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Master thesis

PERCEPTION VS. REALITY: RUSSIA'S SPOILER ACT IN SERBIA AND BiH
PERCEPCIJA NASPRAM STVARNOSTI: RUSKA POLITIKA OTEŽAVANJA U
SRBIJI I BiH

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INTRODUCTION

International relations attempt to explain the interactions of states in the global interstate system, and it also attempts to explain the interactions of others whose behavior originates within one country and is targeted toward members of other countries.

Russia and Serbia and BiH¹ (through The Republic of Sprska) have close links and exchanges that are based on centuries-old historical, cultural, and geopolitical bonds. Over time, these ties have changed and evolved, forming a complex and multidimensional relationship between the two countries. Because of their shared Slavic ancestry, Russia and Serbia have historically had a sense of Pan-Slavism, or Slavic brotherhood, and unity. Shared historical experiences—such as the Ottoman and Habsburg eras, during which both countries struggled for freedom and sovereignty—have reinforced this tie. Russia is frequently viewed as Serbia's ally and defender, especially in times of conflict and turmoil. Russia and Serbia have had a strong cultural interaction as a result of the exchange of artistic, literary, and religious influences. One important point of commonality is the Orthodox Christian faith, which fosters cross-national spiritual and cultural ties. Russia has strategically influenced Balkan events, and Serbia has frequently sought Moscow for assistance and direction on local matters. Russia has supported Serbia diplomatically and economically, and the two countries have cooperated on the political, economic, and military fronts. Economic relations between Russia and Serbia have expanded, with a major area of emphasis being energy cooperation in trade and investment. Russian businesses have made investments in Serbia in a range of industries, including manufacturing, infrastructure, and energy, fostering bilateral trade and economic growth. The relationship between Serbia and Russia is not without its difficulties, though, as should be noted. Relations between Serbia and Russia have occasionally become tense due to Serbia's goals of joining the European Union (EU) and its dedication to upholding cordial relations with Western nations. Careful diplomacy and calculated maneuvering have been necessary in Serbia's balancing act between its historical links to Russia and its objectives of European integration. The historical, cultural, geopolitical, and economic aspects of the

¹ In this thesis BiH relations with Russia will be researched through The Republic of Sprska

relationships and interactions between Russia and Serbia are diverse. Although their shared history and interests provide a solid foundation, their connection is dynamic and ever-changing as a result of regional and international events.

METHODOLOGY

The study of relations between Russia and Serbia (The Republic of Srpska) demanded a multidisciplinary approach and analysis of the dynamics of these relations and actors and factors that influence maintenance of these relations. These factors include: economy, culture, technological development, military, soft power, religion, history. Since this research is qualitative, the basic framework in which it was conducted was based on the knowledge, online research and relevant data and information. Because of the complex nature of the subject, meta-analysis was required in order to explain formed conclusions.

The literature used for this research and this thesis was based on multiple, different sources. These included: literature in the form of books, different web-articles and web-pages, news articles, European Parliamentary Research Service.

The research was based on the period after conflicts in the territory of ex-Yugoslavia, but also at the same time was based on the historical background of 20th and 21st Centuries in order to understand more deeply importance of influence of Russia's politics on Western Balkan (Serbia and The Republic of Srpska). This thesis also encompassed the historical period starting from the Middle Ages when Russia started, through religion, realization of its broader plans, which would become later on, economic and political plans in the region of Western Balkan (Serbia and The Republic of Srpska).

1. PROBLEM OF THE STUDY

The researcher had very few sources to base their research work on. Most of the sources on which she based her work were found in literature and books available in the market from which they originated. Appreciating the aforementioned and recognizing the problem of very limited literature, the researcher procured literature via the internet. This ultimately poses a problem in terms of limited access to literature, which mainly originates from the Russian region. Consequently, this may not necessarily represent the true picture of the overall geopolitical, political, and economic influence of Russia on the Western Balkans (Serbia and The Republic of Srpska). However, it is certainly the only available literature for research.

2. *OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY*

The goal with this thesis was to prove that a common perception of Russia by Serbs is that Russia shares an important Slavic and Orthodox history with Serbia (and The Republic of Srpska) and that Russia is Serbia's and The Republic of Srpska's political ally and that common religion and history were the main connection that kept Russia maintaining its influence in Western Balkans (Serbia and Republic of Sprska). The researcher will aim to do so through the research of the doctrine of Pan-Slavism used by the Russian Empire in 19th century as a term that continued to play a significant role at the Slavic factor level; through the facts that EU integration is favored by most part of the Serbian population but Russia is still continuing to have the strongest influence on Serbia and The Republic of Srpska among all the other ex-Yugoslavia states. Also, one of main focuses will be on Russia and NATO's relations and interest in Western Balkans and ways Serbia and Republic of Sprska are proving its support for Russia.

3. *HYPOTHESIS*

The main hypothesis of this master thesis represents that:

- A common perception of Russia by Serbs is that Russia shares an important Slavic and Orthodox history with Serbia and Republic of Sprska and that Russia is Serbia's and Republic of Sprska's political ally and that common religion and history are the main

connections that are keeping Russia have its influence in Serbia and Republic of Sprska, which the researcher aimed to prove through the available literature that Russia indeed has a significant influence on Serbia and The Republic of Srpska. This is evident from Russia's political influence on the development and decision-making in the Western Balkans, all through global politics and EU institutions where Russia has a right to vote, with particular emphasis on the right to veto. Furthermore, the researcher will prove the main hypothesis through sub-hypotheses, demonstrating individual parts of the hypothesis that, in their final synthesis, fully prove the main hypothesis. Sub-hypotheses are following:

- The doctrine of Pan-Slavism used by the Russian Empire in 19th century continues to play a significant role at the Slavic factor level;
- Even though EU integration is favored by most part of the Serbian population, Russia is continuing to have the strongest influence on Serbia among all the other former Yugoslavia states;
- Majority of Serbs believe that Russia is the country who invests the most in Serbia even though economy of Serbia is more closely tied to the EU than to Russia;
- NATO as a threat to Russian influence and security
- Ways Serbia is proving its support for Russia

4. *SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY*

With this master's thesis, the researcher intends to highlight to future students and anyone researching similar topics, or using the thesis for research purposes, that the real political and economic influence of Russia on the Western Balkans, with particular emphasis on Serbia and The Republic of Srpska as an integral part and entity of Bosnia and Herzegovina, is very significant. Through this thesis, future readers and researchers of similar topics can conclude that

Russia's influence over the last two centuries has left a substantial impact, and potentially consequences, depending on the point of view, on the overall development both economically and politically. By reading this work, future researchers can understand the reasons that have driven today's policies in making decisions in the period after the war that affected the territory of the former Yugoslavia.

5. *SCOPE OF THE STUDY*

This study was conducted in order to elaborate on Russia's influence on Serbia and The Republic of Srpska. To be more precise, this thesis elaborated on how common perception of Russia by Serbs is that Russia shares an important Slavic and Orthodox history with Serbia and Republic of Sprska and that Russia is Serbia's and Republic of Sprska's political, economic, cultural, historical ally. With full respect of methodological approaches, qualitative research methods have been used.

6. *LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY*

The limitation of this study lies in the fact that the researcher has a very small database and limited access to scientific, professional, and other works that would provide a broader picture of the research and a deeper understanding of the entire problem, if it can be called a problem, of Russian influence on the Western Balkans (Serbia and The Republic of Srpska). This can be based on the fact that Russia is one of the most closed nations in terms of international relations and foreign policies, and has long been perceived as having a closed internal policy and intelligence and counterintelligence services. Such services can influence all the sources from which the student collected information for their research. Accordingly, the student considers that the greatest limitation is the access to data on the topic being addressed, which is very restricted and, in the end, may be modified in accordance with Russia's policies.

7. *DATA COLLECTION*

Data was collected through primary and secondary sources. Primary sources were based on qualitative research of previous work, meta-analysis, and comprehensive literature reviews, while secondary data was collected through online media and forums. These sources reflect both the media representation to the public and the opinions of individuals on the internet regarding the research topic, providing a significant study of opinions, both in terms of public opinion display and individual opinions.

1. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

1.1. Geographical position of Russia and historical facts pre-20th Century: from the Middle Ages to the end of 19th Century)

Expanding across Eastern Europe and Northern Asia, Russia, officially known as the Russian Federation, is a vast transcontinental nation. This country is the largest in the world, with 17,125,200 square kilometers. It borders fourteen countries (Belarus, Azerbaijan, China, Estonia, Finland, Georgia, Kazakhstan, North Korea, Latvia, Lithuania, Mongolia, Norway, Poland, and Ukraine) and shares sea boundaries with the US, Japan, Sweden, and Turkey. From the Arctic Ocean in the north to the Black Sea and the Caucasus in the south, the nation's territory stretches from the Baltic Sea in the west to the Pacific Ocean in the east. With 146.7 million inhabitants residing in its 85 federal subjects, Russia is the most populated country in Europe. The nation has a low population density—just 8.5 persons per km²—despite its massive population. Moscow, the nation's capital and largest city, is regarded as the hub of trade, culture, and politics. Russia's second-largest city and a key port on the Baltic Sea² is St. Petersburg, the historic capital.

Before the Middle Ages, three different ethnic groups—the Khazars, the Slavs, and some Finno-Ugric groups—inhabited the lands that would later become Russia. Out of all of them, the Slavs finally developed into the modern-day ethnic Russians. Turkic people were the majority of the

² Hellie, Richard, Wachtel, Andrew B. , McCauley, Martin , Raeff, Marc , Seton-Watson, H. , Dewdney, John C. , Taruskin, Richard , Medvedkov, Yuri V. , Lieven, Dominic , Riasanovsky, Nicholas V. , Medvedkov, Olga L. , Keenan, Edward Louis , Vodovozov, Sergey Arsenyevich and Hosking, Geoffrey Alan. Russia. Encyclopedia Britannica, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Russia> (visited on March 14th, 2023).

Khazar Khaganate, a massive and influential political organization that ruled over most of Asia. But at this early period of Russia's history, the Rus, who would eventually give the nation its name, were the most important group. The Rus were a Norse ethnic group that traded extensively in Central Asia and Northern Europe at first. Along the trading route that ran from the Baltic Sea to the Byzantine Empire, they are thought to have founded villages. Their evolution into the Rus people—the ancestors of the contemporary "East Slavs" of Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine—came about as a result of their intermarriages with local Finns and Slavs.

The birth of Kievan Rus

Along the trading route that connected Scandinavia to the Byzantine Empire, villages were formed during the Viking Age. Novgorod, which is widely regarded as the birthplace of Russia, was home to one of these communities. While Novgorod was a thriving commerce hub in the ninth century, it was also notorious for its disorderliness and frequent skirmishes with nearby towns. In 862, the powerful Viking ruler Prince Rurik was asked by the Novgorodians to assume control of the city and impose law and order. Rurik died in 879, leaving his kinsman Oleg in charge. Oleg united the surrounding Slavic and Finnish tribes to form the Kievan Rus kingdom, and he enlarged the empire to cover areas as far north as what would eventually become St. Petersburg and as far south as Kiev. Novgorod was a major hub for the Russian Orthodox Church's expansion in addition to being regarded as the birthplace of Russia. Following a string of wars between followers of Christianity and pagan religions, Vladimir the Great, the ruler of Kievan Rus between 980 and 1015, attempted to bring his people together under a single religion. Following his studies of many religions, Vladimir the Great decided that Orthodox Christianity should be the primary religion practiced by Russians. The Mongols attacked Kievan Rus early in the thirteenth century, wreaking havoc on several towns, notably Moscow and Kiev. After seizing power and ruling over Russia for generations, the Golden Horde Khan was overthrown by Ivan III, also known as Ivan the Great, who liberated the country from Mongol domination in 1480. Using military control and terrifying the nobles, Ivan IV, sometimes known as Ivan the Terrible, expanded Muscovite dominion into Serbia and became the first czar of Russia. Russia was controlled by the Romanov Dynasty for more than 300 years beginning in the 17th century. Michael Romanov was chosen as the new Tsar by a convention of influential Russians. Michael executed the surviving tsars' relatives who had been nominated by Poland in order to guarantee that the Romanovs would continue to rule the

Empire. After defeating Charles XII of Sweden in the Battle of Poltava in 1709, Peter the Great—the grandson of the first Romanov czar—introduced important westernization reforms and expanded Russia's frontiers westward. Catherine II, commonly known as Catherine the Great, maintained Peter's westernization agenda and increased Russian territory throughout the Romanov Dynasty, making her the longest-ruling female leader of Russia. She acquired the Crimea, Ukraine, and part of Poland. During Alexander I's reign, Napoléon's attempt to conquer Russia was defeated in the early 19th century, and Russia acquired new territories such as Finland and Bessarabia.

The end of the 19th century was marked by Russia's defeat in the Crimean War. The war was fought against the Ottoman Empire, with the support of British and French forces, due to religious tensions and Russian pressure on Turkey. Czar Nicholas I led Russia in the war, which they lost. In 1861, Czar Alexander II issued the Emancipation Reform, which abolished serfdom and gave peasants the opportunity to buy land. Alexander II also made other reforms, including strengthening Russia's military and borders, and promoting self-government. The czar sold Alaska and the Aleutian Islands to the United States in 1867. In the late 1870s, Russia and the Ottoman Empire fought in the Balkans, a conflict that was popular among the Russian people who supported the independence of their fellow Orthodox Slavs, the Serbs and Bulgarians. The war resulted in Romania, Serbia, and Montenegro gaining their independence. During this period, Russia expanded its empire into Central Asia, conquering the khanates of Kokand, Bukhara, and Khiva, and the Trans-Caspian region, which was rich in raw materials. Russia's expansion in Asia brought them into conflict with the British Empire, leading to the Great Game. The two empires eventually divided Asia into zones of influence at the beginning of the 20th century.

During the reign of Alexander III, which lasted from 1881 to 1894, the belief in "Orthodoxy, Autocracy, and National Character" was revived. Alexander III was Slavophile³ who believed that Russia could only be saved from chaos by isolating itself from Western Europe's subversive influences. During his reign, Russia completed its conquest of Central Asia, made important

³ The Slavophiles believed that Russia had a unique identity that was different from the rational and materialistic nations of western Europe, and was derived from her Slav origins. They rejected the westernization efforts of Peter the Great, which they saw as a threat to Russia's traditional values and culture. Instead, they argued for a return to Russia's Slavic roots, and the preservation of its distinctive character.

territorial and commercial concessions from China, and formed a union with republican France to counter the growing power of Germany. Alexander III was succeeded by his son, Nicholas II, who ruled from 1894 to 1917. During this time, the Industrial Revolution began to exert significant influence in Russia, leading to the formation of three political parties. The liberal elements of the industrial capitalists and nobility founded the Constitutional Democratic party or Kadets, which advocated peaceful social reform and a constitutional monarchy. The Socialist-Revolutionary Party or Esers, followers of the Narodnik tradition, advocated the distribution of land among those who worked it—the peasants. The Russian Social Democratic Labour Party, founded in 1898, was the primary exponent of Marxism in Russia, gathering support from radical intellectuals and the urban working class, and advocated for social, economic, and political revolution.⁴

1.2. Geographical position of Serbia and historical facts pre-20th Century: from the Middle Ages to the end of 19th Century

Serbia, officially known as the Republic of Serbia, is a country located at the intersection of Central and Southeast Europe, situated in the southern Pannonian Plain and the central Balkans. It shares borders with Hungary to the north, Romania to the northeast, Bulgaria to the southeast, North Macedonia to the south, Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina to the west, Montenegro to the southwest, and Kosovo to the south. Serbia has a population of almost 7 million people living in 145 municipalities, with a population density of around 90 people per square kilometer, which is much higher than that of Russia. Belgrade, the capital of Serbia, is also the largest city and serves as the main political and cultural center of the country. Novi Sad, the second largest city, is located on the Danube and is also a center for culture and education.

The Serbs, along with other South Slavic tribes, arrived in the Balkans during the Great Migrations of the 6th and 7th centuries. The Byzantine Emperor Constantine Porphyrogenitus first mentioned them in the 10th century in his work "De Administrando Imperio," which was dedicated to his son

⁴ Seton-Watson., H. (1967). *The Russian Empire 1801–1917* (Oxford History of Modern Europe). pp 598–627.

Roman. At that time, the Serbs were settling in western Serbia, eastern and central Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Adriatic coast between the river Cetina and lake Skadar, and in the south in the area bordered by the river Lima and the Prokletije mountain range. "De Administrando Imperio" suggests that the Serbs originated from the unbaptized Serbs, also known as the White Serbs, who lived on the other side of Hungary in the land they called Bojka, close to the Frankish Empire and the great Croatia, which was also unbaptized and known as the White Croatia."⁵

The Vojislavljević dynasty emerged as a powerful Serbian ruling family in the mid-11th century under the leadership of archon Stefan Vojislav, who successfully defeated the Byzantines and established control over several regions. The Vojislavljević family was later replaced by the Nemanjić dynasty, which oversaw a period of great economic, political, and military prosperity in Serbia. During this time, Serbia established its own autocephalous church and became an empire. However, the Nemanjić dynasty fell apart by the end of the 14th century, and Serbia was later divided between the Ottoman Empire and the Habsburg Monarchy. The Ottoman-controlled territories were subject to forced conversions to Islam, while the northern parts were conquered by the Habsburgs. The Serbian people living under Ottoman rule led two uprisings in the 19th century, which eventually led to Serbia becoming an autonomous principality within the Ottoman Empire. Serbia gained independence in 1878 after international recognition and became a kingdom in 1882 under the rule of Milan Obrenović.⁶

1.3. Russia (historical facts from 20th Century)

The RSDLP⁷ broke into two factions in 1903: the more moderate Mensheviks, led by Yuli Martov, and the extreme Bolsheviks, led by Vladimir Lenin. The Mensheviks thought that Russian socialism would expand gradually and peacefully, and that a democratic republic led by socialists working with liberal bourgeois parties would replace the tsar's reign. In order to take power by

⁵ Komatina, P. (2018). *Prve srpske dinastije i poreklo Nemanjića*. Beograd: Liber novus. pp. 4–5.

⁶ <http://www.serbia.com/about-serbia/serbia-history/> (visited in May 2020). Please note that this article is not available anymore but the same information can be found in Komatina, P. (2018).

Prve srpske dinastije i poreklo Nemanjića. Beograd: Liber novus

⁷ Russia Social Democratic Labor Party

force, the Bolsheviks recommended the establishment of a small elite of professional revolutionists who would be subject to strict party discipline and serve as the proletariat's vanguard. Chinese Manchuria was under Russian interests when the Russian Empire resumed its Far Eastern expansion at the start of the 20th century. Russia took an active part in the intervention of the great powers in China to suppress the Boxer rebellion. During this war, Russia occupied Manchuria, which caused a clash of interests with Japan. In 1904, the Russo-Japanese War began, which ended extremely unsuccessfully for Russia.

The event that became known as "Bloody Sunday" took place in January 1905 when Father Gapon organized a sizable group of people to go to the Winter Palace in Saint Petersburg and deliver a petition to the Czar. Upon arriving at the palace, hundreds of people were killed by Cossacks firing at the throng. The slaughter incited the Russian people to such a degree that a general strike calling for a democratic republic was called. The Russian Revolution of 1905 officially began at this point.⁸ Nicholas hesitantly published the October Manifesto in October 1905, which accepted the convocation of an immediate national Duma (legislature). The Duma confirmed laws before they came into effect, and the right to vote was expanded. Bosnian Serbs killed Austria-Hungary's Archduke Franz Ferdinand in June 1914. Austria-Hungary issued an ultimatum to Serbia on July 23, which was regarded as a client state of Russia. Russia had no treaty responsibility to Serbia, and Russia had an incentive to wait because it was gradually outpacing Germany and Austria-Hungary militarily. A conflict was not what the majority of Russian officials wanted. However, in the present crisis they had the support of France, and they feared that the failure to support Serbia would lead to a loss of Russian credibility and a major political defeat to Russia's goals for a leadership role in the Balkans.⁹ Tsar Nicholas II mobilized Russian forces on 30 July 1914 to defend Serbia from Austria-Hungary. The very large but poorly equipped Russian army fought despite its lack of organization and very weak logistics. By 1917 Russia was dealing with poor performance in the war and mismanagement of the economy at home. Those prompt mutinies in the armed forces and street disturbances in major cities. Czar Nicholas II was forced to resign by

⁸ Figes., O. (2014). *Revolutionary Russia. 1891–1991: A History*. pp 1–33.

⁹ Levy, Jack S.; Mulligan, William (2017). Shifting power, preventive logic, and the response of the target: Germany, Russia, and the First World War. *Journal of Strategic Studies*. 40 (5): 731–769. doi:10.1080/01402390.2016.1242421. S2CID 157837365.

liberal politicians, and despite a collapsing military and domestic upheaval, a number of Provisional Governments have attempted to carry on the fight against Germany. During the October Revolution in November 1917, the Bolsheviks overthrew the interim government, suppressed the elected Constituent Assembly, and imposed a brutal 'Dictatorship of the Proletariat' under the control of the Communist Party, which crushed political and religious opposition. The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, which ended the war with Germany in 1918, came at the cost of significant territorial losses in Eastern Europe and the Baltic, which were gradually regained over the next 30 years.

The period from the consolidation of the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917 until 1921 is known as the period of war communism. Land, all industry, and small businesses were nationalized, and the money economy was restricted. The peasants wanted cash payments for their products and resented having to surrender their surplus grain to the government as a part of its civil war policies. Confronted with peasant opposition, Lenin began a strategic retreat from war communism known as the New Economic Policy (NEP).¹⁰ The peasants could now sell their excess harvest on the open market after being released from wholesale grain levies. Allowing for private retail transactions boosted commerce. Banking, transportation, heavy industry, and major utilities remained under state jurisdiction. The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics was established in 1922 by the Bolsheviks from the ruins of the Russian Empire. In order to strengthen his hold on power, Stalin carried out a second revolution in the 1930s. This revolution concentrated land ownership in vast state-run estates and accelerated the speed of economic management, industrialization, the civil service, the armed forces, and security agencies. The last year of the 1930s - the year of 1939 - was the time when Stalin concluded a non-aggression pact with Nazi Germany, seizing eastern Poland, parts of Romania and Czechoslovakia, and then the Baltic States after the start of the Second World War. When it comes to the 1940s, the Soviet Union was facing two wars during this time: Second World War and the beginning of the Cold War. The Soviet Union's allied victory (with Britain and US) over Nazi Germany was followed by swift establishment of Soviet hegemony in Central and Eastern Europe, and Balkans. In February of 1945, Yalta Conference was held. That was the World War II meeting of the heads of government

¹⁰ Richman, Sheldon L. (1981). War Communism to NEP: The Road to Serfdom (PDF). The Journal of Libertarian Studies. 5 (1): 89–97.

of the US (Franklin D. Roosevelt), the UK (Winston Churchill), and the SU (Joseph Stalin) to discuss the postwar reorganization of Germany and Europe. Some of the key points of the meeting were:

1. Germany would undergo demilitarization and denazification.
2. Creation of a reparation council which would be located in the Soviet Union.
3. The Polish eastern border would follow the Curzon Line, and Poland would receive territorial compensation in the west from Germany.
4. Stalin pledged to permit free elections in Poland.
5. Roosevelt obtained a commitment by Stalin to participate in the United Nations.
6. Stalin agreed to enter the fight against the Empire of Japan "in two or three months after Germany has surrendered and the war in Europe is terminated", and that as a result, the Soviets would take possession of Southern Sakhalin and the Kuril Islands, the port of Dalian would be internationalized, and the Soviet lease of Port Arthur would be restored, among other concessions.
7. Nazi war criminals were to be found, and put on trial in the territories where their crimes had been committed; Nazi leaders were to be executed.¹¹

As per the agreement reached at the Yalta Conference, the USSR initiated the Soviet invasion of adjacent Manchuria three months after the Victory Day in Europe (a festival commemorating the surrender of Nazi Germany), winning the final Soviet battle of World War II against the Japanese forces. The Soviet Union, which had acquired nuclear weapons, formed the Warsaw Pact alliance and engaged in the Cold War—a conflict between the US and NATO—for supremacy in the international economy. The West and Cold War began in 1947. The Soviet Union consolidated power in Eastern Europe and promoted pro-Soviet revolution in China, the Middle and Near East, and Asia. During the 1950s Soviet competition for power with the West extended into Latin America and former European colonies in Africa, making the Cold War global. The Soviet Union supported revolutionary movements across the world, including the newly formed People's

¹¹ <https://www.encyclopedia.com/history/united-states-and-canada/us-history/yalta-conference> (visited in May 2020)

Republic of China, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and, later on, the Republic of Cuba. In 1953 current Soviet Union leader, Joseph Stalin, dies. The new leader Nikita Khrushchev denounced *the cult of personality of Stalin*¹² and launched the policy of *de-Stalinization*¹³. Tensions with the US increased simultaneously with the opposing nations' disagreement over US Jupiter missiles stationed in Turkey and Soviet missiles stationed in Cuba. The Cold War began in space with the Soviet Union's Sputnik artificial satellite, which became the first to orbit Earth in 1957. In 1961, Yuri Gagarin became the first person to orbit Earth aboard a Vostok spacecraft. Two years later, a more conservative faction led by Leonid Brezhnev overthrew Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev, whose perceived failure in the Cuban Missile Crisis a year earlier had brought the world dangerously close to nuclear war. Leonid Brezhnev took over as leader when Khrushchev was overthrown in 1964, starting into another era of communal leadership. Eventually called the Era of Stagnation, this was the time between the 1970s and the early 1980s when social policies stagnated and economic growth decreased. Afghanistan was invaded by Soviet forces in 1979 following a revolution led by communists. Because of continuing anti-Soviet guerilla fighting, international criticism, and a lack of support from Soviet population, the Soviet Army was forced to withdraw from Afghanistan ten years later. Mikhail Gorbachev, the final Soviet leader, worked to implement liberal changes within the Soviet framework between 1985 and 1991. In an effort to bring an end to the period of economic stagnation and to democratize the government, he instituted the policies of glasnost (openness) and perestroika (restructuring). Strong nationalist and separatist movements grew as a result of this. As Gorbachev increasingly loses authority over domestic and international reform initiatives, communist rule in Eastern Europe crumbles and the Soviet Union finally collapses. In a referendum held on March 17, the overwhelming majority of voters supported transforming the Soviet Union into a new federation. Instead of overthrowing Gorbachev and maintaining the Soviet Union, a coup d'état attempt by members of his administration in August 1991 resulted in the end of Communist Party of Soviet

¹² Joseph Stalin's cult of personality became a prominent feature of Soviet culture in December 1929, after a lavish celebration of his purported 50th birthday. For the rest of Stalin's rule, the Soviet press presented Stalin as an all-powerful, all-knowing leader, with Stalin's name and image appearing everywhere.

¹³ De-Stalinization consisted of a series of political reforms. The reforms consisted of changing or removing key institutions that helped Stalin hold power: the cult of personality that surrounded him, the Stalinist political system, and the Gulag labour-camp system.

Union. The USSR was split up into 15 post-Soviet entities on December 25, 1991. Decades of communist government came to an end with the fall of the Soviet Union, and Russia's political landscape changed. Russia's first president, Boris Yeltsin, was instrumental in leading the nation through this change. During his presidency, Yeltsin worked to create a democratic political system, which was demonstrated by the 1993 ratification of a new constitution and the multi-party elections that followed. But the shift to democracy was turbulent, with power struggles, disputes between the legislative and executive departments, and the emergence of populist and nationalist movements. The challenges of this period were best shown by the Russian constitutional crisis of 1993, in which Yeltsin struggled with the Russian parliament over concerns of legitimacy and authority. The dissolution of the parliament and the order to shell the White House, the seat of the Russian legislature, by Yeltsin highlighted the weakness of Russia's democratic institutions and sparked worries about authoritarian tendencies within the Yeltsin administration. Russia's struggle in moving from a centrally planned to a market-based economy was brought about by the fall of the Soviet economy. Under the guidance of Yeltsin and his economic advisers, Russia embarked on a program of economic liberalization and privatization known as "shock therapy"¹⁴. However, the rapid pace of privatization led to widespread corruption, crony capitalism, and economic instability. The Russian economy experienced a sharp decline in GDP, hyperinflation, and a dramatic increase in poverty and inequality. The economic reforms of the 1990s also had significant social consequences, as millions of Russians experienced unemployment, wage arrears, and social dislocation. The dismantling of the Soviet social safety net exacerbated social inequalities and contributed to widespread discontent and social unrest. One of the most significant conflicts of this period was the First Chechen War (1994-1996), which erupted between the Russian government and separatist rebels in the breakaway republic of Chechnya. The conflict, fueled by ethnic tensions, political grievances, and aspirations for independence, resulted in widespread devastation and loss of life. Despite initial military successes, the Russian military faced fierce resistance from Chechen fighters and ultimately withdrew from Chechnya under a peace agreement brokered by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).¹⁵

¹⁴ The term "shock therapy" reflects the speed and intensity with which these reforms were introduced.

¹⁵ Dunlop, John B. (1998). *Russia Confronts Chechnya: Roots of a Separatist Conflict*. Cambridge University Press. (Pages 100-150).

The 1990s also witnessed significant shifts in Russia's foreign policy and geopolitical orientation. During the 1990s, Russia underwent profound transformations in its foreign policy and geopolitical orientation following the collapse of the Soviet Union. This period was marked by a shift from superpower rivalry to a more nuanced approach, influenced by internal challenges, economic reforms, and changing global dynamics. In the early 1990s, Russia pursued a policy of engagement and cooperation with Western powers, seeking economic assistance and integration into the global economy. The signing of the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START)¹⁶ in 1991 and the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement with the European Union¹⁷ in 1994 exemplified Russia's efforts to build constructive relations with the West. However, tensions emerged over issues such as NATO enlargement, Western interventions in the Balkans (e.g., the Kosovo War), and disagreements on arms control and missile defense. These issues strained Russia's relations with the United States and NATO throughout the decade.¹⁸ Russia's geopolitical orientation in the 1990s was influenced by regional dynamics in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, and Central Asia. Issues such as territorial disputes, energy security, and ethnic conflicts shaped Russia's policies toward neighboring countries and former Soviet republics. For instance, Russia sought to maintain influence in the Caucasus region, particularly in Georgia and Armenia, while facing challenges from emerging powers like Turkey and Iran. In Central Asia, Russia focused on maintaining security and economic ties with countries like Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan.¹⁹

¹⁶ The Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) is a bilateral agreement between the United States and Russia, aimed at reducing the number of deployed strategic nuclear weapons in each country's arsenal.

¹⁷ The Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) between the European Union and Russia is a comprehensive treaty that governs various aspects of their bilateral relationship. It includes provisions for political dialogue, economic cooperation, trade relations, cultural exchanges, and other areas of mutual interest.

¹⁸ Tsygankov, Andrei P. (1997). *Russia's Foreign Policy After the Cold War: New Dimensions and Directions*. *Mershon International Studies Review* 41, no. 2: 369-394.

¹⁹ Blank, S. (1999). The Dynamics of Russian Foreign Policy in Eurasia. *Central Asian Survey* 18, no. 3: 367-386.

1.4. Serbia (historical facts from 20th Century)

Serbia saw significant change during the 20th century as a result of two World Wars, Tito's communist leadership, and Yugoslavia's final breakup. As the Kingdom of Serbia attained statehood in the late 19th century, it entered the European Union and saw the rise of political parties, ushering in a new era in its political environment. King Peter I came to power in the May Coup of 1903, ushering in a time of parliamentary democracy. King Peter, influenced by European ideas, introduced democratic reforms and translated John Stuart Mill's 'On Liberty,'²⁰ laying the foundation for political freedom. Serbia's national aspirations included uniting with Serbs in Bosnia, although Austria's annexation of Bosnia in 1908 led to deep resentment. The assassination of Austrian Crown Prince Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo in 1914 triggered Austria's declaration of war against Serbia, marking the start of World War I. The invasion of Serbia occurred in spite of Serbia's approval of the majority of Austria-Hungary's demands, and Belgrade was taken in December 1914. But later that month, Serbia's army was able to retake Belgrade and defend the nation. The Serbian army was forced to flee across the Adriatic Sea as German, Austrian, and Bulgarian forces invaded Serbia in late 1915. The harsh conditions during the occupation led to widespread disease, although Austria's pragmatic approach to food supplies alleviated some hardships. Still, Serbian nationalism persisted, and many young men left to join the exiled Serbian army. The Entente powers²¹ promised Serbia territorial gains after the war, encouraging Serbia's

²⁰ John Stuart Mill's "On Liberty" is a seminal work in the field of political philosophy and ethics. Published in 1859, it advocates for individual freedom and the limitations of state power over individuals.

²¹ The Entente Powers, also known as the Allies, were a coalition of countries during World War I that opposed the Central Powers. The main members of the Entente Powers were:

1. Russia
2. France
3. United Kingdom (including the British Empire)
4. Italy (from 1915)
5. United States (from 1917)
6. Japan (from 1914)
7. Serbia
8. Belgium
9. Romania (from 1916)

recovery and return to combat on the Thessaloniki front. However, Serbia suffered significant casualties, with around 28% of its population and 58% of its male population lost during the war, making it one of the hardest-hit countries of World War I.

After Bulgaria's capitulation and the liberation of occupied Serbian territory in November 1918, the war came to an end with the Vojvodina region voting to join Serbia, Montenegro voting to join Serbia, and the southern Slav regions of Austria-Hungary joining the State of Slovenes, Croats, and Serbs. This prepared the way for the December 1918 proclamation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes. Prince Regent Paul of Yugoslavia²² signed a treaty with Hitler, aligning Yugoslavia with Axis powers.²³ The public, however, resisted this action, and Prince Regent Paul was banished as a result. Hitler, Italy, Hungary, and Bulgaria then invaded Yugoslavia in April 1941, bombing Belgrade and occupying other regions of the nation. Along with the creation of concentration camps and the deliberate murder of Jews, Serbs, and other groups the occupying troops judged undesirable, the occupation brought about terrible persecution. Before the Soviet Red Army liberated Yugoslavia in 1944, the country suffered enormous losses and damages throughout the war and occupation. After World War II, Josip Broz Tito became the first president of socialist Yugoslavia, ruling through the League of Communists of Yugoslavia.²⁴ Under Tito's leadership, Yugoslavia transformed into a mid-range industrial country, supporting decolonization

10. Greece (from 1917)

²² The term "Yugoslavia" was first officially used to refer to a country in 1929 when King Alexander I of Yugoslavia proclaimed the formation of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, uniting the South Slavic peoples of Serbia, Croatia, and Slovenia under one state.

²³ The Axis Powers during World War II included:

1. Germany (Nazi Germany under Adolf Hitler)
2. Italy (Fascist Italy under Benito Mussolini)
3. Japan (Imperial Japan under Emperor Hirohito)
4. Hungary
5. Romania
6. Bulgaria
7. Slovakia
8. Croatia (Independent State of Croatia)

²⁴ The League of Communists of Yugoslavia (LCY) was the ruling political party in Yugoslavia from 1945 to 1990. It was founded in 1919 as the Communist Party of Yugoslavia and later renamed the LCY in 1952. The party played a central role in Yugoslav politics under the leadership of Josip Broz Tito. It promoted socialist policies, advocated for workers' self-management, and supported Yugoslavia's non-aligned foreign policy.

and playing a leading role in the Non-Aligned Movement.²⁵ With two autonomous territories inside Serbia and six republics, the nation was federal. The socialist policies of Yugoslavia, which included aspects of the market economy while upholding state-owned property, were governed by Tito's motto of "brotherhood and unity". Nevertheless, with Tito's passing in 1980, internal strife increased, resulting in nationalist movements and economic inequality. This finally led to the dissolution of Yugoslavia in the early 1990s amid wars and declarations of independence by many republics.

Political unrest, economic hardships, and ethnic nationalism all played a significant role in the complex process of Yugoslavia's breakup in the early 1990s. One of the member republics, Serbia, experienced both external influences and internal divisions. Tensions increased with the advent of Slobodan Milošević's nationalist policies, which subsequently sparked hostilities in Kosovo and Bosnia. Bosniaks, Croats, and ethnic Serbs fought a bloody war for land and power throughout the Bosnian War. War crimes and charges of ethnic cleansing were brought against Serbia due to its involvement in the conflict, especially its assistance for Bosnian Serb forces. The 1995 Srebrenica massacre, in which thousands of Bosniak men and boys were massacred by Bosnian Serb forces, is still a black mark on Serbian history. As the situation in Kosovo, where ethnic Albanians were subjected to violence and repression, worsened, NATO launched a bombing campaign in 1999. Debate and controversy were generated by the alliance's decision to intervene militarily without UN sanction. In addition to causing infrastructure damage and civilian casualties, the bombing targeted military and vital locations in Serbia, including Belgrade. There were numerous contributing factors to both the NATO bombardment and the Bosnian War. Power struggles, territory disputes, historical grievances, and ethnic nationalism all had an impact. Driven by Milošević's policies, Serbia's dreams of a Greater Serbia ran counter to the aspirations of other ethnic groups for independence and self-determination. These conflicts had significant and far-reaching effects. Deeply ingrained ethnic differences and unresolved concerns are remnants of the Bosnian War's damage to Bosnia and the surrounding area.

²⁵ Yugoslavia played a pivotal role in the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) as one of its founding members, led by Josip Broz Tito. Through its advocacy for non-alignment, promotion of peaceful coexistence, and support for decolonization, Yugoslavia significantly influenced NAM's agenda and principles, shaping the movement as a voice for independent nations during the Cold War

Relations between Serbia and the West were even more tense as a result of the NATO bombardment of Belgrade, which fueled feelings of hatred and isolation. Serbia had a difficult time reestablishing its infrastructure, economy, and society after the wars. Ethnic tensions, the aftermath of war crimes, and refugee displacement all presented challenges to peace and harmony. International pressure, including the indictment of Milošević for war crimes, added to Serbia's challenges.

1.5. Russia (21st Century: the country under Putin)

In 2000, Vladimir Putin was elected president of Russia. On December 31, 1999, Boris Yeltsin, who had been Russia's first president since the fall of the Soviet Union, announced his resignation, which resulted in a vacancy and an early presidential election. Citing Putin's record as prime minister, Yeltsin publicly supported Putin as his preferred successor. Putin gained substantial political credibility and support in the ruling circles as a result of this endorsement. Russia was coming out of a difficult time characterized by social unrest, political turbulence, and economic crises. Many Russians who had grown weary of years of uncertainty found solace in Putin's image as a strong and determined leader who offered continuity and stability.

“Dear citizens, you know as well as I that the weakness of power affects above all millions of common people. The price of state disorder is personal insecurity, threats to property, housing and ultimately our future and that of our children. This is precisely why we need strong and responsible authority ... That is why I was elected Russian president, and it is this policy that I intend to pursue firmly and consistently in the future, just as we are doing today.”²⁶

Since the early 2000s, Russia has seen tremendous transformation and endured numerous difficulties under Putin. Domestic reforms, geopolitical assertiveness, and controversy have all been hallmarks of Putin's leadership. Efforts to restore the economy, bolster governmental authority, reaffirm Russia's position internationally, and handle domestic security issues defined

²⁶ Putin's words during his inauguration speech on May 7, 2000, when he was elected as the President of Russia for his first term.

Putin's first administration, which ran from 2000 to 2008. Putin took over a nation that was experiencing both political and economic unrest. In an effort to stabilize the economy, he carried out a number of economic changes during his first term. Tax reforms, anti-corruption campaigns, and measures to entice foreign investment were among them. These measures contributed to a period of economic growth and stability in Russia.

The 1999 start of the Second Chechen War continued throughout Putin's presidency. In resolving the war, Putin took a tough stance and prioritized military action against Chechen separatists. Although this strategy produced some military victories, it was criticized for violating human rights and killing civilians. When it came to the political power in Russia, Putin took steps to centralize authority, strengthen the presidency, and reduce the influence of regional governors. This included reforms such as the appointment of regional governors by the president rather than through direct elections. *Putin's reform of regional governors*²⁷ involved changing the method of their appointment, shifting from direct elections to presidential appointment.

The way Putin's administration handled civil liberties and media freedom drew criticism. Press freedom limitations, the suppression of dissenting opinions, and the persecution of political opponents were causes for worry. Several high-profile cases, such as the arrest of Mikhail Khodorkovsky²⁸, raised questions about the rule of law and political freedoms in Russia

The most important events that marked Russia's period under Putin were/are:

²⁷ This reform was implemented in 2004 as part of broader changes aimed at centralizing power and increasing control over regional governance. Under Putin's reform, regional governors are appointed by the president rather than being directly elected by the people. This shift was intended to strengthen the president's control over regional leadership and ensure loyalty to the central government.

²⁸ Khodorkovsky was arrested on charges of tax evasion, fraud, and other financial crimes. The arrest came after Yukos, once Russia's largest oil company, came under scrutiny from Russian authorities for alleged financial irregularities. Khodorkovsky's arrest was widely seen as a politically motivated move by the Russian government, led by President Vladimir Putin. Khodorkovsky was known for his political ambitions and financial support for opposition parties, which made him a target for Putin's administration. He was sentenced to nine years in prison for fraud and tax evasion, and later faced additional charges and an extended sentence. Khodorkovsky's case strained Russia's relations with Western countries, who viewed his arrest and trial as politically motivated and a threat to business confidence in Russia. The case became a symbol of broader concerns about democracy, human rights, and the rule of law in Russia.

1. Russo-Georgian War (2008): August 2008, also referred to as the August War or the South Ossetia War. Georgia and Russia were at war, with the de facto republics of Abkhazia and South Ossetia also participating. As Georgia tried to retake control of South Ossetia, the conflict—which was the result of long-standing disputes about the status of these breakaway regions—grew more intense. Due to Russian military action, there was a full-scale conflict that included airstrikes, land offensives, and naval battles. The war ended with a ceasefire brokered by the European Union, but it had significant geopolitical implications and strained relations between Russia and Western countries.²⁹
2. Dmitry Medvedev (2008-2012): Dmitry Medvedev³⁰ served as the President of Russia from 2008 to 2012, succeeding Vladimir Putin. He was chosen through a process that was carefully organized within the Russian political system. His candidacy was supported by then-Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, who was constitutionally barred from seeking a third consecutive term as president but power remained concentrated in his hands.³¹ During his administration, Medvedev worked to modernize Russia's economy and legal system, encourage innovation, and strengthen ties with the West by implementing programs like the US "reset" campaign. But there were also difficulties during his administration, such as the worldwide financial crisis and internal demonstrations against electoral fraud. Russia underwent a period of relative modernization and liberalization during Medvedev's administration.³²

²⁹ <https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/5-day-long-russo-georgian-war-begins> (visited on March 20th, 2024).

³⁰ Dmitry Anatolyevich Medvedev (born 14 September 1965) is a Russian politician who has served as deputy chairman of the Security Council of Russia since 2020. Medvedev was also president of Russia between 2008 and 2012 and prime minister of Russia between 2012 and 2020.

³¹ The President is elected in a two-round system every six years, with a limit of two consecutive terms. Prior to 2012, the term of office was four years. Later constitutional changes removed presidential term limits, potentially allowing Putin to stay in power until 2036.

³² <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/7136556.stm> (visited on March 25th, 2024).

3. Return of Putin (2012-Present): Putin chose to run for presidency once again in 2012. With about 63% of the vote, he won the election. Putin's ideas and management approach were carried over into his second term as president. Russia engaged in a number of geopolitical problems under his presidency, such as the annexation of Crimea in 2014, the military intervention in Syria in 2015, and the maintenance of tense relations with Western powers over matters including democracy and human rights. Remember that Vladimir Putin was re-elected as Russia's president in March 2024 from the previous Russian election. Putin won 87.3% of the vote on a record turnout of 77.5%. The result means Putin will rule until at least 2030, when he will be 77. He is now Russia's longest-serving leader since Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin, securing a third full decade of rule.³³

“No matter how hard anyone tries to frighten us, whoever tries to suppress us, our will, our consciousness, no one has ever managed to have done such a thing in history, and it won't happen now and it won't happen in the future. Never.”³⁴

4. Annexation of Crimea (2014): Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea was a major turning point in the history of ties between Russia and Ukraine, and it resulted in the ongoing conflict between the two countries. With a large ethnic Russian population, Crimea has a complicated past. During the Soviet era, in 1954, the area was moved from Russia to Ukraine; this shift had no impact until the Soviet Union was dissolved in 1991. Crimea stayed a part of Ukraine but maintained some autonomy when Ukraine gained its independence. Yet, over time, conflicts increased between Ukrainian nationalists and ethnic Russians, who desired stronger links with Russia. Pro-Russian policies of then-President Viktor Yanukovich were opposed by large-scale demonstrations in Ukraine in late 2013 and early 2014, known as the Euromaidan movement, which called for deeper integration with the European Union. Russia claimed that Western countries were interfering in Ukrainian affairs during the protests and voiced concern about the fate of ethnic Russians living in Ukraine. Crimea saw a contentious referendum on annexation

³³ <https://edition.cnn.com/2024/03/17/europe/putin-wins-russia-presidential-election-intl/index.html> (visited on March 25th, 2024) .

³⁴ Putin's words he said after he won Presidential Elections in Russia, March 17th 2024.

following the takeover by pro-Russian forces in February 2014. The referendum that Crimea held in March 2014 to join Russia was considered unlawful by Western nations and Ukraine. After an overwhelming vote in favor of joining Russia in the referendum, Russia formally annexed Crimea shortly after. Following the seizure of Crimea in 2014, Russia escalated their invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022. This event is known now as the Russo-Ukraine conflict/war. The conflict is ongoing and it remains unresolved. It will be discussed more about this conflict in the further text, since through this conflict we could see many ways of Serbia's support for Russia.³⁵

5. Syrian Intervention (2015-Present): Russia's main goal in intervening in Syria in 2015 was to back the Bashar al-Assad-led government there. Throughout Syria, military airstrikes were used to target extremist organizations and rebel groups, such as the Islamic State (ISIS/ISIL). Russia said that it had intervened in response to the Syrian government's appeal for support in battling terrorism and bringing about national stability. Russia was able to establish itself as a key actor in the Middle East thanks to this conflict. Russia aimed to increase its diplomatic and geopolitical influence in the area by actively taking part in military operations and peace negotiations. Russia has energy investments and arms sales in Syria as part of its geopolitical and economic objectives. However, Russia was able to demonstrate its military prowess—particularly its air force and cutting-edge weapons—through its engagement in Syria. This demonstrated Russia's status as a major global power capable of decisive military action beyond its borders.³⁶

1.6. Serbia (21st Century: from 2000s until Now)

The early 2000s in Serbia were marked by many events that reshaped the country's political landscape and international relations in the 21st Century. It all began in 2000 when Slobodan

³⁵ <https://www.britannica.com/place/Ukraine/The-Russian-invasion-of-Ukraine> (visited on April 5th, 2024).

³⁶ <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0032321720934637> (visited on April 5th, 2024).

Milosevic³⁷ was accused of rigging the presidential election against Vojislav Kostunica³⁸. Protests on the streets turned violent, compelling Milosevic to resign and giving Kostunica the opportunity to take over as president. Eventually, the parliament was stormed. Admitted as the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, Serbia became a member of the UN, marking a significant turning point in history. With this action, the nation took a step closer to engagement and acknowledgment on the international stage. However, the internal dynamics in the country remained very turbulent as a reformist alliance won the legislative elections by a landslide, with Zoran Djindjic³⁹ assuming the role of Serbian prime minister. the proposer for of democratic changes and deeper European integration, Djindjic was a pivotal player in the anti-Milosevic movements. As one of the main opposition parties against Slobodan Milosevic's rule, the Democratic Party (DS), which he co-founded in 1990, rose to prominence.

After Milosevic was toppled in 2000, Djindjic took over as Serbia's prime minister. He was instrumental in putting democratic changes into place, reorganizing the country's economy, and mending relations with other countries. Unfortunately, Djindjic's political career was cut short when he was shot and killed by a sniper in front of the Belgrade government building. The offenders were connected to parts of the security apparatus during the Milosevic era as well as crime networks. Prime Minister Djindjic's 2003 killing shocked Serbia and brought attention to the difficulties in maintaining political security and stability. Vojislav Kostunica, the prime minister of a coalition government led by the center-right, led Serbia to persevere in its efforts to join the EU in spite of all these obstacles. In the upcoming years we could see Serbia going through

³⁷ Slobodan Milosevic was a Serbian and Yugoslav politician who served as the President of Serbia from 1989 to 1997 and then as the President of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia from 1997 to 2000. He was a key figure in the Yugoslav Wars of the 1990s, particularly associated with Serbian nationalist policies that contributed to ethnic conflicts and violence in the region.

³⁸ Vojislav Koštunica was born in Belgrade in 1944. He graduated and obtained his Masters and Doctoral degrees at the Law Faculty in Belgrade. In 1992 he founded the Democratic Party of Serbia and became its president. He became the first democratic President of Serbia, after defeating Slobodan Milošević in the first round of the presidential elections in 2000. He was the President of Serbia from 2000 until 2003, and later the Prime Minister, 2004-2007, 2007-2008. He withdrew from political life in 2014.

³⁹ Zoran Djindjic was born on August 1, 1952, in Bosanski Šamac, Yugoslavia (now in Bosnia and Herzegovina), and he was assassinated on March 12, 2003, in Belgrade, Serbia.

many issues such as war crimes trials, Kosovo's declaration of independence, and Montenegro's secession.⁴⁰

1. Kosovo's declaration of independence: On February 17, 2008, Kosovo formally declared its independence from Serbia. Serbia, together with its allies Russia and China, opposed Kosovo's independence, whereas the United States and most other European Union members recognized it. After years of UN supervision in Kosovo following NATO's 1999 involvement to halt ethnic cleansing, this declaration was made. There have been constant tensions and attempts to improve relations between Kosovo and Serbia under discussions sponsored by the EU since 2008. Negotiations between Kosovo and Serbia have been greatly aided by the European Union. Topics like commerce, minority rights, and border management are the main topics of these talks. Even though Serbia does not acknowledge Kosovo's independence, there have been some concrete moves toward collaboration, like integrated border management and document recognition between the two parties. In an effort to fulfill their goals of joining the EU, both nations have tried to normalize relations. This contains accords concerning the exchange of liaison personnel, energy, and telecommunications. The normalization of Kosovo-Serbia relations is seen as essential for regional stability in the Balkans. Efforts to resolve outstanding issues aim to foster peace and cooperation.⁴¹

2. War crime trials: Primarily connected to the wars that occurred in the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s, Serbia has been a party to multiple war crimes tribunals. Slobodan Milosevic was the former president of both Serbia and Yugoslavia, hence his trial was likely one of the most important war crimes cases held internationally as well as the most important one for Serbia. A charge against him was filed in May 1999 by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY). During the Yugoslav Wars, namely in Bosnia, Croatia, and Kosovo, the indictment contained accusations of war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide. In The Hague, Netherlands, at the ICTY, the trial took place in

⁴⁰ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/2844081.stm> (visited on April 10th, 2024).

⁴¹ <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/key-facts-kosovo-independent-15-years-serbia-2023-05-30/> (visited on April 11th, 2024).

February 2002. More than four years passed. During the Balkan conflicts, he was accused of being involved in the slaughter of people, ethnic cleansing, and other atrocities. Milosevic experienced a number of health problems throughout the experiment, which caused hiccups. Milosevic passed away in March 2006, prior to the trial's conclusion, therefore a verdict was not rendered.⁴²

3. Montenegro secession: Following Yugoslavia's dissolution in the early 1990s, Serbia and Montenegro became parts of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. After establishing a loose union in 1992, Montenegro and Serbia were formally renamed the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 1992 and Serbia and Montenegro in 2003. Montenegro held an independence referendum on May 21, 2006. Voters were asked if they supported Montenegro breaking away from Serbia and becoming a sovereign state. The result was Montenegro's declaration of independence on June 3, 2006. Montenegro's independence was gradually recognized by the international community. By mid-2006, a significant number of countries had recognized Montenegro as an independent state. Unlike Kosovo, Serbia acknowledged Montenegro's decision and declared itself the independent sovereign successor state to the union of Serbia and Montenegro.⁴³

Serbia's EU membership negotiations began in 2014. The March–April 2014 elections were won by the Progressive Party under the direction of Aleksandar Vucic. Taking on the position of prime minister, Vucic worked with the Socialist Party to keep Serbia in line with its EU ambitions. Prime Minister Vucic took office as president in April 2017. Ana Brnabic, who became Serbia's first openly homosexual woman prime minister in June of that year, continued Vucic's policies while also indicating a progressive shift in the country's political landscape.

⁴² <https://www.icty.org/en/content/slobodan-milo%C5%A1evi%C4%87-trial-prosecutions-case> (visited on April 11th, 2024).

⁴³ <https://www.britannica.com/place/Montenegro/Independence> (visited on April 20th, 2024).

1.7. Geographical position of The Republic of Srpska (20th and 21st Century)

The Republic of Srpska is one of the two entities that make up Bosnia and Herzegovina, situated in Southeast Europe on the Balkan Peninsula. It covers an area of 25,053 square kilometers and has a population of 1,170,342 inhabitants according to the Institute of Statistics of The Republic of Srpska data and the 2013 census. The Republic of Srpska shares international borders with Croatia, Serbia, and Montenegro and is divided into 8 cities and 56 municipalities. Banja Luka, with a population of over 200,000 citizens, is the capital, as well as the administrative, economic, and cultural center of The Republic of Srpska. The Republic of Srpska was established on January 9th, 1992, and was recognized as a state entity by the Dayton Peace Agreement, which ended the three-year-long war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, signed on December 14th, 1995, in Paris.⁴⁴ Banja Luka serves as the capital of The Republic of Srpska. In the past, Banja Luka was an important military center under the Ottoman Turks, and it served as the seat of the Bosnian pašalik from 1583-1639. The city's commercial prosperity declined due to fires and plagues in the 17th and 18th centuries, but it played a significant role in the uprisings of Bosnians against Turkey and the revolts of Serbs during the 19th century. Under Austria-Hungary rule from 1878-1918, Banja Luka's economy revived. During World War II, the city was a center of Partisan resistance while part of the Axis-created state of Croatia. Banja Luka underwent extensive rebuilding after being seriously damaged by an earthquake in 1969. During the Bosnian conflict, Banja Luka became the main Bosnian Serb center in the northern part of the country. Serbs used violence and persecution to expel thousands of Bosniaks, Croats, Roma, and others from the city and surrounding areas. As part of this effort, Bosnian Serbs destroyed the city's mosques, including two large ones dating from the Ottoman period: Ferhadija and Arnaudija.⁴⁵

Over the years, The Republic of Srpska has developed its own political system. This entity's identity is deeply rooted in Serbian nationalism, with figures like Radovan Karadzic and Ratko

⁴⁴ <https://www.republikasrpska.net/srpska/geografija/> (visited in May 2020). Please note that this link is not available anymore but the same information can be found on <https://geobalcanica.org/wp-content/uploads/GBP/2022/GBP.2022.14.pdf> (visited on May 31st, 2024).

⁴⁵ Lampe, John R. "Bosnian War". Encyclopedia Britannica, 6 Oct. 2022, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Bosnian-War>. Accessed 14 March 2023.

Mladic, despite their status as convicted war criminals, still held in high regard by some segments of the population. The relationship between The Republic of Srpska and the rest of Bosnia and Herzegovina remains fraught with tension. The Republic of Srpska's pro-Russian stance has further complicated its relations with Bosnia and with Europe. It has very strong pro-Russian sentiment, with many supporters of Russia in the region.⁴⁶

2. RELIGION AND PAN-SLAVISM

2.1. Religion and spirituality as first connection between Russia and Serbia (The Republic of Srpska)

In order to understand any kind of connection between Russia and Serbia (The Republic of Srpska) we will have to go way back in time. This connection has deep roots and it goes all the way back to the Middle Ages. Both people, Russians and Serbs, belong to the diverse group of tribal societies called the early Slavs. The early Slavs lived during the Migration Period⁴⁷ and the Early Middle Ages (approximately the 5th to the 10th centuries AD) in Central and Eastern Europe and established the foundations for the Slavic nations through the Slavic states of the High Middle Ages. It is said that the Slavs' original homeland is still a matter of debate due to a lack of historical records; however, scholars believe that it was in Eastern Europe, with Polesia⁴⁸ being the most commonly accepted location.

⁴⁶ <https://www.dw.com/en/what-is-republika-srpska/a-64373205> (visited on March 14th, 2023).

⁴⁷ The Migration Period, also known as the Barbarian Invasions, was a period in European history marked by large migrations that saw the fall of the Western Roman Empire and subsequent settlement of its former territories by various tribes, and the establishment of the post-Roman kingdoms. The term refers to the important role played by the migration, invasion, and settlement of various tribes, notably the Franks, Goths, Alemanni, Alans, Huns, early Slavs, Pannonian Avars, Magyars, and Bulgars within or into the former Western Empire and Eastern Europe.

⁴⁸ Polesia is a natural and historical region in Eastern Europe, including part of Eastern Poland, the Belarus–Ukraine border region, and part of Southwestern Russia.

During the 6th century, when the Slavic tribes occupied a significant chunk of Central and Eastern Europe, the name "Slavs" was first recorded in writing. By that time, the Slavic-speaking populace of the area had assimilated the nomadic Iranian-speaking ethnic groups that inhabited the Eurasian Steppe, such as the Alans, Sarmatians, and Scythians. The Slavs absorbed Illyrian and Thracian peoples as they migrated west to the Elbe River, south to the Alps and the Balkans, and east toward the Volga River during the course of the following two centuries.

Early Slavs practiced Slavic paganism or Slavic religion. Slavic paganism or Slavic religion is the religious beliefs, myths, and ritual practices of the Slavs before Christianization, which occurred at various stages between the 8th and the 13th century. Little is known about Slavic religion before the Christianization of Bulgaria and of Kievan Rus⁴⁹. Many old religious records were destroyed by Slavic authorities after they converted to Christianity. The pre-Christian Slavic religion included a significant element of ancestor worship. The animistic, anthropomorphic, and naturally inspired early Slavic religions were comparatively homogeneous. Out of reverence for the spirit (or demon) within, the Slavs created cults centered around natural items like springs, trees, or stones. The pre-Christian religion of the Slavs was polytheistic and lacked a structured pantheon. A type of monotheism in which a "supreme god ruled in heaven over the others" developed from the early Slavs' seeming lack of understanding of God.

Over numerous centuries, a number of things happened and influences shaped Russia's slow but steady Christianization process. Early in the ninth century, Christianity made its way from the Byzantine Empire to Russia. Orthodox monks and missionaries ventured into the Kievan Rus' territory and started sharing the gospel with the native populace. The Rus' aristocracy and kings were mostly the only ones with early Christian contacts. The Kievan Rus' ruler, Prince Vladimir of Kiev, converted to Orthodox Christianity in the year 988 AD. Following his declaration of Orthodox Christianity as the official religion of his kingdom, he was baptized in the Dnieper River. The Christianization of Russia officially began with this event. The ruling classes encouraged the fast expansion of Orthodox Christianity across Kievan Rus'. A hierarchy of bishops and priests was established, and churches and monasteries were constructed. In addition to helping to bring

⁴⁹ Kievan Rus' was a state in Eastern and Northern Europe from the late 9th to the mid-13th century. Encompassing a variety of polities and peoples, including East Slavic, Norse, and Finnic, it was ruled by the Rurik dynasty, founded by the Varangian prince Rurik.

the many tribes and clans of the area together under a single religion, the Church had a significant impact on the social, cultural, and political life of the Rus'. Due to doctrinal and cultural disagreements, the Orthodox and Catholic churches separated in the eleventh century. This division served to strengthen the Orthodox Church's authority in Russia as well as the Rus' cultural and religious identity. Christianity continues to expand throughout Russia over the ages, touching new regions and populations. As the main religious organization in Russia, the Orthodox Church was crucial to the establishment of the Russian state and national identity. All in all, a variety of political, social, cultural, and theological elements had a role in Russia's lengthy and intricate Christianization process. The Russian people's identity was shaped by their adoption of Christianity, which was also vital to the development of the nation's culture and religion. The process of Christianization in Serbia began with the conversion of the Bulgarian Khanate⁵⁰ in the 9th century, which led to the spread of Christianity among the Slavic people of the region, including those in Serbia and Bosnia. The Byzantine Empire also played a significant role in this process, as it promoted the Eastern Orthodox form of Christianity and sent missionaries to the Balkans to spread the faith. Over time, Christianity became a central part of the cultural and religious identity of the Balkans, shaping the region's history and society for centuries to come. Main role when it comes to Christianization of Serbs was played by Clement of Ohrid⁵¹ and Saint Naum.⁵²

Since these were the earliest significant Serbian-Russian connections, the spiritual ties between the Russian and Serbian people are likewise very old. After starting in the middle ages, spiritual ties grew stronger and more regular between the conclusion of the "long" XVI century and the XVII. The authoritarian and atheistic regimes in both Serbia (SFRY) and Russia caused these two peoples' and churches' spiritual ties to go through difficult periods during the XX century, but

⁵⁰ This refers to the Danube Bulgaria, First Bulgarian State, or First Bulgarian Tsardom (Empire). Between 7th and 9th century the country is also called by modern historians as the Bulgarian Khanate, or the Bulgar Khaganate, from the Turkic title of khan/khagan borne by its rulers.

⁵¹ Clement of Ohrid was one of the first medieval Bulgarian saints, scholar, writer and enlightener of the Slavs. He was one of the most prominent disciples of Saints Cyril and Methodius and is often associated with the creation of the Glagolitic and Cyrillic scripts, especially their popularisation among Christianised Slavs.

⁵² Saint Naum (Bulgarian and Macedonian: Свети Наум, Sveti Naum), also known as Naum of Ohrid or Naum of Preslav was a medieval Bulgarian writer, enlightener, one of the Seven Apostles of the First Bulgarian Empire and missionary among the Slavs.

contact remained strong and full of influences and opportunities for cooperation. The interwar era was probably the most prosperous because the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenians was one of the main destinations for Russian emigrants. The Russian Orthodox Church outside of Russia, which was functioning on Kingdom territory at the time, received the blessing and assistance of the Serbian Orthodox Church throughout that period. During that time, there were tight and intense interactions between Serbian and Russian priests, monks, spiritual leaders, and believers. For example, Russian monks and nuns had a significant impact on the resurgence of female monasteries and nunneries within the church. Even after the communist regimes in both nations crumbled at the start of the 1990s, spirituality and religiosity are still significant issues. The issues at hand are not limited to the social attitudes and relationships between the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Russian Orthodox Church. Although the interactions between the two organizations are certainly important, perhaps the most important, we cannot downplay the importance of the issues surrounding religiosity, faith, pilgrimage, and the population's shared self-reception in faith as fundamental components of both societies' identities. As a result, it is evident that there are undoubtedly a large number of intricate, diverse, and overlapping connections as well as cooperative partnerships. For instance, there are church ties, the extensive reach of the Russian church in Belgrade, Serbia, and the Serbian church in Moscow, Russia; additionally, many future Serbian priests and theologians attend Russian spiritual seminars and academies; Serbian believers travel on pilgrimages to Russia, but also Russian monks and believers visit Serbian shrines and holy places, such as pilgrimage tours “S.,C Вятки“; and lastly, the Russian Federation has donated material support for the reconstruction of Serbian churches and spiritual shrines in Kosovo and Metohija.⁵³

Since Eastern Orthodox Christianity is practiced in both Russia and Serbia, we can claim that their religious relations are particularly strong, considering that religion was one of the first and oldest links between the two countries. The two churches have worked together over the years to promote traditional Orthodox principles, protect religious history, and defend human rights, among other

⁵³ The project was defined during 2008, when, the then Russian president Vladimir Putin, expressed the will to contribute 2 million dollars and various other kinds of technical and expert help to restore and protect Serbian spiritual holy places and shrines in Kosovo – Pec Patriarchy, Gracanica monastery, Visoki Decani monastery, Bogoridica Ljeviska monastery.

problems. Thus, it is possible to draw the conclusion that Russia's views of the Balkans—Serbia and The Republic of Srpska—were influenced by religion to some extent.

2.2. Pan-Slavism

2.2.1. Pan-Slavism in the 19th Century

Political views that highlight the Slavic people's linguistic and cultural unity have changed since the early modern era, especially in the 19th century. This movement is known as Pan-Slavism. The term "Pan-Slavism" was first used in 1826 by the Slovak philologist Ján Herkel. It started with Czech and Slovakian scholars who were inspired by the theories of Johann Gottfried Herder⁵⁴ and Romanticism. Many people were affected by Herder's view that the Slavs would one day symbolize a new global civilization. This belief influenced discussions regarding Russia's role in the region, the inter-Slavic countries, and the evolution of political ideals.

Pan-Slavism emerged in the middle of the 19th century as a political movement with the goal of emancipating and bringing Slavic peoples together into a single "Slavic state." This literary movement attempted to discover a common Slavic language and literature by employing a critical historical-philological approach. The Pan-Slavic idea ignited several national movements throughout the Balkans and East Central Europe, even if some believed it would lead to a national awakening among the peoples. The ideological unity of Pan-Slavism, which included both democratic Austro-Slavism and authoritarian Russo-centric Pan-Slavism, was frequently overstated. The idea of "Slavicity" served a number of purposes: it influenced academic disciplines, offered political justification, and persisted as a motif in literature, art and cinema.

This movement gained momentum, particularly in the Habsburg empire, where Slavic militants were frightened by the large number of Germans and Magyars. In reaction to this perceived threat, political mobilization occurred quickly, leading to the first Slav Congress, which was held in Prague from June 2–12, 1848.

⁵⁴ Johann Gottfried Herder was a German philosopher, theologian, and literary critic who was born in 1744. One of his notable works is "Ideas for a Philosophy of the History of Mankind" (1784-1791), where he explored the diversity of human cultures and argued against cultural imperialism, promoting the idea of each nation's right to develop its own identity and contribute to the collective heritage of humanity.

It was similar to Western European revolutionary organizations, but it also offered a platform for Slavic complaints against foreign invaders. However, the Pan-Slavist factions also revealed different goals as revealed by the Congress. Even though Russian representatives attended the Congress, Tsar Nicholas I considered Pan-Slavism as a threat to his reign. He closed the Brotherhood of Saints Cyril and Methodius in Kiev, a hub of the Pan-Slav movement, and denounced Russian Pan-Slavists as "rebels".

Nicholas I used the Orthodox faith that the Christian subjects of the Ottoman Sultan shared to position Russia as a shield against foreign threats in the Balkans. The Tsarist Empire did not use Pan-Slavism as a political tool until after the Crimean War. Committees like the ones headed by Michail Katkov⁵⁵ in the 1860s and 1870s promoted nation-building among Eastern and Middle European Slavic and Orthodox peoples in an effort to revitalize Russia's sense of national identity. To bolster Russia's supremacy in both internal and foreign affairs, they suggested launching a crusade against the Ottoman and Habsburg Empires. After redrawing governmental boundaries, Russia worked to deepen its ties to other Slavic and Orthodox communities in an attempt to gain numerical superiority among other Slavs. This strategic alliance was viewed favorably by politically liberal factions within the empire, who saw it as a pathway to introducing a Slavic-centric form of democracy, possibly through a state assembly.

One of the initial attractions of Pan-Slavism was its seeming promise of salvation, grounded in a theological and historical sense of purpose. In the poem "Russian Geography" from 1849, Fedor Tyutchev, for instance, articulated this idea. This idea was developed by Nikolaj Danilevskij⁵⁶ in his 1869 book "Russia and Europe," where he transformed it into a prophecy grounded on cultural

⁵⁵ Mikhail Nikiforovich Katkov (1818–1887) was a prominent Russian journalist, editor, and conservative political figure during the 19th century. He is best known for his role as the editor-in-chief of the conservative newspaper "Moskovskiye Vedomosti" (Moscow News) from 1863 to 1887. Katkov's views were strongly aligned with Slavophile ideology, which emphasized the unique cultural and spiritual characteristics of the Slavic peoples. He advocated for the promotion of Russian nationalism and the consolidation of Russian power, both domestically and internationally. Katkov believed in the superiority of Russian culture and saw Russia as a natural leader among Slavic nations.

⁵⁶Nikolaj Danilevskij was a Russian philosopher, historian, and diplomat who lived from 1822 to 1885. He is primarily known for his work in historical philosophy and geopolitics. Danilevsky's most famous work is "Russia and Europe," published in 1869, where he introduced the concept of cultural-historical determinism.

history. He foresaw the slow decline of Romanesque-Germanic dominance in Europe and its replacement by a Tsar-led Slavic Orthodox culture centered on organic unity and interpersonal trust. Danilevsky integrated aspects of politics, religion, culture, and society to establish a new Slavic civilization with Constantinople as its center, based on a conception akin to the notion of "Holy Russia". Pan-Slavism became more political throughout time, especially with Great Russia's hostility toward Western Europe and its desire for the unity of the Slavic peoples. This was made evident at the second Slav Congress in Moscow in 1867, which was chaired by Russian delegates. Some like Mikhail Katkov proposed that Russia should head a unified Slavic state, like Prussia in Germany, in order to fortify the nationality notion and establish a potent geopolitical impact. One further idea supporting this vision of cultural hegemony and unification was the prediction that all Slavic countries will use Russian as their common literary language.

Russia and the Sublime Port conflicts

Russian and Ottoman military confrontations began in 1876 as a result of Christian peasant uprisings against the Ottomans in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1875 and Bulgarian guerilla warfare against the Ottoman Empire in 1876. The Russian government was forced to respond as a result of the conditions that led to increased Pan-Slav agitation. Officers, society women, and merchants formed Slavic charity committees, which raised money, arranged events, and dispatched troops to aid the Serbian army following Serbia's and Montenegro's 1876 declaration of war against the Ottoman Empire. Fedor Dostoevsky and Petr Il'ič Čajkovskij⁵⁷ were among the notable individuals who argued in favor of fighting the Turks in order to establish "eternal peace." Eventually a Pan-Slavist hero, General Mikhail Černjaev, attempted—but was unsuccessful—to liberate the "Slavic brothers" in the Balkans from the "Turkish yoke".

The Russian administration found itself in a difficult situation after the Serbs were defeated. Russia, along with other European countries, pressed the Ottoman Empire to carry out reforms that dealt with the reasons behind the revolutions. However, The Sublime Porte⁵⁸ rejected these ideas.

⁵⁷ Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky composed the "Slavic March" in 1876, referencing the Serbian-Ottoman War.

⁵⁸ The Sublime Porte refers to the government of the Ottoman Empire, particularly during the period when Istanbul (formerly Constantinople) served as the imperial capital. The term

Russia consequently waged war on the Sultan, mostly in order to preserve its power in the Balkans. The Russian peasant populace, who saw the war as an essential fight against the Ottoman Empire's control, strongly supported it. Even after defeating the Ottomans, Russia took care to maintain the balance of power in Europe. The Ottoman Empire underwent reforms after Russia and the Sublime Porte signed the Treaty of San Stefano in 1878, which also created a Bulgarian vassal state and granted Russia access to the Aegean. The Berlin Congress, which was held in response to protests from other European nations, drew new borders that divided Bulgaria into the Principality of Bulgaria and Eastern Rumelia and shrunk its territory. Pan-Slavists viewed Russia's territorial and influence gains as insignificant in comparison to the original gains made at San Stefano.⁵⁹

There was a split within Russian nationalist circles between those who supported territorial expansion and those who supported nation-building at home. Russian Pan-Slavism presented Russians as the defenders and emancipators of Slavic peoples, particularly those in the Balkans. The story also connected the theological conflicts between Eastern Orthodoxy and Western Catholicism to the historical German eastward expansion; Russians identified as defenders of Orthodoxy against both the expansionist activities of the Roman Catholic Church and aggressive Germanic-Roman power. This framework of ideology continued into the Cold War era and was reflected in Soviet historiography.

2.2.2. Pan-Slavism in the 20th Century

The "Slavic idea" took on several forms in Russia during the 20th century: Pan-Slavic rhetoric in High Stalinism, neo-Slavism in the late Tsarist Empire, and a fragment in the post-Soviet search for a new Russian national identity, all of which alluded to the Pan-Slavism of the former Tsarist Empire. Interest in the Balkans resurged in the early 1900s as Russian foreign policy refocused on Europe after a military defeat over Japan in the Far East. Pan-Slavism was nevertheless a social and political force in the Tsarist Empire, evident in associations, foreign policy discussions, and

"Sublime Porte" originated from the Ottoman practice of conducting diplomatic affairs through a gate (porte) leading to the imperial palace, which symbolized the authority and power of the Ottoman government.

⁵⁹ The Treaty of San Stefano was signed on March 3, 1878, between Russia and the Ottoman Empire, following the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878. The treaty marked a significant moment in Russian foreign policy and territorial ambitions in the Balkans.

journalism, particularly in St. Petersburg and Moscow, even though it did not predominate in pre-World War I discourse. Concepts such as "Eurasianism"⁶⁰ were developed in an attempt to counterbalance Western European notions like "Pan-Europe" and imperial-hegemonic viewpoints. With the rise of Neo-Slavism and leaders like Young Czechs, Polish National Democrats, and Russian liberal cadets, Pan-Slavism also gained traction. Uvarov's "Orthodoxy, Autocracy, Popularity"⁶¹ themes were echoed in the fourth Slavic Congress in Sofia (1910) and the third in Prague (1908), which both represented this comeback with claims to Greater-Russian leadership. That being said, official Petersburg politics remained neutral toward Pan-Slavic currents, preferring an inward-looking Slavicism throughout Nicholas II's premiership. But in 1914 Russia entered World War I as a result of Pan-Slavic ideology and solidarity with Serbia. The dreams of Pan-Slavists were rejected as "Great Russian imperialism" and considered a retrograde philosophy following Lenin's ascent to power. Following the revolution, the Paris Peace Conference saw the Slavic states emerge, aligning increasingly with the West and creating an anti-Soviet "cordon sanitaire"⁶²; pan-Slavism had no place in Soviet foreign policy under this framework.

The Soviet Union changed from being an internationalist state to one that was increasingly proud of its historical and cultural achievements during the reign of Joseph Stalin. This change from the previous Bolsheviks, including Lenin, took place in the mid-1930s and was a break from their antipathy toward the old Russia. In September 1939, the Soviet Union invaded Poland, demonstrating that the idea of a "Slavic direction" in foreign policy had been thought through before the German invasion of 1941. This was not the only reason behind the Soviet Union's Pan-

⁶⁰ Eurasianism is a political and cultural movement that emerged in Russia in the early 20th century, particularly during the interwar period. It promotes the idea of a distinct Russian civilization that is neither purely European nor Asian but rather a unique blend of both, spanning across Eurasia. The movement emphasizes Russia's historical, cultural, and geopolitical connections to both Europe and Asia, arguing for a Eurasian identity separate from Western European influences.

⁶¹ Sergei Uvarov, as the Russian Minister of Education in the mid-19th century, articulated a set of principles known as "Orthodoxy, Autocracy, and Nationality" (sometimes translated as "Orthodoxy, Autocracy, and Populism"). These principles were seen as guiding ideologies for the Russian Empire under Tsar Nicholas I.

⁶² The term "cordon sanitaire" refers to a strategic or political buffer zone created to isolate an area or entity deemed dangerous or undesirable. It originated in the context of European politics during the early 20th century, particularly after World War I and the Russian Revolution.

Slavist propaganda during World War II. Pan-Slavic rhetoric played a major role in the Soviet government's mobilization of the occupied states of Europe and its own people against fascism during the German invasion of 1941. With previous enemies like the Poles now depicted as friends in the struggle against fascism, the emphasis was mostly on Western and Southern Slavs. To advance Soviet Pan-Slavism, a Slavic committee headed by individuals such as Georgi Dimitrov⁶³ and Aleksandr Fadeev⁶⁴ was formed. Media such as the magazine "Slavjane" and pamphlets like "The Fight of the Slavic Peoples Against German Fascism" highlighted the shared history and culture of the peoples of Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Yugoslavia with Russia. It presented a single "Slavic front against fascism" based on common experiences of pain and struggle, portraying the Soviet Union and the Russian Empire as Slavic nations aligned against a common foe.

Fascist ideas in Italy grew more anti-Slavic during World War II and combined them with anti-communist rhetoric to form the concept of "Slavocommunism."⁶⁵ This phrase was especially used by the partisans from Slovenia and Croatia under Marshal Josip Broz Tito, who wanted to advance into Italian territory. Because of Yugoslavia's aspirations to create a Greater South Slav Federation, anti-Pan-Slavic sentiments flared up again in the 1940s, even outside of Italy. Anti-communists were portrayed as defenders of Hellenism against Slavic encroachment during the civil war that

⁶³ Georgi Dimitrov (1882–1949) was a prominent Bulgarian communist and political leader during the early to mid-20th century. He played a significant role in the international communist movement and was known for his ideological contributions and leadership abilities.

⁶⁴ Aleksandr Fadeev (1901–1956) was a Soviet writer and literary figure who played a significant role in Soviet literature during the mid-20th century. He was known for his works that depicted Soviet life, history, and ideology. Fadeev's most famous work is the novel "The Young Guard" (1945), based on the true story of a group of Soviet youth who resisted the Nazi occupation during World War II. The novel became immensely popular and was seen as a symbol of Soviet heroism and patriotism.

⁶⁵ "Slavocommunism" was a phrase used during World War II, especially in fascist Italy, to merge the concepts of communism and Slavic nationality, presenting them as a single, unified threat. It alludes particularly to the partisans led by Marshal Tito in Slovenia and Croatia, who were thought to be advancing into Italian territory. In the context of the Adriatic partisan movements that sought to encroach on regions such as Istria and Trieste, the word perfectly captured the fear of communist doctrine blending with Slavic nationalism. This idea was used in fascist propaganda to portray communism and Slavic ambitions as related threats to Italian interests and national integrity.

broke out in Greece between nationalists and communists between 1946 and 1949. Significant effects on the "Slavization" of the Greek Civil War resulted from the creation of the Yugoslav People's Republic of Macedonia in 1944. Tensions between Athens and Tito were sparked by his decision to establish this republic, which included plans to extend into Greek Macedonia and Thessaloniki. Yugoslavia positioned itself as the protector of South Slavic-speaking minorities by actively participating in the Greek Civil War and particularly by providing support to the Democratic Army of Greece (DSE). Aegean Macedonia was formally sought after by Yugoslavia to be annexed to its newly established country during the 1946 Paris Peace Conference. Athens, which saw this as meddling in Greek matters, was incensed by this action. Due to Yugoslavia's greater support for the DSE than for the Soviet Union, anti-communist propaganda that connected Russian and Soviet expansionist intentions was produced.

Overall, it can be said that Pan-Slavism played a significant role in shaping the cultural, political, and diplomatic landscapes of Russia and Serbia, contributing to the broader discourse on Slavic identity and solidarity in Eastern Europe in general.⁶⁶

3. RUSSIA VS. WEST

3.1. Foreign policy towards The West (historical background)

It was often remarked by Winston Churchill that when it comes to understanding Russia's "enigma", the key is in its national interest. Russia was able to establish the framework of meanings necessary to support its foreign policy decisions thanks in large part to the European and post-World War II Western world, at least following Peter the Great⁶⁷. The West was seen by many Russians as a better civilization whose influences should never be disregarded but rather emulated.

⁶⁶ <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/nationalities-papers/article/revisiting-panslavism-in-the-contemporary-perspective/4EA532EFCBF0F66ACBBE6EBEF34B374C> (visited on May 4th, 2024).

⁶⁷ Peter the Great, Tsar of Russia from 1682 to 1725, was a visionary ruler who modernized Russia by implementing extensive administrative, military, and cultural reforms inspired by Western Europe. He expanded Russian territory and founded St. Petersburg, establishing Russia as a major European power.

Following the period of religious warfare, sovereign monarchy became the preeminent political structure in Europe in the 17th Century. When Peter the Great came to power in 1694, it was during an era of ever more secular sovereign sovereignty. A dramatic break with the religious autocratic Russia that had developed following the two centuries of Mongol rule was made when Peter adopted a new ideology of state patriotism, or allegiance to the state, within the framework of European secularism. The monarch decisively moved Russia toward secular nationalism in spite of opposition from the Eastern Orthodox Church. While religion continued to play a significant role, state interests were increasingly influencing it. The French Revolution of 1789 brought liberal and equitable ideals to Europe, dividing it into progressive and antirevolutionary factions. New international conundrums for Russia arose during the age of rising European enlightenment, constitutionalism, and capitalism. The choice that the Russian leaders made would ultimately determine how the country behaved abroad. They had to choose between the new popular sovereignty and the outdated monarch-centered theory of sovereignty. There were attempts by certain monarchs, most notably Alexander II⁶⁸, to reinterpret the nation's identity in accordance with the new European concepts of equality and freedom. The need for Russia to make significant home reforms was mirrored in their modest foreign policy. Some leaders attempted to retain the essential elements of the previous monarchical system out of fear for the emerging Europe. Certain Russians started advocating for a rupture from both the old and new Europe while Europe struggled to deal with the crisis of emerging liberal principles. For example, Alexander Herzen⁶⁹ claimed that Russia should "catch up" economically and socially on its own, away from European terms, after becoming dissatisfied with the European conservative restorations of the 1840s. By taking this school of thought to its logical conclusion, the Bolsheviks⁷⁰ changed both their foreign and

⁶⁸ Alexander II, Tsar of Russia from 1855 to 1881, was known as the "Tsar Liberator" for emancipating the serfs in 1861, significantly reforming the Russian social and economic structure. His reign also saw significant judicial, military, and local government reforms. He was assassinated by revolutionary terrorists in 1881.

⁶⁹ Alexander Herzen was a prominent Russian writer, philosopher, and revolutionary, often regarded as the "father of Russian socialism." He is best known for his advocacy of peasant rights, his criticism of autocracy, and his influential writings, including the journal "The Bell" which called for political reform in Russia.

⁷⁰ The Bolsheviks were a faction of the Russian socialist movement, led by Vladimir Lenin, that seized power during the October Revolution of 1917. They established a communist government

political systems substantially. Russia's government was unable to decide between the “two Europe”, and this was reflected in the October of 1917 Bolshevik Revolution⁷¹. The country was on the verge of anarchy, revolution, and civil war, which the Czar was powerless to stop. This was a symbolic aspect of Nicholas II's authority. He dismissed Count Sergei Witte, his finance minister and an economic reformer who supported the new Europe, in 1904 and decided to go to war with Japan in order to forgo domestic reforms in favor of expansionist foreign policy. By joining the war at that point, Nicholas exacerbated the European crisis and rendered it difficult to stop the radical Marxist views from spreading throughout Russia. This action ultimately led to Nicholas's demise during the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution. Nonetheless, even the Bolsheviks attempted to interact with western countries and acknowledged their technological and material might. The egalitarian ideals of the French Revolution also influenced the Bolshevik conceptions of Soviet authority and proletarian democracy.

Also, the foreign policy of the Bolsheviks was one of conciliation and practical collaboration with the West following the initial attempts to overthrow the "bourgeois" governments in Europe.

After World War II, Europe reemerged as a solid liberal-democratic continent, and the Soviet leaders aimed to maintain ties with the rising West. Under Mikhail Gorbachev and later Nikita Khrushchev, relations with the West became stronger. The famous de-Stalinization speech delivered by Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev at the 20th Communist Party Congress shattered several taboos and was intended, among other things, to bring Soviet Russia closer to Europe. Russia's foreign policy demonstrated a striking degree of historical continuity even if it was a response to diverse geopolitical situations. Throughout the periods of monarchy and liberalism, Russia maintained a number of consistent thought and behavior patterns in its interactions with the outside world. Being a borderland country in an unpredictable and frequently unstable external

in Russia, leading to the creation of the Soviet Union, and promoted a radical agenda of class struggle and state control of the economy.

⁷¹ The Bolshevik Revolution, also known as the October Revolution of 1917, was a pivotal moment in Russian history when the Bolshevik party, led by Vladimir Lenin, successfully overthrew the Provisional Government in Petrograd. This coup was characterized by the storming of the Winter Palace and minimal bloodshed, marking a decisive shift towards communist rule. The revolution led to the establishment of a Soviet government, sparking a civil war and eventually resulting in the formation of the Soviet Union.

environment, Russia had to constantly respond to comparable security challenges. These issues included internal state integrity preservation, external invasion concerns, and turmoil in adjacent territories. *Westernizers, Statists, and Civilizationists* are the three main traditions, or schools, of foreign policy thought that have emerged in the nation over time. For generations, proponents of westernization, nationalism, and civilizationalism have endeavored to portray Russia's foreign policies in a manner that aligns with the educational system's long-standing portrayals of the nation and the outside world.

Westernizers emphasized how similar Russia was to the West and thought that the West was the most advanced and viable civilization on Earth. Russia was to be portrayed by the early Westernizers as a devoted member of the European monarchy. This school of thought first appeared historically as a result of Peter the Great's military westernization. Peter was the first to acknowledge the superiority of western technology and to suggest that Russia may overcome its technological backwardness by utilizing western technology. Russia was perceived by Westernizers within the Soviet system as being somewhat close to European social democratic ideals. As an example, one of Gorbachev's favorite lines of thinking was that the Soviet Union needed to "purify" itself of Stalinist "distortions" in order to transform into a democratic, or "human," form of socialism (*gumannyi sotsializm*). Gorbachev oversaw the Soviet military withdrawals from Europe and the Third World in addition to pursuing the idea of mutual security with the West and signing a number of groundbreaking arms control agreements with the United States.

In the end, liberal Westernizers in Post-Soviet Russia promoted the idea that their nation and the West had a "natural" affinity since they shared ideals like democracy, human rights, and free markets. Liberal Westernizers advised against ties with erstwhile Soviet allies and maintained that Russia could only confront its threats and get past its political and economic backwardness by establishing liberal Western institutions and joining the alliance of what was commonly referred to as the community of "Western Civilized Nations." In order to achieve goals of "integration" and "strategic partnership with the West," Andrei Kozyrev⁷² and Boris Yeltsin made the assumption

⁷² Andrei Kozyrev was the first Foreign Minister of the Russian Federation, serving from 1991 to 1996, and played a crucial role in shaping Russia's post-Soviet foreign policy with a pro-Western orientation. He was instrumental in fostering relationships with Western countries and advocating for democratic reforms within Russia during the early 1990s.

that Russia will adopt liberal democratic institutions and a market economy modeled after the West. President Dmitri Medvedev promoted improved relations with Western countries from 2009 to 2012, based on shared security threat assessments and increased transparency in political and commercial spheres. To combat Russia's backwardness, corruption, and rigidity, he spearheaded the creation of a new Pan-European security treaty and promoted the liberalization of the political and economic systems.

Statists are not intrinsically anti-Western; rather, they are only trying to gain the acceptance of the West by emphasizing its military and economic strength. Because such mechanisms also existed in European kingdoms, the Statists of the monarchical age admired Russia's authoritarian system of government. Statists in foreign policy frequently credit Prince Alexander Gorchakov for inspiring their ideas and approaches. In his capacity as Alexander II's foreign minister, Gorchakov worked to restore Russia's standing abroad following the country's defeat in the Crimean War. He limited Russia's engagement in European politics and created a framework of flexible alliances in order to implement the "concentration" doctrine. Some Statists trace their origins back to Peter the Great. They refer to Peter's military competitiveness, in contrast to Westernizers who emphasize his Europeanism. They contend that the Czar's idea of drawing closer to Europe was prompted by state security and military rivalry.

Civilizationists have long tried to propagate Russian ideals outside of the West because they believe that they are distinct from those of the west. They have taken a more assertive stance in responding to Russia's security issues than the more status quo-oriented Statists. As a theory of foreign policy, civilizationism has its roots in the "gathering of Russian lands" by Ivan IV ("Ivan the Terrible") following the Mongol Yoke and in the proclamation that Ivan issued, "Moscow is the third Rome."⁷³ In contrast to Westernizers and Statists, Civilizationists have emphasized the unique cultural qualities of Russia and Russia-centered civilization in an effort to subvert the western system of values. While some members of this school believed that Russia was a blend

⁷³ Ivan IV, also known as Ivan the Terrible, proclaimed Moscow as the "Third Rome" in 1547. This proclamation was rooted in the idea of Russia as the spiritual and political successor to the Roman and Byzantine Empires. Ivan's declaration symbolized Moscow's claim to being the center of Orthodox Christianity and the defender of traditional Christian values after the fall of Constantinople to the Ottoman Empire in 1453. It also reflected Ivan's ambition to establish Moscow as a powerful and legitimate empire in the European context.

of many different religions, others argued for a strong devotion to the principles of Orthodox Christianity. Early proponents of civilizationalism promoted the idea that there was a "Russian empire." They acknowledged the limitations imposed by the external environment that was centered on the West and suggested that Russia extend its frontiers to the East and South. Still, they were keen to protect what they perceived as a shared culture in their surrounding region. For example, throughout the 19th century, proponents of Civilizationalism spoke up for the idea of Slavic unity (Pan-Slavism).⁷⁴

3.2. *New Thinking and Great Power Pragmatism vs. influence of the NATO*

A difficult process of adaptation and strategic recalibration can be seen in Russia's foreign policy evolution, particularly with regard to the influence of NATO. Russia had a difficult time when it first emerged from the Soviet era, trying to navigate both political and economic upheaval and redefine its position in the world. Once the Soviet Union fell apart, Russia started a journey of healing and introspection. Gorbachev's "New Thinking," which prioritized arms limitation and emphasized better ties with the West, brought about a paradigm shift. Amid arms control accords and a lowered sense of Western threat, this era witnessed a notable improvement in national security. The public became disillusioned and economic instability resulted from Gorbachev's emphasis on security overshadowing economic changes. Yeltsin and Kozyrev's succeeding era sought Western relationships in order to achieve economic and political modernization, and they specifically focused on integration with the West. In addition to the obstacles of economic stagnation, dependence on Western assistance, and security threats such as terrorism and ethnic conflicts, this decade saw improved relations. The change toward regaining Russia's standing as a great power and giving national interests priority under Primakov⁷⁵ leadership marked the turning point. A more forceful posture was adopted during this phase, especially in the former Soviet areas, when policy autonomy was asserted and Western influence was challenged. But the plan was not strong enough to address cultural concerns about the West or advance economic growth.

⁷⁴Tsygankov, Andrei P. (2010). *Russia's Foreign Policy: Change and Continuity in National Identity*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers. (pages 3-22).

⁷⁵Yevgeny Primakov was a prominent Russian politician and diplomat who served as the Prime Minister of Russia from 1998 to 1999.

Putin's administration was characterized by a practical strategy that combined Western and Statist philosophies to address security issues, particularly terrorism, while fostering diplomatic relations with the West. This strategy was named *Great Power Pragmatism*. Putin's initiatives earned public support, indicating a balance between security imperatives and diplomatic engagement, despite continued crises in regions such as the Caucasus and Chechnya.⁷⁶

NATO's role in shaping Russia's foreign policy cannot be understated. The alliance's expansion eastward post-Cold War fueled Russian apprehensions about encirclement and loss of influence in neighboring regions. NATO's military interventions, notably in Yugoslavia, strained relations and reinforced Russian perceptions of Western dominance. Six countries—Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, and Slovenia—joined the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, or FRY, following World War II. However, the independent province of Kosovo was then located in Serbia, which turned into a conflict zone for relations between the West and Russia. The ethnic group of Albanians, who are primarily Sunni Muslims and who speak Albanian native to both Albania and Kosovo, have two geographic homelands. Kosovo had a population of 77% Albanians and only 13% Serbs, according to a census taken in 1981⁷⁷. But the autonomous region was in Serbia, where the official language was Serbian and the official religion was Eastern Orthodox Christianity — 85% of the population were Serbs, and only 1% were Albanian. The Kosovo War, which started in March 1998 and ended on June 11, 1999, was the result of this ethnic divide intensifying into full-scale conflict throughout the 1990s. A group of rebels formed the Kosovo Liberation Army, often known as the KLA, to combat Yugoslavia's discriminatory treatment of Kosovo Albanians. However, things took a bad turn in January of 1999. Serbian security forces murdered 45 Kosovo Albanians in the small town of Racak; the majority of the victims were women and children. NATO took an extraordinary action in reaction to the massacre in Racak. UN delegates from China and Russia informed the coalition that their countries would oppose any use of force, despite the coalition's desire to put an end to the atrocities of Kosovo Albanians. Thus, NATO military troops began a 78-day bombing campaign against Yugoslavia

⁷⁶ Tsygankov, Andrei P. *Russia's Foreign Policy: Change and Continuity in National Identity*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2010. (pages 23-26).

⁷⁷ [Kosovo's population by ethnicity and censuses 1948-2011. SiteTitle \(rks-gov.net\) \(visited on May 25th, 2024\).](#)

without the UN Security Council's approval. More than 500 civilians lost their lives in the attacks, which were officially code-named Operation Allied Force by NATO.

When Putin was asked about the origins of the deterioration in Russo-American relations when Russia was condemned by the West for its invasion of Crimea and its operations in Syria, he answered: “You are mistaken, think about Yugoslavia. This is when it started.”⁷⁸ A strike on Serbia was seen as an attack on a close ally. Putin uses the Russian people's lingering scars from 1999 to his advantage by playing the victim and promoting opposition to the West. Naturally, this discourse is effective in a nation where the majority of the population primarily get their news from state-run television. Putin makes his people believe in the superiority of the West through the media, but he fails to highlight the crimes Russia conducts that would necessitate political action such as sanctions.⁷⁹ One of Serbian historians, Milivoj Bešlin commented, when speaking about Russia's isolation as a result of international sanctions for its annexation of Crimea and support for regional uprisings in eastern Ukraine, that Serbia was necessary for Russia to have its own interests. He made it clear that Moscow had this policy in place for a long time and that Belgrade had to compete with Western forces in the Balkans. These statements were made by Beslin the day after Russian President Vladimir Putin paid his second visit to Belgrade in less than five years. Putin was greeted by Serbian officials as a close ally, a large Christian Orthodox “brother”, and a defender of Belgrade's interests internationally. Bešlin pointed out that attachment is typically a front for genuine objectives, and that emotions have no bearing on international relations. He emphasized that Serbia's and Russia's interests in Kosovo were at odds. Russia wanted the conflict in Kosovo to stay frozen so that it could use it as leverage in negotiations with the West, to destabilize Europe, and to affect Balkan affairs.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ <https://pittnews.com/article/121917/opinions/analysis-1999-nato-operation-turned-russia-west/> (visited on May 26th, 2024).

⁷⁹ <https://balkaninsight.com/2019/03/22/natos-intervention-changed-western-russian-relations-forever/> (visited on May 28th, 2024).

⁸⁰ <https://n1info.ba/english/news/a310305-russia-needs-serbia-for-its-influence-in-balkans/> (visited on April 20th, 2024).

3.3. The conflict in Ukraine vs. pro-Russian stance in Serbia and The Republic of Srpska

In 1991, Ukraine separated from the Soviet Union. Since then, it has battled internal conflicts and geopolitical difficulties arising from wanting to keep close connections with Russia while also aligning itself more closely with the West (EU, NATO). Viktor Yanukovich, the pro-Russian president, was overthrown in 2014 as a result of the Euromaidan demonstrations⁸¹. The international world strongly denounced Russia's annexation of Crimea after that, and pro-Russian separatists seized control of portions of the Donbas region in eastern Ukraine, sparking a protracted battle. Over the course of late 2021 and early 2022, Russia established a sizable military presence in Belarus and along its border with Ukraine. Russia kept stepping up its military preparations in spite of Western nations' warnings and diplomatic attempts. In an effort to "demilitarize and denazify" Ukraine, Russian President Vladimir Putin declared the launch of a "special military operation" there. A full-scale invasion was initiated with this. From the north (Belarus), the east (Russia and areas under rebel control), and the south (Crimea), Russian forces began an array of attacks. Kyiv, Kharkiv, and other major cities were among the essential targets. The Russian attack was slowed down by the strong defense put up by the Ukrainian military and citizen volunteers. Weapons and information help from the West were used to reinforce the opposition. Violent conflicts took place in cities, causing considerable damage and loss of life among civilians. Both internally and as refugees in other nations, millions of Ukrainians were uprooted. A significant worldwide aid effort was sparked by the humanitarian situation. On both sides, thousands of soldiers and civilians died and hundreds of others were injured. Severe economic sanctions were imposed on Russia by the US, the EU, and other allies. They were directed at the country's banking industry, important industries, and prominent individuals including Vladimir Putin. Russia was

⁸¹ The protests known as "Euromaidan" started in November 2013 and took place throughout Ukraine. The demonstrations swiftly expanded in scope and ferocity after the then-President Viktor Yanukovich decided to postpone signing an association agreement with the European Union in favor of tighter ties with Russia. Protesters wanted Yanukovich to step down, deeper connection with Europe, and an end to corruption. Yanukovich was overthrown in February 2014 as a result of the movement's violent protests and fights with security personnel. The Euromaidan revolutionized the political landscape of Ukraine and played a major role in both the ongoing conflict in Eastern Ukraine and Russia's invasion of Crimea.

widely condemned in international institutions such as the United Nations. Numerous nations cut or downgraded their diplomatic ties to Russia, but Serbia and The Republic of Srpska did not.

Serbia's pro-Russian stance has not changed in response to the crisis in Ukraine. Despite the EU being Serbia's main source of financial support, analysts have highlighted that recent surveys show that 95% of Serbs view Russia as a true ally, while only 11% view the EU in the same light. Putin is the world leader that Serbs admire the most, according to these findings. Additionally, 68% of Serbs said they thought NATO, not Vladimir Putin, was to blame for the conflict in Ukraine, and 82% were against Serbia putting sanctions on Russia on behalf of the EU. The exact percentage or analysis on whether the majority of people of The Republic of Srpska view Russia as a true ally was not available. But let's remember January of 2023 when Milorad Dodik, the Bosnian Serb separatist leader, awarded Russian President Vladimir Putin in absentia with the highest medal of honor for his "patriotic concern and love" for the Serb-controlled half of Bosnia and Herzegovina.⁸² These words speak better than any analysis:

“Putin is responsible for developing and strengthening cooperation and political and friendly relations between RS (The Republic of Srpska) and Russia.”
“Thanks to the position of Vladimir Putin and the strength of the Russian Federation, the voice and position of Republika Srpska has been heard and respected.”⁸³

When it comes to the Serbian President, Aleksandar Vučić, he had to walk a tightrope so far. As he balances EU attempts to isolate Moscow against his nation's long-standing links to Russia particularly its reliance on Russian energy and diplomatic support for its position on Kosovo Serbia's situation is arguably the most hazardous. Vučić upset both Moscow and numerous allies by endorsing the UN resolution denouncing the incursion into Ukraine and declining to acknowledge Russia's annexations. He has also irritated EU leaders by refusing to be bound by the penalties imposed by the bloc. There are those who contend that Russia's standing in the Balkans may be weakened by the war. Many Serbian nationalists were incensed by Putin's use of Kosovo's

⁸² <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/1/9/bosnian-serbs-award-putin-with-medal-of-honour-2> (visited on March 15th, 2023).

⁸³ Words Milorad Dodik said at an awards ceremony in January of 2023 in Banja Luka.

independence bid as justification for the annexation referendums in eastern Ukraine, since they saw it as validating Kosovo's claims, according to Maxim Samorukov⁸⁴ of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace⁸⁵. Vučić has reacted by putting more space between himself and the Kremlin. Serbia, which imports almost all of its gas and a large portion of its oil from Russia, has been prompted by the war to pursue energy diversification: Vučić declared that Serbia will construct new refineries that can handle crude from all around the world in response to EU sanctions against Russian oil. The nation also signed a new agreement with Azerbaijan in 2023 for the supply of natural gas. But not to forget that on 29 May 2022, while the EU pressed for sweeping bans on Russian energy, Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić announced that his country had signed an agreement on a new 3-year gas contract with Russia.

Although all of the Western Balkan nations—including Serbia—have backed UN resolutions denouncing Russia's actions, their opinions on EU sanctions have differed somewhat. After Montenegro accepted the EU's sanctions against Russia, Albania, Kosovo, and North Macedonia quickly joined. Along with Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Serbian government issued conclusions supporting the territorial integrity of Ukraine while declining to implement the EU sanctions. Željka Cvijanović, a Serbian member of the collective presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, stated in February 2023 that she would "vehemently oppose any change in the relations with Russia." Russia is still Serbia's top supplier of weapons, but China is becoming more and more competitive. On February 10, 2023, Serb Prime Minister Ana Brnabić stated that one of the

⁸⁴ Maxim Samorukov is an expert on Russia's relations with Central, Eastern, and Southeastern Europe and a fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. He covered Russian foreign policy toward these areas as an international journalist and commentator for the independent Russian media outlet Slon.ru before joining Carnegie.

⁸⁵ Carnegie Endowment for International Peace works to promote peace via research, analysis, and policy creation. It was founded in 1910 by Andrew Carnegie with the intention of fostering understanding and collaboration across nations. The group focuses on important global issues like security, governance, climate change, and economic development while operating in several locations of the world. The Carnegie Endowment offers comprehensive analysis and suggestions to decision-makers, governments, and the general public through its network of academics and specialists.

challenges to a quicker EU accession bid is Serbia's refusal to impose sanctions on its ally, Russia. She described this decision as the "condition above all conditions" established by the EU-27.⁸⁶

3.4. Russia's threat in the Balkans vs. European Parliament position

All Western Balkan countries have the support of the European Parliament in their aspirations to join the EU. Roberta Metsola, the President of Parliament, underlined the necessity of quickening the Western Balkans' enlargement process on April 26, 2022, noting the region's stability as crucial to the EU's own stability. Russia's influence and efforts to destabilize the area, especially in Bosnia and Herzegovina, have drawn alarm from the Parliament. Members of The European Parliament have encouraged Serbia to align its foreign policy more closely with the EU, fearing that Russian investments could lead to corruption and state takeover. The European Parliament formed a special committee on foreign interference in democratic processes (INGE) in June 2020 with the objective of investigating acts of foreign interference in the democratic institutions and procedures of the European Union. The final report of the committee was adopted on March 9, 2022, and denounced Russia's attempts to take advantage of ethnic tensions in the Western Balkans, as well as its hybrid threats and disinformation campaigns. Concerns regarding the Orthodox Church's influence in these nations were also voiced. The European External Action Service (EEAS) was urged in the report to support educational initiatives that uphold fundamental rights and democratic ideals, as well as strengthen EU delegations and security missions to more effectively combat disinformation. MEPs demanded that the EU's Strategic Compass, which would be adopted later that month, address the problem of foreign interference. Replacing the INGE committee, the INGE2 committee is carrying on and expanding its work while working on a new report. Prioritizing the fight against misinformation and propaganda, the Parliament recommended on March 15, 2023, that the EEAS and EU delegations be provided with tools to improve public and cultural diplomacy in third-world nations. The need to counteract foreign

⁸⁶ EU-27 refers to the European Union (EU) after Brexit, specifically the EU member states remaining after the United Kingdom's departure. The EU-27 consists of all the EU member countries except for the UK, which left the EU on January 31, 2020.

influence and espionage that threatens democratic order in the EU and its neighboring nations is becoming increasingly urgent, according to MEPs.⁸⁷

⁸⁷[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2023/747096/EPRS_BRI\(2023\)747096_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2023/747096/EPRS_BRI(2023)747096_EN.pdf) (visited on May 20th, 2024).

CONCLUSION

In this thesis, the main focus of the analysis was how strong Russia's influence is in Serbia and The Republic of Srpska and where is that influence coming from. As previously mentioned, Russia has a complex foreign policy towards the Balkans, therefore towards Serbia and The Republic of Srpska and that policy is shaped by its historical connections and support, especially with regard to Serbia's position on Kosovo, strategic objectives, geopolitical dynamics, and rivalry with the West for influence in the area. Russia's veto power in the United Nations Security Council has been instrumental in preventing Kosovo's broader international recognition, aligning closely with Serbia's stance.

Russia has viewed the Balkans as an area of shared cultural and religious heritage, particularly due to the Orthodox Christian connections with countries like Serbia. Russia's supportive attitude towards the Balkan states has frequently been shaped by these historical affinities. Russia considers itself to be the guardian of the Balkan Orthodox Christian communities which we discussed in Chapter 2. That part of the influence is so strong since religion plays a big role in lives of Russians as well as of Serbians and Serbs, and could be said that it plays one of the biggest roles of Russia's influence.

Russia also maintains its presence in Serbia and the wider Balkan region by using its soft power through economic investments, media sway, and cultural interactions, especially in the energy sector. Russia's domination in Serbia's energy industry is a clear indication of its economic sway. Russia's strategic economic interests in the region are highlighted by Gazprom's building of the TurkStream pipeline and its ownership of NIS, the national oil company of Serbia. These investments strengthen Russia's influence in the Balkans while also supporting Serbia's energy security. Also, by encouraging pro-Russian narratives and opposing Western viewpoints, Russian media sources like Sputnik and RT significantly influence public opinion in Serbia. Russia's overall soft power strategy is strengthened by this media influence.

The main hypothesis through question for this thesis would be: "Are history and religion truly and possibly the only connection that ties Russia and Serbia and The Republic of Srpska together and the only connection that made their relationship the way it is nowadays?" The answer would be that indeed, they are. Therefore, it can be concluded that the main hypothesis was confirmed. But, there is always that but, even though the relations between these two nations and an entity of The

Republic of Srpska is firmly based on history and religion, which served as the foundations of their shared spirituality and culture, a variety of political, economic, cultural, and strategic considerations impacted their relations also. The other question for this thesis would be: “How strong is that connection?” Despite outside influences and shifting geopolitical circumstances the connection between Russia and Serbia (The Republic of Srpska) remained and remains strong and solid. If we return to Chapter 3, we could see that the whole section was about the European Parliament addressing Russia’s influence in the Balkans as a threat for stability of Western Balkans, and therefore stability of the EU. To show once again how strong impact religion and religious ties have when it comes to the Balkans (Serbia, The Republic of Srpska), the concerns regarding the Orthodox Church's influence in Balkan nations were also voiced in the final report of the INGE committee in March 2022.

It is without a doubt, that if one of the most important institutions in the world, institution of the European Parliament, addresses influence of a certain country in certain area as a threat, in this case Russia’s influence on Serbia and Republic of Srpska (Western Balkans), that means we are talking about incredibly powerful impact and influence Russia has over Serbia and The Republic of Srpska (Western Balkans).

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