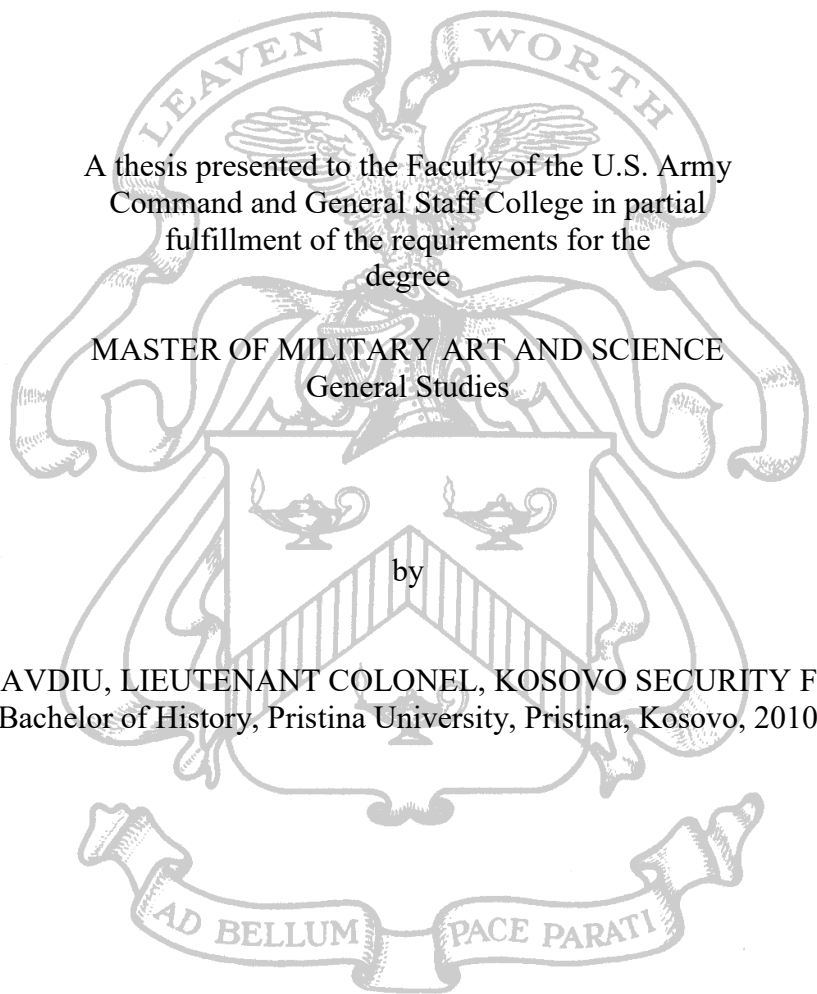


RUSSIAN INFLUENCE IS SLOWING DOWN THE INTEGRATION OF
WESTERN BALKAN COUNTRIES IN THE EUROPEAN UNION
AND NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY ORGANIZATION



A thesis presented to the Faculty of the U.S. Army
Command and General Staff College in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree

MASTER OF MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE
General Studies

by

IMER AVDIU, LIEUTENANT COLONEL, KOSOVO SECURITY FORCE
Bachelor of History, Pristina University, Pristina, Kosovo, 2010

Fort Leavenworth, Kansas
2019

Approved for public release; distribution is unlimited. United States Fair Use determination or copyright permission has been obtained for the use of pictures, maps, graphics, and any other works incorporated into the manuscript. This author may be protected by more restrictions in their home countries, in which case further publication or sale of copyrighted images is not permissible.

REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE			<i>Form Approved</i> <i>OMB No. 0704-0188</i>		
Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing this collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden to Department of Defense, Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports (0704-0188), 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to any penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number. PLEASE DO NOT RETURN YOUR FORM TO THE ABOVE ADDRESS.					
1. REPORT DATE (DD-MM-YYYY) 14-06-2019		2. REPORT TYPE Master's Thesis		3. DATES COVERED (From - To) AUG 2018 – JUN 2019	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE Russian Influence is Slowing Down the Integration of Western Balkan Countries in the European Union and North Atlantic Treaty Organization			5a. CONTRACT NUMBER		
			5b. GRANT NUMBER		
			5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER		
6. AUTHOR(S) Imer Avdiu			5d. PROJECT NUMBER		
			5e. TASK NUMBER		
			5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER		
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) U.S. Army Command and General Staff College ATTN: ATZL-SWD-GD Fort Leavenworth, KS 66027-2301			8. PERFORMING ORG REPORT NUMBER		
9. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)			10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)		
			11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)		
12. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for Public Release; Distribution is Unlimited					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES					
14. ABSTRACT The dissolution of Yugoslavia inspired the progression of Russian influence in the western Balkans. Russian influence in this region has affected politics, the economy, security, and beyond. Accordingly, by preventing Western Balkans integration into the Euro Atlantic organizations, it limits Western expansion in this region. This research focuses on Russian influence in five Western Balkan States, Bosnia and Herzegovina (B&H), Kosovo, Macedonia, Serbia, and Montenegro. The purpose of this thesis is to identify Russian influence in the Western Balkans, to analyze it from different perspectives, and recommend how to minimize it. The current approach of the EU and NATO to counter Russian influence is too passive and must be more aggressive to mitigate Russian influence. Russian presence, especially in Serbia, is noticeable in ethnic and religious relations, and is used as a foothold to influence the area. To mitigate the Russian influence, countries should join the Euro Atlantic family. Accordingly, to join either EU or NATO, each country should focus on specific criteria that will create socioeconomic prosperity, safety, and stability of the region.					
15. SUBJECT TERMS Western Balkans, Russian influence, EU, NATO, WB5, economy, politics, security.					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	18. NUMBER OF PAGES	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT (U)	b. ABSTRACT (U)	c. THIS PAGE (U)			19b. PHONE NUMBER (include area code)
			(U)	140	

Standard Form 298 (Rev. 8-98)
Prescribed by ANSI Std. Z39.18

MASTER OF MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE

THESIS APPROVAL PAGE

Name of Candidate: Imer Avdiu

Thesis Title: Russian Influence is Slowing Down the Integration of Western Balkan Countries in the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization

Approved by:

_____, Thesis Committee Chair
Robert S. Martin, MBA

_____, Member
Lieutenant Colonel Romae M. Araud, M.A.

_____, Member
John H. Modinger, Ph.D.

Accepted this 14th day of June 2019 by:

_____, Director, Graduate Degree Programs
Robert F. Baumann, Ph.D.

The opinions and conclusions expressed herein are those of the student author and do not necessarily represent the views of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College or any other governmental agency. (References to this study should include the foregoing statement.)

ABSTRACT

RUSSIAN INFLUENCE IS SLOWING DOWN THE INTEGRATION OF WESTERN BALKAN COUNTRIES IN THE EUROPEAN UNION AND NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY ORGANIZATION, by LTC Imer Avdiu, 140 pages.

Dissolution of Yugoslavia inspired the progression of Russian influence in the western Balkans. Russian influence in this region has affected politics, the economy, security, and beyond. Accordingly, by preventing Western Balkans integration into the Euro Atlantic organizations, it limits Western expansion in this region. This research focuses on Russian influence in five Western Balkan States, Bosnia and Herzegovina (B&H), Kosovo, Macedonia, Serbia, and Montenegro. The purpose of this thesis is to identify Russian influence in the Western Balkans, to analyze it from different perspectives, and recommend how to minimize it. The current approach of the EU and NATO to counter Russian influence is too passive and must be more aggressive to mitigate Russian influence. Russian presence in this area, especially in Serbia, is noticeable in ethnic and religious relations, and is used as a foothold to influence the area. To mitigate the Russian influence, countries should join the Euro Atlantic family. Accordingly, to join either EU or NATO, each country should focus on specific criteria that will create socioeconomic prosperity, safety, and stability of the region.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First of all, I would like to thank KSF leadership and ODC, U.S. embassy in Pristina who selected and financed me to participate in this great education.

Second, I am thankful to my tireless thesis committee; Mr. Scott Martin, who was my staff group adviser and worked with me on a daily basis. Dr. John Modinger put in tireless effort to ensure my thesis was on the correct and academic path and LTC Romae Araud enriched my thesis with her experience and knowledge on this topic.

Third, Mrs. Rhonda Quillin, with her patience and tireless engagement, helped me to overcome my writing obstacles by ensuring every sentence is in its place. Mrs. Ann Chapman ensured the successful technical aspect of my thesis.

Fourth, I would like to thank LTC Enver Voca and SGM Bujar Gosalci, my additional readers who enriched my ideas and the thesis in general.

Then, staff group 6C, who were and will remain a great team and made me enjoy my CGSOC class of 2019.

Last, and most important is gratitude to my lovely wife, Valbone, who stands as the main pillar of my career and my life in general, and my sweet children, Kushtrim, Jehona, and Vlera, who are my inspiration.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
MASTER OF MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE THESIS APPROVAL PAGE	iii
ABSTRACT.....	iv
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	v
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	vi
ACRONYMS.....	viii
ILLUSTRATIONS	x
TABLES	xi
CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION	1
Research Purpose.....	3
Problem Statement.....	4
Importance	5
Research Questions.....	6
Primary Research Question.....	6
Secondary Questions.....	6
Assumptions.....	7
Limitations of Scope.....	7
CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW	8
Books	9
Government Documents and Publications.....	18
Other Sources.....	21
CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY	36
Data Collection and Analysis	36
CHAPTER 4 ANALYSIS	43
Introduction.....	43
Russia’s Economic Influence.....	48
Gas and Oil	49
Other Economic Investments.....	56
Cultural and Humanitarian Organizations	61
Political Influence	64

Government and Political Parties.....	65
Media Influence	77
Orthodox Church Influence	82
Security Influence	91
Military Affairs	92
Intelligence Sphere.....	97
CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	104
Conclusions.....	104
Recommendations.....	108
BIBLIOGRAPHY	117

ACRONYMS

B&H	Bosnia and Herzegovina
CARL	Combined Arms Research Library
DGDP	Directorate of Graduate Degree Programs
DIME	Diplomatic Informational Military Economic
EU	European Union
EULEX	European Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo
EUSR	EU Special Representative
FAS	Feasible Acceptable Suitable
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
FYROM	Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia
GCMC	George C. Marshall Center
GDP	Graduate Degree Programs
KFOR	Kosovo Force (NATO)
KLA	Kosovo Liberation Army
KSF	Kosovo Security Force
NALT	NATO Advisory and Liaison Team
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO	Non-Government Organization
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
PfP	Partnership for Peace
RS	Republic of Srbska
SGA	Small Group Advisor
UN	United Nations

UNPROFOR United Nations Protective Force

USEUCOM US European Command

USSR Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

WB Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina (B&H), Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Serbia, and Montenegro

WB5 Bosnia and Herzegovina (B&H), Kosovo, Macedonia, Serbia, and Montenegro

ILLUSTRATIONS

	Page
Figure 1. Research Methodology	40
Figure 2. Russia Influence in the Western Balkans by Countries	44
Figure 3. Gas Pipeline Plan for South Stream and Turkish Stream	53
Figure 4. Countries with the Highest Share in the Volume of Trade with Republic of Srbska (KM-Convertible Mark, B&H Currency)	61
Figure 5. Survey Results	87
Figure 6. Screenshot: A Briefing Prepared for the Director of Macedonia's Intelligence Agency, the UBK.....	102

TABLES

	Page
Table 1. Russian Influence by Country.....	33

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Russia is not returning to the Balkans because it never left.

—Dimitar Bechev, “Russia’s Foray into the Balkans: Who Is Really to Blame?”

Current Russian influence in Western Balkan is slowing down the integration of Western Balkan countries in the European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO.) The current approach to counter Russian influence is too timid, the EU and NATO should be much more persistent in order to enable Western Balkan countries to join both groups. By interfering in the economy, politics, and security of the states Russia aims to limit the influence of NATO and the EU in the Western Balkans.¹ However, the Western Balkan countries aspire to join the EU and NATO, and Serbia aspires to join the EU, remain in the Partnership for Peace (PfP) program, and not become a full NATO member.

Historically, Russia has supported the Slavic nations in order to extend its influence rather than rely on historical ethnic ties.² The idea that Russia is Serbia’s protector developed in the 18th century. Serbia’s uprising was a great opportunity for

¹ Western Balkans include Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia but for thesis purpose Albania and Croatia are not included in research.

² Stratfor, “Yugoslavia, Russia Strengthening Ties,” 4 January 2001, accessed 29 January 2019, <https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/yugoslavia-russia-strengthening-ties>.

Russia to gain an entry in the Balkans.³ The first diplomatic relations between Russia and Serbia were established in 1838 when Russia opened its consulate in Belgrade, then in 1878 the consulate transformed into a mission.⁴ Over the years, those relationships varied according to the interests and leaders of the respective countries. One of the dominant factors that plays a role in relationships of the Slavic ethnicities is the Serbian Orthodox church, which is influenced by Russia and has an impact in religious and cultural terms.⁵

Traditionally, Moscow looked to the Balkans with the aim of accessing and controlling the region through Slavic peoples. With support of Russia, First Yugoslavia was created after the end of World War I in 1918. Then, after World War II, the partisans, led by Tito and supported by the Russian Red Army, created a second Yugoslavia composed of six republics, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Slovenia, Macedonia, Montenegro, and two autonomous provinces within Serbia: Kosovo and Vojvodina.⁶ The second Yugoslavia began to break down in 1991 with the separation of Slovenia, and ended in 2008 with Kosovo's independence. The relations

³ Elvin Aghayev, "Relations Between Russia and Serbia," The Independent International Political Research Center, 11 April 2017, accessed 17 January 2019, <http://www.iiprc.org/relations-between-russia-and-serbia.html>.

⁴ Diplomats of the Russian Empire, "Serbia (Residence in Belgrade)," 18 November 2018, accessed 19 January 2019, <http://www.rusdiplomats.narod.ru/serbia.html>.

⁵ Daniel Heler. "Russia, North Kosovo and Kosovo Serbs: What are the connections?" European Western Balkans, 12 November 2018, accessed 20 December 2019, <https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2018/11/12/russia-north-kosovo-kosovo-serbs-connections/>.

⁶ Robert Wilde, "Yugoslavia," Thought.Co, 08 April 2017, accessed 29 January 2019, <https://www.thoughtco.com/yugoslavia-1221863>.

between Russia and Serbia strengthened during the wars that culminated in Yugoslavia's breakup during the 1990s, with Moscow advocating on behalf of Slobodan Milosevic.⁷

Russia historically was present in the Western Balkans and dominated the region since the creation of the First Yugoslavia in 1918. After the fall of communism, the EU and NATO continued to expand in former communist countries. The WB5 are now in the critical phase of the integration, and, because of this, Russia increased its efforts to deny them membership in EU and NATO. Russia successfully denied membership in NATO and the EU to some of its neighbors by invading them partially. The EU, NATO and WB5 are failing to mitigate the Russian influence in the WB5. They should change their approach in order to ensure smooth Euro-Atlantic (EU, NATO) integration process of the region.

Research Purpose

The purpose of this thesis is to identify the Russian influence in the Western Balkans and to analyze it from different perspectives. The focus will be on the economy, politics, and security. The research will trace various actors involved in the Western Balkan countries, investigate the purpose of each actor involved in the region, and analyze possible benefits or harms. It also will analyze the end states of each country, regarding Russia and the West. The answers to the research questions will result in recommendations if measures should be taken to minimize the Russian influence in the

⁷ Congressional Research Service (CRS), *Serbia: Background and U.S. Relations*, CRS Report for Congress (Washington, DC: Library of Congress, updated 16 November 2018), accessed 29 January 2019, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R44955.pdf>.

Western Balkans. The recommendations will include the measures for individual states and the international community to take.

Problem Statement

Russia is increasing its influence in Western Balkans since the start of Yugoslavia's collapse in the 1990s with intention to hinder EU and NATO integrations for these countries. As tensions between the west and Russia rises after the invasion of Ukraine by Russia in 2014, Russia's activities in WB increases. The Western Balkans, particularly the Slavic countries, historically have maintained a good relationship with Russia, and this plays an important role in their successful interference. Russia has already built a permanent base in Serbia that they use as a foothold to influence the area. In Serbia, they have a military presence and other capabilities too. Lately Russia requested Diplomatic immunity for its personnel in Serbia. In 2016, Russia orchestrated a failed coup in Montenegro in order to kill the prime minister and overthrow the pro-western government so Montenegro does not join NATO. In Montenegro they invested more than \$1 billion EURO in real estate, literally they bought most of the coastline of Montenegro. In 2017, they orchestrated a similar attempt to overthrow the elected government in Macedonia. In Kosovo, they support nationalistic extremist groups, mainly through camping and military training. Politically Russia is heavily involved in Kosovo, through supporting Serbian Minority and supporting Serbia to deny Kosovo membership in international organizations, in particular the UN. In Bosnia, they are heavily involved with RS, mainly through security cooperation with RS security apertures. They also use the Orthodox Church to spread their narratives in the Slavic population. All these interferences by Russia, causes increased tensions between Kosovo

and Serbia, Serbia and Bosnia, Serbia and Montenegro and Albanians and Macedonians in Macedonia. Furthermore, their interference causes many economic problems, fosters corruption, slows legal reforms, and hinders EU and NATO integrations in the region. The EU, NATO, and WB5 countries are failing to mitigate Russia's interference to a level that it cannot hinder the Euro Atlantic integration of the Region. The WB5, EU, and NATO must be more aggressive and agile in countering the Russia' interference in WB5 in order to ensure integration of the region in the EU and NATO.

Importance

The intent of this research is to bring attention to Russian interference in the Western Balkan countries. In recent years, Russia has moved quickly to interfere in countries that aspire to join the EU or NATO by using either diplomacy or force. Examples of Russian meddling in the internal affairs of sovereign countries include the Russo-Georgian conflict for Abkhazia and South Ossetia 2008, the partial occupation of Ukraine in 2014, and occupation of Transnistria in Moldova since 1992.⁸ These countries desired to join the NATO or EU however Russia does not want NATO enlargement, especially in its neighboring countries, and attacked them to prevent their membership in the NATO or EU. Russia has shown it will take all necessary measures to stop neighboring countries to join NATO or EU. Today WB5 countries are facing similar threats from Russia. This study will recommend what measures WB5, EU, and NATO should take in order to mitigate interference from Russia.

⁸ Michael Lambert, "Tracing the Roots of Russia's Hybrid Warfare Tactics," Eurasianet, 11 October 2017, accessed 6 October 2018, <https://eurasianet.org/tracing-the-roots-of-russias-hybrid-warfare-tactics>.

The importance of this research increases considering the fact that NATO already has forces present in Bosnia and Hercegovina (B&H) and Kosovo. NATO's primary mission in B&H is "to assist the authorities of Bosnia and Hercegovina with reforms and commitments related to the Partnership for Peace (PfP) and closer integration with NATO."⁹ Whereas NATO's mission in Kosovo, Kosovo Force (KFOR), is to "contribute to a safe and secure environment"¹⁰ and support country peace and stability. They should be dealing with Russian interference, because it undermines their mission.

Research Questions

Primary Research Question

Why are the current EU and NATO approaches toward Russian influence in the Western Balkans failing?

Secondary Questions

1. What is the current economic, political, and security situation in the Western Balkans 5?
2. Why are the Russians interested in the Balkan countries?
3. What potential threats are inherent with greater Russian influence in the Western Balkans?
4. What are the factors driving NATO and EU's eastward expansion?

⁹ North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), "Relations with Bosnia and Hercegovina," October 01, 2018. Accessed 12 December 2018 https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_49127.htm.

¹⁰ Kosovo Force, "Mission," accessed 08 October 2018, <https://jfcnaples.nato.int/kfor/about-us/welcome-to-kfor/mission>.

Assumptions

This study makes several assumptions including, Western Balkan countries will commit to join the EU and NATO; the NATO and EU policy will continue eyeing expansion. Other assumptions are Russians will seek to prevent the Western Balkan countries from joining the EU and NATO, and the Western Balkan countries share a common threat and will not constitute a threat to one another. The final assumption is there will be no separation of or union with any other Western Balkan state.

Limitations of Scope

Initially, this thesis aimed to research Russian influence in the six Western Balkans countries of Albania, B&H, Kosovo, Macedonia, Serbia, and Montenegro. However, based on findings and lack of findings, Albania is removed from the research. It seems that Russian influence is focused more on the countries of former Yugoslavia and those inhabited with Slavic ethnicity. The research will be limited to Russian influence in these five remaining Western Balkan countries, which is referred to as WB5. Even though there are other external actors that influence the WB5, the study will focus on Russia. The study will only utilize open and unclassified sources related to the topic. Regarding the timeframe, the study begins with the dissolution of Yugoslavia in the early 1990s.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

There are a large number of studies on Russian influence in different areas and countries, but there are few studies that focus specifically on the WB5 countries. Therefore, the focus of this research is on the WB5 countries. The review will focus exclusively on studies that are related to, and have useful information on the topic. However, for general information, the research might refer to other literature that may add to this topic.

To answer research questions and frame the problem of Russian influence in Western Balkans, the research aims to focus on three groups of literature. First, books written about the region and related to the topic. Second, documents and statements that represent the positioning of each government or the officials of the Western Balkans and international community standpoint regarding Russian influence in the region. The third group of literature is comprised of newspapers, databases, opinions, publications, and other studies related to the topic. The literature used for this thesis was evaluated for its reliability and relevance, so each used publication should consist of author, the name of organization, or web page that publishes it. If there is a Russian influence in the WB5, then to minimize that influence, the study will bring recommendations for taking measures, either from individual countries or from Euro-Atlantic organizations. These recommendations aim to be suitable, feasible, and acceptable to be recognized and accepted by all actors involved in the region.

Books

The book analysis will focus on the part that speaks about the research topic as well as Balkan countries. The book analysis will help the researcher to frame the problem, and create theoretical ideas about Russian influence in the western Balkans.

Several publications directly and indirectly dissect the role and tendencies of Russian interference in Europe and the Western Balkan countries. Most writers suggest Russia intends to prevent the Western Balkan region from joining western organizations such as the EU and NATO and agree the Balkans have strategic importance for the western world. In addition, some writers agree that security and the political and economic situation in the region is fragile. As a result, one can consider that pro-Russian individuals, groups, and organizations can misuse this situation to leverage for a larger Russian presence in the Balkans, to cause more instability in the region, and delay further integration in the EU, NATO, and other international organizations. Within all this literature, the focus mainly is on the Western Balkan countries, Europe, U.S., and NATO response to Russian influence, and how this influence harms and slows down democracy and the Euro-Atlantic integration of the WB5.

The book, *NATO's Balkan Interventions*, remarks that progress was made in economic and other governance spheres, but the situation is still unstable, and unpredictable.¹¹ The author notes friction between Russian and NATO regarding conflicts in the region and especially because of the international campaign during the

¹¹ Dana H. Allin, *NATO's Balkan Intervention* (New York: Oxford University Press Inc., July 2002), 92.

1990s in B&H and Kosovo. Furthermore, the book mentions that a stable Balkan requires NATO mandate governments should remain engaged in the region.¹²

The book, *War and Change in the Balkan*, by Brad K. Blitz, focuses on the breakup of Yugoslavia, the creation of new states, the role of international actors, and progress on the democratization and integration of these countries in the EU. In addition to the United States, EU, and NATO roles in the region, the author stresses the roles of Turkey and Russia in the Balkans. Turkey's interests were about Turkish and Muslim populations in the former Yugoslavia. Otherwise, their foreign policy shows no vital interests.¹³ Nevertheless, Turkey maintains good relations with Western Balkan states. It is understandable, each big power tends to exercise its influence in particular regions, but when that influence brings mutual benefits and helps country or region development, then it is not a problem and should be welcomed.

On the other hand, based on Blitz's book, Russia's attention in this area is primarily in two main fields of interest. First, Russia focuses on preventing NATO gaining strength and influence in the region, while the second one is geopolitical interests and rivalry in Central Asia and the Caucasus. Both have significant implications in the Balkans.¹⁴ The author also argues that without strengthening the economy, it is hard to have successful democratization.

¹² Allin, *NATO's Balkan Intervention*, 92.

¹³ Brad K. Blitz. *War and Change in the Balkans: Nationalism, Conflict and Cooperation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 189.

¹⁴ Ibid.

This book about NATO and the former Yugoslavia, among other issues, highlights difficulties, misunderstandings, and frictions between Western countries and Russia regarding measures taken in the Western Balkans specifically during the 1990s conflicts in former Yugoslavia. The conflicts in the Balkans were a challenge for NATO because not all members agreed on intervention. It took three years to agree on the military action to intervene in Bosnia, whereas in the Kosovo case, it took five months from the time the Alliance decided military actions was necessary.¹⁵ This shows experience and lessons learned from previous cases helps decision making. From this book, there are various experiences and arguments that Russia is a factor in the Balkans and for some countries, it is not impossible but it is hard to take any decision without having a Russian blessing. Russia can slow or prevent important decisions through its veto in the United Nations.

General Wesley Clark (Ret, U.S. Army) was involved during the Western Balkan conflicts, and in his book *Waging Modern War: Bosnia, Kosovo, and the Future of Combat*, among other issues, he details the conflicts and general history of the region. General Clark explains the diplomatic difficulties for NATO in the B&H and Kosovan conflicts. The author explains his experiences with the situation in B&H and explains the limitations of the U.N. Protective Force (UNPROFOR.) The UNPROFOR were lightly equipped and they were not made for heavy fighting, their mission was mostly

¹⁵ Joyce P. Kaufman. *NATO and the Former Yugoslavia: Crisis, Conflict, and the Atlantic Alliance* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2002), 223.

humanitarian to protect noncombatants.¹⁶ It explains the diplomatic engagement of the U.S. and NATO leadership in their discussions and negotiations with Serbian and Russian leadership.¹⁷

The book *Balkan Ghosts*, by Robert Kaplan, approaches the Balkans peninsula from different perspectives. It describes the history and culture of the Balkan region. It also provides general historical information about the Balkan people, conflicts, frictions, and border shifts, the Byzantine and Ottoman Empire rule, the creation of Yugoslavia, and agreements among the great powers to set the regional state borders after the Ottoman Empire. Kaplan writes that in October 1944, Stalin and Churchill divided the Balkan countries, Albania was not mentioned, and Tito placed the province of Kosovo under the jurisdiction of the Republic of Serbia.¹⁸ Each ethnic group claims they are the aborigine in the region. The Albanians are descended from ancient Illyrian tribes that came to the Balkan Peninsula before the Greeks, and more than thousand years before the Slavs.¹⁹ The author also brings to attention the root of the myths in the Balkans, and he says that in the Balkans, history is not viewed as a chronological tracing progression, as it is in the west; instead, it jumps around and moves in a circle.²⁰ People from each country

¹⁶ Wesley K. Clark. *Waging Modern War: Bosnia, Kosovo, and the Future of Combat* (New York: Harper Collins, 2001), 33.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 287.

¹⁸ Robert D. Kaplan, *Balkan Ghosts: A Journey Through History* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 14 October 1993), 45.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 43.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 58.

have different opinions and myths for the same stories. It explains how the major powers agreed and then disagreed regarding the Balkans. The treaty of San Stefano conducted in 1878 granted full independence to Russia's Slavic allies, the Serbs.²¹ This book helps to understand the cultural differences, ethnic frictions and divisions, and rivalry among international powers and their influence, as well as ethnic nations in the Balkans.

Richard Holbrooke's, "To End a War" explains the diplomatic effort to find a solution for the war in B&H from personal experience. During the Bosnian war between ethnic Bosnians and Serbs, basic human rights were violated and massacres were conducted against civil Bosnians. The Serbian ethnic group was also supported by the army of Serbia. Holbrooke refers to Yugoslavia as a failure of historic dimensions; in addition, he considers it a greatest collective security failure of the west.²² One other writer who criticizes the west for this failure in the B&H, David Harland, argues the response to the crisis in Yugoslavia were generally reactive and incoherent. He states Europe acted at cross-purposes with the U.S. and even when they were able to act together, they were poorly coordinated. The Dayton agreement did not offer a sustainable solution to the B&H because it remained a dysfunctional and trapped country in the provisions of the agreement.²³ The factors for this failure were considered; the

²¹ Kaplan, *Balkan Ghosts: A Journey Through History*, 55.

²² Richard Holbrooke, *To End a War* (New York: The Modern Library, 09 November 2006), 21.

²³ David Harland, "Never again: International intervention in Bosnia and Herzegovina," Center for Humanitarian Dialogue, July 2017, accessed 02 March 2019, <https://www.hdcentre.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Never-again-International-intervention-in-Bosnia-and-Herzegovina.pdf>, 3.

misreading of Balkan history, the end of the Cold War, the behavior of the Yugoslav leaders, the inadequate American response to the crisis, and the mistake of the Europeans who believed they could handle the post-Cold War challenge on their own.²⁴ The author gives a historical background of the region, and the ethnic frictions between communities that was one of the factors contributing to the Yugoslavian conflicts.

US Secretary of State Warren Christopher proposed an air strike against Bosnian Serbs, which the Europeans negated.²⁵ After the EU, the UN, and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) failed to find a solution about the Bosnian conflict. In April 1994, the Contact Group was created and composed of France, Germany, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom, and the United States.²⁶ Unless they benefit, Russia historically will oppose the western community in any decision, they use their veto in the UN Security Council and other local actors to influence and prevent the West from enforcing the rule of law and democracy. The Russians, as part of the negotiations, were not satisfied; they felt they “got no respect” and looked for ways to be seen as one of the “big boys.”²⁷ Moreover, Serbs who conducted massacres in Bosnia enjoyed the protection of Russia, who declined to allow the Contact Group of the United

²⁴ Holbrooke, *To End a War*, 21.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 55.

²⁶ Qerim Qerimi, “An informal world: The role and status of ‘Contact Group’ under International Law,” *Chicago-Kent Journal of International and Comparative Law* 7 (May 2014): 118, accessed 03 March 2019, http://studentorgs.kentlaw.iit.edu/jicl/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2014/01/The_Role_and_Status-Final.pdf.

²⁷ Holbrooke, *To End a War*, 117.

States, Germany, France, Great Britain, and itself to use force against the Serbs.²⁸ Concerning Russia, the Western allies wanted to maintain the balance in the region in order to be able to intervene in the crisis in Bosnia. Even though the West knew Russian involvement in negotiations could cause a serious problem, given its pro-Serb attitude,²⁹ the Russians wanted to show that they were an essential factor. The war in B&H stopped then the United Nations sent NATO peacekeeping forces called Implementation Force (IFOR) to the country. Beside NATO forces, there were participants from non-NATO countries, in particular, Russian Forces. Those forces wanted to participate in peacekeeping operations but not to be led by NATO, but either by the UN or by some special coalition in which they could play an equal role with the U.S.³⁰

The General Framework Agreement for peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina also known as the Dayton Agreement was reached in Ohio, U.S. and signed in Paris on 14 December 1995 and achieved a cease fire. It did not find the best solution nor was it long term, because as a result, Bosnia and Herzegovina is divided into ethnic groups of Bosnians and Serbs. The presidency is composed of three representatives of ethnic groups, Bosnians, Serbians, and Croats. Both groups have their territories and constitutions and other constitutional instruments that keeps the country fragile and vulnerable to further frictions and external influence.

²⁸ Stephen J. Blank, ed., "Yugoslavia's wars: The problem from Hell," (Report, Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, PA, 1995), accessed 02 March 2019, <https://ssi.armywarcollege.edu/pdffiles/PUB160.pdf>, 2.

²⁹ Holbrooke, *To End a War*, 117.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 206.

The author of “The Rise of a State” describes Kosovo Foreign policy, from the perspective between a university professor and diplomat, as a former Foreign affairs minister of Kosovo. The book explains the position and relations of Kosovo with the world, explains the current situation, and the past and future concerning external relations. The author argues when Albania declared independence in 1912, Serbia conquered Kosovo in 1912-1913. Moreover, when the Ambassadors conference in London took place, when it came to deciding Albanian boundaries the big powers such as UK, France, Germany, Austro-Hungary, and Italy pursued their political interests rather than ethnic, language and territorial principles. As a consequence Kosovo remained out of Albanian borders and occupied by Serbia.³¹ Hoxhaj reflects, the Independence of Kosovo happened due to international circumstances where the U.S. is a single global superpower and EU enlargement, hence, none of Kosovo's international relations is like that with the US. Simultaneously for the European plan, the most essential and strategic relations of Kosovo are with Germany, Great Britain, and France.³² While the primary opponent of Kosovo independence has been and continues to be Russia. The rivalry is not only with Kosovo, in fact, but this is also not the essence of the rivalry, regarding Southeast Europe and other places in the world, the rivalry has always existed between West and Russia, no matter was it Tsarist or Soviet Russia.³³ Russian interests always were geopolitical ones.

³¹ Enver Hoxhaj, *Ngritja e një Shteti: Politika e Jashtme e Kosovës (The Rise of a State: Kosovo Foreign Policy)* (Tirana: Guttenberg, 2017), 21.

³² *Ibid.*, 248.

³³ Hoxhaj, *The Rise of a State: Kosovo Foreign Policy*, 250.

The author interlinks the Kosovo case and its agenda advancement with geopolitical movements in Europe and beyond. NATO and EU enlargement, the process known as atlantization and europeanisation of East and Southeast Europe represents a significant change in the political, economic, and social system. Another effect is the collapse of the Soviet Union, which also has had economic, political and security implications. In response, the collapse of the Soviet Union, the dissolution of Yugoslavia and the union of Germany created a new geopolitical situation and affected European balance. The author argues that the NATO enlargement and reunion of Germany would not have happened without U.S. decisiveness.³⁴ The competition between the big powers is evident, Russia, China, Europe, Japan, India, Iran, and the U.S. are in the rivalry for superiority in the region and the battle for status and influence in the international arena.³⁵ Therefore, Russian influence and presence in the region for Kosovo is a threat due to opposite orientation and aspiration of the country. This was proven many times and especially in diplomatic spheres where Kremlin conducts aggressive diplomatic actions against Kosovo in various international institutions and countries. Among other things, one of Russia's major diplomatic obstacles to Kosovo is the use of the veto when it comes to Kosovo's membership in the UN. So far, Russia has consistently hampered and blocked Kosovo everywhere; and in this regard, China is one of the countries that oppose Kosovo independence as a permanent member of the UN Security Council.³⁶

³⁴ Hoxhaj, *The Rise of a State: Kosovo Foreign Policy*, 259.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 282.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 378.

Government Documents and Publications

These sources are crucial for this research because they support clarification of states and the position of every actor this research is considering. The sources will examine problems in the domains of economy, politics and security needed to support the thesis. The use of these sources is vital to understand and analyze it because they are ones who shaped and continue to shape the way of integration and or prevention of integration of WB5 into the western institutions and organizations.

For the WB5, who aspires to join the EU it is essential the EU strategy supports the Western Balkans integration since the region geographically is in Europe, and they share a common heritage, history, and values. Therefore, for the countries who want to join the EU, press releases from the European Commission regarding the expansion of the Strategy for the Western Balkans of February 2018 addresses and clarifies the path that countries have to follow. However, before integration, each country who seeks EU membership has to meet specific requirements and standards so from this membership they can benefit the freedom of movement, economic growth, and security. The strategy indicates that the prospect of EU membership for the Western Balkans is for mutual political, security, and economic interests, and it encourages them to promote democracy, the rule of law that allows collective integration, security, prosperity, and social well-being.³⁷ Analyzing the EU strategy and other relevant documents will clarify the EU approach and requirements that each country has to fulfill to join the EU.

³⁷ European Commission, “A Credible Enlargement Perspective for and Enhanced EU Engagement with the Western Balkans,” (Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, Strasbourg, 6 February 2018), accessed 10 July 2018,

The NATO summit of July 2018, held in Brussels, reaffirmed commitment to the “Alliance’s Open Door Policy” for all aspiring countries that share democracy and Alliance values.³⁸ The declaration clarifies the requirements and progress needed for every country to join NATO. Regarding the Western Balkans, it also recognizes the hybrid threat and Russian interference by specifically mentioning the case of Montenegro, other widespread disinformation campaigns, and malicious cyber activities.³⁹

Albania and Montenegro are already members of the alliance, whereas B&H, Macedonia, and Serbia are in Partnership for Peace. Kosovo aspires to contribute to security in the region and to improve its capabilities that are supported by the NATO Advisory and Liaison Team (NALT).⁴⁰ The NATO strategy and other relevant documents will help analyze the threats in the region and clarify the NATO approach toward the Western Balkans. Furthermore, it shows the need to support non-NATO partners to integrate into the Alliance.

https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/communication-credible-enlargement-perspective-western-balkans_en.pdf.

³⁸ Heads of State and Government of the North Atlantic Alliance, *Brussels Summit Declaration*, 11-12 July 2018, accessed 02 September 2018, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_156624.htm.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ U.S. Congress, Senate, Armed Services Committee, *Statement by General Curtis Scaparrotti, U.S. Army, Commander, United States European Command Commander* (Washington, DC, 8 March 2018), accessed October 7, 2018, <http://www.eucom.mil/mission/eucom-posture-statement-2018>.

The EUCOM posture and related documents are valuable sources for this research and support understanding the U.S. standpoint regarding the Western Balkans. Analyzing this document will enable the reader to have a better understanding of the situation from different perspectives, and to visualize U.S. efforts to promote regional stability.

Understanding U.S. scholars, diplomats, and policymaker's opinions is useful to help shape the research and predict the U.S. level of engagement in support of WB's western integration. The National Committee on American Foreign Policy report of May 2018 for Western Balkans argues the U.S. along with EU partners were heavily involved during the 1990s, and 2008, but after that U.S. has only maintained minimal high-level engagement. Similarly, Europe did not pay much attention to the region due to other engagements such as the financial crises, refugee flows and internal threats to cohesion. Consequently, progress in the WB has slowed down and the situation has deteriorated.⁴¹ The report suggests it is time for the U.S. to re-engage alongside EU to support the prevention of potentially fractured states and extensive instability on Europe's borders. The report describes the situation of each WB country, provides a specific recommendation for priority measures for each country, and suggests how to implement a joint Western agenda into the region.

The report recommends the US and the EU should counter Russian interference by actively supporting WB's opportunity to join the E.U., NATO, or both. This may be

⁴¹ Thomas E. Graham, Jonathan E. Levitsky, Cameron P. Munter, Frank G. Wisner, Mark D. Stadnyk, and Stephen C. Whittaker, *Time for Action in the Western Balkans: Policy Prescriptions for American Diplomacy* (New York: National Committee on American Foreign Policy and East West Institute, May 2018), accessed 20 March 2019, <https://www.ncafp.org/2016/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Time-for-Action-in-the-Western-Balkans.pdf>, 2.

done by supporting independent media to counter Russian media manipulation; advancing the region's cooperation with NATO and EU on cybersecurity, and trying to find an alternative to Russian energy dependence, such as U.S. liquefied gas (LNG).⁴² U.S. engagement and their viewpoint historically has played an important role in Southeast Europe's framing geopolitical and social situation. Most of the countries of that region support and require U.S. engagement to assist them in democracy-building and to transition toward the euro Atlantic membership.

Other Sources

The next group contains different open sources such as newspapers, databases, opinions, publications, and studies about related topics. Findings from these sources will help the author to complement the answers to his research questions. These sources will be selected carefully and, when selected, will be assessed for their reliability and validity.

Dimitar Bechev, who is well known for his research in the Western Balkans and Russian foreign policy, in his article, "Russia's Foray into the Balkans: Who Is Really to Blame?" examines Russian interference in the Balkan Peninsula. He clearly describes Russian interference in several fields. "Russia has both the means and the will to infiltrate domestic politics in these countries," he also explains that Russia's plan is to subvert the

⁴² Graham et al., *Time for Action in the Western Balkans: Policy Prescriptions for American Diplomacy*, 5.

Western-led order in Europe and beyond.⁴³ He says that Putin is not one who created the clientelism, corruption, militant nationalism, and state capture, but Putin exploits this situation created by the weak governance to exercise the influence. Weak governance, he continues, opens the door for further Russian meddling.

This article adds some important facts that will serve for further development of the thesis. He is not only blaming Moscow about the fragility of the region that requires U.S. and EU engagement, but in particular encourages the individual countries to fight their weaknesses and to have better governance.

The Balkan Correspondent at the Associated Press, Dusan Stojanovic, in the article “*EU and Russia Battle for Influence in Balkan Region*,” published by *Independent*, elaborates on the competition between the EU and Russia in the region. Russia is concerned about losing its ally Serbia, whereas the EU has a strategy that tentatively plans for Serbia and Montenegro to join by 2025.⁴⁴ He also argues that Russia wants to discourage Western Balkan countries from joining NATO and the EU. One of the well-known Russian intentions, not only in the Balkans but overall is to have reputation and position as one of key world actors.

The New York Times article, “In Bosnia, Entrenched Ethnic Divisions Are a Warning to the World,” written by Andrew Higgins, describes the Bosnian city of Mostar

⁴³ Dimitar Bechev, “Russia’s Foray into the Balkans: Who Is Really to Blame?” Foreign Policy Research Institute, 12 October 2017, accessed 07 October 2018, <https://www.fpri.org/article/2017/10/russias-foray-balkans-really-blame/>.

⁴⁴ Dusan Stojanovic, “EU and Russia battle for influence in Balkan region,” *The Independent*, 24 February 2018, accessed 07 October 2018, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/eu-brussels-russia-moscow-kremlin-balkans-ukraine-jean-claude-juncker-vladimir-putin-nato-latest-a8226786.html>.

where Bosnians and Croats live. The city has double services to serve each ethnic group; for instance, there are two fire brigades, two garbage collection companies, two hospitals, two electricity companies, two bus stations, nightclubs and so on.⁴⁵ This is just one example of life in the B&H, even though that war ended two decades ago, the fear, ethnic divisions, and frictions are still present among the ethnic groups, and the story is pretty much the same in the entire country at each level, including central governance.

Dimitar Bechev, in his article “*Understanding Russia’s Influence in the Western Balkans*” writes Macedonia has always enjoyed a constructive relationship with Russia. In fact, after Macedonia separated from Yugoslavia, the first UN Security Council member to recognize Macedonian independence in 1992 before the U.S. and most of the western big powers was Russia.⁴⁶ However, current Macedonian Government changed the course of orientation and is working hard in resolving the issues and achieving required standards for euro Atlantic membership. The governments in Skopje have considered Russia a diplomatic and economic partner rather than a threat to its security; therefore, Russia continually uses different means to interfere in the country. Greece opposed Macedonia’s efforts to join NATO because of the context of Macedonia’s name; Greece does not recognize its name. In this case, during the dialogue between Greece and

⁴⁵ Andrew Higgins, “In Bosnia, Entrenched Ethnic Divisions Are a Warning to the World,” *The New York Times*, 19 November 2018, accessed 23 December 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/19/world/europe/mostar-bosnia-ethnic-divisions-nationalism.html?smid=fb-nytimes&smtyp=cur>.

⁴⁶ Dimitar Bechev, “Understanding Russia’s influence in the Western Balkans,” The European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats, September 2018, accessed 27 December 2018, <https://www.hybridcoe.fi/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Strategic-Analysis-2018-9-Bechev-.pdf>.

Macedonia and before the agreement was achieved, prime minister Zoran Zaev accused the Russian-Greek businessman, Ivan Savvides, of financing opponents to the agreement between the two countries.⁴⁷ Lately the Macedonia and Greece achieved the “Prespa” agreement about name dispute and since February 12 2019 has used the new name of the Republic of North Macedonia.⁴⁸

Fake news and disinformation age that has expanded to Europe and beyond has become a serious problem influencing all levels of society especially during the elections or any crisis where population can be easily misinformed and led to the wrong direction. This does not exclude the Western Balkans either. To illustrate, the disinformation attempt was evident in Macedonia during its 30 September 2018 elections to change the name, according to the agreement with Greece. According to the article “*In the Balkans, Russia and the West Fight a Disinformation-Age Battle*,” many websites and social media called for a boycott, trying to frighten and spread disinformation to the voters by saying the future of Macedonia was in danger and so on.⁴⁹ The western and local officials blamed these social media activities on Russian-backed groups that wanted to lower the

⁴⁷ Bechev, “Understanding Russia’s influence in the Western Balkans.”

⁴⁸ Government of the Republic of North Macedonia, “Announcement of the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia for entry into force of the Final Agreement, Constitutional Amendments and Constitutional Law for Implementation of Amendments,” 12 February 2019, accessed 03 March 2019, <https://vlada.mk/node/16763?ln=en-gb>.

⁴⁹ Marc Santora and Julian E. Barnes, “In the Balkans, Russia and the West Fight a Disinformation-Age Battle,” *The New York Times*, 16 September 2018, accessed 17 September 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/16/world/europe/macedonia-referendum-russia-nato.html?rref=collection%2Ftimestopic%2FMacedonia&action=click&contentCollection=world®ion=stream&module=stream_unit&version=latest&contentPlacement=1&pgtype=collection.

number of voters who participated in the referendum so the country would then not be able to join NATO.⁵⁰ According to the Regional Media Monitoring Analysis conducted by Centre for Research, Transparency and Accountability, not only in Macedonia but in the entire Western Balkans, a significant percentage of news has no citations and features biased reporting. These items are distinctive characteristics of disinformation and “fake news.”⁵¹ The Macedonian government, with apparent western support, was eager to end the dispute with Greece. During the country’s preparation for the referendum, the visits of U.S. and EU officials such as the U.S. Secretary of Defense, the German chancellor, and the EU Foreign Policy Chief showed the international community’s support of Macedonia’s path toward an integration in western organizations.⁵²

According to Michael Birnbaum, both the West and Russia are engaged in a pitched battle for the allegiance of Serbia, an important Balkan country that expressed a desire to join the EU. Simultaneously, Serbia relies on and sees Russia as an essential ally⁵³ rather than Europe, who is investing in the country more than Russia. Even though

⁵⁰ Santora and Barnes, “In the Balkans, Russia and the West Fight a Disinformation-Age Battle.”

⁵¹ Tara Tepavac, “Disinformation and fake news as the new normal: A challenge for the Western Balkans,” *European Western Balkans*, 11 January 2019, accessed 03 March 2019, <https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2019/01/11/disinformation-fake-news-new-normal-challenge-western-balkans/>.

⁵² Santora and Barnes, “In the Balkans, Russia and the West Fight a Disinformation-Age Battle.”

⁵³ Michael Birnbaum, “Russia’s low-cost influence strategy finds success in Serbia,” *The Washington Post*, 03 October 2018, accessed 04 December 2018, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/russias-low-cost-influence-strategy-finds-success-in-serbia--with-the-help-of-fighter-jets-media-conspiracies-and-a-biker->

European investment and aid to Serbia are more significant than Russia's aid, Serbians appreciate the Russian alliance. In 2016, including aid, investments, and trade, Europe has invested \$11.8 billion, but Serbia sees the Russian donation of Soviet-era fighter jets MiG-29 as more valuable.⁵⁴ The Kremlin found a low-cost approach to influence and penetrate Serbia by donating jets; the Serbian president stated that he almost cried when he saw the planes. Foreign investments are not always measured by their quantity and economic growth impact but for political and propagandistic effect and to show the close ties between two nations.

In the Serbia-Russian connection, beside the historical ties, influence is linked to different spheres such are Orthodox and Slavic Cultural Heritage; in addition, Russian state-controlled companies dominate the oil and natural gas market, Serbia imports around 75 percent of its gas from Russia. The Serbian Orthodox church is one of the actors who play a significant role into politics and other state-level decision-making; furthermore, the robust presence and influence of the church, demonstrates meetings with Russian political leaders continually influence the Serbian priests.⁵⁵

Former British ambassador to Yugoslavia, Ivor Robert insists "The West must not just abandon the Balkans to Russia's embrace," explaining how officials and people in Serbia are divided into two groups. One group supports integration into NATO and the EU; the second group, bases their hopes on a nostalgic interpretation of the past,

gang/2018/10/03/49dbf48e-8f47-11e8-ae59-01880eac5f1d_story.html?utm_term=.957912ffef67.

⁵⁴ Birnbaum, "Russia's low-cost influence strategy finds success in Serbia."

⁵⁵ Ibid.

including a benign Russia, which obviously enjoys the blessing and support of Moscow.⁵⁶ The difference in the opinions of leaders and people exists not only in Serbia, but it is the same in all Balkan countries where Slavic ethnic groups live. One youth organization in the Serbian capital of Belgrade recommended the placement of a statue of Milosevic Serbia's late president that caused the collapse of Yugoslavia and a series of disastrous wars in the 1990s.⁵⁷ He died while he was in the Hague prison after he was found guilty in 2016 for war crimes conducted during wars in Bosnia and Kosovo. Moreover, Roberts states he met Milosevic many times during negotiations to end the war in Bosnia and prevent it in Kosovo, and that Milosevic had charm and charisma. The author is surprised how people want to immortalize the person who caused conflicts and the dissolution of Yugoslavia.

Moscow supports the group who is nostalgic for Russia and the past and, through them, attempts to prevent Orthodox Christian countries of the region from joining NATO and to remain as a wedge between Greece and other NATO allies to the north.⁵⁸ To prevent NATO and EU expansion in the region, in 2016 in Montenegro there was an assassination attempt of Milo Djukanovic, who was leading the country to join NATO. In 2017 in Macedonia, there was an attempt to prevent the current prime minister Zoran Zaev from taking the governance from pro-Russian nationalists. Finally, in Bosnia, well-

⁵⁶ Ivor Roberts, "The west must not just abandon the Balkans to Russia's embrace," *The Guardian*, 05 April 2018, accessed 16 January 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/apr/05/slobodan-milosevic-serbia-russia-balkans>.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

known nationalist Milorad Dodik, currently president of Serb Republic, appears to spend more time in Moscow than with his government.⁵⁹

Vuk Vuksanovic, a Ph.D. researcher in International Relations at the London School of Economics wrote an article titled “*Serbs are not ‘Little Russians.’*” The article states that “Contrary to conventional wisdom, Belgrade and Moscow are not natural allies. But Westerners who treat them as such are only driving them closer.”⁶⁰ The author says Serbian society believes the West will never accept them, not only the ordinary citizens but also the most pro-European and Americans have the same sense. This is due to shared ethnic and religious heritage, so they sense that they will always be seen as “little Russians.”⁶¹ Moreover, he blames Western thinkers and their positions and postures about Serbian and Russian relations. He points to both sides of the Atlantic for their overemphasizing a supposed “traditional” alliance between Serbia and Russia. He specifically mentions Mark Galeotti in his report “Do the Western Balkans Face a Coming Russian Storm?” published by European Council on Foreign Relations. He mentions the former NATO Supreme Allied Commander Wesley Clark and one of his articles in The Washington Post titled “Don’t wait for the western Balkans to blow up again. The U.S. and the E.U. must act.”⁶²

⁵⁹ Roberts, “The west must not just abandon the Balkans to Russia’s embrace.”

⁶⁰ Vuk Vuksanovic, “Serbs Are Not ‘Little Russians,’” *The American Interest*, 26 July 2018, accessed 21 January 2019, <https://www.the-american-interest.com/2018/07/26/serbs-are-not-little-russians/>.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

Florian Feyerabend, in his report “The influence of external actors in the Western Balkans” explains that various external influences are involved in the WB, the report warns the region is at risk of becoming a geostrategic chessboard of external actors. The EU’s approach toward WB was indifferent until Russia’s annexation of the Crimea in 2014 and the migration crisis of summer 2015 their attention caught and restored the West’s interest in the WB in terms of foreign policy.⁶³ According to the publication, the main external actors involved in or influencing WB are the United States, Russia, China, Turkey, and the Arab Gulf States (Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, and Qatar). These countries have different interests in the WB5 such as geopolitical; cultural; political; and the economic sphere, such as trading, banking, and construction.

Meanwhile the Russian influence in Bosnia extends to most spheres of society and government. Often this influence is overestimated in B&H and by the rest of the world. Moscow is represented in the energy and banking sector, they also have religious ties that have grown through the Orthodox Church. Influential activities that Russia is involved in within B&H include training the Republic of Srbska police and advising their government.⁶⁴

EU supports Kosovo in its progress for its European journey. There are currently two EU missions operating in Kosovo: the Rule of Law Mission (EULEX), and the office of the European Union, EU Special Representative in Kosovo (EUSR). The current

⁶³ Lars Hänsel and Florian C. Feyerabend, “The influence of external actors in the Western Balkans,” Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, 12 September 2018, accessed 03 February 2019, https://www.kas.de/c/document_library/get_file?uuid=194afc48-b3be-e3bc-d1da-02771a223f73&groupId=252038, 5.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 15.

NATO force within the framework of KFOR in Kosovo involves 30 countries and more than 4600 troops. The U.S. also supports Kosovo to strengthen area security by combating violent extremism, promoting minority rights, and by the integration into Euro-Atlantic structures.⁶⁵ Russia is an important player among the countries who do not recognize Kosovo independence, and opposed Kosovo's 2008 declaration of independence. Since Kosovo was liberated in 1999, Russia has had a diplomatic office in Belgrade that acts as a branch of the Russian embassy and as part of the UN mission. At the Balkan Energy Cooperation Summit in Zagreb 2007, Putin presented Russia's plan to supply gas via Macedonia, to Kosovo, Albania, and southern Serbia. Moreover, besides opposing Kosovo independence, President Putin has constantly compared Kosovo to Crimea. Kosovo is concerned about the Russian-Serbian humanitarian center situated in Nis in southern Serbia around 100 km from Kosovo capital city. For Kosovars, this center is seen as a threat as well as a counterbalance to KFOR.⁶⁶

Macedonia is a candidate for EU and NATO PfP, the problem was the naming dispute with Greece. However, an agreement has been made and NATO membership and negotiations for EU accession appear positive for 2019. The U.S. presence in Macedonia is in numerous areas; their support is in the economic, public, political, social, and security spheres. The U.S. has been Macedonia's most influential partner since its independence.⁶⁷ Russia's strategic interest in Macedonia is to prevent or slow down its

⁶⁵ Hänsel and Feyerabend, "The influence of external actors in the Western Balkans," 17.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 18.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 20.

accession to NATO, and if it happens, there will be no NATO military bases established in Macedonia. While Moscow's connection and support in Macedonia is mostly within the small "left" political party, Russia has a small influence in the business sector and investment in gas. In addition, the Russian Orthodox Church maintains good relations and is a significant factor in the Macedonian Church, even though the Macedonian Church has adopted the Bulgarian one as its Mother Church, which differs from the Russian faith.⁶⁸

The primary objective of U.S. foreign policy in Serbia and Montenegro is to maintain stability and support integration of the region into NATO and EU structures.⁶⁹ Russian influence in Serbia is based in three areas. First, as a permanent member of the UN Security Council, Russia prevented Kosovo from being recognized as an independent state. Second, they share political, historical, cultural, and religious ties with these countries' orthodox tradition and third, Russian is the region's leading energy supplier, is an investor, and trading partner. Russia is using its relations with Serbia to prevent the expansion of American influence in the WB, and they are making a political effort to play the role as Serbia's only reliable partner.⁷⁰

The "European Council on Foreign Relations" in its publication summarizes WB as a geopolitical competition between the great powers, and the EU has been absorbed by other crises and has been distracted and failed. As a result, Russia and Turkey are

⁶⁸ Hänsel and Feyerabend, "The influence of external actors in the Western Balkans," 26.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 32.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

increasing their influence in the Balkans Moscow, and is using the opportunity to challenge Western influence and is promoting an anti-EU atmosphere in the region.⁷¹ Some of the governments balance their positions between the West and other powers; despite its EU candidacy, Serbia maintains a strategic partnership with Russia. Table number 1 illustrates Russian influence in each separate WB country.

⁷¹ Francisco de Borja Lasheras, Vessela Tcherneva, and Fredrik Wesslau, “Return to Instability: How migration and great power politics threaten the Western Balkans,” (Policy Brief, European Council on Foreign Relations, March 2016), accessed 12 March 2019, https://www.ecfr.eu/page/-/ECFR_163_RETURN_TO_INSTABILITY.pdf, 1.

Table 1. Russian Influence by Country		
Country	Russia's influence	Level of influence
Serbia	<p>Criticism of NATO's bombing of Serbia in 1999 and Western support for Kosovo's independence in 2008 form a central part of Russia's narrative in the country. Local nationalist groups see Russia as a protector of Serbia's interests and as a model of conservative values, opposed to those of the West and Europe. Russia retains influence over Kosovo through its diplomatic presence, especially at the UN Security Council. It has used its veto right to support Serbia's objectives (e.g. by rejecting the Security Council's Srebrenica resolution of 2015).</p> <p>Soft power: Russian soft power is high in Serbia. Russia and Putin appeal to nationalists, ultranationalists, and fringe groups, including paramilitaries, which seek various levels of alliance or association of Serbia with Moscow.</p> <p>Propaganda: Russia actively uses Kremlin-sponsored media (Russia Today, Sputnik, etc.) and other outlets to spread propaganda in the country.</p> <p>Economy: Serbia depends on Russia for its natural gas and oil imports. Russia also provides substantial financial assistance and loans to Belgrade.</p> <p>Security: In recent years, Serbia has reinvested in its military and foreign policy partnership with Russia, although it also pursues relations with NATO.</p> <p>Sanctions: The country did not align with EU sanctions against Russia.</p>	High
Bosnia and Herzegovina	<p>Russia supports the Serb-majority region of Republic of Srbska, and its challenge to the Western presence in the country and the tenets of the Dayton Agreement. It has supported Republic of Srbska's plans for a referendum on Bosnia's judiciary, and its challenges to the Office of the High Representative and to EUFOR's executive mandate, though Moscow has refrained from endorsing plans for independence of the entity. Moscow has used its veto and blocking powers over Bosnia-related questions at the UN (e.g. the Srebrenica resolution) and at the Dayton framework.</p> <p>Soft power: Moscow's pro-Serbian and anti-Western populist narrative appeals to many Bosnian Serbs, especially regarding the protection of Republic of Srbska, and on the war.</p> <p>Economy: Russian companies control parts of the energy sector. Russia provides loans and other financial assistance to Republic of Srbska's leadership, but with strings attached.</p> <p>Security: Russia and Republic of Srbska have recently been reinforcing security cooperation.</p> <p>Sanctions: Bosnia did not align with EU sanctions against Russia.</p>	High
Macedonia	<p>During last year's protests against the Gruevski government, Moscow derided the protests as Western plots to overthrow a legitimate government enjoying good relations with Moscow. It played the ethnic card on the violent incidents in Kumanovo, and accused Albania and Bulgaria of attempting to partition the country.</p> <p>Propaganda: Moscow's narrative was assisted by propaganda, while pro-government fringe groups have at times brandished Russian flags.</p> <p>Economy: Currently, Russia only has a small economic network in Macedonia.</p> <p>Sanctions: Macedonia did not align with EU sanctions against Russia.</p>	Medium

Montenegro	<p>Having historically supported Montenegro, Russia is now in a confrontation with the pro-Western and pro-NATO government, and enjoys significant support among pro-Serbian and anti-NATO groups involved in protests.</p> <p>Propaganda: Moscow’s narrative resonates among some pro-Serbian and anti-NATO opposition parties and leaders, who have visited Moscow for support. Supporters of these groups sometimes brandish Russian flags in protests, as well as anti-NATO slogans.</p> <p>Security: Moscow has called for a referendum on the country’s path to NATO membership, which it considers to be a red line, and has warned Podgorica against this.</p> <p>Economy: Russia remains Montenegro’s top investor, especially in the private sector, though this might change given the souring relations between Moscow and Podgorica.</p> <p>Sanctions: Montenegro aligned with EU sanctions on Russia.</p>	Medium
Kosovo	<p>Kosovo forms a key part of Russia’s narrative of Western abuses and hypocrisy. Russia could be a spoiler at key decision-making points on Kosovo and Serbia, thanks to its position as a UNSC permanent member. It enjoys significant influence with some segments of the Serb minority in Kosovo.</p>	Low
Albania	<p>Albania, a NATO ally, is probably the most pro-Western and pro-EU country in the region. Russia’s influence there is limited, though it can play a disruptive role by tapping into fears of a “greater Albania” and weighing into controversies between the Serbian Slavs in the region and the Albanians.</p> <p>Sanctions: Albania aligned with EU sanctions against Russia.</p>	Low

Source: Francisco de Borja Lasheras, Vessela Tcherneva, and Fredrik Wesslau, “Return to Instability: How migration and great power politics threaten the Western Balkans,” (Policy Brief, European Council on Foreign Relations, March 2016), accessed 12 March 2019, https://www.ecfr.eu/page/-/ECFR_163_RETURN_TO_INSTABILITY.pdf, 5.

Current literature suggests Russia dominates the energy market, mostly natural gas, and in reality is not that heavily or continuously involved in the WB5. However, Russia is aware of activities and wants to maintain control over the region and to prevent countries from integrating to international mechanisms such as NATO and the EU. It is doing that by using its relations with Serbia, B&H leaders of RS (region of B&H that pretends to be an independent state), and other countries through individual or small political parties to achieve Moscow’s interest in the Western Balkans. The literature identifies Russian relations with the Western world as fragile and unstable. To prevent

Russian influence, Western Balkan countries should immediately increase their fight against corruption and work harder on their economy.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This thesis aims to address the current Russian influence that aims to prevent or at least to slow down the WB's integration into Euro-Atlantic organizations. Analyzing the research problem from different perspectives will facilitate reliable, informed conclusions in support of the thesis. Such a variety of perspectives will hopefully suggest recommendations that may be helpful tools to integrate the WB into the Euro-Atlantic organizations.

The sources for this thesis will be analyzed using applied qualitative research methodology. Qualitative research uses a model for strategy development and assessment, which will answer research questions and eventually address the problems. The methodology uses feasibility, acceptability, and suitability (FAS) as an approach for this research. The answers to research questions will be obtained by observing the situation from the regional and international point of view. Taking into consideration the opinions of regional and international actors is essential because both have a significant impact on the orientation and further development of the WB5.

Data Collection and Analysis

The data collection will—hopefully—validate, or at least underscore, the identified problem by analyzing the situation in the region. To answer the research questions, the source literature has been divided into three groups: One, scholarly works written about the region which evaluate the ongoing Russian influence in the Western Balkans; second, official national and international policies, documents, and

pronouncements reflecting political orientations of the WB5 countries; and third, a wide spectrum of high-quality, peer-reviewed articles, reports, and publications from various organizations, creating reasonable objectives for an assessment of the situation. For research, the methodology will use FAS. The FAS model maintains objectivity of research and continuously assesses and reassesses product validity.⁷²

The research questions will be answered by assessing and analyzing the current situation in the WB5 and the Russian influence from different standpoints such as from the local actors, international actors, different subject matter experts, and other scholars. The focus will be on analyzing current economic, political, and security environment, challenges and countries' strategic goals. It will analyze the EU and NATO approach toward their expansion to the WB and the Russian influence. The analysis also will examine potential threats with greater Russian influence in the Western Balkans.

The literature review in chapter two indicates that during the wars that resulted in the dissolution of Yugoslavia, Russia often exploited the situation to strengthen their relations with Slavic countries and ethnicities in the WB5. The influence is mostly in economic, political, and security spheres with a strategic goal to maintain its presence in the region and simultaneously to discourage them from joining EU and NATO. The fragile economy, corruption, and nationalism are other factors that prevent WB5 from western integration. Russia as a permanent member of the UN continually opposes the decisions related to benefit post conflict countries because a resolution goes against their strategic interest. Also, negligence or lack of ability of the western community, who were

⁷² Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), Joint Doctrine Note (JDN) 1-18, *Strategy* (Washington, DC: Government Publishing Office, 25 April 2018), IV-2.

involved in conflicts in the former Yugoslavia to ensure permanent solutions in the post-conflict zones and countries, permitted ongoing ethnic crisis and frictions. This was perhaps because of disagreements between EU or NATO members on specific decisions. All of these made the WB5 vulnerable to Russian influence, and strengthened Russia's influence and presence in the former Yugoslavian region and beyond.

The first group of sources used in this research includes books about cases in the Balkans region, in which the focus is on Russian influence and presence in the WB5. These sources are vital for research because the opinions and fact are those by authors who observed the situation from different angles. Some of these writers have witnessed different processes that happened in the Balkans region. Some writers have followed and studied the situation continuously and have broad knowledge of the Russian and western roles in the WB.

The second group of sources is official national and international policies, documents, and pronouncements in relation with the WB5 Euro – Atlantic integration and Russian influence or policy about the Balkans. The political orientations of the WB5 countries reflect the views of the countries' leaders; therefore, analyzing the official publications and statements, media interviews and other official documents are important for this thesis. Meanwhile, the international community policies, strategic documents, public statements, other publications and interviews of Western or Russian officials will be a vital source in support of this research. Understanding the approach of the international community, and the orientation of each WB5 country plays a fundamental role in this research.

The third group of sources is reports and publications from various organizations such as security study institutes or institutions, various analysts, and other newspapers and research written about influence in the Western Balkans. Using these sources will further develop the research and will approach the subject from diverse points of view. This group of sources are an important part of the literature because they bring a different perspective and most of the time, are independent in their perspective, which will help to maintain the objectivity of research.

The mix of these three groups of sources is essential to answer the research questions and prove the thesis. Using this variety of sources will enrich the research development and its objectivity, and to use FAS methodology, as a tool to answer the research questions and validate sources and findings, is important to maintain objectivity in this research.

The FAS model is typically used to assess strategy, development, and courses of actions; however, it also is used as a research methodology for this thesis development. Using the FAS approach evaluates the research and findings during thesis development process to continuously assess the validity.⁷³ Objective and fact-based analysis will provide options, which are likely to be successful in their employment.⁷⁴ Hence the approach will be applied against a triple gauntlet aimed at establishing the viability of proposals which will emerge in chapter four. That FAS triple gauntlet ensures a particular

⁷³ JCS, JDN 1-18, V-2.

⁷⁴ Andre Samuel, "Business Analysis Project, Assessing Strategies: Session 6 – Evaluating Strategies," Samuel's Learning Resource Center, accessed 07 May 2019, http://www.samuellearning.org/bus_ana_proj/Session6_Evaluating_Strategies.pdf.

proposal is feasible, acceptable, and suitable. The criterion will assess and validate if the recommended approach is possible, if there are available resources; if there is any risk and is it worth undertaking; will it help to minimize Russian influence; and, if will it help the WB5 to integrate in Euro Atlantic organizations. Figure 1 explains how the FAS methodology is incorporated in this research process.

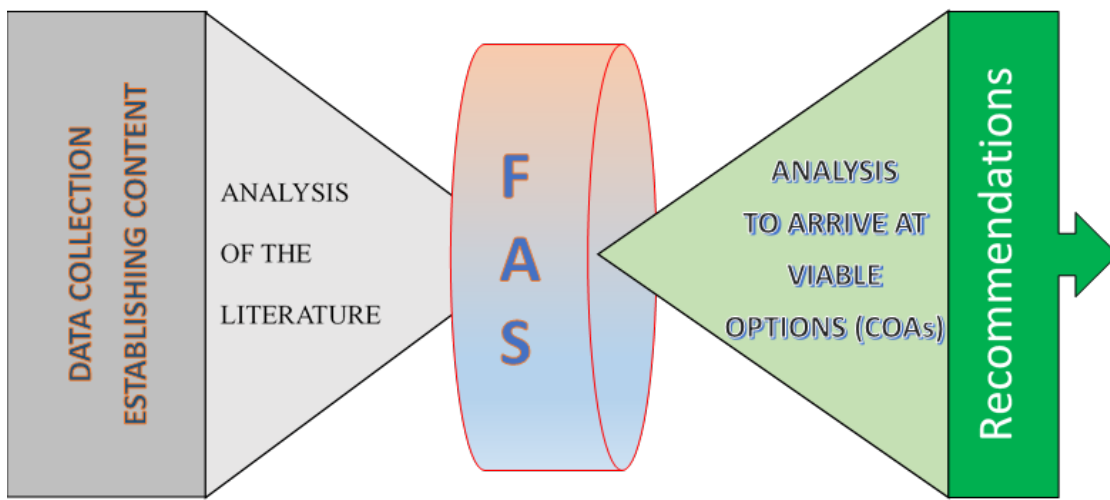


Figure 1. Research Methodology

Source: Created by author.

Feasibility studies if the nation can afford the proposed strategy or course of action and measures if the means available or attainable can reach the strategic conclusions⁷⁵ within the time contemplated by the plan.⁷⁶ It also assesses if necessary

⁷⁵ JCS, JDN 1-18, IV-3.

⁷⁶ Ibid., V-59.

sources and support of the population can be sustained long enough to achieve the conclusions. Feasibility evaluates if the economy of the country is able to endure the cost of the required effort without jeopardizing other higher priority strategic goals.⁷⁷

Acceptability will assess if recommendations comply with the countries strategies and policies, and if that is acceptable to their leadership if they are practical and rational. It assesses if the expected benefits of achieving the strategic end balance expected costs. The other aspect that acceptability treats is if the plan of action is consistent with the state's values, the national mood, domestic concerns, partners' interests and the personal goals of political and national leaders.⁷⁸ In this manner, the research will hopefully derive acceptable alternatives for most actors involved in the region. Moreover, the analysis also will consider NATO and EU strategies and goals for their expansion in the WB5.

Suitability is important because it confirms whether the derived option will attain the desired ends. By filtering products through suitability, instead of solely end state achievement, it ensures that the given options will protect/advance the national interests at stake, attain the desired ends, and not work against other national-level strategies, policies, and goals,⁷⁹ and if there are resources, capacity, and abilities to actually implement the proposed measures.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ JCS, JDN 1-18, IV-3.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid, V-2.

⁸⁰ Oxford College of Procurement and Supply, "Evaluating Strategic Options Using SAF Strategy Model," *Oxford College of Marketing* (blog), 25 February 2018, accessed 30 January 2019, <https://blog.oxfordcollegeofmarketing.com/2018/02/25/evaluating-strategic-options-using-saf-strategy-model/>.

The literature review findings will be further developed during the analysis in chapter four. Consequently, the analysis will validate findings and summarize the thesis. Depending on results of the study, recommendations will be presented that eventually might be capable of minimizing Russian influence in the WB. The recommendations will suggest a feasible, acceptable, and suitable approach to achieve the desired end state for the Western Balkan region integration into the Euro-Atlantic organizations.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS

Introduction

This chapter aims to analyze findings of possible Russian influence in the WB5 countries, which may lead to delaying or prevention of Euro-Atlantic integration. It will also analyze the approach of EU and NATO and individual countries concerning integrations. The chapter will examine Russian economic, political and security influence, and situation of corresponding areas in the WB5. Analyzing interests, threats, and possible gaps for integration of the WB5 will allow better understanding and recommendations that might eventually help to minimize the Russian influence and threat as well as Euro-Atlantic integration of the region. In recent years, Moscow has constantly outmaneuvered the West, playing their weaker hand with remarkable skill. Russia has improved their skills in information and hybrid warfare, using methods such as pressure diplomacy, fake news, and foreign electoral intervention. Along the way, it has taken parts of Georgia and Ukraine by force and bumped both U.S. and Britain down several pegs geopolitically.⁸¹ Figure 2 visualizes the level of Russian influence in the Western Balkans by country.

All Balkan countries expect, or at least aspire, to join the EU. Montenegro started accession negotiations on 29 June 2012 and is a candidate country to join EU, Macedonia

⁸¹ Jeffrey A. Stacey, "A Russian Attack on Montenegro Could Mean the End of NATO," *Foreign Policy*, 27 July 2018, accessed 24 March 2019, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/07/27/a-russian-attack-on-montenegro-could-mean-the-end-of-nato-putin-trump-helsinki/>.

is also a candidate country but is currently waiting for a commission recommendation to open accession negotiations.⁸² While B&H and Kosovo status is a potential candidate, B&H applied on February 2016, while for Kosovo, in April 2016 the Stabilization and Association Agreement entered into force.⁸³

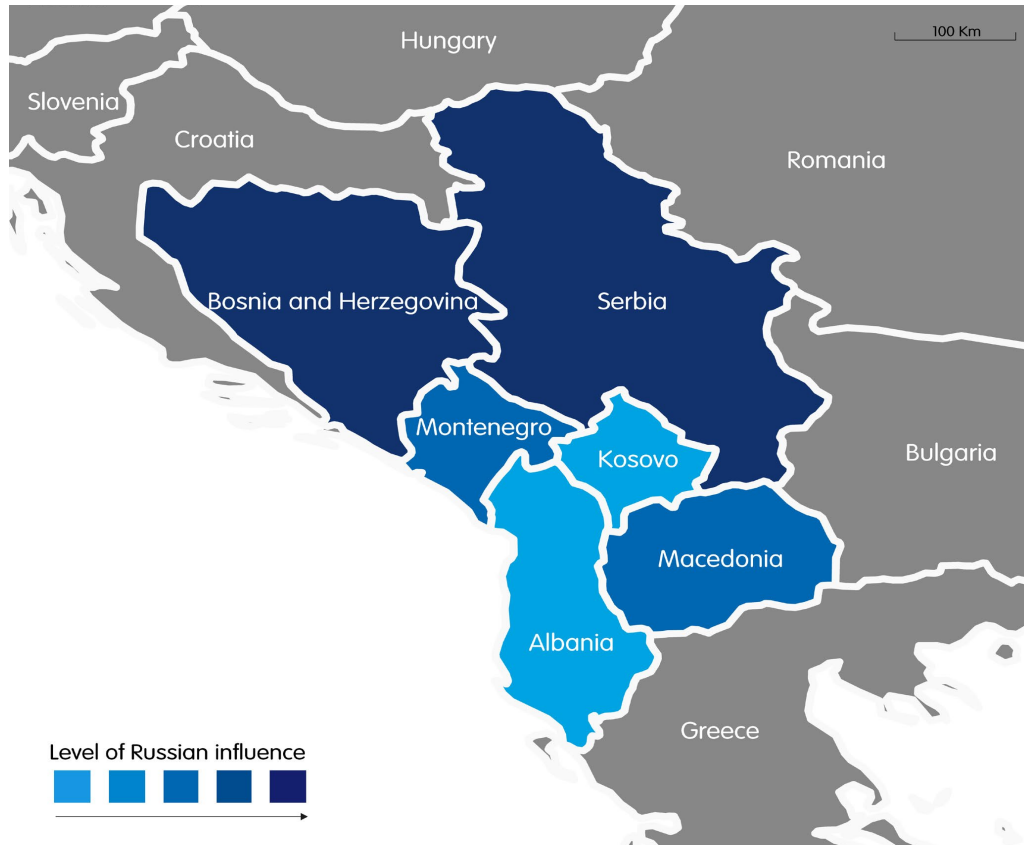


Figure 2. Russia Influence in the Western Balkans by Countries

Source: Francisco de Borja Lasheras, Vessela Tcherneva, and Fredrik Wesslau, “Return to Instability: How migration and great power politics threaten the Western Balkans,” (Policy Brief, European Council on Foreign Relations, March 2016), accessed 12 March 2019, https://www.ecfr.eu/page/-/ECFR_163_RETURN_TO_INSTABILITY.pdf, 4.

⁸² European Commission, “Western Balkans Enlargement: Common Destination,” (State of the Union, 2017), accessed 16 February 2019, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/western-balkans-enlargement_en.pdf, 1.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

Serbia has been negotiating its EU accession since January 2014 after the European Council agreed to launch accession negotiations with Serbia.⁸⁴ All WB5 countries want to join EU but Russian interference can endanger them. However, being an EU member and a very close ally with Russia, Serbia could be considered a “Trojan Horse.” They could constitute a serious threat to EU because no one can predict what is behind this latent position. Serbia cannot be an ally with the EU and Russia at the same time.

According to the Treaty on the European Union states, any European country may apply for membership if it respects the democratic values of the EU and is committed to promoting them consequently, the EU also needs to be able to integrate new members.⁸⁵ Recently, the European Commission prepared a new document aiming the integration of the WB. The EU document has set criteria that each candidate member should fulfill prior joining. According to European Commission, countries wishing to join the European Union must have:

1. Stable institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities;
2. A functioning market economy and the capacity to cope with competition and market forces in the EU;

⁸⁴ Council of the European Union, “Serbia: Status of Negotiations,” accessed 29 January 2019, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/enlargement/serbia/>.

⁸⁵ European Commission, “Western Balkans Enlargement: Common Destination,” 2.

3. The ability to take on and implement the obligations of membership, including adherence to the aims of the political, economic and monetary union effectively.⁸⁶

Based on Article 10 of its Founding Treaty, NATO enlargement has “open door policy”⁸⁷, which allows aspirant countries to join. However, to join NATO the aspirant countries would have to be able to demonstrate that they have fulfilled certain requirements that include:

1. A functioning democratic political system based on a market economy;
2. The fair treatment of minority populations;
3. A commitment to the peaceful resolution of conflicts;
4. The ability and willingness to make a military contribution to NATO operations;
5. A commitment to democratic civil-military relations and institutional structures.⁸⁸

The path of WB5 countries toward joining NATO is in different stages to fulfill membership criteria and requirements. B&H joined NATO PfP in 2006 and aspires to join NATO, the focus on its continued reforms is in various spheres such are political, economic, defense, and legal reforms.⁸⁹ Kosovo is in its stage of developing its security

⁸⁶ European Commission. “Western Balkans Enlargement: Common Destination,”
2.

⁸⁷ NATO, “Enlargement,” last updated 15 February 2019, accessed 16 February 2019, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_49212.htm.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ NATO, “Relations with Bosnia and Herzegovina.”

forces, as it aspires to join NATO, while the NATO presence in the country is with KFOR, which is training KSF according to NATO standards. On December 2018, Kosovo adopted the laws of transition of KSF mission to military forces that authorize the KSF with competencies to defend the sovereignty and territorial integrity, citizens, property, and interests of the Republic of Kosovo.⁹⁰ On the other hand, NATO is supporting KSF with its previous mandate. The statement of the NATO secretary after approval of the legislature for KSF transition from Kosovo assembly was, they have to re-examine the level of NATO's engagement with the Kosovo Security Force.⁹¹ A reason for this re-examination is not all NATO members recognize Kosovo independence. Macedonia is PfP member since 1995, and after achieving agreement with Greece about the name, NATO invited them for accession talks for membership.⁹² Montenegro is already a member since June 2017.⁹³ Serbia joined the NATO PfP program and the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council in 2006, but regarding joining NATO, Serbian government

⁹⁰ Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo, Law No. 06/L-123, *On Kosovo Security Force*, 14 December 2018, http://ligjet.kuvendikosoves.org/Uploads/Data/Documents/Lawno06L-123_JnCNXRTmfk.pdf, 3.

⁹¹ NATO, "Statement by the NATO Secretary General on the adoption of the laws on the transition of the Kosovo Security Force," 14 December 2018, accessed 18 February 2019, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_161631.htm?selectedLocale=en.

⁹² NATO, "Relations with the Republic of North Macedonia," last updated 15 February 2019, accessed 18 February 2019, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_48830.htm.

⁹³ NATO, "Member countries," 26 March 2018, accessed 18 February 2019, https://www.nato.int/cps/em/natohq/topics_52044.htm.

remain to retain a military neutrality policy.⁹⁴ On the other hand, Serbia is the country from where Russia is exercising its influence on the west Balkan countries. Russia's greatest support in the region comes from Serbia and Republic of Srpska in BH including individuals from Kosovo, Macedonia, and Montenegro.⁹⁵ Because of this, the WB course and, in particular, Serbian orientation toward international integration should be monitored and managed with great care. Russia is influencing the economy, politics and security affairs in the WB5 in order to prevent expansion of the NATO and EU.

In the economic sphere, gas and oil markets dominate the market with cultural and humanitarian activities, and other economic activities. In politics, Russia is using different tools to interfere in the region, such influencing governments and political parties, and media. Whereas in the security sphere which also is the most delicate one Moscow's focus is in the military and intelligence field. Therefore, this causes a threat for those countries which are west-integration oriented.

Russia's Economic Influence

Exploiting the weak economy and high level of corruption in the Western Balkan countries, Russia increases its economic presence and influence in the region. Russia is seeking to ensure the exportation of its products of gas, oil, and services; increase cultural and humanitarian organizations missions; and other economic influencers such as real

⁹⁴ NATO, "Relations with Serbia," 11 December 2017, accessed 13 December 18, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_50100.htm.

⁹⁵ Mark Galeotti, "Do the Western Balkans face a coming Russian storm?" (Policy Brief, European Council on Foreign Relations, 04 April 2018), accessed 13 December 2018, http://www.ecfr.eu/publications/summary/do_the_western_balkans_face_a_coming_russian_storm.

estate, pharmaceuticals, and tourism. Russian investment and businesses are increasingly present in almost every country of this region.

Gas and Oil

Russia is one of the biggest producers and exporters of natural gas in the world; therefore, it is one of the countries that has a significant impact on the gas market. Moreover, Russia is one of the big powers that does not need to import oil and gas, while the EU can only cover around 25 percent of its oil and about half of its gas consumption and must import a considerable amount of its energy needs.⁹⁶ It is not only the WB that depends on Russian natural gas and oil, but it is Europe and the EU.⁹⁷ Most of the WB5 countries depend on Russian energy sources for both gas and oil, except Montenegro who imports its oil from Greece.⁹⁸ Since 2006, a gasoline station in Montenegro operating as Lukoil Montenegro, a daughter company of Russia's Lukoil, has invested nearly 56 million euro in 11 gasoline stations, which makes it the second largest fuel distributor in the country. Late in 2018 the Lukoil company extended its presence in the Montenegrin

⁹⁶ Muhidin Mulalic and Mirsad Karic, "The Western Balkans Geopolitics and Russian Energy Politics," *Epiphany: Journal of Transdisciplinary Studies* 7 (December 2014): 102, accessed 10 February 2019, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/283497357_The_Western_Balkans_Geopolitics_and_Russian_Energy_Politics.

⁹⁷ Filip Marković, "Energy strategy of Russia in Western Balkans," (Working Paper 7, Energy and Environmental Policy Laboratory, University of Piraeus, December 2017), accessed 07 February 2019, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/321883777_Energy_strategy_of_Russia_in_Western_Balkans, 9.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 10.

fuel market along the country's coast.⁹⁹ Novate, one other Russian private companies has been involved in subsea oil and gas exploration in partnership with an Italian company.¹⁰⁰ Macedonia is one of the WB5 countries who entirely depends on Gazprom. Hence, Macedonia is one of the countries who pays the highest gas prices in Europe, so Gazprom placed financial strain and inflexible take-or-pay contract terms on major gas buyers in Macedonia.¹⁰¹ This is happening because in Macedonia there is no other options for gasoline, this way Gazprom is benefiting in the absence of any other alternative for consumers. In Serbia, Russian gas and oil companies possess most of the local oil and gas reserves, and they have control over 50percent fuel market; furthermore, they indirectly influence state-owned gas suppliers and their industrial clients.¹⁰² The main Russian state-owned companies that operate in oil and gas production and export are Gazprom, which also is the biggest player in Moscow's foreign policy, along with Rosneft, Lukoil, and Surgutneftegas.¹⁰³ The WB dependency on Russian gas and oil, has

⁹⁹ Center for the Study of Democracy (CSD), "Assessing Russia's Economic Footprint in Montenegro," (CSD Policy Brief No. 73, January 2018), accessed 24 February 2019, <http://old.csd.bg/artShow.php?id=18126>, 11.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Center for the Study of Democracy (CSD), "Assessing Russia's Economic Footprint in Macedonia," (CSD Policy Brief No. 71, January 2018), accessed 24 February 2019, <http://old.csd.bg/artShow.php?id=18116>, 5.

¹⁰² Center for the Study of Democracy, "Assessing Russia's Economic Footprint in the Western Balkans," 2018, accessed 13 December 2018, <http://www.csd.bg/artShow.php?id=18131>, 18.

¹⁰³ Marković, "Energy strategy of Russia in Western Balkans," 9.

¹⁰³ Marković, "Energy strategy of Russia in Western Balkans," 7.

negative impacts on the economy of the region. Having only one alternative and being just an operator without other competition might cause negative implications not only in economics but also in different decision making spheres that affect all levels of society.

The control of gas transportation in the Balkans is becoming a geopolitical battle between the West and Russia. Timothy Less, head of the Nova Europa political risk consultancy in West, Russia battle for control over Balkan's natural gas corridors says Russia tries to change Serbia, Bosnia, Bulgaria and Macedonia dependency on gas supplies into political dependence and hamper their integration with the west.¹⁰⁴ Furthermore, according to the article, the gas market in the Balkans and rivalry of the West and Russia serves to increase the geostrategic significance of the region.¹⁰⁵ The rivalry between the West and Russia in the gas market is best observed by project South Stream gas pipeline.

The South Stream gas pipeline was one of the most significant Russian projects to transport gas to Europe, for which the final investment decision was taken in October 2012. This pipeline plan was designed to cross the Black Sea and through the Western Balkans reach Europe, more specifically Italy.¹⁰⁶ In 2014 the project was canceled due to Russia's involvement in Ukraine and the EU and U.S. undertook sanctions on Russian

¹⁰⁴ The Economic Times, "West, Russia battle for control over Balkans natural gas corridors," Energy World, 16 July 2017, accessed 07 February 2019, <https://energy.economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/oil-and-gas/west-russia-battle-for-control-over-balkans-natural-gas-corridors/59615466>.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Hydrocarbons Technology, "South Stream Pipeline Project, Europe," accessed 25 February 2019, <https://www.hydrocarbons-technology.com/projects/southstream/>.

companies and individuals, for that reason relations between Kremlin and EU have been strained. Russia accused the European Commission of blocking the South Stream project for political purposes, whereas, the European Commission stated this project might be breaking EU competition rules.¹⁰⁷ One other reason for the South Stream project cancelation is Bulgaria did not allow the pipeline to cross through its territory. It is being replaced by Turkish Stream, which is re-routing the energy supply through Eastern Europe, and using almost the same route as South Stream except it excludes Bulgaria and compensates for that by detouring through Greece and Macedonia as shown in Figure 3.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ BBC News, “Russia drops South Stream gas pipeline plan,” 01 December 2014, accessed 26 February 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-30283571>.

¹⁰⁸ Ari Rusila, “Comeback of South Stream?” *Ari Rusila’s Conflicts* (blog) *BlogActiv*, 30 August 2015, accessed 26 February 2019, <https://arirusila.blogactiv.eu/2015/08/30/comeback-of-south-stream/>.



Figure 3. Gas Pipeline Plan for South Stream and Turkish Stream

Source: Ari Rusila, “Comeback of South Stream?” *Ari Rusila’s Conflicts* (blog) *BlogActiv*, 30 August 2015, accessed 26 February 2019, <https://arirusila.blogactiv.eu/2015/08/30/comeback-of-south-stream/>.

Even though the Balkan’s current gas infrastructure depends on Russia, EU is working on a system of pipelines which will be an alternate supplier for the Balkans.¹⁰⁹ This alternative may not prevent dependency, but has the potential to minimize it. The Southern Gas Corridor project is an alternative for the Western Balkans. The European Southern Corridor, provided by the Trans-Anatolian Pipeline (TANAP) runs from

¹⁰⁹ European Parliament, Directorate General for External Policies, Policy Department, *Countering hybrid threats: EU and the Western Balkans case* (Study for SEDE Subcommittee, September 2018), accessed 11 February 2019, [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2018/603851/EXPO_STU\(2018\)603851_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2018/603851/EXPO_STU(2018)603851_EN.pdf), 11.

Azerbaijan to Turkey and then the Trans-Adriatic Pipeline (TAP) extends from Turkey to Italy through Greece and Albania, to provide gas for the entire Balkans.¹¹⁰ By offering attractive alternatives, it at least balances the price and economic influence, and also weakens Russian gas company dominance.

One of the obvious examples of Russian gas company dominance is the Russian company Gazprom Neft that controls Serbia's biggest business, NIS Oil and Gas Corporation.¹¹¹ According to a survey held in Serbia in 2015, Dimitar Bechev, in his article "*Russia's Foray into the Balkans: Who Is Really to Blame*" remarks that 47 percent of respondents believed Russia provides more financial aid than the EU. The EU contributed €3.5 billion in grants between 2000 and 2013 alone, Russia has only committed to extending a loan of \$338 M to the Serbian railways; and even distant Japan has given more.¹¹²

Russia is extending its market of gas and oil in the Balkan region and its intention is to get a bigger piece of the market as the Russian corporation Gazprom did with "Nafta Industrije Srbije." Even Serbia still benefits from a free-trade agreement with the Russian Federation; the percentage of exports was 5.4 percent in 2015.¹¹³

According to Gazprom's *Gas Market News* a meeting took place between Gazprom and Serbian officials in early October 2018 in Moscow as part of the

¹¹⁰ European Parliament, "Countering hybrid threats: EU and the Western Balkans case," 11.

¹¹¹ Galeotti, "Do the Western Balkans face a coming Russian storm?"

¹¹² Bechev, "Russia's Foray into the Balkans: Who Is Really to Blame?"

¹¹³ Ibid.

International Forum “Russian Energy Week.” They agreed on the efficiency of cooperation in gas market and they pointed the amount of gas supply is increasing by 41 per cent from 2014 to 2017. In the first nine months of 2018, Gazprom exported 1.5 billion cubic meters of gas to Serbia, a 2.9 per cent rise from the same period of 2017.¹¹⁴ The Russian company Gazprom has invested billions of dollars in the Western Balkans and Russian gas and oil footprint is increasingly visible in other countries, such as BH.¹¹⁵

Even though Russia has only 6.6 percent of foreign investment in the WB,¹¹⁶ the WB remains important for Moscow for two reasons. First, the rivalry between Russia and other international and regional actors (e.g., the USA and the EU;) second, as a vital region for control over the energy supply paths to Europe, and the intention to strengthen Russian key position energy sector of Europe.¹¹⁷ However, it is obvious that Russia is one of the key external players in the WB, especially in the Slavic ethnic countries.

¹¹⁴ Gazprom Export. “Gazprom and Serbia Developing Effective Cooperation in Gas Industry,” 03 October 2018, accessed 24 February 2019, http://www.gazpromexport.com/en/presscenter/news/2233/?_ga=2.23630333.679616303.1551028062-1654562328.1551028062.

¹¹⁵ Center for the Study of Democracy, “Assessing Russia’s Economic Footprint in the Western Balkans.”

¹¹⁶ Hänsel and Feyerabend, “The influence of external actors in the Western Balkans,” 5.

¹¹⁷ Marta Szpala, “Russia in Serbia – soft power and hard interests,” (OSW Commentary Number 150, Centre for Eastern Studies, 27 October 2014), accessed January 2019, https://www.osw.waw.pl/sites/default/files/commentary_150.pdf, 1.

Other Economic Investments

In the Western Balkans, Russia is interested in extending its permanent presence from where they can operate more comfortable. They will exploit every possible opportunity they can take advantage of in long terms that will have an economic, geostrategic, and geopolitical impact. Russia Investments in some countries of the region such as real estate, pharmaceuticals, and tourism are some Russian targets in the Western Balkans.

The real estate interest of the Russian companies in the WB5 is focused in the most vital places such as cost lines, land pieces, and other attractive places of geopolitical and strategic impact. According to the Center for the Study of Democracy Report, since the independence of Montenegro, Russian nationals have paid nearby to €25 million in real estate sales taxes and the number of properties is circulated around 70,000 of them.¹¹⁸ According to local estate agents, nearly 60 percent of buyers are Russians; furthermore, an old man in Montenegro claims “Russians already own more than half of Montenegro. We will become a colony!” furthermore, the local authorities are concerned that foreigners are buying houses in the coastal towns.¹¹⁹ According to Marta Spazla’s paper, unlike other Western Balkan countries where Kremlin impacts countries via the energy sector and by strengthening dependence on supplies of Russian energy resources, Moscow’s economic influence in Montenegro has another specific character. Montenegro

¹¹⁸ Center for the Study of Democracy, “Assessing Russia’s Economic Footprint in the Western Balkans,” 51.

¹¹⁹ Albena Shkodrova, “The Balkans: Europe’s Property Bargain,” *Balkan Insight*, 29 November 2007, accessed 12 March 2019, <https://balkaninsight.com/2007/11/29/the-balkans-europe-s-property-bargain/>.

does not rely on Russian energy resources, but again Russia is the biggest foreign investor in the country, the accumulated Russian investments in 2016 exceeded the value of USD1.3bn, which means that over 28percent of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in Montenegro is a Russian capital. Moscow's influence domination effort is due to Montenegro's attractive location on the Adriatic Sea, and the Russian influence mainly focuses on two interrelated sectors – tourism and the real estate market – and to a smaller extent on the construction sector.¹²⁰ All these investments will enable Russia to have increased influence in this countries and Russia will leverage it to hinder Euro-Atlantic integrations.

Russia also is investing heavily in Macedonia in order to increase its economic influence. Referring to an assessment of “Prague Security Studies Institute,” in Macedonia 78 companies have at least 25 percent of their shares owned by Russians. The revenues of Russian companies increased from 63 million euro in 2006 to over 212 million euro in 2015. Russian investment in Macedonia is estimated to be around 4 percent of total FDI. The import of Russian goods accounts for 1 percent of Macedonia's total imports, while the export of goods to Russia accounts for 1.2 percent of Macedonia's total exports.¹²¹ In Macedonia the Russian largest pharmaceutical company

¹²⁰ Marta Szpala, “Montenegro seeks alternatives to cooperation with Russia,” *Financial Observer*, 08 November 2017, accessed 12 March 2019, <https://financialobserver.eu/cse-and-cis/montenegro/montenegro-seeks-alternatives-to-cooperation-with-russia/>, 2.

¹²¹ Prague Security Studies Institute, “Briefing Paper III: Western Balkans at the Crossroads: Assessing Non-Democratic External Influence Activities,” *Western Balkans at the Crossroads*, accessed 12 March 2019, <https://www.balkancrossroads.com/bp-iii-economics>, 7.

“Protek Group” has diverse business interests and is active in all major sectors of the pharmaceutical industry such as manufacturing and selling pharmaceutical and beauty products. Protek Group has registered the “Prodis Company” in Macedonia, and constructed a manufacturing facility in Skopje with a large plant to produce various medicines. Protek Group currently plans to extend their activities and attach another big facility and leased area of 2.5 hectares and an investment of over €4 million.¹²² The previous Macedonian government was more pro-Russian, especially former Prime Minister Gruevski, who floated the idea for a free trade agreement between Russia and Macedonia, but this did not materialize. Russian FDI in Macedonia has increased since 2014 due to the establishment of closer ties with the government of former Prime Minister Gruevski. Macedonia tried to export dairy and meat products, but due to Russian high tariffs and strict food regulations, this trade did not take place.¹²³ This proves that Russia is interested in a one way economic interest, and will use every possible gap in the country to exercise their influence.

In B&H, Russian economic influence primarily is concentrated in RS where they are one of the largest foreign investors. The incomes of Russian enterprises RS make up 42 percent of the total revenue of all foreign businesses, while the combined EU based businesses are only 27percent. Russia’s five companies, which are all in energy, banking,

¹²² Agency for Foreign Investors and Export Promotion of the Republic of North Macedonia, “Protek Group,” Invest North Macedonia, accessed 13 March 2019, <http://www.investinmacedonia.com/completed-project/205-protek-group>.

¹²³ Center for the Study of Democracy, “Assessing Russia’s Economic Footprint in Macedonia,” 4.

and pharmaceutical sectors, represent a significant part of the regional economy.¹²⁴ Likewise, the Kremlin directs Russian business to develop business influence in this region, which has a significant impact in various spheres, not only in the RS, but in the entire Bosnian Federation. The annual report for external trade published by RS lists Serbia and the Russian Federation as two of the three highest shares in the volume of external trade.¹²⁵ At same time these countries export very little in Russia, as Figure 4 illustrates.

Beside in RS, Moocow invested covertly in main Bosnian companies like Bosnalijek. Bosnalijek dominates the pharmaceutical sector in Bosnia; this company's drug production was acquired by the Russian company "Haden" through Nedim Uzunović, the ambitious head of the Moscow branch of Bosnia's top generic drugs maker. For some time, the real owners were kept secret, the factory continued shipping drugs to Russia, to other companies whose real owners also were in secret charge of Bosnalijek. The company owned 655,729 shares which were bought by private individuals hidden behind secret bank accounts and funds from the Cayman Islands.¹²⁶ According to an analysis of trading with IFC's stocks, one these proxies sold their stakes

¹²⁴ Center for the Study of Democracy. "Assessing Russia's Economic Footprint in Bosnia and Herzegovina," 2.

¹²⁵ Republican Bureau of Statistics, *External Trade: Statistical Yearbook of Republika Srpska 2018*, accessed 14 March 2019, http://www.rzs.rs.ba/static/uploads/bilteni/godisnjak/2018/20str_2018.pdf, 392.

¹²⁶ Rise Moldova, "Suspicious transactions on the Moldovan-Bosnian drug market," Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project, 21 April 2016, accessed 15 March 2019, <https://www.occrp.org/en/28-ccwatch/cc-watch-indepth/5144-suspicious-transactions-on-the-moldovan-bosnian-drug-market>, 2, 5.

to Haden with minimal or no profit. This case was considered as an illegal and criminal trade and money laundering because of the controversial and suspicious way of transactions, hidden owners, and cash payments.¹²⁷ Furthermore, Bosnalijek and Dita Estfarm, one of the biggest pharmaceutical players of Moldova has been involved in a series of suspicious transactions; as a result, they were examined by prosecutors from B&H. For these suspicious activities, seven people were arrested last year by prosecutors on allegations of money laundering, tax evasion, and forgery, according to the prosecutor the illegal activities caused in profits of more than \$13 million USD.¹²⁸ The Financial Police in Sarajevo inspected contracts and payments made by Bosnalijek in period of time 2006 – 2012 which showed director of Dita Estfarm, Iurie Chirtoaca, and his wife, Svetlana, appearing alongside companies from Russia, the United Arab Emirates (Dubai) and Libya.¹²⁹ As explained above, Russia uses unfair economic practices or any other means to take over the Bosnian economy, and this could collapse the Bosnian economy.

¹²⁷ Rise Moldova, “Suspicious transactions on the Moldovan-Bosnian drug market,” 5.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

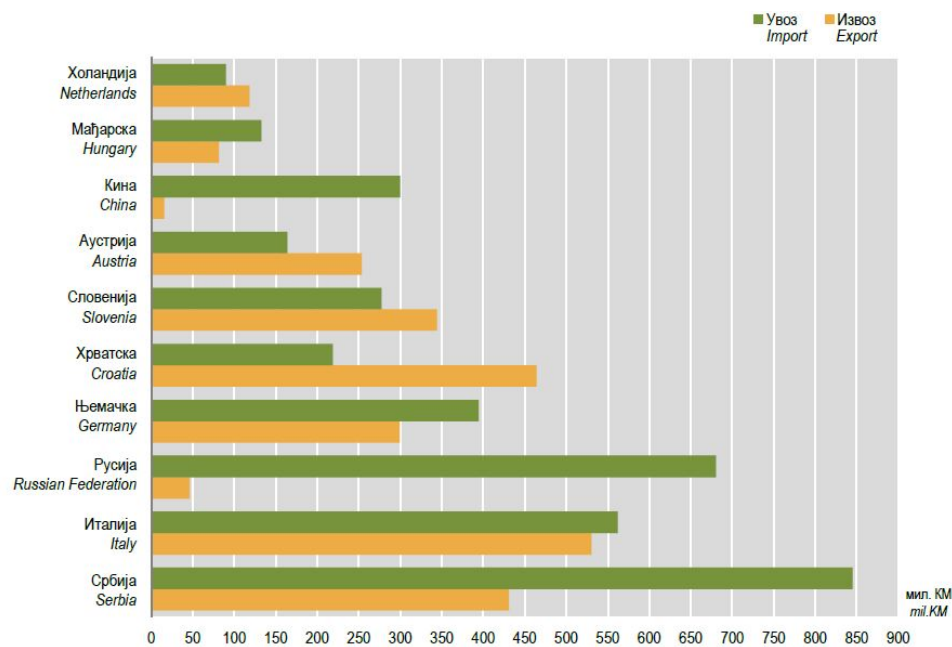


Figure 4. Countries with the Highest Share in the Volume of Trade with Republic of Srbska (KM-Convertible Mark, B&H Currency)

Source: Republican Bureau of Statistics, *External Trade: Statistical Yearbook of Republika Srpska 2018*, accessed 14 March 2019, http://www.rzs.rs.ba/static/uploads/bilteni/godisnjak/2018/20str_2018.pdf.

Cultural and Humanitarian Organizations

The Russian government manipulates its cultural and humanitarian organizations to conduct insidious activities.¹³⁰ The Russian-financed Non-Government Organizations' (NGO) goals are to improve the environment, inspire the obedience of human rights, improve welfare of poor people, or to represent a group agenda. Conversely, not all the NGOs represent these humanitarian improvement programs, and their objectives might

¹³⁰ Galeotti, "Do the Western Balkans face a coming Russian storm?"

cover wide-ranging of political and philosophical positions and plans.¹³¹ To illustrate the misuse of NGOs or humanitarian organizations, when Kosovo declared its independence, the Russian government took the initiative to send humanitarian aid to the Kosovar Serbian minority, declaring the Serbians were living in marginalized conditions, without support and attention from Belgrade.¹³² This clearly showed Russian tendencies for destabilization, not for humanitarian aid because there was no marginalization or humanitarian necessity. Non-Governmental Organizations typically means they do not depend on governments; however, some NGOs depend heavily on governments for their fundings.¹³³ Russia is using NGOs to foster ethnic tensions and to support its influence in all domains.

Russian humanitarian organizations are operating throughout Balkan, and their activities do not always support its supposed humanitarian mission. The Russian Humanitarian Mission (RHM) that cooperates closely with Russian and Serbian governments on the Serbian network B92 have an assigned memorandum with RHM to support Serbian people in Kosovo.¹³⁴ The Serbian official, Marko Djuric director of the so-called Office for Kosovo and Metohija who signed the memorandum said; “This was a

¹³¹ Nonprofit Expert, “NGOs – Non-Governmental Organizations,” 16 June 2017, accessed 22 February 2019, <https://www.nonprofitexpert.com/ngos-non-govermental-organizations/>, 3.

¹³² Szpala, “Russia in Serbia – soft power and hard interests,” 6.

¹³³ Nonprofit Expert, “NGOs – Non Governmental Organizations,” 5.

¹³⁴ B92, “Russian NGO teams up with Kosovo Office to assist Serbs,” 25 September 2017, accessed 24 September 2018, https://www.b92.net/eng/news/politics.php?yyyy=2017&mm=09&dd=25&nav_id=102397.

reputable and serious international humanitarian organization that brings together significant donors from all over Russia. It gathers eminent people, intellectuals, people of influence, and it is good that they are interested and engaged in helping our people in Kosovo and Metohija.”¹³⁵ On the other hand, deputy Prime minister of Kosovo Enver Hoxhaj said that Russian humanitarian assistance in Balkans is nothing but a geopolitical instrument to undo the West’s good-intended investment in stability.¹³⁶ It is suspect that this so-called humanitarian center is located in Nis to oppose KFOR and especially the U.S. military camp in Bondsteel, Kosovo. In addition, other humanitarian organizations are involved in suspicious activities that aim to influence B&H, Macedonian local populations, and leaders at a lower level. The economic influence within the region enables Russia to interfere in Balkan nations’ politics.

According to the article in *The Globe Post*, many initiatives such are “youth camps,” “fitness clubs” and “patriotic education clubs,” and other cultural organizations are backed up directly and indirectly by Moscow. They belong to a broader structure that is part of modern Russian mobilization policies of President Vladimir Putin. One example is the Youth Camp, which gathered young kids of ages 12 to 13 of Serbian, Montenegrin Serbs, Bosnian Serbs, and Russian ethnicities.¹³⁷ The Zlatibor “patriotic

¹³⁵ B92, “Russian NGO teams up with Kosovo Office to assist Serbs.”

¹³⁶ Enver Hoxhaj, “Russian NGO trying to spread Russian influence in the region,” *RTK Live*, 26 October 2017, accessed 25 September 2018, <https://www.rtklive.com/en/news-single.php?ID=9459>.

¹³⁷ Kiril Avramov and Trad Ruslan, “Patriotic Youth Camps: Recruiting Next Generation ‘Russian World’ Supporters,” *The Globe Post*, 8 October 2018, accessed 21 February 2019, <https://theglobepost.com/2018/10/08/patriotic-russian-youth-camps/>.

youth camp” organized by the Russian ultranationalist E.N.O.T. Corp, a controversy group for mercenary and paramilitary activities in Eastern Ukraine and led by Zeljo Vukelic, a Serbian war veteran.¹³⁸ The “Patriotic Youth Camp” which according to organizers focuses on survival skills, was situated in Zlatibor, Serbia 200 kilometers south of Belgrade. In 2018, it was reported that over four dozen boys and girls attended. Moreover, some 30 other children from Serbia traveled to Russia to participate in similar training.¹³⁹ Later in 2018 this camp was closed due to media and opposition party pressure. Training children in military training with the purpose of raising the nationalism “patriotism” in a country which proclaims to hold western democratic values is unacceptable.

Political Influence

Russia continues to seek to redraw international borders by force. And here, in the Western Balkans, Russia has worked to destabilize the region, undermine your democracies, and divide you from each other and from the rest of Europe.

—U.S. Vice President Mike Pence, Podgorica, 1 August 2017

The Russian influence in Balkan countries embraces not only the economic domain but also political power at all levels of government. In the political sphere, the Kremlin influence in the WB5 usually focuses on governments and political parties, media influence, and the Orthodox Church. The International Crisis Group, which is

¹³⁸ Avramov and Ruslan, “Patriotic Youth Camps: Recruiting Next Generation ‘Russian World’ Supporters.”

¹³⁹ The International News, “Serbia Shuttters Russia-Backed military training camp for kids,” 18 August 2018, accessed 21 February 2019, <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/356658-serbia-shuttters-russia-backed-military-training-camp-for-kids>.

known for their assessment of situations in different regions, argues Western Balkans political instability keeps growing amid a geopolitical contest involving increased tensions with Russia. Furthermore, political instability in the WB might trigger new crises on the EU's close borders. In this contest, many EU politicians are worried that Russia aims to worsen the situation, while Russia has hidden interest in Balkans, its involvements are more opportunistic than strategic.¹⁴⁰ Also Russia's interference is very active in the diplomatic sphere where usually intends to hamper efforts of decisions for the benefit of Balkan states (sometimes successfully), especially when it comes to Euro-Atlantic integration of the region.

Government and Political Parties

Most of the WB5 are oriented to integrate into the Euro Atlantic family, but there are many required conditions and standards to achieve membership. However, the process of integration for the region is succeeding very slowly. As it happens in the post-communist and post-conflict countries, the transition to democratic society it has its costs also. The governance in the WB5 is considered weak with potential growth of ethnic and inter-country frictions and unstable relations, many corruption cases at all levels, and this worsens the external actor's influence. Russia tends to exploit this situation and extend its political influence in order to prevent WB5 countries from joining Euro Atlantic organizations.

¹⁴⁰ International Crisis Group. "The Western Balkans: Fragile Majorities," 30 April 2017, accessed 19 March 2019, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/balkans/western-balkans-fragile-majorities>.

After the successful NATO military intervention in the former Yugoslavia, the current situation appears to be regressing politically and diplomatically. This may be due not only to WB5 ineffectiveness to deal with their problems, but also due, in part to inappropriate solutions to the region. The slow EU approach and neglect is contributing to the fragility of the region. Some examples of EU neglect are, Macedonia for about two decades was not able to seek membership in the EU and NATO because of a dispute with a member of both union and NATO. The model that was used to create the Bosnian Federation is almost non-functional with continuous ethnic tensions, and unstable government and decision-making system. It is not better in Kosovo where an ethnic group that makes up less than 10percent of the country can stop any vital decision making by using its constitutional power, and constantly divides the country. EU failure to encourage and support enough the countries toward membership progress inspires Russia to use every opportunity to influence countries.

Until the independence of Kosovo in 2008, U.S. led the EU in WB engagement, after that the U.S. stood back and gave the EU a leading role.¹⁴¹ However, the EU neglected the WB because they had to deal with financial crises, refugee flows, and internal threats; consequently, WB progress was delayed, and the situation has deteriorated.¹⁴² Dusan Stojanovic shared some concerns when he stated the EU is absorbed in its own problems like the debt crisis, immigration, or Brexit for so many years they neglected Balkans. Some EU officials fear that Balkans could fall to renewed

¹⁴¹ Graham et al., *Time for Action in the Western Balkans: Policy Prescriptions for American Diplomacy*, 2.

¹⁴² Ibid.

conflict if the EU 28- nation bloc does not get more involved. In addition, the European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker said “If such a complex European region gets an impression that we are not serious with the European perspective, we will experience, sooner rather than later, what we saw in the Balkans during the 1990s.”¹⁴³ Russia exploit the EU neglecting to extent its influence in the governments and political parties of the WB5.

The greatest influence from Russian politics is on the Serbian government, from where they influence other countries as Bosnia and Hercegovina with a sizable Serbian minority, Montenegro, then Macedonia and Kosovo. Even though the current Serbian president Vucic declares the Serbian goal is to join the EU, it is obvious he is maintaining close relations and a traditional alliance with Russia that is influenced and supported by most of the political actors in Belgrade.¹⁴⁴ Russian support for Serbia during the wars in 1990s shows their strong commitment to relations with Serbia. Furthermore, Russia diplomatic support over Kosovo is critical for Serbia. Overall, Russia remains strong presence and influence over government, political parties and society in Serbia.

According to Enver Hoxhaj, the current Kosovo deputy prime minister, Serbia’s return to Russia demonstrates a desire not for solidarity with the European Union, but rather for domination of the Balkans in Russian style, a style, which employs instability

¹⁴³ Dusan Stojanovic, “Russian influence rising in Balkans, Baltics, Central Europe,” *AP News*, 09 October 2018, accessed 26 March 2019, <https://www.apnews.com/05da1f1eabeb428db5b8e40f1ca28bdb>.

¹⁴⁴ Valerie Hopkins, “In Balkans, Britain rejoins battle for influence,” *Politico*, 30 March 2018, accessed 13 December 2018, <https://www.politico.eu/article/balkans-bbc-britain-rejoins-battle-for-influence-russia-soft-power/>.

in the name of restoring stability, but in a way favorable to Moscow's interests. Kosovo is a target for Serbia, and its strategy is to use the Serb population in Kosovo to oppose Kosovo institutions and provoke tensions. Furthermore, Hoxhaj argues that Serbia maintains illegal and parallel organizations to serve Serbs within Kosovo's territory, harms domestic sovereignty, and impedes the integration of Kosovo's Serbs. Other Serbian tactics in Kosovo include disinformation campaigns and attempts to arrest or extradite Kosovar citizens and political leaders.¹⁴⁵

In addition to not recognizing Kosovo, Serbia continuously interferes in Kosovo internal politics through the Serb minority and, more specifically, the political party of the Serb minority, "Serbian List" (SL). The diplomatic field's brutal campaign has successfully prevented Kosovo membership in international organizations and blocked the country's recognition from new countries. In this regard Russia's support for Serbia on Kosovo's internal issues as well as in the diplomatic sphere. According to Adelina Hasani, a researcher at the Kosovo Democracy Institute, both Serbia and Russia gain benefits from their mutual cooperation, Russia's interest is to demonstrate its international power and maintain instability in Kosovo and the region through its influence in Serbia. Similarly, these political interests bait the EU, i.e., by threatening to join in an alliance with Russia and, most importantly, to bring Russian influence to the Balkan region. Moreover, Hasani refers to a meeting of Serbian and Russian presidents

¹⁴⁵ Enver Hoxhajm, "Kosovo Feels Russia's Heavy Hand, via Serbia," *The New York Times*, 13 April 2017, accessed 05 August 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/13/opinion/kosovo-feels-russias-heavy-hand-via-serbia.html>.

where they wanted to proclaim that both the West and Russia should be part of important political developments in the region.¹⁴⁶

Since 2011, the EU has facilitated dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia for normalization of relations between the two countries. In 2013 the dialogue produced a 15- point agreement called the Agreement of Principles Governing the Normalization of Relations. Initially, the dialogue was about regional cooperation including telecommunications, air traffic, customs, civil records, and freedom of movement. Then the dialogue advanced to the more problematic and political discussions such as the representation of Kosovo at regional organizations, an exchange of liaison officers between countries, and so on. Kosovo signed the document, trusting it to be a legally binding international law whereas Serbia has yet to sign the document as they see it only as a political agreement.¹⁴⁷ The 2013 agreement resulted in the creation of an association composed of Serb majority municipalities in Kosovo, the structure and competencies of association, the dissolution of security and other structures (Serbian parallel structures have been operation in north of Kosovo since 1999) operating in Kosovo, their integration in to the Kosovo Institutions, and to stop paying them from the Serbian government. Based on point 15 of the agreement, it was agreed that neither side will

¹⁴⁶ Adelina Hasani, “Russia uses the Serbia-Kosovo dispute to assert its influence in the Western Balkans,” *European Western Balkans*, 30 October 2018, accessed 25 February 2019, <https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/.2018/10/30/russia-uses-serbia-kosovo-dispute-assert-influence-western-balkans/>, 2.

¹⁴⁷ Barbara Matias, “Linking the Kosovo-Serbia Dialogue to the EU enlargement strategy - which accession policies are at stake” (Policy Report No. 03/2018, Group for Legal and Political Studies, July 2018), accessed 22 March 2019, <http://www.legalpoliticalstudies.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/GLPS-Linking-the-Kosovo-Serbia-Dialogue-to-the-EU-Enlargement-Strategy.pdf>, 15.

block, or encourage others to block, the other side's progress in their respective EU path.^{148 149}

The dialogue between Serbia and Kosovo has stopped due to imposed customs tariffs to B&H and Serbia. On November 2018 the Kosovo government imposed 100percent customs tariff on Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. This was in response to an “aggressive campaign” in the diplomatic sphere where Kosovo accused Belgrade of influencing some small states to reverse their recognition of its independence. Moreover, Serbian aggression has successfully prevented Kosovo from gaining membership in Interpol for three years. Kosovo complained of a "fierce campaign" conducted by Serbia against the idea of normalizing relations.¹⁵⁰ Even though Kosovo is recognized by more than 116 countries,¹⁵¹ it continues to be challenged not only by Serbia but also from Russia, China, and some EU countries such are Romania, Greece, Spain, and Slovakia.

In B&H, Russian political interference is at a high level. Since the war ended in 1995, the B&H is divided in two federal entities. On one side is the Federation of Bosnia

¹⁴⁸ Republic of Serbia, “First agreement of principles governing the normalization of relations,” accessed 23 March 2019, <http://kim.gov.rs/eng/p03.php>.

¹⁴⁹ Republic of Kosovo, Prime Minister Office, “First agreement of principles governing the normalization of relations,” (Brussels, 19 April 2013), accessed 23 March 2019, http://www.kryeministri-ks.net/repository/docs/FIRST_AGREEMENT_OF_PRINCIPLES_GOVERNING_THE_NORMALIZATION_OF_RELATIONS,_APRIL_19,_2013_BRUSSELS_en.pdf.

¹⁵⁰ BBC News, “Kosovo hits Serbia with 100% trade tariffs amid Interpol row,” 21 November 2018, accessed 23 March 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-46287975>.

¹⁵¹ Republic of Kosovo, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Diaspora, “List of Recognitions,” accessed 23 March 2019, <http://www.mfa-ks.net/al/politika/484/lista-e-njohjeve/484>.

and Herzegovina mainly populated with Bosnian and Croats, and on the other side is RS populated mostly with Serbs. According to Tamnik current RS president Milorad Dodik, a onetime western darling, is now flirting with secession. During his two- year rule, RS procured thousands of rifles, and currently there are 78 Russian-allied nationalist organizations in the region.¹⁵² Kremlin uses ethnic Serbs and RS institutions to dominate and maintain instability in the country and prevent B&H from progressing westward. Current RS President Milorad Dodik is one of the key Kremlin instruments through which Russia stretches its influence. Dodik is well known for his populist and highly controversial rhetoric over the Srebrenica massacre and other sensitive topics and has frequently threatened to remove RS from B&H. He called a referendum on the status of the Bosnian judiciary and on the authority of the Office of the High Representative in Bosnia (OHR), held by an EU diplomat. Dodik also called for the removal of the mandate of the military mission in B&H.¹⁵³ Russia officially did not support the RS call for independence but abstained to vote when the security council brought resolutions to extend EUFOR’s mandate in B&H.¹⁵⁴ For instance, if RS wants to secede from B&H, Serbs from north of Kosovo will also attempt to do so. Albanians from south of Serbia will try to join Kosovo; and parts of Bosnia would likely want to unite with what would

¹⁵² Emily Tamkin, “Bosnia Is Teetering on the Precipice of a Political Crisis,” *Foreign Policy*, 21 March 2018, accessed 21 March 2019, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/03/21/bosnia-is-teetering-on-the-precipice-of-a-political-crisis-balkans-election-law-dodik/>.

¹⁵³ Lasheras et al., “Return to Instability: How migration and great power politics threaten the Western Balkans,” 6.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

remain of B&H and Albanians in Macedonia would want a union with Kosovo, or potentially Albania.¹⁵⁵ The possibilities for territorial divisions are dangerous and can inflame ethnic relations and exacerbate the situation in the WB. So, the countries themselves and the West should not support these initiatives, and the EU, and especially the U.S., should encourage the local leaders not to undertake this risk.

Whereas, Russian political influence in Montenegro is mainly through opposition parties, mostly ethnic Serbs. Current Montenegrin government has moved the country toward the Euro-Atlantic membership. Even though the country has already joined NATO and expects to join the EU by 2025, it is still vulnerable to Russian influence. Due to the geostrategic position, the country accesses the Adriatic sea and is attractive to continuous external influence. Hence, Russia's interest in Montenegro intensified several years ago when the reliability of its naval base in Tartus was in question, and their Syrian naval base became less confident, then Kremlin began seeking new alternatives.

Therefore in 2013 Kremlin asked to use the ports of Bar and Kotor for their naval ships; in a word they wanted to install a Russian naval base which was, of course, refused by Montenegro.¹⁵⁶ Montenegro recently joined the NATO and in many ways is NATO's weakest member with its population of about 630,000 people, and approximately 2000 members of the armed forces. The West worries the coup de grace could come in the

¹⁵⁵ Council on Foreign Relations, "The Unraveling of the Balkans Peace Agreements," 08 November 2017, accessed 21 March 2019, <https://www.cfr.org/report/unraveling-balkans-peace-agreements>.

¹⁵⁶ Reuf Bajrović, Vesko Garčević, and Richard Kraemer, "Russia's Strategy of Destabilization in Montenegro," Foreign Policy Research Institute, June 2018, accessed 23 March 2019, <https://www.fpri.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/kraemer-rfp5.pdf>, 7.

Balkans as a result of Russian competition with the West. The foreign policy article mentions that no one knows what Presidents Trump and Putin agreed upon during the two-hour meeting in Helsinki in June 2018,¹⁵⁷ assumptions are, in the meeting, Balkans was discussed as well. In addition, Stacey (a U.S. national security consultant) says Trump seems to be playing along with a Russian trick of going after a new NATO alliance member. He states when President Trump was asked if Montenegro as a NATO member will be attacked, the President described the Montenegrin people as strong and aggressive people who might get aggressive and cause World War III.¹⁵⁸ Stacey concludes that an armed Russian incursion in Montenegro including either hybrid or traditional warfare would give Trump an opportunity to tell the NATO allies Washington will not honor Article 5 of the NATO treaty to help Montenegro.¹⁵⁹

Furthermore, Russia's essential strategy in Montenegro is to have a pro-Russian, and anti-Western government to thwart further engagement of Western influence. To gain influence, Russia relies on its ability to exploit ultranationalistic ideas inherent in Pan-Slavism, to use the universal Christian Orthodox religion and their close relations with ethnic Serbs, and several political parties. One of the parties is headed by a Serb ethnic-nationalist political force, the Democratic Front (DF), a coalition made up of several Serb nationalist parties known for their pro-Russian affiliation.¹⁶⁰ In 2017 Russia attempted to

¹⁵⁷ Stacey, "A Russian Attack on Montenegro Could Mean the End of NATO."

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Bajrović, Garčević and Kraemer, "Russia's Strategy of Destabilization in Montenegro," 6.

organize a coup in Montenegro when the new pro-Western government was taking charge of the country and was driving country toward Western democracy. The coup failed due to law enforcement reaction in time.

In North Macedonian politics, Russia mostly is interfering through the current opposition political party “Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity” (VMRO-DPMNE.) The fact that Russia was meddling in the WB politics was apparent during the 2018 referendum for the name dispute agreement with Greece, when Kremlin organized a movement to boycott the referendum. This movement was considered to purely pro-Russian and was supported by the Macedonian President Gjorge Ivanov, the main opposition party VMRO-DPMNE, and around 30 NGOs. Consequently, 64percent of Macedonians boycotted the referendum; Mr. Reka argues the boycott was not due to organized movements but due to the wording of the referendum question, Are you in favor of European Union and NATO membership by accepting the agreement between the Republic of Macedonia and the Republic of Greece?¹⁶¹ Later the Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov blamed the West for pushing Macedonia toward NATO. In fact, Russia continually opposed Macedonian Greek name negotiations. Former U.S. Defense Secretary James Mattis saw Russian influence behind the organized Macedonian and Greek protests against the

¹⁶¹ Blerim Reka, “Macedonia: A new front in Russia-West tensions,” *Emerging Europe*, 16 November 2018, accessed 22 March 2019, <https://emergingeurope.com/voices/macedonia-a-new-front-in-russia-west-tensions/>.

agreements, and said: “We do not want to see Russia doing (in Macedonia) what they have tried to do in so many other countries.”¹⁶²

During the 2006-2016 Macedonian governance of Nikolai Gruevski, the country experienced a degradation of media and the judiciary system, widespread corruption, and misuse of power; it moved from being a promising country to an authoritarian state. A 2015 wiretapping scandal went public when secret recordings caught top government officials discussing everything from rigging votes to covering up killings.¹⁶³ When the Macedonian government was changing, Ivanov refused to give the mandate to newly elected Prime Minister Zaev. The new prime minister built a coalition with Albania, which is about a quarter of Macedonia’s population, to make the Albanian language as the second official language and to have an Albanian head of parliament. That led to organized demonstrations in Macedonia against the new coalition and their agreements.¹⁶⁴ The protesters entered by force into parliament where 77 persons were injured, including lawmakers, the new prime minister, and 22 police officers as well. Zaev’s party accused VMRO-DPMNE of organizing the demonstrations.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶² Stojanovic, “Russian influence rising in Balkans, Baltics, Central Europe.”

¹⁶³ Aleksandar Dimishkovski, “Macedonia Has New Government, but Rocky Road Ahead,” *The New York Times*, 01 June 2017, accessed 23 March 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/01/world/europe/macedonia-zoran-zaev-election.html?register=google>.

¹⁶⁴ Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, “Protesters Attack Lawmakers After Storming Macedonia’s Parliament,” 28 April 2017, accessed 23 March 2019, <https://www.rferl.org/a/macedonian-parliament-stormed-zaev-injured-beaten-vmro-dpmne/28455833.html>.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

The Russian influence in the Balkans and the rise of populism in Central Europe has given Moscow a reputation for aggression within sympathetic parties and politicians across the continent and EU nations like Hungary, Austria, and the Czech Republic. Similarly, pro-Russian opposition forces in Latvia and the political party, Harmony, which is supported by ethnic Russians who makes up a quarter of the Latvian population, took 19.9percent of the vote,¹⁶⁶ this political party is a dominant domestic political force that plays a decisive role in the country policymaking. In addition, some of the Balkan leaders use meetings and strengthen relations with Russian leaders like Dodik from RS and some of Serbian leaders who oppose NATO and the West, and Moscow is a friend with a great respect for the Slavic brethren. These relations with Kremlin give them personal advantages to influence their populations and spread mistrust in Western democracies and present Washington and Brussels as opponents who tend to ban people of their identity and national pride by pushing them toward EU integration.¹⁶⁷

Depending on the government at the time, in each country, Russia uses different ways and means to achieve their desired end state in the Balkan region. If a specific country's government supports a positive relationship with Russia, Kremlin will use that government as a tool. If the government is pro-Western, then Moscow tries to influence through opposition parties, ethnic minorities, individuals with high influence, various media, and the Orthodox Church.

¹⁶⁶ Johan Ahlander and Gederts Gelzis, "Dissatisfied Latvians turn to newcomers in parliamentary election," *Reuters*, 07 October 2018, accessed 26 March 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-latvia-election/dissatisfied-latvians-turn-to-newcomers-in-parliamentary-election-idUSKCN1MH0BH>.

¹⁶⁷ Stojanovic, "Russian influence rising in Balkans, Baltics, Central Europe."

Competition between east and west is nothing new, but started during WB conflicts of the 1990s. However, with Russian relations at their chilliest since the Cold War, there is an urgency for the EU to ensure Serbia and other Balkan nations end up in the western bloc's fold and to help pursue its expansion eastward.¹⁶⁸

Media Influence

With the evolution of information technology and increased dependency of societies on technology, the possibilities of influencing and shaping the opinions of population and society at all levels is very easy. It is well-known Russia is heavily engaged in its hybrid warfare and especially in cyber warfare, using different methods of influence and propaganda such as foreign electoral influence, fake news, social media trolling, and other diplomatic campaigns. To impose their political view and empower their presence, Russia is operating and expanding its media in the Balkans. Sputnik News service has operated in Belgrade since 2014, where in addition to news, they are providing assistance to some media, especially to ones that will inflame ethnic and religious tensions.¹⁶⁹

Sputnik is the leading media apparatus in the WB, which produces many free contents, press agencies, and media outlets in the Balkans, frequently the content is not verified before it is republished in local languages. So multi-media Sputnik enlarges its

¹⁶⁸ Andrea Dudik, Misha Savic, and Gordana Filipovic, "Europe Exposes Its Weakness to Russia and China in the Balkans," *Bloomberg News*, 16 May 2018, accessed 12 March 2019, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-05-16/global-powers-square-up-for-influence-in-europe-s-balkan-flank>.

¹⁶⁹ Galeotti, "Do the Western Balkans face a coming Russian storm?"

influence in other media considerably.¹⁷⁰ Sputnik media reporting is not reliable, as demonstrated in reports by Russian television in Montenegro presenting “brutal repression of anti-NATO protests in the country,” shown material from riots flashed in 2015 when the militants of opposition party Democratic Front tried to storm the parliament reports Grzegorz. Russian propaganda in the Balkans reports, the West is afraid of Russia while EU is on the edge of downfall, they also published propaganda that the West is backing the Albanians for the creation of Greater Albania comprising Albania, Kosovo, and parts of Serbia, Macedonia, and Montenegro populated by Albanians.¹⁷¹ In the WB, Russia uses the local media to exert the most effective influence because often media is ethnically and politically polarized. Russia uses local media that supports and endorses pro-Russian news without requiring significant investment.¹⁷²

The Russian influence in the media sphere significantly depends on the ordinary media controlled by local governing political parties, in particular, Serbia and Bosnia’s Serb dominated entity RS. Serbian and RS media maintain close relations and use news provided by Russian media and present in the region.¹⁷³ In the article *In Balkans, Britain*

¹⁷⁰ Prague Security Studies Institute, “Balkan Media Scene and Russian Influence,” *European Security Journal*, 30 January 2019, accessed 24 March 2019, <https://www.esjnews.com/balkan-media-scene>.

¹⁷¹ Grzegorz Kuczyński, “Russia's Hybrid Warfare in the Western Balkans,” Warsaw Institute, 26 March 2019, accessed 27 March 2019, <https://warsawinstitute.org/russias-hybrid-warfare-western-balkans/>, 8.

¹⁷² Prague Security Studies Institute, “Balkan Media Scene and Russian Influence.”

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*

rejoins battle for influence; Stevan Dojčinović said, “The majority of fake news comes from the mainstream media and the government. Yes, there is some coming from Russia, but they are second-rate fake news people,” he said. “It is literally a disaster: They promote criminals and war criminals and they do propaganda for the government.” Most of the media in the region is influenced by respective governments as well.¹⁷⁴ Moreover the KGB, where the Putin served, strongly believed and taught that the access to information and means of communication should be under total control of the state and even after he was prime minister, he retained a suspicion of journalists, a legacy of his service in the security service.¹⁷⁵

The Bloomberg editorial board in an opinion piece on Russian influence in the Balkans, wrote “The region is making progress. So, of course, Russia is meddling with it.” Therefore, as a result of recent actions and or changes in the WB5 such as Montenegro joining as a 29th NATO member, Macedonia’s progress with Greece on the name solution, peace talks on Kosovo’s future, and the 2018 national elections in B&H were fair, unlike the 2014 elections that were followed by the riots. Bloomberg considers this should be a time for optimism for the states of the former Yugoslavia. To Putin, this is disturbing news to know the Balkans are stabilizing and consolidating relations with the West, and he considers the western countries hold of the Balkans to be part of the effort to encircle Russia and thwart its place as a world power. Therefore, Kremlin uses all possible means to hold its position as a key player not only in the Western Balkans but

¹⁷⁴ Hopkins, “In Balkans, Britain rejoins battle for influence.”

¹⁷⁵ Andrei Soldatov and Irina Borogan, *The Red Web–The Kremlin’s War on the Internet* (New York: Public Affairs, September 2015), 90.

beyond.¹⁷⁶ In the Balkan region, Russia's spread of fake news over many years did not go without attention. Undoubtedly the intimidation of the disinformation must be considered seriously, particularly in delicate societies such as WB where it has a significant potential to bring back again inter-ethnic tensions. Often it is impossible to prove direct Russian involvement in this news because often the initiative comes from local actors rather than outside groups.¹⁷⁷

The fake news shape public opinion and mislead and convince the population the information is genuine, in particular when they are related to political or global topics. For illustration, media journalism in Serbia is mostly positive concerning Russia where largely neutral or sometimes against when it comes to the EU. So, in media monitoring analysis for foreign relations conducted in 2017 in Serbia proves that the politics and military affairs are the most common articles which potentially containing fake news and featuring pro-Russian and anti-Western address. Therefore, in Serbia, most of the population believes Russia is their leading supporter though only less than a quarter of citizens are familiar with the fact the EU is among the country's biggest donors and provides the most support, followed closely by the U.S.¹⁷⁸ Moreover, the Russian-friendly media supported by Moscow pretends that because the U.S. or EU backs certain

¹⁷⁶ Bloomberg Editorial Board, "Keeping the Balkans Out of Putin's Grasp," *Bloomberg News*, 20 December 2018, accessed 26 March 2019, <https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2018-12-20/the-balkans-progress-and-russian-interference>.

¹⁷⁷ Prague Security Studies Institute, "Balkan Media Scene and Russian Influence."

¹⁷⁸ Tepavac, "Disinformation and fake news as the new normal: A challenge for the Western Balkans."

pro-Western political leaders, they are the root cause of the failure to address the corrosive corruption or the poor progress of the rule of law and empowered civil society. Furthermore, Kremlin's propaganda for the WB contends that the West prefers to defend Muslim groups and claims that the U.S. supports ethnic separatism and efforts to dismember Balkan states.¹⁷⁹ So Russia is targeting the most fragile and sensitive aspects of the region to exercise its impact successfully and to look like it protects the interests of populations and the region.

The media influence reflects Russian and Serbian interference in Macedonia in recent years. The boycott of the Macedonian referendum in 2018 was heavily supported by Russian propaganda whose efforts were mostly through Serbian media to include the Sputnik news package at Belgrade and the RT (formerly Russia Today). Hundreds of new anti-referendum websites were established and launched publishing propaganda, in response to this Russian disinformation campaign in support of Macedonia, the U.S. Congress allocated 8 million US dollars.¹⁸⁰

Considering the media influence and spread of fake news and tendencies to win the hearts of the population with little or nothing to support a society but maybe to harm them is unacceptable. Therefore, in particular, for the western countries, it is not enough to provide that support whatever it is and to be quiet. They should advertise what they are doing for the WB5 in a way to change the opinion of society who believes Russia is the

¹⁷⁹ Paul Stronski and Annie Himes, "Russia's Game in the Balkans," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, January 2019, accessed 31 March 2019, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2019/02/06/russia-s-game-in-balkans-pub-78235>, 8.

¹⁸⁰ Blerim Reka, "Macedonia: A new front in Russia-West tensions."

most significant support of the region. The advertisement or information for the real support from every player involved cannot be done without the local government support; therefore, governments should work hard and provide a legal basis on preventing disinformation and allowing themselves to advertise the support that comes from the West.

Orthodox Church Influence

In our people there is a saying: God, then Russia, and except in God, we hope only in Russia.

—Serbian Patriarch Irinej, *Irinej Kod Putina: Nadamo se u Boga i Rusiju!*

Besides media, Russian influence through orthodox church plays a significant role in the Western Balkans, and it affects not only in religious affairs but in entire spheres of life to include the politics and governments. Hence, the Kremlin benefits from the power that the Orthodox Church has in the WB5 by using it as another tool from which they intend to achieve the influence in the region. Kremlin utilizes the Russian OC as a vehicle of influence in countries with significant Orthodox population by using the story of Slavic brotherhood and common Orthodox Christianity to strengthen its relations with key internal players in the region and so can influence public and elite opinion in its favor.¹⁸¹

Russia's influence in the WB5 churches is mostly through its impact in the Serbian OC, which influences its country's decision making and relations with neighboring countries and churches. According to the Associated Press, Russia and

¹⁸¹ Stronski and Himes, "Russia's Game in the Balkans," 10.

Serbian Churches have played a substantial role in restoring Russian Serbian alliance, which weakened during Tito's rule of Yugoslavia, who initiated better relations with the West. As a result of Kremlin's influence in Serbia, Putin is considered a symbol of Russia, a modern Russia that Serbs have started to believe in once again. In Serbia there is now a village, a wax figure, a plum brandy, and several cafes named after Putin and there are plans for a church. In the same way, in the Serb-run part of B&H pro-Russian leaders are building another other religious and cultural center that might be seen as a presentation of Russian soft power impact in the Balkans.¹⁸²

In B&H and specifically in RS, the Russian church has a significant impact and especially close ties with its president Milorad Dodik. Thus, in RS, Russia's attraction is easily seen. A short walk from the center of the capital city, Banja Luka, is a 70,000-square-foot portion of land designated for a Russian Cultural center and five domed churches with a design of an ancient Russian cathedral in Kremlin, which was destroyed after the Bolshevik Revolution.¹⁸³ The complicated governance of the Bosnian federation, ethnic divisions, and Dodik's excellent relations with Moscow provide opportunities for Kremlin to interfere in almost all internal Bosnian affairs.

Furthermore, when the Russian church rejected the independence of the Ukrainian Church from Moscow, the Serbian church proved its loyalty by taking the Russian

¹⁸² Dusan Stojanovic, "Ahead of visit, Putin gets church in Serbia named after him," *AP News*, 14 January 2019, accessed 01 April 1, 2019, <https://www.apnews.com/3d98bcf3c2804462885fac93d816aeae>.

¹⁸³ Michael Colborne, "One of Bosnia's New Presidents May Want to Break the Country Apart," *Foreign Policy*, 09 October 2018, accessed 02 April 2019, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/10/09/one-of-bosnias-new-presidents-may-want-to-break-the-country-apart/>.

side.¹⁸⁴ The same situation happened in Montenegro, when the Montenegrin government decided to support EU sanctions against Russia for annexing the Crimea. The head of Montenegrin OC stated, “May he who is not loyal to the same language, same-blood Russia, have the living flesh fall off him, may he be cursed thrice and 3,000 times by me.”¹⁸⁵ The Serbian lead OC has endless loyalty to the Russian Church and leaders. Even though in the Crimean case, the sanctions imposed on Russia were recognized and supported from countries of the democratic world, it didn’t seem to matter to the orthodox church if it was right or wrong, if it benefited them.

Moscow frequently counts on the OC to share its message throughout the region and inspire cohesion. For example, the head of the Montenegrin Church opposed the government’s decision to impose sanctions against Russia by declaring “May he who is not loyal to the same language, same-blood Russia, have the living flesh fall off him, may he be cursed thrice and 3,000 times by me.” Then in Macedonia, the Russian Patriarchate has built several churches; so, by financing the Orthodox Churches, Russia is expected to have additional influence and benefits in any given country.¹⁸⁶

In Montenegro, the Serbian OC has a substantial socio-political force where approximately three-quarters of Montenegrins are Orthodox. The Serbian church of Montenegro who has a patriarchal seat in Serbia and the Serbian church from its

¹⁸⁴ Stojanovic, “Ahead of visit, Putin gets church in Serbia named after him.”

¹⁸⁵ Vera Zakem, Bill Rosenau, and Danielle Johnson, “Shining a Light on the Western Balkans,” (CNA Occasional Paper, CNA, May 2017), accessed 31 March 2019, https://www.cna.org/cna_files/pdf/DOP-2017-U-015223-2Rev.pdf, 15.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

beneficial position effectively administers political endorsement, logistical assistance, and financial support to Montenegro's extremists. Example, though the Serbian OC was not implicated directly in the coup attempt in Montenegro, but it hosted an overnight meeting of the coup's leadership at one of Montenegro's famous Ostrog monastery before the election; consequently, this occasion suggests the involvement of the of Amfilohije Radovic, the Serbian Metropolitan Bishop.¹⁸⁷ Serbian Orthodox Church emphasizes the opposition toward the liberal West that endorses values which are contradictory to Slavic values, consequently considers the EU as a threat to the traditional Serbian values. Whereas the Serbian OC is fighting for authority over the churches of the neighboring countries of Montenegro, Kosovo, Macedonia, B&H, it questions these countries' independence. While supports attempts of nationalist organizations to recapture "Serbian territories" and raises plans to maintain influence in the WB5 through linkage of church establishments.¹⁸⁸ Accordingly, the activities of the Serbian OC give the impression to be consistent with the Russian approach of targeting ethnic tensions in the region. Besides, the Serbian Patriarch Iriney during his visit Moscow visit in 20113 in his conversation with Putin did not exclude from criticism nor Serbian leadership's policy towards Kosovo as being pursued in EU pressure and asked support for the activities of the Serbian OC in Macedonia and Kosovo.¹⁸⁹ Even if Serbian government and political parties agree on achieving agreement with Kosovo they can only hope to build national

¹⁸⁷ Bajrović, Garčević, and Kraemer, "Russia's Strategy of Destabilization in Montenegro," 11.

¹⁸⁸ Szpala, "Russia in Serbia – soft power and hard interests," 5.

¹⁸⁹ Zakem, Rosenau, and Johnson, "Shining a Light on the Western Balkans," 15.

consensus by winning over two opinion shapers which are the Serbian Orthodox Church (which still regards Kosovo as “Serbia’s heartland”) and the Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences.¹⁹⁰

The Macedonian OC wants to be independent from the Serbian one, but the Serbian OC will not grant the independence, and even though the Macedonian church maintains good relations with its counterparts in Moscow it still does not get support for independence. Both the Russian and Serbian Church are ready to grant autonomy to the Macedonian church; therefore, in 2017 the Macedonian OC embraced Bulgarian OC as its “Mother Church,” setting it on a course that contrasts the Russian Orthodoxy.¹⁹¹

Other actors that Russian players with ties to the OC and far-right elements in Russian society contribute as a tool of soft power in the Balkans that providing Moscow with a mask of deniability of an influence operation go twisted. One of the examples is with the St. Basil the Great Charitable Foundation who is the largest Orthodox charity in Russia lead by Konstantin Malofeev, with a stated budget of over 40 million dollars, whose charity operations goes beyond Russia. Also, in the Balkans Malofeev and his charity is a crucial channel for Russia’s outreach to conservative Orthodox groups in the Balkans.¹⁹²

¹⁹⁰ Blerim Reka, “Serbia prepares to change course on Kosovo,” Geopolitical Intelligence Service, 12 December 2017, accessed 03 April 2019, <https://www.gisreportsonline.com/serbia-prepares-to-change-course-on-kosovo,politics,2415.html>.

¹⁹¹ Hänsel and Feyerabend, “The influence of external actors in the Western Balkans,” 26.

¹⁹² Stronski and Himes, “Russia’s Game in the Balkans,” 10.

The predominant view in the Orthodox Christian countries is that Russia must protect Orthodox population internationally, and the ethnic Russians should be protected around the World. For this has been conducted a survey in some countries with the Orthodox-majority inhabitants where most of them agreed with the statements posted in survey such are: Strong Russia necessary to balance influence of the West; Our country's traditional values conflict with those of the West; Russia has an obligation to protect Orthodox Christians outside its borders; Russia has an obligation to protect ethnic Russians outside its borders..¹⁹³ The results of the survey visualized in the figure 5.

<i>% who say they completely/mostly agree with each statement</i>				
	Strong Russia necessary to balance influence of West	Our country's traditional values conflict with those of the West	Russia has an obligation to protect Orthodox Christians outside its borders	Russia has an obligation to protect ethnic Russians outside its borders
Orthodox majority				
Russia	85%	73%	72%	77%
Armenia	83	71	79	84
Serbia	80	78	74	86
Belarus	76	45	62	62
Greece	70	70	69	74
Moldova	61	52	63	70
Bulgaria	56	43	56	72
Georgia	52	65	62	62
Romania	52	51	65	74
Ukraine	22	37	38	38
Median	66	59	64	73

Figure 5. Survey Results

¹⁹³ Jeff Diamant, "Orthodox Christians in Central and Eastern Europe favor strong role for Russia," Pew Research Center, 11 May 2017, accessed 31 March 2019, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/05/11/orthodox-christians-in-central-and-eastern-europe-favor-strong-role-for-russia-in-geopolitics-religion/>.

Source: Jeff Diamant, “Orthodox Christians in Central and Eastern Europe favor strong role for Russia,” Pew Research Center, 11 May 2017, accessed 31 March 2019, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/05/11/orthodox-christians-in-central-and-eastern-europe-favor-strong-role-for-russia-in-geopolitics-religion>.

NOTE: In Orthodox-majority countries, more people favor a strong Russia and view Russia as protector.

As a result of Moscow’s influence with the Serbian church, several Orthodox priests regularly met with key Russian political leaders. The priests’ sermons highlight the shared religious heritage and, among other things, are thankful to Kremlin for thwarting independence for Kosovo, which the Serbian Church considers its home.¹⁹⁴ According to Kallaba, Kosovar Centre for Security Studies, Russian engagement and its possible influence in Kosovo is mostly coming through Serbian OC due to lack of Kosovo institutions financial control over the Serbian OC which creates chances for a disruptive agenda. So with the political backing to the religious institutions, Russia pursues to preserve and increase a robust emotional presence among the Serbian community in Kosovo.¹⁹⁵ Even though Serbia is a secular state, the OC exercises considerable nationalist not only in Serbia but in neighboring countries where Serbian minorities live, as well. One of the illustrations of the church is that Serbian church openly supported the 1990s wars that took part in the former Yugoslavia where extreme

¹⁹⁴ Birnbaum, “Russia’s low-cost influence strategy finds success in Serbia.”

¹⁹⁵ Pëllumb Kallaba, “Russian interference in Kosovo: How and why?” (Occasional Paper by KCSS, Kosovo Centre for Security Studies, September 2017), accessed 05 August 2018, http://www.qkss.org/repository/docs/Russian_interference_in_Kosovo_finale_2_735070.pdf, 14.

Orthodox clerics openly blessed Serb nationalist paramilitaries who committed war crimes in Croatia, B&H, and Kosovo.¹⁹⁶

Even though Serbia is a secular state still OC exercises considerable nationalist influence, not only in Serbia but in neighboring countries where Serbian minorities live as well. One of the illustrations of the church is that Serbian church openly supported the 1990s wars that took part in the former Yugoslavia where extreme Orthodox clerics openly blessed Serb nationalist paramilitaries who committed war crimes in Croatia, B&H, and Kosovo.¹⁹⁷ Moreover, based on Vaskovic Serbia's patriarch Irinej told to a Belgrade newspaper that under their internal revision of constitution will change the name of Serbian Orthodox Church as a Serbian Orthodox Church-Pec (original name of town Peja) Patriarchate named after a city in Kosovo.

Likewise, this move marks that church opposes the efforts of Serbian President for improvement of relations with Kosovo which is one of the conditions for Serbia's EU membership.¹⁹⁸ The Russian OC mission in Kosovo is to support the effort of Serbian OC in Kosovo. Consequently, Russia donated \$2 million to UNESCO to invest in the restoration of four Serb Orthodox monuments, which are under the protection of the UNESCO World Heritage list. On the other hand, the polarization of UNESCO's bid by

¹⁹⁶ Lasheras et al., "Return to Instability: How migration and great power politics threaten the Western Balkans," 9.

¹⁹⁷ Aleksandar Vaskovic, "Serbia's Orthodox Church to change name to stress Kosovo link," *Reuters*, 08 March 2018, accessed 01 April 1, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-serbia-church-kosovo/serbias-orthodox-church-to-change-name-to-stress-kosovo-link-idUSKCN1GK1XX>.

¹⁹⁸ Vaskovic, "Serbia's Orthodox Church to change name to stress Kosovo link."

the Russian and Serbian OC generated an unprecedented campaign counter to Government of Kosovo and attempted to preserve the domination of a Slavic cultural ‘historical and mythological story on Kosovo.’¹⁹⁹

The dedication of the Serbian OC, which attempts to uphold the status-quo and raise ethnic tension demonstrates their anti-Western orientation. The Serbian Orthodox Church knows that if the region is stable and have good neighborhood relations than the countries are closer to fulfill the requirements for EU and or NATO membership. Therefore, with these destabilization acts and interference in the political sphere the church then knows it can prevent or at least delay the membership of the states in the Western organizations, which is Russian goal as well.

¹⁹⁹ Kallaba, “Russian interference in Kosovo: How and why?” 12.

Security Influence

The attitude of Russia changed after aggression to Ukraine and the escalation of the conflict with the West. Then the Western Balkans in the eyes of the Kremlin became, above all, the next battlefield.

—Warsaw Institute, “Russia’s Hybrid Warfare in the Western Balkans”

In the security sphere, Russian influence extends through the military and intelligence fields. As mentioned in previous chapters, except Serbia the WB5 countries are oriented to NATO membership. Montenegro is already a member, although Macedonia is close to being 30th member, Serbia is PFP but has no aspiration to join as it insists in its military neutrality. As far as Bosnia it is PFP and ethnic Bosnian’s are interested in full membership, but because of constitutional composition and resistance and objections of the Serbian ethnic group cannot join yet. While Kosovo is a bit farther away, they just updated their legal bases on its Security Forces which will take ten years for KSF to achieve its full operational capabilities.

Russian presence in the WB is present through its “Russian-Serbian Humanitarian Centre” in Nis, and despite the strong western pressure did not receive diplomatic status as requested from Moscow, as a lot of Western governments express concerns of its engagement in intelligence activities. The positioning of this center this leaves room to question if that is humanitarian Centre considering where it is stationed close to Serbia’s borders with Bulgaria and Romania, both NATO members as well as Macedonia and Kosovo, both NATO aspirants.²⁰⁰ According to Krastev, logic dictates that if Moscow

²⁰⁰ Blerim Reka, “A new military build-up in the Balkans,” *Emerging Europe*, 10 January 2019, accessed 27 March 2019, <https://emerging-europe.com/voices/a-new-military-build-up-in-the-balkans/>.

wants to increase pressure on Europe, it will do so outside the territory of the former Soviet Union and if that is the plan, the Balkans is a probable hotspot. A controlled crisis in the Balkans would give Moscow bargaining marks and deniability. It would force European governments to turn away from Ukraine. Moreover, it would be almost impossible for the EU to maintain even a semblance of unity on security and it would open a gap between the European south and the European north.²⁰¹

Russian effort is to keep WB5 in a status-quo with a weak economy, politics, and security. By using all possible means, Russia hungers to destabilize the countries by maintaining an unstable situation, and fragile relations between neighboring countries will prevent and or slow down Euro-Atlantic membership for the region. NATO interest and benefits are mutual with the Balkans, which is to strengthen relations with Serbia and other WB countries as it sees as the enlargement as enhanced collective security and security of entire the Euro-Atlantic region, which advances democratic values, reform, and respect for the rule of law.²⁰²

Military Affairs

Without prospects of joining the EU in future, the Western Balkans might face new military conflicts soon.

—President of the European Commission Jean-Claude Juncker
“Western Balkans could face new military conflicts
without EU perspective, Juncker says”

²⁰¹ Ivan Krastev, “The Balkans are the soft underbelly of Europe,” *Financial Times*, 14 January 2015, accessed 14 October 2018, <https://www.ft.com/content/2287ba66-8489-11e4-bae9-00144feabdc0>.

²⁰² Heads of State and Government of the North Atlantic Alliance. *Brussels Summit Declaration*, 17, 18.

In military affairs, Russia mostly is exercising its influence in Serbia and RS by supporting them with military equipment, weapons systems, and training. Serbia is part of PfP in NATO and at the political level; the Serbian government has declared military neutrality toward NATO. This announcement was stated many times by Serbia and recently by the Serbian president during a meeting with Putin.²⁰³ Whereas, RS as a part of Bosnian federation, is opposing Bosnian NATO membership. One of the cases that demonstrates the Russian tendencies for destabilizations, even by using military means, was when they deployed a unit from Bosnia to seize Pristina's airport before NATO's arrival. Still, Russia was furious about the 1999 NATO bombing campaign in Kosovo and faced many temptations to play the spoiler.²⁰⁴

This Russian military engagement with Serbia is more evident since the 2014 Crimea annexation.²⁰⁵ Though in reality, Serbia's benefit from its military engagement with Russia includes joint military exercises and equipment, the purchase of which are advertised much more deeply in the Serbian press than the military cooperation with the U.S. Consequently, fears of an "arms race" have been emerging in the region, Serbia seeks to procure weapons from Russia, and Croatia look for artillery systems from the U.S.²⁰⁶ Bechev confirmed that Moscow donated different military equipment, software,

²⁰³ President of Russia, "Meeting with President of Serbia Aleksandar Vucic," 08 May 2018, accessed 13 February 2019, <http://en.kremlin.ru/catalog/countries/RS/events/57434>.

²⁰⁴ Allin, *NATO's Balkan Intervention*, 89.

²⁰⁵ Zakem, Rosenau, and Johnson, "Shining a Light on the Western Balkans," 17.

²⁰⁶ Zakem, Rosenau, and Johnson, "Shining a Light on the Western Balkans," 18.

T-72 tanks, and MiG-29 fighters to Serbian armed forces.²⁰⁷ and, as a gift, Russia transferred 30 T-72C main battle tanks and 30 BRDM-2 armored vehicles with all arms to Serbia. Furthermore, Serbia and Russia signed an agreement to purchase the Buk Air Defense Complex for the Serbian army,²⁰⁸ Russia plans to establish a regional center for servicing its military helicopters, and recently announced it would deploy troops to Serbia.²⁰⁹ Besides the Serbian defense industry, which is growing and undertaking substantial modernization, Belgrade is building up its military in cooperation with Moscow, who is predictably framing the geopolitics of the Balkans and beyond. Serbia has an agreement for Military-Technical cooperation with Russia; from this agreement, besides the donations mentioned above, Serbia is acquiring MI-17 and possibly MI-35 helicopters, and Antonov An-26 transport airplanes.²¹⁰ Furthermore, there are suggestions to acquire the famous Russian air defense system S-300, to better secure Serbian airspace and detain potential threats, mainly posed the West and its partners in the post-Yugoslav space. These purchases are supported mostly by anti-Western nationalist politicians.²¹¹

²⁰⁷ Bechev, “Russia’s Foray into the Balkans: Who Is Really to Blame?” 4.

²⁰⁸ Aghayev, “Relations Between Russia and Serbia.”

²⁰⁹ Reka, “A new military build-up in the Balkans.”

²¹⁰ Daniel Heler, “Serbian Guns Have Consequences for Balkans and Beyond,” *Balkan Insight*, 13 December 2018, accessed 25 February 2019, <https://balkaninsight.com/2018/12/13/serbian-guns-have-consequences-for-balkans-and-beyond-12-12-2018/>.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*

A 15-year bilateral defense agreement was signed late in 2013 after many high-level visits, training operations, joint exercises, arms sales, and intelligence sharing between Moscow and Belgrade, and Russia and Serbia. The same year, after signing a NATO Partnership for Action Plan and agreeing to maintaining military neutrality, Serbia became an observer to the Russian-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) military alliance, hosted Russian-led military exercises, and officially expressed its desire to acquire Russian weaponry.²¹² Furthermore, Moscow initiated military-style training for teenagers in Serbia and Russia to promote cultural links and military-patriotic solidarity between youth in Russia and ethnic Serbs in the region. However, later in 2018 Serbian police closed the camp.²¹³

According to the Foreign Policy Research Institute in its article, “*Bosnia on the Russian Chopping Block: The Potential for Violence and Steps to Prevent It*,” Russia is training paramilitary groups of Serb Republic in B&H and Serbia, whose aims and objectives are to support extreme nationalism.²¹⁴ Pro NATO and EU countries of the region have no military power to resist the Russian military and that is one of the reasons the NATO presence in Balkans is necessary until all the countries become NATO

²¹² Lasheras et al., “Return to Instability: How migration and great power politics threaten the Western Balkans,” 7.

²¹³ Stronski and Himes, “Russia’s Game in the Balkans,” 14.

²¹⁴ Reuf Bajrović, Richard Kraemer, and Emir Suljagić, “Bosnia on the Russian Chopping Block: The Potential for Violence and Steps to Prevent It,” Foreign Policy Research Institute, 16 March 2018, accessed 04 July 2018, <https://www.fpri.org/article/2018/03/bosnia-russian-chopping-block-potential-violence-steps-prevent/>.

members.²¹⁵ The newspaper, “The Guardian,” reported Russian-trained mercenaries back Bosnia's Serb separatists, and the mercenaries employed by separatist leader Milorad Dodik are helping to establish a paramilitary unit.²¹⁶ “The Guardian” also refers to the Bosnian security minister who confirmed the militia called “Serbian Honor,” was trained in a Russian-founded “humanitarian center” in Serbia. He also confirmed the existence of a paramilitary group to be used against Dodik’s opponents, who organized a military parade in Banja Luka in disobedience to a ruling by the country’s constitutional court. This movement from Bosnian Serbs comes at a time of rising western concerns about Russia’s efforts to destabilize the Balkans and NATO’s expansion in the region.²¹⁷

As General Curtis Scaparrotti, mentioned in his delivery to the House Armed Services Committee, the Russian general objective is to undermine any movement toward integration with the E.U and NATO. Gen. Scaparrotti mentioned the Balkan challenges and Russia’s position against Montenegro in NATO. He thinks Moscow will continue to try and address this with North Macedonia, just as they tried to interfere in Montenegro's succession.²¹⁸

²¹⁵ Leonid Savin, “Russia’s Geopolitical Interests in The Balkans,” *Geopolitica*, 19 June 2017, accessed 13 February 2019, <https://www.geopolitica.ru/en/article/russias-geopolitical-interests-balkans>.

²¹⁶ The Guardian, “Russian-trained mercenaries back Bosnia's Serb separatists,” 12 January 2018, accessed 19 February 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jan/12/russian-trained-mercenaries-back-bosnias-serb-separatists>.

²¹⁷ Ibid.

²¹⁸ U.S. Congress, House, Committee on Armed Services, *2019 HASC Opening Statement and Posture Statement as Delivered by General Curtis Scaparrotti, U.S. European Command Commander* (Washington, DC, 14 March 2019), accessed 07 April

Considering the fragility of the relationship between countries, ethnic divisions, and tendencies to show superiority among neighboring countries, a disproportion of military powers present threats for the region. The situation worsens if the orientation of countries is different such as in the WB5 where Serbia maintains strong military ties with Moscow and does not want to join NATO. Whereas B&H is polarized by ethnic groups where Bosnians, but not the Serbs, desire to join NATO. Bosnia needs a consensus to decide, and the consensus between Bosnian and Serbs in B&H is almost impossible, especially when it comes to Euro-Atlantic consideration.

Intelligence Sphere

In the intelligence field, Moscow is focused and pays a lot of attention to the WB as evidenced in efforts to attempt a coup, interfere in elections in Macedonia, and contribute to the rising nationalist rhetoric, to finance, and to manage news feed across the region. Consequently, politics in the WB are supervised by Nikolai Patrushev, Secretary of the Security Council and former long-term director of FSB.²¹⁹ The situation has worsened with the presence of a possible Russian spy center in Nis, the so-called Serbian-Russian Humanitarian Center.

The well-known Russian-Serbian Humanitarian Response Center in Nis, Serbia, stated their mission is to enhance regional capacity to respond to weather emergencies

2019, <https://www.eucom.mil/media-library/transcript/39554/hasc-2019-transcript-as-delivered-by-general-curtis-scaparrotti>.

²¹⁹ Warsaw Institute, “The head of SVR in Serbia. What is the Russian intelligence up to?” 25 April 2018, accessed 15 March 2019, <https://warsawinstitute.org/head-svr-serbia-russian-intelligence/>, 3.

and other natural or human-made disasters.²²⁰ Western countries and analysts believe this center is an intelligence collection center. Limited public information about this facility and its activities has led to the conclusion the real mission is not what it publicly states. Hence this center gives Moscow a potential collection and operational platform to monitor events in Serbia and key countries of interest, including Bosnia, Bulgaria, Kosovo, and Macedonia.²²¹

Russian and Serbian individuals arrested in Montenegro during the 2016 failed coup indicates that Russian engagement in the region influences this area too. Russian intelligence agencies are active all across the WB; Specifically, in Serbia, Russian services reportedly use their influence with their local colleagues. In the Serbian entity, in B&H, seemingly has deep ties to Russian intelligence, and in Montenegro, two purported Russian spies were accused in November 2016 of conspiracy to eliminate Prime Minister Milo Djukanovic to establish a pro-Russia government.²²² Russia will likely continue its efforts to connect with formal institutionals, social, and political supporters as it did in Montenegro to use an alliance between local Orthodox Slavophiles, the Balkan Cossack Army, and Russia's Night Wolves motorcycle gang.²²³ The 2016 attempted coup in Montenegro marks the first time Russian used violence outside of the former Soviet Union territory to achieve its political aims. According to investigators, around 50

²²⁰ Stronski and Himes, "Russia's Game in the Balkans," 14.

²²¹ Ibid., 15.

²²² Zakem, Rosenau, and Johnson, "Shining a Light on the Western Balkans," 18.

²²³ Galeotti, "Do the Western Balkans face a coming Russian storm?" 14.

Russian military intelligence officers arrived in Montenegro illegally from Serbia a night before the coup, to assist plotters who consisted of members of Montenegro's political opposition, extremists from neighboring Serbia, and Russian agents.²²⁴ According to the Foreign Policy Research Institute, the coup d'état led by former Serbian gendarmerie commander Bratislav Dikic, planned to use a group of 20 individuals dressed in stolen Montenegrin police uniforms to occupy the parliament on elections night. In the meantime, the pro-Russian political party, the Democratic Front, would announce victory and call on hundreds of mobilized devotees to storm the parliament building. The group of disguised police would fire on opposition protesters, the Democratic Front would then call for nationwide protests, and declare the violence was an attempt to prevent the opposition's victory. Also, the plotters were to assassinate Djukanovic and in that way use a state of emergency as a springboard to state control.²²⁵ Besides the engagement of experienced agents and dozens of external players, Montenegrin authorities prevented the destabilization and coup attempt, and today Montenegro is a NATO member and has a pro-Western government.

According to the newspaper, "The Guardian," intelligence individuals that are usually called "embassy officials" influence through different "cultural" associations and

²²⁴ Cristina Maza, "Russian military spies backed attempt to assassinate leader of Montenegro," *Newsweek*, 03 July 2018, accessed 07 April 2019, <https://www.newsweek.com/exclusive-russian-military-spies-backed-attempt-assassinate-leader-montenegro-1007324>.

²²⁵ Bajrović, Garčević, and Kraemer, "Russia's Strategy of Destabilization in Montenegro," 9.

organizations.²²⁶ Russian intelligence and its propaganda consistently work to destabilize Balkans, and another example is in Macedonia where Moscow has worsened tensions between Macedonians and Albanians. In particular, Russia intended to increase the political crisis and spread gossip that Albania and Bulgaria are trying to divide the country.²²⁷

Files from *The Guardian* on Macedonian counter-intelligence reports demonstrate that in 2017 Russian intelligence was involved in the Macedonian parliament, as is showed in Figure 6.²²⁸ In April 2017, nationalist protesters attacked the Macedonian Prime Minister and parliament members. The documents leaked from Macedonian counter-intelligence proves that the Serbian intelligence strongly supported this pro-Russian and anti-western group.²²⁹ The leaked documents suggest Russian and Serbian attempts to push Macedonia away from the west contributed to the political and ethnic crisis in country.

²²⁶ Luke Harding, Aubrey Belford, and Saska Cvetkovska, “Russia actively stoking discord in Macedonia since 2008, intel files say,” *The Guardian*, 04 June 2017, accessed 13 February 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jun/04/russia-actively-stoking-discord-in-macedonia-since-2008-intel-files-say-leak-kremlin-balkan-nato-west-influence>.

²²⁷ Zakem, Rosenau, and Johnson, “Shining a Light on the Western Balkans,” 14.

²²⁸ Harding, Belford, and Cvetkovska, “Russia actively stoking discord in Macedonia since 2008, intel files say.”

²²⁹ Vuk Velebit, “Russian influence in Macedonia: A credible threat?” *European Western Balkans*, 14 November 2017, accessed 13 February 2019, <https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2017/11/14/russian-influence-macedonia-credible-threat/>.

The 2018 visit of Sergey Naryshkin, the head of Foreign Intelligence Service of the Russian Federation (SVR) in Belgrade, confirms Russia is involved in the intelligence sphere in the WB5 and enjoys a special role and distinctive relationship with Serbia. The visit is a sign that in the future one should expect new destabilizing Russian activities. Initially these activities might be seen in RS as the WB as it became a significant battlefield in the geopolitical competitiveness with the west. After the meeting between Naryshkin and Serbian President Vucic, the Intelligence Service of the Russian Federation announced, “during the conversation both sides underlined the necessity of obeying international law in dealing with regional conflicts,” and the necessity of cooperation between SVR and Serbian intelligence. In addition, besides others, Naryshkin met with the head of Serbian OC as well.²³⁰ One other Russian oligarch, Konstantin Malofeev, who is a nationalist and protagonist of the Pan-Slavic community, was mentioned previously about his “charity,” was also involved in activities in Crimea and Donbas and provided financial support to Russian activities. He is a well-known businessman with interests in Serbia and RS, and has organized a visit of a considerable number of Cossacks in Banja Luka, the capital of RS, to support Milorad Dodik, who according to Russia is the most important regional Serbian pro-Russian politician.²³¹

²³⁰ Warsaw Institute, “The head of SVR in Serbia. What is the Russian intelligence up to?” 2.

²³¹ *Ibid.*, 3.

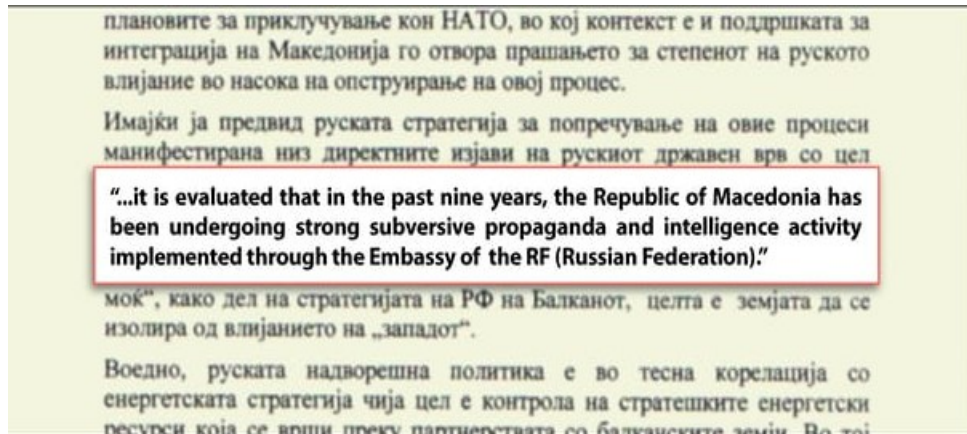


Figure 6. Screenshot: A Briefing Prepared for the Director of Macedonia's Intelligence Agency, the UBK

Source: The Guardian, "Russia actively stoking discord in Macedonia since 2008, intel files say," 4 June 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jun/04/russia-actively-stoking-discord-in-macedonia-since-2008-intel-files-say-leak-kremlin-balkan-nato-west-influence>.

Due to increased tensions between Serb and Kosovar politicians and rising Serbian nationalist rhetoric, in 2017 pro-Russian outlets distributed news feeds across Serbia stating Russia will defend that population by installing the S-400 air defense system in Serbia in case of any military conflict.²³² In fact, Serbia provokes the situation and raises tensions between the countries as well as in Kosovo by financing and directing suspicious organizations intent on creating instability and ethnic frictions. Examples of destabilization and increasing instability in the region was demonstrated when the Serbian government intended to send a Russian-made train from Belgrade to Mitrovica, a northern town of Kosovo. This train was decorated with provocative symbols and

²³² John Cappello, "Operations in the Western Balkans," *Real Clear Defense*, 01 February 2017, accessed 05 April 2019, https://www.realcleardefense.com/articles/2017/02/02/russian_information_operations_in_the_western_balkans_110732.html.

statements that “Kosovo is Serbia” in more than 20 languages. Kosovo stopped the train at the border. For that reason, Kosovo accused Serbia of wanting to stage an invasion of Northern Kosovo, based on Russia’s annexation of Crimea. In return, Serbia accused Kosovo of setting mines along the railway tracks and preparing a bombing campaign against Serbs and their holy sites.²³³

²³³ Barbara Surk, “Russia Stirs Friction in Balkans, as NATO Keeps an Uneasy Peace,” *The New York Times*, 19 February 2017, accessed 05 April 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/19/world/europe/russia-nato-balkans.html>.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

In conclusion, one can consider that due to lack of effort from local governments, and lukewarm Western enthusiasm toward the WB integration, there is a confident and quite clear observation that Russia's engagement to bring presence and domination in all spheres of society, politics, and economy, is evident and must not be neglected. Through research, one could conclude that the approach that Russia is taking is dangerous – continuous and realistic, towards establishing the long-term presence in the region of Balkan Peninsula, with particular attention to WB5 through its traditional ally, Serbia. However, an enhanced joint and coordinated approach of local governments, EU, U.S., and NATO, will hasten the WB Euro-Atlantic integration. In that way, Russian influence in the economy, politics and security sphere will be minimized. The region will likely be peaceful and look forward to their socio-economic development and appreciate the benefits of being part of western establishments.

The continuous engagement of Russia towards establishing its domination in the society and all aspects mentioned earlier brings to the conclusion that Russia is leveraging the lack of clear orientation and the weak engagement of WB5 countries to work toward integration into EU and NATO. At the same time, the WB5 countries are making very slow progress toward fulfilling the criteria in order to join the EU and NATO. On the other side, NATO and the EU do not appear to have a strong will for speeding up the process and accepting these countries into their organization.

Russia is spreading its influence mainly by doing what they do best, propaganda. During the Soviet era, it used propaganda against their population, creating deceptions about how great they were and how bad their western enemies stood on every aspect of life, economy, security, and politics. After the Soviet collapse and Putin's rise in power, Russia started using propaganda as their most sophisticated weapon but this time not against their population; instead, they use propaganda against the population of their western enemies and their allies.

Almost two decades after the struggle and war for liberation, along the lack of economic and social progress, Kosovo still faces the struggle to set up a permanent agreement with its northern neighbor, Serbia, so they can concentrate on working toward joining the NATO and EU. This ongoing slow-progressive approach is happening because of Russia's aspirations toward using the Serb service in achieving its goals.

In Kosovo, especially in its northern part, Russia is involved through instrumenting the Serbian political party Serbian List, at some extent so-called humanitarian organizations by providing support to local Serbs and local media that are opposing to Kosovo independence (Kosovo had declared independence from Serbia in 2008). In Macedonia, Russian efforts are focusing on the Serbian intelligence to support pro-Russian and anti-Western Macedonian nationalists. In Montenegro, besides the intelligence and the opposing parties oriented to Russian politics, the economic presence of Russia is quite significant, especially at tourist industry. Finally, the Russian influence and presence in Serbia are at all levels of governance.

Russia has an intention to impede NATO and EU from expanding in Balkan countries by interfering in their economy, politics and security issues. Russia is following

different approaches and different relations with every individual Balkan country. The NATO and EU have a plan to enlarge in the western Balkans, even though it is slow and so far, not sufficient enough to counter Moscow's dominance especially in economic and propaganda sphere. Russia wants to increase its influence in the region by maintaining its footprint in the Balkans. Economically Russia is influencing the Balkans by dominating in the oil and gas market and manipulating the humanitarian activity. Similarly, Russia is achieving its political interference in the governments of the region and conducting widespread propaganda. In conclusion, all of this involvement allows the Russian government to influence Balkans countries activities in security field through military and intelligence.

Media influence on the other side is playing a significant impact by placing additional obstacles toward western integration. Having in mind technological improvements primarily due to the internet, news from all over the world spreads almost as it happens, and the channels to spread news are not as a few decades ago through newspapers and TV news where editors had their say to assure the accuracy of news. Since nowadays news spreads through internet news portals and it reaches the audience through their electronic devices mainly smartphones, the role of news editors ensuring the accuracy of the news is almost eliminated. This allows for influence through fake news and opinion making through glorifying insignificant people and events. Due to the lack of serious quality media control and massive launching propaganda, a considerable number of young un-educated people have a negative opinion toward Western democracy and integration on it. The lack of educational information and the vast space of information flow is bringing Russia a favorable moment on 'adding gas to the spark' and

spreading propaganda by showing the unpleasant parts of WB countries to the western world.

The economy in WB5 is stagnating, and the wealth is not adequately spread, it is concentrated into a small group of people (corruption, wars, history). In order to maintain political and economic power, fair competition is abolished. Very often due to corrupt affairs, foreign investors withdraw from investing. There are no proper Secondary Financial Markets established where bonds and stocks are traded in WB5 countries. This enables governments to control the economy entirely. Despite the rhetoric of WB5 politicians to fight high unemployment rates, one can assume that they intend to keep the high rate of unemployment as they can control the population easily. They do employ their political party militants in government institutions, so they keep them under control regarding their vote during elections. Brain migration is ongoing for several years now.

The above-described situation makes natural ground for Russian propaganda to multiply the perception of injustice, corruption, and rotten politics, resulting in lost hope and pessimism. This state of mind of the population results in increased insecurity and will to leave for better and safer countries. In the political field, it makes the majority lose interest in politics and therefore boycott any engagement, even voting, as their focus is to leave the country. Economically, this forces them to save as much as they can and not spend on anything but necessary items. This makes the economy stagnate even more.

Balkan Peninsula historically is identified and known as a boiling pot. One can believe that those assumptions have been made based on historical events that have led to almost non-stoppable wars, conflicts, and bloodshed. This situation is now repeating, but with different means. The Russian expansion, by all means, needs to stop. Looking at all

the research that has been done, there is an unavoidable fact that not only Kosovo but also the entire Balkan countries with a western-oriented perspective, need to work toward enhancing their dedication toward joining the two main essential organizations, EU and NATO.

Recommendations

As presented in this thesis the overall situation in the WB5 is fragile and unstable. To counter the Russian influence and negative impact, first of all, local governments in close coordination with EU and NATO should undertake reform measures to improve the legal framework in the economy, empower their anti-corruption institutions, and maintain rigorous control over the finances at all levels of governance. Second, to avoid individuals from long-standing in power and same position, in coordination with western NGOs and other organizations introduce cultural, scientific and sports initiatives, increase population awareness and education on information domain and promote western democratic values. Third, encourage Serbia and Kosovo to continue their dialogue, encourage countries to define their political position and alignment. Finally, West, should increase security cooperation and maintain NATO presence in the WB5 to deter Russian threat and prevent any eventual conflict.

Meanwhile, not all of the recommendations will immediately meet FAS criteria; however, in the stages of implementation of the initial phases will create conditions that will meet the criteria. Therefore, the recommendations are assessed to be feasible, acceptable, and suitable.

Recommendation 1: Improve the legal framework for economic investment: The local governments, in close coordination with western partners, should ensure they have a

proper legal framework and create favorable conditions for local businesses and encourage western ones. There is no doubt that Europe and the U.S. are investing and supporting WB5 by far more than Russia does, but probably the investment should be focused more on the fields that are required to fulfill the integration requirements. The region will achieve multiple goals which each government aims and those are: decrease the unemployment rate, create a liberal market by bringing various alternatives, and prevent or at least minimize the Russian monopolization of market in particular gas and oil.

Desired end state: Increase economic stability and keep fair business competition which will deny monopoly and dumping. Creating suitable space for local, regional and international businesses and investment.

FAS assessment: The improvement of legal framework meets FAS requirements because allows local economies and western business to benefit from rational treatment, and will enable considerations for domestic concerns which is to increase the rate of employment and partners interest.

Recommendation 2: Empower the anticorruption institutions, and maintain rigorous control over the finances by maintaining, recording and documenting all and cross-checking documentation, and regular reporting. Local government should enhance more transparent government, support and encourage courts in prosecuting corrupt individuals. Likewise, the EU should place more pressure on political elites, especially regarding judicial system independence. The stronger law enforcement and the rule of law over the economic domain will allow countries to have a better perspective and

economic welfare. Furthermore, by the transparent economy and no/or limited/low corruption the region will have better economic growth.

Desired end state: Significantly decrease corruption in the countries to enable economic prosperity stability and welfare of populations.

FAS assessment: If the corruption is significantly mitigated in the region, national interests can be more easily pursued, and strategically devised to achieve the collective interests of WB5 members. That kind of momentum will likely positively influence western interest in expansion to include the WB5.

Recommendation 3: Strengthen the rule of law in the WB5 Region. The current democratic values are not always followed through, and the rule of law is not empowered, although the legal framework exists. In the WB there are cases when the specific leaders would not give up power despite losing elections who would still insist on remaining in power. To prevent this occurrence, measures should take to adopt model legal frameworks in harmony with the western ones which limits political power for particular individuals who violate basic political norms and regulations. Also, EU leaders should encourage local leaders to embrace and undertake necessary reforms to harmonize local laws and regulations with the EU ones. Strengthening the law and its implementation would be of most vital importance to minimize the influence of not only Russia but also other non-democratic and non-western ideologies.

Desired end state: Application of Western values, law, and political order in accordance with EU requirements.

FAS assessment: These measures might not be acceptable from some of the local leaders, but generally would be appreciated and respected from civil society and pro-

western values political parties. Moreover, restricting individuals to gain political power from longstanding in position might prevent corruption, bring political balance, protect and advance national interests.

Recommendation 4: Encourage Serbia and Kosovo to implement the agreements achieved so far, and reach a final agreement and reconciliation. The dialogue for normalization of relations between Serbia and Kosovo should continue, and the EU should continue to facilitate the dialogue and encourage the U.S. to engage in this dialogue as well. Of course, resolution without Western engagement is almost impossible. As demonstrated in various cases, Serbia has Russian support to oppose Kosovo's independence and membership in the Western organizations, and this situation is aggravated even more by the non-recognition of Kosovo by five EU member states. The non-recognition of Kosovo independence by EU members contributes to preventing Kosovo's membership in Western institutions. However, what is most important to have better and faster results the EU should apply equal treatment and standards to both countries and give them an equal political opportunity. Moreover, neither of them can become EU or NATO member without mutual recognition and normalization of relations.

Desired end state: Regional stability, which may allow to find the peaceful resolution of the current state between Serbia and Kosovo, and bring countries closer to EU membership.

FAS assessment: Due to the significant differences between these two countries, the appliance of FAS to both parties is challenging. Normalization of relations and mutual recognition might bring both closer to Western integration since both countries desire EU membership.

Recommendation 5: To introduce cultural, scientific and sports initiatives in the WB5. Increased cultural, scientific and sports activities exchange between WB5 countries would be of great help to overcome rampant parochialism and exceptionalism. Education and student exchanges would also play a significant role in approaching each other and fighting nationalism and far-right ideology. EU countries, as well as the U.S. and NATO, should be more active in the region to help establish robust, functioning democracies by empowering civil society and economic reforms to generate hope and weaken Russian influence. Furthermore, these activities will promote youths understanding and appreciating the western values.

Desired end state: Introduce Western values and increase the social awareness of youth and global awareness. This will highlight the drawbacks and possible harms from non-democratic organizations operating in the region.

FAS assessment: Social activities will positively influence the national mood of the WB5. Initiation of social events is beneficial for all societies, and each WB5 country can endure the required cost without jeopardizing other priorities; moreover, in some cases can be covered from various funds through NGOs and other organizations which are to undertake these measures. Likewise, this recommendation fits all societies and meets the FAS criteria.

Recommendation 6: Increase population awareness and education on information domain. One of the critical ways to prevent populations from trusting and being influenced by fake news is to educate them. The education of society should be by maintaining or developing legal bases and or governmental teams that will mentor the media publications and censure those who have a suspicious or unclear origin of news,

author and not bringing the pieces of evidence following proper media publications standards that should always be fact-based. That way in a given country the media community will have to publish only fact-based news by fulfilling required criteria of publications such as a known house of publication/name of newspaper or web page, the author of release, a valuable source, and empower law-enforcement agencies to raise awareness of fake-news deriving from unknown and untrusted media.

Desired end state: Population and the entire society is routinely exposed to reasonably objective information sources and is not unduly affected by propaganda and disinformation. Society can make the difference of information served to them.

FAS assessment: Free and transparent media is the goal of every democratic society and its leaders. The population deserves to be informed correctly, and the local governments have principal sources and with reasonable effort can endure the eventual cost and sustain the media transparency and obedience of media regulations in place. Likewise, the recommendation meets required FAS criteria.

Recommendation 7: To undertake an information campaign in the WB5 countries to promote western values and counter non-democratic fake news. As mentioned in the thesis in the W5 and in particular among ethnic Slavic population, the perception for Russia as a Slavic protector, whereas the West is proclaimed as a threat to Slavic values. WB5 in close coordination with the EU, local and western NGOs should undertake information campaign and inform vulnerable population with the west perspective and benefits from it. This information campaign should use all available media such as local TVs, online media, and social media. This campaign should target a vulnerable audience

especially in the countries in which populations perception is negative for western democracy.

Desired end state: To shape information and promote Western democracy, its values, and the benefits from embracing those values, and counter Russian propaganda.

FAS assessment: The recommendation is feasible because the campaign will support the priority, strategy, and goal of most of the pro-western local leaders such as transparency and freedom of media. It is acceptable because it consists and aims democratic values from which the entire society will benefit and will understand the more comprehensive reality. Besides, it suits to have the correct information in media because it protects and advances national interests.

Recommendation 8: Make clear to WB5 countries, particularly, Serbia and the RS within B&H they cannot be aligned with Russia and being aligned into the EU. The political and general orientation of Russia is in contradiction with western democracy, and especially after the violation of international law in Crimea, does not correspond to Western democratic values and as such poses a threat for EU. Therefore, each country that aspires EU membership must line up with the EU on economic, politics, and security policies.

Desired end state: A clearly defined political orientation for Serbia and the RS that respects B&H sovereignty, maintains regional stability and implements EU criteria for eventual membership.

FAS assessment: Even though the recommendation does not meet FAS criteria, its implementation might have a positive impact on entire WB and its stability and beyond.

Recommendation 9: Enhance Security cooperation and maintain current NATO presence in WB5. NATO and its member states should increase their engagement in security cooperation with the WB5 countries. This cooperation should be by engaging countries in training and exercises and building capabilities and equipping. Also, the current NATO presence in WB5 should be sustained to support peace and stability of the region. Moreover, viable NATO strategy should also be to decrease military and or security cooperation with Russia for those countries which do not show a willingness on a relationship with NATO and keep or improve their military and security ties with Russia.

Desired end state: Increase the interoperability, common operating standards, and education. That way the WB5 military will be closer to achieving NATO membership requirements and be prepared to contribute in NATO collective defense, as well as maintain a military power balance in the region which contributes to eventual military conflict. Achieve Euro-Atlantic integration sooner and so can prevent or minimize Russian opportunity to further meddle in the WB5.

FAS assessment: Beside Serbia and Republic of Srbska, the NATO presence and cooperation with it in the WB5 countries is desirable. It fits the strategies and policies of nations; it also has the support of the population of the region. It also is, in compliance with the EU and NATO strategies and goals which are prosperity and security of the region, which also protects and advances long-term interests of all pro-western and western parties involved in WB5. Furthermore, enhanced security cooperation is not threatening and is not against any other neighboring nation strategies, policies, and goals.

Even though WB5 countries have undertaken some transformation reforms in political, economic, social, and the rule of law remains insufficient. The local leaders should set aside personal benefits and engage more decisively on resolving their internal and regional issues. Also, to prevent or minimize Russian influence in the WB5, among other, it is crucial the rule of law, media independence, the speedup of the EU and NATO integration process, and clarification and support of the WB5 countries from West about the expected membership criteria requirement from local leaders. As it geographically lies in Europe, and surrounded EU and NATO members, instability of the WB5 might have a negative impact in Europe and Alliance territory as well as inspire further Russian involvement in the region. Therefore, Western engagement must act more decisively and unify actions in support of the WB Western integration. The integration of WB in EU and NATO will consume or dim the current ethnic frictions, economic and security fragility, and political climate and the current political climate the region, and finally by the integration of the region in the western organizations, it is very likely that Russia loses leverage in the region. To achieve all of the above mentioned is required more active Western engagement with pro-democratic and supporter of reform forces in the regions.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books

- Allin, Dana H. *NATO's Balkan Intervention*. New York: Oxford University Press Inc., July 2002.
- Blitz, Brad K. *War and Change in the Balkans: Nationalism, Conflict and Cooperation*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006.
- Clark, Wesley K. *Waging Modern War: Bosnia, Kosovo, and the Future of Combat*. New York: Public Affairs, 31 July 2001.
- Holbrooke, Richard. *To End a War*. New York: The Modern Library, 09 November 2006.
- Hoxhaj, Enver. *Ngjitja e një Shteti: Politika e Jashtme e Kosovës (The Rise of a State: Kosovo Foreign Policy)*. Tirana: Guttenberg, 2017.
- Kaplan, Robert D. *Balkan Ghosts: A Journey Through History*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 14 October 1993.
- Kaufman, Joyce P. *NATO and the Former Yugoslavia: Crisis, Conflict, and the Atlantic Alliance*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2002.
- Soldatov, Andrei, and Irina Borogan. *The Red Web—The Kremlin's War on the Internet*. New York: Public Affairs, September 2015.
- Turabian, Kate L. *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*. 9th rev. ed. Edited by Wayne C. Booth, Gregory G. Colomb, Joseph M. Williams, Joseph Bizup, William T. Fitzgerald, and the University of Chicago Press Editorial Staff. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018.

Government Documents and Publications

- Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo. Law No. 06/L-123, *On Kosovo Security Force*. 14 December 2018. http://ligjet.kuvendikosoves.org/Uploads/Data/Documents/Lawno06L-123_InCNXRTmfk.pdf.
- Congressional Research Service (CRS). *Serbia: Background and U.S. Relations*. CRS Report for Congress. Washington, DC: Library of Congress, updated 16 November 2018. Accessed 29 January 2019, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R44955.pdf>.
- Council of the European Union. "Serbia: Status of Negotiations." Accessed 29 January 2019. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/enlargement/serbia/>.

- Diplomats of the Russian Empire. "Serbia (Residence in Belgrade)." 18 November 2018. Accessed 19 January 2019. <http://www.rusdiplomats.narod.ru/serbia.html>.
- European Commission. "A Credible Enlargement Perspective for and Enhanced EU Engagement with the Western Balkans." Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, Strasbourg, 6 February 2018. Accessed 10 July 2018. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/communication-credible-enlargement-perspective-western-balkans_en.pdf.
- . "Western Balkans Enlargement: Common Destination." State of the Union 2017. Accessed 16 February 2019. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/western-balkans-enlargement_en.pdf.
- European Parliament, Directorate General for External Policies, Policy Department. *Countering hybrid threats: EU and the Western Balkans case*. Study for SEDE Subcommittee. September 2018. Accessed 11 February 2019. [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2018/603851/EXPO_STU\(2018\)603851_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2018/603851/EXPO_STU(2018)603851_EN.pdf).
- Government of the Republic of North Macedonia. "Announcement of the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia for entry into force of the Final Agreement, Constitutional Amendments and Constitutional Law for Implementation of Amendments" 12 February 2019. Accessed 03 March 2019. <https://vlada.mk/node/16763?ln=en-gb>.
- Graham, Thomas E., Jonathan E. Levitsky, Cameron P. Munter, Frank G. Wisner, Mark D. Stadnyk, and Stephen C. Whittaker. *Time for Action in the Western Balkans: Policy Prescriptions for American Diplomacy*. New York: National Committee on American Foreign Policy and East West Institute, May 2018. Accessed 20 March 2019. <https://www.ncafp.org/2016/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Time-for-Action-in-the-Western-Balkans.pdf>.
- Heads of State and Government of the North Atlantic Alliance. *Brussels Summit Declaration*. 11-12 July 2018 Accessed 02 September 2018. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_156624.htm.
- Joint Chiefs of Staff. Joint Doctrine Note 1-18, *Strategy*. Washington, DC: Government Publishing Office, 25 April 2018.
- . Joint Publication 5-0, *Joint Planning*. Washington, DC: Government Publishing Office, 16 June 2017.
- Kosovo Force. "Mission." Accessed 08 October 2018. <https://jfcnaples.nato.int/kfor/about-us/welcome-to-kfor/mission>.

- North Atlantic Treaty Organization. "Enlargement." Last updated 15 February 2019. Accessed 16 February 2019. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_49212.htm.
- . "Member countries." 26 March 2018. Accessed 18 February 2019. https://www.nato.int/cps/em/natohq/topics_52044.htm.
- . "Relations with Bosnia and Hercegovina." 1 October 2018. Accessed 12 December 2018 https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_49127.htm.
- . "Relations with Serbia." 11 December 2017. Accessed 13 December 18. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_50100.htm.
- . "Relations with the Republic of North Macedonia." Last updated 15 February 2019. Accessed 18 February 2019. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_48830.htm.
- . "Statement by the NATO Secretary General on the adoption of the laws on the transition of the Kosovo Security Force." 14 December 2018. Accessed 18 February 2019. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_161631.htm?selectedLocale=en.
- President of Russia. "Meeting with President of Serbia Aleksandar Vucic." 08 May 2018. Accessed 13 February 2019. <http://en.kremlin.ru/catalog/countries/RS/events/57434>.
- Republic of Kosovo, Ministry of Economic Development. *Energy Strategy of the Republic of Kosovo 2017-2026*. March 2017. Accessed 06 April 2019. http://mzhe-ks.net/repository/docs/Kosovo_Energy_Strategy.pdf.
- Republic of Kosovo, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Diaspora. "List of Recognitions." Accessed 23 March 2019. <http://www.mfa-ks.net/al/politika/484/lista-e-njohjeve/484>.
- Republic of Kosovo, Prime Minister Office. "First agreement of principles governing the normalization of relations." Brussels, 19 April 2013. Accessed 23 March 2019. http://www.kryeministri-ks.net/repository/docs/FIRST_AGREEMENT_OF_PRINCIPLES_GOVERNING_THE_NORMALIZATION_OF_RELATIONS,_APRIL_19,_2013_BRUSSELS_en.pdf.
- Republic of Serbia. "First agreement of principles governing the normalization of relations." Accessed 23 March 2019. <http://kim.gov.rs/eng/p03.php>.
- Republican Bureau of Statistics. *External Trade: Statistical Yearbook of Republika Srpska 2018*. Accessed 14 March 2019. http://www.rzs.rs.ba/static/uploads/bilteni/godisnjak/2018/20str_2018.pdf.

- U.S. Army Command and General Staff College. Student Text 20-10, *Master of Military Art and Science (MMAS) Research and Thesis*. Ft. Leavenworth, KS: U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, August 2018.
- U.S. Congress. House. Committee on Armed Services. *2019 HASC Opening Statement and Posture Statement as Delivered by General Curtis Scaparrotti, U.S. European Command Commander*. Washington, DC, 14 March 2019. Accessed 07 April 2019. <https://www.eucom.mil/media-library/transcript/39554/hasc-2019-transcript-as-delivered-by-general-curtis-scaparrotti>.
- U.S. Congress. Senate. Armed Services Committee. *Statement by General Curtis Scaparrotti, U.S. Army, Commander, United States European Command Commander*. Washington, DC, 8 March 2018. Accessed 02 September 2018. <http://www.eucom.mil/mission/eucom-posture-statement-2018>.

Other Sources

- Agency for Foreign Investors and Export Promotion of the Republic of North Macedonia “Protek Group.” Invest North Macedonia. Accessed 13 March 2019. <http://www.investinmacedonia.com/completed-project/205-protek-group>.
- Aghayev, Elvin. “Relations Between Russia and Serbia.” The Independent International Political Research Center, 11 April 2017. Accessed 17 January 2019. <http://www.iiprc.org/relations-between-russia-and-serbia.html>.
- Ahlander, Johan, and Gederts Gelzis. “Dissatisfied Latvians turn to newcomers in parliamentary election.” *Reuters*, 07 October 2018. Accessed 26 March 2019. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-latvia-election/dissatisfied-latvians-turn-to-newcomers-in-parliamentary-election-idUSKCN1MH0BH>.
- Avramov, Kiril, and Trad Ruslan. “Patriotic Youth Camps: Recruiting Next Generation ‘Russian World’ Supporters.” *The Globe Post*, 8 October 2018. Accessed 21 February 2019. <https://theglobepost.com/2018/10/08/patriotic-russian-youth-camps/>.
- B92. “Russian NGO teams up with Kosovo Office to assist Serbs.” 25 September 2017. Accessed 24 September 2018. https://www.b92.net/eng/news/politics.php?yyyy=2017&mm=09&dd=25&nav_id=102397.
- Bajrović, Reuf, Richard Kraemer, and Emir Suljagić. “Bosnia on the Russian Chopping Block: The Potential for Violence and Steps to Prevent It.” Foreign Policy Research Institute, 16 March 2018. Accessed 04 July 2018. <https://www.fpri.org/article/2018/03/bosnia-russian-chopping-block-potential-violence-steps-prevent/>.

- Bajrović, Reuf, Vesko Garčević, and Richard Kraemer. "Russia's Strategy of Destabilization in Montenegro" Foreign Policy Research Institute, June 2018. Accessed 23 March 2019. <https://www.fpri.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/kraemer-rfp5.pdf>.
- BBC News. "Kosovo hits Serbia with 100% trade tariffs amid Interpol row." 21 November 2018. Accessed 23 March 2019. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-46287975>.
- . "Russia drops South Stream gas pipeline plan." 01 December 2014. Accessed 26 February 2019. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-30283571>.
- Bechev, Dimitar. "Russia's Foray into the Balkans: Who Is Really to Blame?" Foreign Policy Research Institute, 12 October 2017. Accessed 07 October 2018. <https://www.fpri.org/article/2017/10/russias-foray-balkans-really-blame/>.
- . "Understanding Russia's influence in the Western Balkans." The European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats, September 2018. Accessed 27 December 2018. <https://www.hybridcoe.fi/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Strategic-Analysis-2018-9-Bechev-.pdf>.
- Birnbaum, Michael. "Russia's low-cost influence strategy finds success in Serbia." *The Washington Post*, 3 October 2018. Accessed 4 December 2018. https://www.washingtonpost.com/percent20world/europe/russias-low-cost-influence-strategy-finds-success-in-serbia--with-the-help-of-fighter-jets-media-conspiracies-and-a-bikerpercent20gang/2018/10/03/49dbf48e-8f47-11e8-ae59-01880eac5f1d_story.html?utm_term=.571a6bc17630.
- Blank, Stephen J., ed. "Yugoslavia's wars: The problem from Hell." Report. Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, PA, 1995. Accessed 02 March 2019. <https://ssi.armywarcollege.edu/pdffiles/PUB160.pdf>.
- Bloomberg Editorial Board. "Keeping the Balkans Out of Putin's Grasp." *Bloomberg News*, 20 December 2018. Accessed 26 March 2019. <https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2018-12-20/the-balkans-progress-and-russian-interference>.
- Cappello, John. "Operations in the Western Balkans." *Real Clear Defense*, 01 February 2017. Accessed 05 April 2019. https://www.realcleardefense.com/articles/2017/02/02/russian_information_operations_in_the_western_balkans_110732.html.
- Center for the Study of Democracy (CSD). "Assessing Russia's Economic Footprint in Bosnia and Herzegovina." CSD Policy Brief No. 74. January 2018. Accessed 14 March 2019. <http://old.csd.bg/artShow.php?id=18127>.

- . “Assessing Russia’s Economic Footprint in Macedonia.” CSD Policy Brief No. 71. January 2018. Accessed 24 February 2019. <http://old.csd.bg/artShow.php?id=18116>.
- . “Assessing Russia’s Economic Footprint in Montenegro.” CSD Policy Brief No. 73. January 2018. Accessed 24 February 2019. <http://old.csd.bg/artShow.php?id=18126>.
- . “Assessing Russia’s Economic Footprint in the Western Balkans.” 2018. Accessed 13 December 2018. <http://www.csd.bg/artShow.php?id=18131>.
- Clark, Wesley K. “Don’t wait for the western Balkans to blow up again. The U.S. and the E.U. must act.” *The Washington Post*, 11 April 2018. Accessed 16 January 2019. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/global-opinions/wp/2018/04/11/dont-wait-for-the-western-balkans-to-blow-up-again-the-u-s-and-the-e-u-must-act/?utm_term=.c0a30904827a.
- Colborne, Michael. “One of Bosnia’s New Presidents May Want to Break the Country Apart.” *Foreign Policy*, 09 October 2018. Accessed 02 April 2019. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/10/09/one-of-bosnias-new-presidents-may-want-to-break-the-country-apart/>.
- Council on Foreign Relations. “The Unraveling of the Balkans Peace Agreements.” 08 November 2017. Accessed 21 March 2019. <https://www.cfr.org/report/unraveling-balkans-peace-agreements>.
- de Borja Lasheras, Francisco, Vessela Tcherneva, and Fredrik Wesslau. “Return to Instability: How migration and great power politics threaten the Western Balkans.” Policy Brief. European Council on Foreign Relations, March 2016. Accessed 12 March 2019. https://www.ecfr.eu/page/-/ECFR_163_RETURN_TO_INSTABILITY.pdf.
- Diamant, Jeff. “Orthodox Christians in Central and Eastern Europe favor strong role for Russia.” Pew Research Center, 11 May 2017. Accessed 31 March 2019. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/05/11/orthodox-christians-in-central-and-eastern-europe-favor-strong-role-for-russia-in-geopolitics-religion/>.
- Dimishkovski, Aleksandar. “Macedonia Has New Government, but Rocky Road Ahead” *The New York Times*, 01 June 2017. Accessed 23 March 2019. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/01/world/europe/macedonia-zoran-zaev-election.html?register=google>.
- Dudik Andrea, Misha Savic, and Gordana Filipovic. “Europe Exposes Its Weakness to Russia and China in the Balkans” *Bloomberg News*, 16 May 2018. Accessed 12 March 2019. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-05-16/global-powers-square-up-for-influence-in-europe-s-balkan-flank>.

- The Economic Times. "West, Russia battle for control over Balkans natural gas corridors." *Energy World*, 16 July 2017. Accessed 07 February 2019. <https://energy.economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/oil-and-gas/west-russia-battle-for-control-over-balkans-natural-gas-corridors/59615466>.
- The Economist. "Russian spy centre in Nis?" 21 November 2014. Accessed 19 February 2019. <http://country.eiu.com/article.aspx?articleid=1152511099&Country=Serbia&topic=Politics&subtopic=Forecast&subsubtopic=International+relations>.
- Galeotti, Mark. "Do the Western Balkans face a coming Russian storm?" Policy Brief. European Council on Foreign Relations, 04 April 2018. Accessed 13 December 2018 http://www.ecfr.eu/publications/summary/do_the_western_balkans_face_a_coming_russian_storm.
- Gazprom Export. "Gazprom and Serbia Developing Effective Cooperation in Gas Industry." 03 October 2018. Accessed 24 February 2019. http://www.gazpromexport.com/en/presscenter/news/2233/?_ga=2.23630333.679616303.1551028062-1654562328.1551028062.
- The Guardian. "Russian-trained mercenaries back Bosnia's Serb separatists." 12 January 2018. Accessed 19 February 2019. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jan/12/russian-trained-mercenaries-back-bosnias-serb-separatists>.
- . "The west must not just abandon the Balkans to Russia's embrace." 05 April 2018. Accessed 16 January 2019. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/apr/05/slobodan-milosevic-serbia-russia-balkans>.
- Hänsel, Lars, and Florian C. Feyerabend. "The influence of external actors in the Western Balkans." Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, 12 September 2018. Accessed 03 February 3, 2019. https://www.kas.de/c/document_library/get_file?uuid=194afc48-b3be-e3bc-d1da-02771a223f73&groupId=252038.
- Harding, Luke, Aubrey Belford, and Saska Cvetkovska. "Russia actively stoking discord in Macedonia since 2008, intel files say." *The Guardian*, 04 June 2017. Accessed 13 February 2019. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jun/04/russia-actively-stoking-discord-in-macedonia-since-2008-intel-files-say-leak-kremlin-balkan-nato-west-influence>.
- Harland, David. "Never again: International intervention in Bosnia and Herzegovina." Center for Humanitarian Dialogue, July 2017. Accessed 02 March 2019. <https://www.hdcentre.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Never-again-International-intervention-in-Bosnia-and-Herzegovina.pdf>.
- Hasani, Adelina. "Russia uses the Serbia-Kosovo dispute to assert its influence in the Western Balkans." *Europe and Western Balkans*, 30 October 2018. Accessed 25 February 2019. <https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/.2018/10/30/russia-uses-serbia-kosovo-dispute-assert-influence-western-balkans/>.

- Heler, Daniel. "Russia, North Kosovo and Kosovo Serbs: What are the connections?" *European Western Balkans*, 12 November 2018. Accessed 20 December 2019. <https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2018/11/12/russia-north-kosovo-kosovo-serbs-connections/>.
- . "Serbian Guns Have Consequences for Balkans and Beyond." *Balkan Insight*, 13 December 2018. Accessed 25 February 2019. <https://balkaninsight.com/2018/12/13/serbian-guns-have-consequences-for-balkans-and-beyond-12-12-2018/>.
- Higgins, Andrew. "In Bosnia, Entrenched Ethnic Divisions Are a Warning to the World." *The New York Times*, 19 November 2018. Accessed 23 December 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/19/world/europe/mostar-bosnia-ethnic-divisions-nationalism.html?smid=fb-nytimes&smtyp=cur>.
- Hopkins, Valerie. "In Balkans, Britain rejoins battle for influence." *Politico*, 30 March 2018. Accessed 13 December 2018. <https://www.politico.eu/article/balkans-bbc-britain-rejoins-battle-for-influence-russia-soft-power/>.
- Hoxhaj, Enver. "Kosovo Feels Russia's Heavy Hand, via Serbia." *The New York Times*, 13 April 2017. Accessed 05 August 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/13/opinion/kosovo-feels-russias-heavy-hand-via-serbia.html>.
- . "Russian NGO trying to spread Russian influence in the region." *RTK Live*, 26 October 2017. Accessed 25 September 2018. <https://www.rtklive.com/en/news-single.php?ID=9459>.
- Hydrocarbons Technology. "South Stream Pipeline Project, Europe." Accessed 25 February 2019. <https://www.hydrocarbons-technology.com/projects/southstream/>.
- International Crisis Group. "The Western Balkans: Fragile Majorities." 30 April 2017. Accessed 19 March 2019. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/balkans/western-balkans-fragile-majorities>.
- The International News. "Serbia Shuttters Russia-Backed military training camp for kids." 18 August 2018. Accessed 21 February 2019. <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/356658-serbia-shuttters-russia-backed-military-training-camp-for-kids>.
- Kallaba, Pëllumb. "Russian interference in Kosovo: How and why?" Occasional Paper by KCSS. Kosovo Centre for Security Studies. September 2017. Accessed 05 August 2018. http://www.qkss.org/repository/docs/Russian_interference_in_Kosovo_finale_2_735070.pdf.
- Krastev, Ivan. "The Balkans are the soft underbelly of Europe." *Financial Times*, 14 January 2015. Accessed 14 October 2018. <https://www.ft.com/content/2287ba66-8489-11e4-bae9-00144feabdc0>.

- Kuczyński, Grzegorz. "Russia's Hybrid Warfare in the Western Balkans." Warsaw Institute, 26 March 2019. Accessed 27 March 2019. <https://warsawinstitute.org/russias-hybrid-warfare-western-balkans/>.
- Lambert, Michael. "Tracing the Roots of Russia's Hybrid Warfare Tactics." Eurasianet, 11 October 2017. Accessed 6 October 2018. <https://eurasianet.org/tracing-the-roots-of-russias-hybrid-warfare-tactics>.
- Marković, Filip. "Energy strategy of Russia in Western Balkans." Working Paper 7. Energy and Environmental Policy Laboratory, University of Piraeus, December 2017. Accessed 07 February 2019. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/321883777_Energy_strategy_of_Russia_in_Western_Balkans.
- Matias, Barbara. "Linking the Kosovo-Serbia Dialogue to the EU enlargement strategy - which accession policies are at stake." Policy Report No. 03/2018. Group for Legal and Political Studies, July 2018. Accessed 22 March 2019. <http://www.legalpoliticalstudies.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/GLPS-Linking-the-Kosovo-Serbia-Dialogue-to-the-EU-Enlargement-Strategy.pdf>.
- Maza, Cristina. "Russian military spies backed attempt to assassinate leader of Montenegro." *Newsweek*, 03 July 2018. Accessed 07 April 2019. <https://www.newsweek.com/exclusive-russian-military-spies-backed-attempt-assassinate-leader-montenegro-1007324>.
- Mulalic, Muhidin, and Mirsad Karic, "The Western Balkans Geopolitics and Russian Energy Politics." *Epiphany: Journal of Transdisciplinary Studies* 7 (December 2014): 88-109. Accessed 10 February 2019. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/283497357_The_Western_Balkans_Geopolitics_and_Russian_Energy_Politics.
- Nonprofit Expert. "NGOs – Non-Governmental Organizations." 16 June 2017. Accessed 22 February 2019. <https://www.nonprofitexpert.com/ngos-non-governmental-organizations/>.
- Oxford College of Procurement and Supply. "Evaluating Strategic Options Using SAF Strategy Model." *Oxford College of Marketing* (blog), 25 February 2018. Accessed 30 January 2019. <https://blog.oxfordcollegeofmarketing.com/2018/02/25/evaluating-strategic-options-using-saf-strategy-model/>.
- Prague Security Studies Institute. "Balkan Media Scene and Russian Influence." *European Security Journal*, 30 January 2019. Accessed 24 March 2019. <https://www.esjnews.com/balkan-media-scene>.
- . "Briefing Paper III: Western Balkans at the Crossroads: Assessing Non-Democratic External Influence Activities." *Western Balkans at the Crossroads*. Accessed 12 March 2019. <https://www.balkancrossroads.com/bp-iii-economics>.

- Prelec, Marko. "New Balkan Turbulence Challenges Europe." International Crisis Group, April 2017. Accessed 13 November 2018. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/balkans/macedonia/new-balkan-turbulence-challenges-europe>
- Qerimi, Qerim. "An informal world: The role and status of 'Contact Group' under International Law." *Chicago-Kent Journal of International and Comparative Law* 7 (May 2014): 117-143. Accessed 03 March 2019. http://studentorgs.kentlaw.iit.edu/jicl/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2014/01/The_Role_and_Status-Final.pdf.
- Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. "Protesters Attack Lawmakers After Storming Macedonia's Parliament." 28 April 2017. Accessed 23 March 2019. <https://www.rferl.org/a/macedonian-parliament-stormed-zaev-injured-beaten-vmro-dpmne/28455833.html>.
- Reka, Blerim. "Macedonia: A new front in Russia-West tensions." *Emerging Europe*, 16 November 2018. Accessed 22 March 2019. <https://emergingeuropa.com/voices/macedonia-a-new-front-in-russia-west-tensions/>.
- . "A new military build-up in the Balkans." *Emerging Europe*, 10 January 2019. Accessed 27 March 2019. <https://emerging-europe.com/voices/a-new-military-build-up-in-the-balkans/>.
- . "Serbia prepares to change course on Kosovo." Geopolitical Intelligence Service, 12 December 2017. Accessed 03 April 2019. <https://www.gisreportsonline.com/serbia-prepares-to-change-course-on-kosovo,2415.html>.
- Rise, Moldova. "Suspicious transactions on the Moldovan-Bosnian drug market." Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project, 21 April 2016. Accessed 15 March 2019. <https://www.occrp.org/en/28-ccwatch/cc-watch-indepth/5144-suspicious-transactions-on-the-moldovan-bosnian-drug-market>.
- Roberts, Ivor. "The west must not just abandon the Balkans to Russia's embrace." *The Guardian*, 05 April 2018. Accessed 16 January 2019. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/apr/05/slobodan-milosevic-serbia-russia-balkans>.
- Rusila, Ari. "Comeback of South Stream?" *Ari Rusila's Conflicts* (blog) *BlogActiv*, 30 August 2015. Accessed 26 February 2019. <https://arirusila.blogactiv.eu/2015/08/30/comeback-of-south-stream/>.
- Samuel, Andre. "Business Analysis Project, Assessing Strategies: Session 6 – Evaluating Strategies." Samuel's Learning Resource Center. Accessed 07 May 2019. http://www.samuellearning.org/bus_ana_proj/Session6_Evaluating_Strategies.pdf.

- Santora, Marc, and Julian E. Barnes. "In the Balkans, Russia and the West Fight a Disinformation-Age Battle." *The New York Times*, 16 September 2018. Accessed 17 September 2018. https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/16/world/europe/macedonia-referendum-russia-nato.html?rref=collectionpercent2Ftimestopic%2FMacedonia&action=click&contentCollection=world®ion=stream&module=stream_unit&version=latest&contentPlacement=1&pgtype=collection.
- Savin, Leonid. "Russia's Geopolitical Interests in The Balkans." *Geopolitica*, 19 June 2017. Accessed 13 February 2019. <https://www.geopolitica.ru/en/article/russias-geopolitical-interests-balkans>.
- Shkodrova, Albena. "The Balkans: Europe's Property Bargain." *Balkan Insight*, 29 November 2007. Accessed 12 March 2019. <https://balkaninsight.com/2007/11/29/the-balkans-europe-s-property-bargain/>.
- Stacey, Jeffrey A. "A Russian Attack on Montenegro Could Mean the End of NATO." *Foreign Policy*, 27 July 2018. Accessed 24 March 2019. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/07/27/a-russian-attack-on-montenegro-could-mean-the-end-of-nato-putin-trump-helsinki/>.
- Stojanovic, Dusan. "Ahead of visit, Putin gets church in Serbia named after him." *AP News*, 14 January 2019. Accessed 01 April 1, 2019. <https://www.apnews.com/3d98bcf3c2804462885fac93d816aeae>.
- . "EU and Russia battle for influence in Balkan region." *The Independent*, 24 February 2018. Accessed 07 October 2018. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/eu-brussels-russia-moscow-kremlin-balkans-ukraine-jean-claude-juncker-vladimir-putin-nato-latest-a8226786.html>.
- . "Russian influence rising in Balkans, Baltics, Central Europe." *AP News*, 09 October 2018. Accessed 26 March 2019. <https://www.apnews.com/05da1f1eabeb428db5b8e40f1ca28bdb>.
- Stratfor. "Yugoslavia, Russia Strengthening Ties." 4 January 2001. Accessed 29 January 2019. <https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/yugoslavia-russia-strengthening-ties>.
- Stronski, Paul, and Annie Himes. "Russia's Game in the Balkans." Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, January 2019. Accessed 31 March 2019. <https://carnegieendowment.org/2019/02/06/russia-s-game-in-balkans-pub-78235>.
- Surk, Barbara. "Russia Stirs Friction in Balkans, as NATO Keeps an Uneasy Peace." *The New York Times*, 19 February 2017. Accessed 05 April 2019. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/19/world/europe/russia-nato-balkans.html>.

- Szpala, Marta. "Montenegro seeks alternatives to cooperation with Russia." *Financial Observer*, 08 November 2017. Accessed 12 March 2019. <https://financialobserver.eu/cse-and-cis/montenegro/montenegro-seeks-alternatives-to-cooperation-with-russia/>.
- . "Russia in Serbia – soft power and hard interests." OSW Commentary Number 150. Centre for Eastern Studies, 27 October 2014. 17 Accessed January 2019. https://www.osw.waw.pl/sites/default/files/commentary_150.pdf.
- Tamkin, Emily. "Bosnia Is Teetering on the Precipice of a Political Crisis." *Foreign Policy*, 21 March 2018. Accessed 21 March 2019. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/03/21/bosnia-is-teetering-on-the-precipice-of-a-political-crisis-balkans-election-law-dodik/>.
- Tepavac, Tara. "Disinformation and fake news as the new normal: A challenge for the Western Balkans." *European Western Balkans*, 11 January 2019. Accessed 03 March 2019. <https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2019/01/11/disinformation-fake-news-new-normal-challenge-western-balkans/>.
- Vaskovic, Aleksandar. "Serbia's Orthodox Church to change name to stress Kosovo link." *Reuters*, 08 March 2018. Accessed 01 April 1, 2019. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-serbia-church-kosovo/serbias-orthodox-church-to-change-name-to-stress-kosovo-link-idUSKCN1GK1XX>.
- Velebit, Vuk. "Russian influence in Macedonia: A credible threat?" *European Western Balkans*, 14 November 2017. Accessed 13 February 2019. <https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2017/11/14/russian-influence-macedonia-credible-threat/>.
- Vuksanovic, Vuk. "Serbs Are Not 'Little Russians'." *The American Interest*, 26 July 2018. Accessed 21 January 2019. <https://www.the-american-interest.com/2018/07/26/serbs-are-not-little-russians/>.
- Warsaw Institute. "The head of SVR in Serbia. What is the Russian intelligence up to?" 25 April 2018. Accessed 15 March 2019. <https://warsawinstitute.org/head-svr-serbia-russian-intelligence/>.
- Wilde, Robert. "Yugoslavia." *ThoughtCo*, 08 April 2017. Accessed 29 January 2019. <https://www.thoughtco.com/yugoslavia-1221863>.
- Zakem, Vera, Bill Rosenau, and Danielle Johnson. "Shining a Light on the Western Balkans." CNA Occasional Paper. CNA, May 2017. Accessed 31 March 2019. https://www.cna.org/cna_files/pdf/DOP-2017-U-015223-2Rev.pdf.