms and institutions of conflict resolution

The main institution for conflict resolution within the armed forces was the military judiciary system until 2004, when it was abolished and its mandate and responsibilities transferred to civilian courts. Serbia does not have the institution of a military ombudsman. However, if a soldier's human rights are violated in any way by a state institution, he/she is entitled to bring his/her grievance to the attention of the civilian ombudsmen.

Soldiers can be dismissed in the event of detention or imprisonment. Disciplinary action may be taken for breaches of disciplinary rules and regulations, and disciplinary offences. Minor breaches of the military code of discipline are sanctioned with measures, such as warnings and temporary salary cuts, while the punishments for disciplinary offences from longer-term salary cuts, demotion, temporary suspension from a command position or a temporary ban on advancement to the loss of rank and total recall of duty or rank. Officers also lose their rank if they lose Serbian citizenship, or are sentenced to imprisonment of six months or longer. Similar measures and punishments apply to recruits and cadets.

It is therefore clear that the system of military advancement as well as the norms and institutions of conflict resolution have been undergoing transformation, just like the rest of the defence system. Advancement has been placed under civilian control, while some of the responsibilities of the institutions of conflict resolution have been transferred to civilian institutions. This process fits in with the gradual civilianization of the military, which is a common feature of democratic societies.

4 Field research on the image of the democratic soldier

We will now discuss how the broader societal and political environment informs the soldiers' habitus. Specifically, we will ask whether soldiers' perceptions conform to the abstract norms derived from the political culture and normative framework.

4.1 Non-participant observations

The findings presented here come from two weeks of field research conducted at the Military Academy in Belgrade in November 2009. The field research had two components, the first of which was completed in the first week (23–27 November 2009), when the author conducted non-participant

observations of 12 different classes of social studies at the Military Academy involving classes at all levels including the first group of female students.[12]

4.1.1 Participants

Student participants are required to wear uniform at all times. Female cadets represented 5–20 per cent of students in the classes. Students' interest and discipline differed from class to class and largely corresponded to the lecturers' rank. The cadets rarely interrupted lecturers with questions, nor did they have any questions during the question and answer time after the lecture, except for questions relating to course requirements. Only once did a cadet challenge the professor's view. In a later interview, one of the lecturers, who holds a PhD from a civilian university, regretted that the cadets did not ask more challenging questions, but attributed this to the internal culture of the military institution.

4.1.2 Lecturers

Most lecturers were from the military. They wore service uniforms, while the civilian lecturers wore civilian suits. While the military lecturers were formal and strict in their bearing towards the cadets, the civilian lecturers were much less formal. When addressed by a military lecturer, a cadet would, as a rule, stand up and address the professor in a formal military manner, stating the professor's rank. With civilian lecturers, the student–teacher relationship was much less formal and rigid. The attitude of the lecturers towards the researcher–observer ranged from disinterest to being very supportive. When a lecturer of the rank of colonel introduced the researcher, he was proud to say:

> Now the defence system has become transparent, not only in terms of having outsiders come and see what is going on inside the system but also in terms of having the insiders more exposed to whatever is happening out there in the outside world.

4.1.3 Class routine

When a military lecturer was in charge, lectures started punctually with a roll call and late arrivals were usually not allowed to attend. The procedure for classes held by civilian professors was less formal. As a rule, professors would provide examples to support their arguments. The majority of the examples came from the Punic Wars (246–146 BC), the two Serbian Uprisings (1804–1815) and the First World War, as well as from the recent conflicts in Croatia, Bosnia and Kosovo (1990s). However, professors displayed no personal preference for any particular political leadership, foreign army, or branch or service of the military and avoided addressing

politically controversial topics in an explicit manner. Instead, these topics were tackled implicitly and in an ambiguous way. Overall, the quality of teaching was similar to that at a civilian university. Classes were well prepared and in keeping with curriculum requirements, but there was absolutely no interactive class work.

4.2 Interviews

In the second week (30 November–4 December), the author conducted 18 interviews with soldiers from all levels of hierarchy and branches/ services. The interviewees were five cadets, one recruit (corporal), one NCO (senior sergeant first class) and 11 officers (one major-general, three colonels, two lieutenant colonels, three majors, one captain and one lieutenant). All were male, and all but one were ethnic Serbs. Most interviews took place on the military premises. The interviews were anonymous, semi-open, and took about an hour and a half, on average.[13]

4.2.1 Reasons for attempting a military profession

The main reasons the soldiers identified as their motivation for pursuing a career within the military fall into three groups: social (financial benefits, social status, machismo, elitism), professional (competitiveness, education, advancement in rank, interest in military hardware) and patriotic (strengthening of the state, national security, loyalty to the community). Most interviewees mentioned all of these objectives in one way or another. A few of the interviewees were rather reserved concerning patriotism. One interviewee said, 'In the Yugoslav People's Army the emphasis was on patriotism. Today, … the military profession is perceived as just another profession' (Major 14). A few respondents also criticized the recent deterioration of the officers' social status.

4.2.2 A good soldier

According to the interviewees, the most important qualities of a good soldier are a sense of responsibility, discipline, professionalism, expertise, sense of justice, and respect for others, physical strength, leadership, ability to make decisions quickly, perseverance and loyalty. When asked whether the same prerequisites apply to women, the vast majority of soldiers answered affirmatively. However, many stated that women performed better when given tasks that do not involve heavy physical work. They tended to be better at administration, intelligence, communication and so on. Some officers were enthusiastic about the impact female officers would have in the future. However, some respondents expressed scepticism about the ability of women to fit in and adapt to military life.

4.2.3 Military ethos

Serbian officers are not familiar with the term 'military ethos' and often confuse it with ethics or tradition. They provided two main interpretations of military ethos. The first definition is universalistic, and is related to the military profession per se regardless of national culture. The other interpretation may be even more interesting for this research. It refers to a particular Serbian military ethos. Most soldiers recognize difficulties in building a contemporary Serbian military ethos due to often-ideological disruptions in recent Serbian history. One officer argued, 'The older generations still remember Tito's time when they lived very well. The younger generations are suspended between Western universal values and the traditional values of the Kingdom of Serbia' (Colonel 18). Some respondents tried to account for the Serbian military ethos with arguments drawn from the newly discovered traditions of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century.

4.2.4 Tradition

Most of the soldiers reported that they had similar problems with military tradition as with military ethos: both concepts appear to be damaged and contested. Some higher-ranking soldiers had served in four different militaries in their lifetime – the Yugoslav People's Army (JNA), VJ, the Military of Serbia and Montenegro (VSCG) and the VS! They clearly distinguished the tradition of Socialist Yugoslavia from the national-democratic one. While the former tradition cultivated memories of the Second World War and the National Liberation War (NOR), the latter, which is becoming dominant today, reconnects with the liberation wars of the nineteenth century, the Balkan Wars and the First World War. When asked about relevant traditions, the soldiers made references to the great battles of the First World War, glorified by many as a Golden Age when 'the uniform was a privilege of the select few who inherited a glorious military tradition' (Lieutenant 2). None of them referred to the communist partisan struggle! In addition, the military tradition of Socialist Yugoslavia is largely absent from the higher military education curriculum, although some of the soldiers believed that it had some merit and that its patriotism, order, discipline, status in society and international respect should not be abandoned and forgotten.

4.2.5 Style of command

Regarding their preferred style of command, most of the officers emphasized the human dimension of leadership. In order to be a good leader, an officer has to understand his subordinates, provide a good example and attempt to earn informal authority in addition to the formal authority

derived from his rank. He should consider other opinions before making a decision that should be clear, precise and authoritative. The interviews indicated that this common opinion could be the result of the broader democratization of society that was kick-started in 2000. This is implicit in the following statement:

> If I had been asked to answer this question some eight or nine years ago, I would surely have answered it differently. I used to think that a commander should just make decisions without listening to his subordinates. Today, I believe that he should listen carefully to what his subordinates have to say, although everyone needs to know who the boss is.
>
> (Captain 10)

Nevertheless, environment also plays a role: 'The most widely practised style in units is the autocratic style. At the Military Academy, the dominant style of command is the democratic style, while the liberal style is practised at military institutes' (Major 15).

4.2.6 Ideals

The majority of the soldiers agreed that the only ideals that the military should defend are professionalism and defence of the state. They were rather sceptical about political ideals. As one soldier put it, 'Maybe we are in limbo at the moment and, therefore, unable to tell which ideals the military defends' (Corporal 13). Another soldier argued that 'in the past a lot of things changed quickly and there was not enough time for some public or military opinion to crystallize. Still, we are on the right track to identify the ideal that will be worth fighting for' (Cadet 4).

The interviewees were aware that, in the past, the military was highly ideological 'but those ideals are gone and forgotten' (Sergeant first class 12). Maybe the most illustrative was the comment of a colonel who stated ironically, 'it is difficult to talk about ideals on an empty stomach' (Colonel 4). All of this indicates that, for many soldiers, political ideals have been replaced by social ideals. Only one respondent included democracy on his list of the ideals that the military should protect.

4.2.7 Public debate about the ideal soldier

The majority of the soldiers agreed that there was not enough public debate in Serbia about the ideal soldier in a democracy. They would welcome such debate because it could 'establish a moral backbone after a stretch of ideological confusion, state restructuring and national setback at the end of the twentieth century' (General 3). The officers believed that one of the main reasons for the absence of this debate was the memory of

the recent armed conflicts that still lingered. One soldier pointed out that 'the burden of the nineties is undoubtedly a great problem. It has significantly affected our general perception of the military and society' (Lieutenant 2). Several respondents argued that the general public lacked the necessary systematic knowledge about military affairs to be able to engage in an informed and constructive discussion about what the ideal soldier should be like.

However, some soldiers did mention certain public debates. A few of them confirmed that there was a rift in the broader political culture discussed above. One officer argued:

> [T]he debate conducted outside and away from the military has no direct effect on us ... we are heading towards a professionalized military which has the identity and tradition of the Serbian military, and we will be recognized as such by the rest of Europe.
>
> (Major 14)

Furthermore, some officers agreed that democratization affected the image of soldiering.

4.2.8 Public debate about new missions

According to the majority of soldiers, there is little, if any, debate among the general public on issues concerning the new missions of the military, namely its second and third missions. As one soldier commented, 'society at large has no clue about them' (Corporal 13). However, given that Serbia was a target of a NATO military operation ten years ago, and that part of its territory is still being disputed (Kosovo), the officers were well aware that the general public is very sceptical about the new international engagement of the Serbian military. One of the officers said, 'Our people want the military to perform traditional tasks.... They have reservations about non-traditional missions such as peacekeeping, which have become of interest to the political elite' (Major 1). Another soldier argued:

> The most widespread opinion is that today's Serbia and its military are careless and negligent. This generates fear that our engagement in peacekeeping operations would be second rate, that is, that our military would be far removed from the significance the former JNA enjoyed on the international scene.
>
> (Major 14)

The soldiers also noted that the political elite were very much involved in a debate about different aspects of new missions of the military. The respondents pointed out that the elites are divided over the new missions,

especially regarding the second mission, namely participation of the Serbian military in international military operations.

Finally, the officers noted that the decision-makers in Serbia have recently adopted a more forward-looking view on the new missions, while society at large seems to keep its conservative ground, or demonstrates ignorance or indifference. For example, one of the officers commented, 'A few years ago, nobody even thought about our involvement in international operations, and today we already have the Law on Participation of Armed Forces in Peacekeeping Operations' (Lieutenant Colonel 17). The soldiers believe that the debate about this matter has undergone insignificant changes at the level of society.

4.2.9 Stereotypes regarding the armed forces

The largest variation was noticeable in the section on societal stereotypes and prejudices against the armed forces. We could distinguish three major categories: affirmative, neutral and negative. For the most part, the soldiers noted affirmative prejudices. One of the officers explained:

> It is common knowledge that the people of Serbia have traditionally appreciated and respected the military. Today, however, some make fun of this saying, adding 'Mind you, not too many nations can boast of a relationship this good between the common people and the military'.
>
> (Colonel 16)[14]

Other affirmative prejudices that the soldiers mentioned were that the military is an orderly system capable of defending the country; that it is the least criminalized institution of the state; that its officers are among the best-educated people in the country; and that military service has a positive transformative effect on individuals. One interesting negative prejudice mentioned was that the military is apparently believed to be, at the same time, too conservative, a bastion of communism and leaning towards NATO too much.

4.2.10 Conflict resolution

Conflicts between soldiers are settled through dialogue, chain of command and disciplinary action; the rules regulating these processes are very formal and strict. All soldiers prefer conflict-solving dialogues at the lowest possible level. As one of them put it, 'The higher up you go, the harsher the sanctions will be and eventually the punishment will be extended to the whole unit' (Corporal 13). If a conflict cannot be resolved through dialogue, the soldier may decide to take it further, in which case he must first bring it to the attention of his immediate supervisor. The

supervisor is in charge of the next step, wherein the soldier argues his case before a designated higher authority. The soldier receives the ruling no longer than 30 days later. A problem occurs when the conflict is with the immediate supervisor. In such cases, the lower-ranking officer or soldier has a very slim chance of carrying the day. Soldiers are not necessarily satisfied with this method of conflict resolution. One colonel said, 'The mechanism for conflict resolution is not very well developed' (Colonel 16).

4.2.11 Human rights

The soldiers interviewed were aware of the majority of the constitutional and legal restrictions on their human rights and, generally speaking, were satisfied with the mechanisms to protect these. 'It's much better than it used to be at the time when commanders started the day with the question "Who didn't get a slap today?"', said one officer (Major 1). However, two major problems stand out. One is mobbing, that is workplace bullying by superiors, which is 'still a taboo in the military' (General 3). Mobbing often takes the form of overtime labour, especially in units. Also, according to several accounts, the system of advancement favours people who would make authoritarian leaders. 'We call them *cyclists* because they bend their heads before their superiors but pedal vigorously over their subordinates', said another officer (Major 14).

The other problem is the lack of will to use formal mechanisms to protect human rights. For example, although professional soldiers have the legal right to establish a union, there have been no signs of a military union in the making to date. Officers are either unaware of this new right, are not interested, or are afraid to use it. One soldier explained, 'No one wants to have his career tarnished … everyone would rather have others do it. This right exists only on paper but doesn't work in practice' (Major 15). This provides a good illustration of how liberal democratic norms fail to function in an environment where a liberal democratic culture has not been fully developed.

4.2.12 Politics

It was striking that all the interviewees agreed that soldiers should not engage in politics. However, they all also pointed out that soldiers need to be well informed about politics and to have a particularly good understanding of foreign policy and international politics. One of the officers remarked, 'A soldier needs to understand politics better than an average citizen, especially because he will often be in a situation to promote and even implement his country's policies' (General 3). Another officer made an interesting comment, referring to the *coup d'état* in 1903 and claiming that there was a strong feeling in one area of society that the military should have a much stronger presence in political life (Major 14).

4.2.13 Civilian education

In part three, we pointed to the adaptation of the Military Academy to the civilian system of higher education under the Bologna Process. Most of the officers interviewed expressed satisfaction with the increased civilian education because it helped them (1) broaden their views, especially on international politics; (2) advance their careers and solve their housing issues; (3) prevent their alienation from society at large, thus boosting their socialization; (4) prepare for a life after the military; and (5) obtain accreditation for the Military Academy. However, some respondents were rather sceptical about the organization and usefulness of civilian education, claiming that it is not directly relevant to the military.

4.2.14 Peacekeeping missions

The officers interviewed had mixed feelings about the question of whether Serbia should step up its involvement in international military operations. The first group of soldiers interviewed were enthusiastic about international operations for reasons ranging from economic motives and *raison d'état* to collective security arguments: 'The real question is whether we have a national interest in these missions. If we do, we should participate in them' (Colonel 16). Another officer argued, 'We have to share the responsibility for global security if we want to secure peace in our own backyard' (Major 14). There was also a group of soldiers less enthusiastic about international military operations, especially those without UN mandates for reasons of military neutrality, the unresolved Kosovo issue, the NATO intervention of 1999 and the fear of losing one's life without a good cause.

It is reasonable to expect this kind of ambiguity with reference to international missions because state policy is just as ambiguous. Serbia proclaimed military neutrality in a parliamentary resolution on territorial integrity in December 2007, but this policy has not been elaborated in any form whatsoever. Nor do the recently adopted National Security Strategy and Strategy of Defence of October 2009 make any mention of military neutrality. Furthermore, the education process does not cover new missions or preparations for international military operations in any way worth noting.

4.2.15 Legitimacy of out-of-area missions

The soldiers had diverging opinions regarding the criteria of legitimacy for military operations. Only a few officers took a neutral position, arguing that whatever democratically elected decision-makers decide is legitimate. However, most officers came up with a set of standards that they believe have to be met: a clear UN mandate and a parliamentary decision

(approved unanimously or with a two-thirds majority); the mission has to be peacekeeping and not peacemaking, something not considered legitimate; it needs to be approved by the government of the country where it will take place; it must have clear rules of engagement; and the troops must be well trained and be given high quality equipment.

5 Summary and conclusions

To conclude, we identified that there is no single normative model of the soldier in democratic Serbia. The government is building the image of a professional, internationally integrated and democratically controlled 'postmodern' military. However, due to the serious ideological, political and cultural rifts in Serbian society, this is not how other members of the political elite and society at large perceive the military. The emergence of a single concept is also hindered by the unsettled Kosovo issue, as well as by a significant presence of illiberal elements in the democratic transition of Serbian society and politics. National-liberational discourses, which hinge on a strong scepticism towards the West, professionalization of the armed forces, and international military missions are still shaping societal and political preferences in favour of a massive 'modern' neutral military designed for territorial defence. A strong resistance to military involvement in international missions is to be expected as long as territorial integrity is perceived to be in jeopardy in Kosovo.

Second, we presented the military institutions responsible for the socialization of soldiers and argued that their reform is moving along the lines of overall civilianization and Europeanization. The Military Academy is on track to becoming part of the civilian higher education system. The training system has been undergoing comprehensive reforms in order to meet NATO standards.

Third, we analysed the results of field research in which we investigated the soldiers' responses to normative models set forth by society and political elites. The soldiers interviewed noted that there were deep ideological and cultural rifts between and among Serbian political elites and society at large. The soldiers nevertheless attempted to synchronize and forge a single coherent model from the different normative images proposed. Among the troublesome elements, the military's involvement in international military operations was particularly hard to bend to fit the frame, since society generally disapproves of these missions, especially if they are not conducted under a clear UN mandate. The fuzzy Serbian policy of military neutrality and the unsettled Kosovo dispute underscore the dissonance between the orientation shared by society and the one put forward by the government. The soldiers noted that some segments of society expected the military to engage in politics, but they themselves favoured the image of a de-politicized military proposed by the elites. Although the interviewees did not perceive democracy as a value that should be

defended by the military, they admitted that democratization had a positive effect on the defence system. Most of them thought the democratization process was yet to be completed. In fact, despite the official introduction of new military rights, these have not yet been implemented for reasons of the underdeveloped democratic culture within the military and for fear of possible consequences. In addition, the model of the authoritarian combat leader still seems to dominate, despite the emergence of new leadership models fostered by certain institutions within the defence system. This may be the result of tradition, but also of role models provided by authoritarian civilian leaders.

If the process of peaceful transition continues in Serbia, society, political elites and the military will gradually move towards the actual adoption of the professional postmodern military. This will preserve some of the consonant national-liberational undertones, such as those of the old Serbian tradition or the Orthodox ethos. If, however, there is another incidence of political or military turmoil – related to the status of Kosovo, Bosnia or elsewhere – the nationalistic overtones of anti-Westernism, isolationism and *levée en masse* are likely to distort the emerging image of the democratic Serbian soldier that we have depicted above, and roll back the whole process.

Notes

1 Some parts of the security sector, such as private security and prisons, still await a proper normative framework.
2 Independent state agencies are the Ombudsman, the Commissioner for Information of Public Importance and Personal Data Protection and the State Audit Office and Anti-Corruption Agency.
3 The Special Operations Unit was disbanded following the assassination of Prime Minister Zoran Đinđić in 2003.
4 During the time of the Socialist Republic of Yugoslavia, its army, the JNA, was a very active participant in international peacekeeping missions under the auspices of the UN. However, Yugoslavia was not a member of the UN from 1992 to 2000 due to the disintegration of the federal state, armed conflicts and international sanctions.
5 For the importance of *inat* in Serbian culture, see Jovanović 2008.
6 According to the Serbian historian Slobodan Marković, over the last 200 years Serbia has been a democracy on and off, but, in total, for no more than 30 years, or 15 per cent of the time (2004).
7 If not stated otherwise, all data regarding public opinion are an average percentage from seven rounds of an opinion poll conducted by the Centre for Civil–Military Relations between 2002 and 2005 (Hadžić and Timotić 2006).
8 Military education, training and doctrine are one of the priorities set in Serbia's PfP Presentation Document.
9 The idea of a Military University, which has not yet materialized, would integrate the Military Academy and the Medical Faculty (Military-Medical Academy).
10 The education of NCOs is conducted in courses devised for the best professional soldiers with at least secondary-level education.

11 The events observed and celebrated are Statehood Day, which is also VS Day (15 February 1804); the Day of Victory (9 May 1945); the Day of Branch and Service; the Day of the Unit; My Garrison Day; as well as the days of the Battle of Kosovo (28 June 1389); the First Serbian Uprising (15 February 1804); the Second Serbian Uprising (23 April 1815); the Balkan Wars (24 October 1912 – 1913); the First World War (24 August, 15 September 1914 – 1918); the Second World War (6 April 1941); and Defence from NATO Aggression (24 March 1999).

12 The classes observed were attended by all generations of cadets at the bachelor degree level.

13 In order to secure and protect the anonymity of the interviewees the author used a code, which consisted of the rank and the number under which the interview was recorded.

14 In the 1990s, the military had many draft problems. Hence the ironical modification of the old Serbian saying: 'Eager is a Serb to enlist, when he's pulled by two and beaten by three' (*Rado ide Srbin u vojnike, dva ga vuku, a trojica tuku*).