

Committee: North Atlantic Council (NAC)

Topic: Working Towards the De-escalation of Tensions and Security Concerns in the Western Balkans

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Position: Deputy President

PERSONAL INTRODUCTION

Dear delegates,

It is with great pleasure that I welcome you to the 7th Deutsche Schule Thessaloniki Model United Nations conference. My name is Ioulieta Georgiou, I am an IB1 student at Anatolia College, and I will be serving as the Deputy President of the North Atlantic Council. This is the sixth conference I am attending and the first one as a student officer.

First and foremost, I would like to congratulate all of you for applying to this year's conference and this committee. Whether you are a first-time or an experienced delegate, MUN gives us the ability to connect and bond over our shared interest in diplomacy and debating. Throughout this three-day conference, you will have the chance to debate on pressing matters, collaborate with your fellow delegates, and find effective solutions to the issue at hand.

This study guide will serve as guidance for your research on the sole topic on our agenda, "Working Towards the De-escalation of Tensions and Security Concerns in the Western Balkans." Due to the broadness of the topic, it will be divided into four different sub-topics. In this document, you will find useful information regarding each of the sub-topics we are going to be discussing during the conference. Of course, you are encouraged to do your own research as it is going to aid you in better understanding the topics, as well as your country's policy on each of them.

Researching and preparing for this committee will not be an easy task, so if you have any questions regarding the sub-topics, the committee itself, or how to prepare, feel free to contact me. I am here to help you in any way I can so don't hesitate to do so via my email address, which is 20202005@student.anatolia.edu.gr.

Looking forward to meeting you,
Ioulieta Georgiou

TOPIC INTRODUCTION

Following the decline of communism in Eastern Europe in the late 1980s, the dissolution of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia offered the chance for independence to many of its republics. In many cases, the attempts to gain independence led to active conflicts in the Western Balkans at the time, and tensions relating to these conflicts continue to affect the region today.

The most violent and destructive of all the conflicts that occurred during the dissolution of Yugoslavia was that of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The state's multicultural character, including mainly Bosnian Croats, Bosniaks, and Bosnian Serbs, made the attempt for independence as one united country extremely difficult, if not impossible. The referendum held in March 1992, in which more than 60% of the population voted in favor of the state's independence, was boycotted by the Bosnian Serbs who, the following month, rebelled with the support of the Yugoslav People's Army (JNA) and Serbia. After years of what would later constitute the Bosnian War, the Dayton Accords were signed in December 1995, which decided upon a unified Bosnia and Herzegovina which would be composed of two entities; "a Croat-Bosniak federation and [...] a Serb republic"¹ (Republika Srpska).

However, with the constant presence of nationalist sentiments within Bosnia and Herzegovina and an inconvenient political system, tensions are extremely hard to overcome. The Republika Srpska threatens to secede from the federalized state, under the leadership of polarizing politicians, who further undermine the sentiment of unity within the state.

While the tensions relating to Bosnia and Herzegovina are only internal, the same cannot be said about the instability that plagues Kosovo. In the mid-1990s, Kosovar Albanians' protests against the annulment of Kosovo's autonomy by Slobodan Milošević, then president of the Serbian republic, were replaced by the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA). The conflict that transpired officially ended in June 1999 with the signing of the Kumanovo Military-Technical Agreement.

Though the conflict ended 25 years ago and Kosovo declared its independence from Serbia in 2008, two years after Serbia and Montenegro became separate states, it is still facing continuous episodes of violence. The internal conflict between ethnic Albanians and ethnic Serbs, in addition to Serbia and its allies rejecting Kosovo's independence, has led to immense instability in the region and the question of its independence has caused strained relations between a number of states in the Western Balkans.

The Russian Federation has taken advantage of the tensions in the area to further push its own agenda. Wishing to expand its sphere of influence, it continuously spreads disinformation and propaganda and backs causes that could lead to active conflicts within

¹ Lampe, John R.. "Bosnian War". Encyclopedia Britannica, 28 Mar. 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Bosnian-War>. Accessed 21 July 2024.

the Western Balkans, whether among different states or within one. This way it undermines NATO's cause, as well as the European Union's, leading to the alienation of a number of states within the area.

It is important to aid states in the Western Balkans in their pursuit for inclusion in intergovernmental organizations and their struggle to maintain their relations with other states. Collaborating with other organizations and other third-party actors is vital for minimizing instability in any case, especially the case of a region plagued by it for decades.

DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

Referendum

"A vote in which all the people in a country or an area are asked to give their opinion about or decide an important political or social question."²

Kosovo Force (KFOR)

NATO's peace-support operation in Kosovo which was established when its air campaign against Milošević's regime was over.

Bosniak

The term adopted in the mid-1990s by Bosnian Muslims used to refer to themselves.

Republika Srpska

One of the two entities within Bosnia and Herzegovina, with a primarily Serbian population.

Secession

"the act of becoming independent and no longer part of a country, area, organization, etc."³

Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY)

The federal state consists of the republics of Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia, and North Macedonia. It is now referred to as the former Yugoslavia; preceded by the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, unofficially succeeded by the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY), which consisted of Serbia and Montenegro.

Ethnic Cleansing

² "Referendum." *Cambridge Dictionary*, 17 July 2024, dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/referendum. Accessed 19 July 2024.

³ "Secession." *Cambridge Dictionary*, 17 July 2024, dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/secession. Accessed 22 July 2024.

War crime; “rendering an area ethnically homogeneous by using force or intimidation to remove persons of given groups from the area.”⁴

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Sub-topic 1: The Conflict Between the Republic of Serbia and the Republic of Kosovo and the Involvement of Foreign States

Origin of the Conflict

Since the Serbian Empire was defeated by the Ottomans in the Battle of Kosovo in 1389, the annexation of the area by the Ottoman Empire led to a number of Albanians relocating to Kosovo. Serbia later regained control of the area, and it became part of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (the first Yugoslavia). Kosovo became an autonomous entity within the Serbian republic of the SFRY in the 1960s, simultaneously creating its present-day borders, gaining the status of an “Autonomous Province”. With the adoption of Yugoslavia’s final constitution in 1974, Kosovo’s status was almost that of any republic within the SFRY. At this point in time, ethnic Albanians outnumbered the Serbs inhabiting Kosovo.



Figure 1: Map of the ethnic breakdown of Kosovo

In the 1980s, nationalist sentiments grew among the ethnic Albanian population, who protested and called for an independent Kosovo. Of course, these actions were not accepted by the Serbs of the region nor the Serbian political

⁴ United Nations. *United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect*. www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/ethnic-cleansing.shtml.

leaders; in 1989, Slobodan Milošević, then president of the Serbian republic, responded to these protests with the abrogation of Kosovo's autonomy.

The Serbian government's control over the JNA and the police, led to extremely violent actions against the Albanian population and Albanian members of the now disbanded Provincial Assembly of Kosovo. Kosovar Albanians faced severe discrimination by the Serbian police and courts.

In 1996, the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) appeared. Its presence and its attacks on Serbian police and politicians throughout the two following years continuously escalated, until war broke out in 1998.

Serbia was determined for Kosovo to remain its province. The significance of the territory is due to a multitude of reasons. Historically, Kosovo was a vital part of the Serbian Empire and was the site of its defeat to the Ottomans in 1389, as well as that of Serbia's victory over the Ottoman Empire during the First Balkan War. Kosovo was also where the Serbian Orthodox Church was seated, a fact which contrasted the religious demographic of the province, which was primarily Albanian Muslims; it also led to political leaders disputing it.

The Kosovo Conflict (1998 - 1999)

The repeated attacks by the KLA led Serbia to an attempt to regain its control over Kosovo, initially through the Serb special police and later the JNA. This marked the beginning of the Kosovo conflict. In March 1998, the Contact Group, an informal alliance comprised of the United States, Great Britain, Germany, France, Italy, and Russia, attempted to reach a ceasefire, demanding "the withdrawal of Yugoslav and Serbian forces from Kosovo, the return of refugees, and unlimited access for international monitors."⁵ The FRY, now led by Slobodan Milošević, agreed to these terms but ultimately did not take action according to them.

Due to the non-implementation of the terms proposed by the Contact Group, the KLA returned to battle, thus ending the ceasefire. Extreme acts of violence transpired. Serbia and the allied Yugoslav army (the military of the FRY) engaged in a program of ethnic cleansing in Kosovo, which in turn led to a number of ethnic Albanians fleeing to Albania and North Macedonia.

In February 1999, negotiations began in Rambouillet, France. However, Milošević refused to sign the Accords, a decision which found Serbia's military on the wrong end of NATO's attack. These attacks provided Serbia with a way to justify the

⁵ Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia. "Kosovo conflict". Encyclopedia Britannica, 4 Dec. 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Kosovo-conflict>.

actions it took; removing Kosovo's Albanian population from the territory, displacing "hundreds of thousands of people into Albania, Macedonia (now North Macedonia), and Montenegro."⁶ This was, of course, not the first time that displacement of non-Serbs took place. It had already started in the summer of 1998, when the militarized Serbian police and the Yugoslav Army engaged in "[t]he displacement of about 350.000 Kosovar Albanians, Turks and other non-Serbs."⁷

NATO's Involvement and its Effects

After the negotiations in Rambouillet failed, March 24th, 1999 marked the beginning of NATO's campaign against Serbia in the Kosovo War. This included mostly aerial bombings of the FRY, and lasted until June 1999. Serbia responded to NATO's action by continuing its acts of ethnic cleansing and further displacement of non-Serbs, who fled to North Macedonia and Albania. Serbia's decision to resume acts of ethnic cleansing also provided "legitimacy to NATO's 'humanitarian intervention'" in the region.⁸ Milošević capitulated after 78 days of bombing by NATO.

The Kumanovo Peace Agreement was signed by NATO and FRY/Serbia on June 9th, 1999. It stated that FRY/Serbia was to remove all of its troops, police, and withdraw politically. The following day, Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 1244 was adopted, making Kosovo an international protectorate, with a significant number of roles within its borders attributed to international organizations, such as NATO, OSCE, the UN, etc.

The passing of this resolution established the UN Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) and the NATO led Kosovo Force (KFOR). KFOR was deployed in Kosovo on June 12th, 1999, with the mandate to "to deter renewed hostilities, establish a secure environment and ensure public safety and order, demilitarise the Kosovo Liberation Army, support the international humanitarian effort and coordinate with the international civil presence."⁹

⁶ The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. "Kosovo conflict". Encyclopaedia Britannica, 4 Dec. 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Kosovo-conflict>.

⁷ Bebler, Anton. "The Serbia-Kosovo Conflict." *"Frozen Conflicts" in Europe*, edited by Anton Bebler, 1st ed., Verlag Barbara Budrich, 2015, pp. 151–70. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvdf0bmg.18>.

⁸ Bebler, Anton. "The Serbia-Kosovo Conflict." *"Frozen Conflicts" in Europe*, edited by Anton Bebler, 1st ed., Verlag Barbara Budrich, 2015, pp. 151–70. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvdf0bmg.18>.

⁹ "NATO's role in Kosovo." *North Atlantic Treaty Organization*, 20 Nov. 2023, www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_48818.htm.

Present Day

Kosovo officially declared independence from Serbia on February 17th, 2008. Serbia is yet to recognize it as a sovereign state, as are many other states, including 4 members of NATO; Greece, Romania, Slovakia, and Spain.

KFOR continues to fulfill its mandate set in 1999 by UNSC resolution 1244 and the Kumanovo Agreement. Its purpose is to help create, and presently maintain, peace and security in Kosovo. The mandate includes “demilitariz[ing] the KLA,”¹⁰ preventing further threats and aggression by Serbia, and upholding humanitarian efforts.

However, the international community’s intervention in Kosovo has, in hindsight, not been received quite well. Since the UN played and continues to play a fundamental role in the state’s nation-building efforts, it has not become a truly independent nation. The international community still regulates lawmaking and other essential government actions, however, without providing Kosovo and Kosovars with the privileges enjoyed by other states.

Kosovo is still being plagued with internal conflicts, whether among government officials or Kosovar civilians themselves. Cases of attacks by gunmen, aggression towards law enforcement, and deaths recorded due to these cases keep Kosovo in a constant state of instability. While the Kosovar government accuses Serbia of instigating and backing these attacks, Serbian government officials allege that it is attempting to commit “a brutal ethnic cleansing with the help of the international community,”¹¹ creating a larger diplomatic barrier between the two states.

Due to Kosovo’s majority ethnic Albanian population, the Republic of Albania is involved in the state’s matters. While it supports Kosovo’s independence, the region is included what constitutes the concept of “Greater Albania.”

¹⁰ “NATO’s role in Kosovo.” *North Atlantic Treaty Organization*, 20 Nov. 2023, www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_48818.htm.

¹¹ Bytyci, Fatos. “Kosovo says Serbia should hand over escaped Serb gunmen after deadly shootout.” *Reuters*, 25 Sept. 2023, www.reuters.com/world/europe/kosovo-police-enter-northern-village-after-shootout-with-gunmen-killed-four-2023-09-25.

Sub-topic 2: The Escalation of Tensions in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Historical Background

When SFR Yugoslavia first came to be, Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) became one of the republics that constituted the entity. A multitude of changes followed, mainly at the expense of its Muslim population, one of the three ethnic groups of the state; Bosnian Muslims (Bosniaks), Bosnian Serbs, and Bosnian Croats. By the early 1990s, Bosnian Muslims made up the majority of the republic's population.

The elections of December 1990 led to the establishment of a tripartite coalition government, with each of the parties representing each of the major ethnic groups. However, the rising nationalist sentiments and the rapid decline of Yugoslavia made cooperation extremely difficult, especially with the Serb Democratic Party which was led by Radovan Karadžić.

In 1991, "Serb Autonomous Regions" were declared in areas with large Serbian populations. The Serb Democratic Party distanced itself from the Bosnian government and later "removed its deputies from the Bosnian assembly and set up a "Serb National Assembly."¹²

In February-March 1992, a referendum on independence was held. Almost no Bosnian Serbs voted, however most of the voters were in favor of an independent BiH, and it was declared on March 3rd, 1992.

Bosnian War (1992 - 1995)

On April 7th, 1992, war broke out in Bosnia. Bosnian Serbs, with the military support of the JNA and the funding of the FRY launched attacks on Sarajevo and other areas with primarily Bosniak populations, gradually taking control of the territory, which was named Republika Srpska.

In many areas, Bosniaks faced extreme persecution by the Serbs. Many of them were forcibly displaced and became victims of ethnic cleansing. Over the years that the war lasted, thousands of Bosniaks were massacred in the Serbs' attempt to eliminate non-Serbs from the territories under their control.

¹² Lampe, John R.. "Bosnian War". Encyclopedia Britannica, 28 Mar. 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Bosnian-War>.

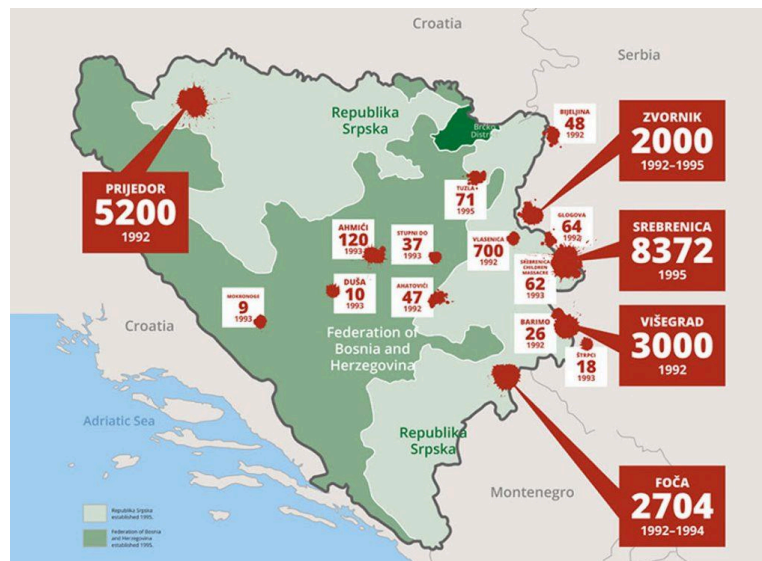


Figure 2: Massacres during the Bosnian War

While there were many attempts for a ceasefire throughout the Bosnian War, it officially ended with the Dayton Accords. During November 1995, US-sponsored peace talks took place in Dayton, Ohio. The agreement included, among others, establishing an international High Representative “with responsibility for oversight of civilian implementation of the peace settlement,”¹³ the deployment of the Implementation Force (IFOR), the establishment of the complex system of government in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the distribution of the state into two republics. This made BiH a federalized state comprised of a Bosniak-Croat federation, the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH), and a Serb republic, the Republika Srpska, occupying 51% and 49% of the land respectively.

NATO’s Involvement

NATO did not actively intervene in the conflict for the majority of its duration. In early 1993, NATO agreed to enforce the UN’s established “no-fly” zone over Bosnia, and later in the year announced their willingness to respond “with air strikes [...] in the event that UN safe areas, including Sarajevo, came under siege.”¹⁴

In February 1994, two airplanes violated the “no-fly” zone. They were shot down by NATO in what was the organization’s first case of military action. The airstrikes against the Army of the Republika Srpska (VRS) continued, and the Srebrenica Massacre only intensified the action, ultimately forcing the Republika

¹³ Fella, Stefano. “Bosnia and Herzegovina: secessionism in the Republika Srpska.” *House of Commons Library*, House of Commons Library, 29 Apr. 2024, commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-10013.

¹⁴ “Fact Sheet: NATO Involvement in the Balkan Crisis.” *US Department of State*, 9 May 1997, 1997-2001.state.gov/regions/eur/natobalk.html.

Srpska to participate in negotiations for a ceasefire agreement, and thus the signing of the Dayton Accords.

The Dayton Accords mandated the IFOR, which was established with the UNSC resolution 1031 and was a force which would oversee the implementation of the military aspect of the terms included in the agreement. It was tasked with ensuring the cessation of hostilities and “separate the armed forces of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina [...] and Republika Srpska.”¹⁵

The Stabilization Force (SFOR) was the successor to the IFOR. It derived its mandate from the UNSC resolution 1088, and, like the IFOR, its goal was to secure peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Some of the actions taken by the SFOR to fulfill its mandate were patrolling throughout Bosnia, removing unregistered weapons from the area, and contributing to de-mining.

Bosnia and Herzegovina has taken strides to cooperate with NATO since the Bosnian War. In 2006, it became part of the Partnership for Peace (PfP), a programme “of bilateral cooperation between individual Euro-Atlantic partner countries and NATO.”¹⁶ Bosnia is also a NATO partner country since 2006, and is currently participating in the Membership Action Plan (MAP), a NATO initiative which provides assistance to states wishing to acquire membership in the Alliance.

Present Day

The Dayton Accords established that Bosnia and Herzegovina would be comprised of two republics; the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Republika Srpska, each with its own government, united by a federal one. However, this system constantly proves to be dysfunctional and unnecessarily complex.

Each of the entities has separate presidencies and legislatures. The Head of State of BiH is the Chairman of the Presidency, which is comprised of three presidents; one Bosniak, one Croat, and one Bosnian Serb, who interchangeably become Chairman of the Presidency every eight months. The Head of Government is the Chairman of the Council of Ministers, while the parliament is comprised of two organs; the House of Peoples and the House of Representatives.

¹⁵ “Peace support operations in Bosnia and Herzegovina (1995-2004).” *North Atlantic Treaty Organization*, 21 Mar. 2024, www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_52122.htm.

¹⁶ “Partnership for Peace programme.” *North Atlantic Treaty Organization*, 28 June 2024, www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_50349.htm.

The current members of the presidency are Bosniak Denis Bećirović, who is also serving as Chairman of the Presidency until November 2024, and Bosnian Croat Željko Komšić, and Željka Cvijanović.

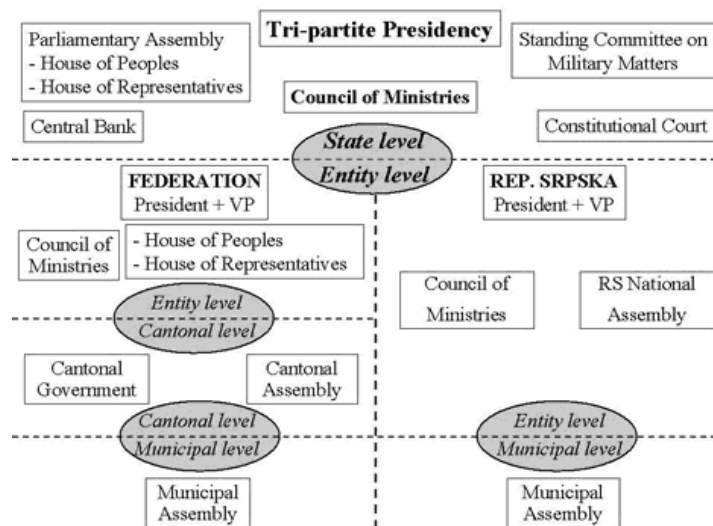


Figure 3: Political System of Bosnia and Herzegovina¹⁷

However, the dysfunctionality of the government structure and system, as well as former and current tensions, create an environment in which cooperation within the government is difficult, and in some cases near impossible.

While the West was abandoning what was their obligation to uphold the terms of Dayton, nationalist and populist politicians saw an opportunity to rise to power in Bosnia. One such politician is Milorad Dodik; a former member of BiH’s tripartite presidency, currently in his third term as president of the Republika Srpska.

Under Dodik’s leadership, the Republika Srpska has turned to a more extreme secessionist ideology, threatening the unity of BiH. He has a record of ignoring actions and decisions taken by the Office of the High Representative (OHR), even going as far as to sign legislation that allows “the RS National Assembly to disregard High Representative decisions.”¹⁸

Dodik has previously stated that he intends to hold a referendum regarding seceding from Bosnia and Herzegovina at the end of the year or the beginning of 2025. Whether this intention will come to fruition, or even be successful, relies on the political scene at the time, especially the results of the US presidential election, as stated by Dodik himself.

¹⁷ Domin, Thierry. “Political System of Bosnia and Herzegovina.” *SFOR Informer Online*, 31 Oct. 2001, www.nato.int/sfor/indexinf/125/p03a/b01031a.htm.

¹⁸ Fella, Stefano. “Bosnia and Herzegovina: secessionism in the Republika Srpska.” *House of Commons Library*, House of Commons Library, 29 Apr. 2024, commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-10013.

Milorad Dodik's continued position in power reflects the nationalist, separatist sentiments of the majority in the Republika Srpska. The Western powers' failure to intervene sufficiently in the current situation has led to a conflict within the Bosnian population, obstructing the smooth functioning of the state.

Sub-topic 3: Security Concerns Regarding the Influence of the Russian Federation in the Western Balkans

Historical Background

Throughout history, the Russian Federation has remained involved in the happenings and matters concerning the Balkan peninsula, supporting and assisting its allies when needed. Yugoslavia itself did not enjoy the privileges of the USSR's aid, even though it was a communist state, and was not allied with the Soviet Union, distancing itself from the Western and Eastern blocs.

However, Slavic and Orthodox Christian groups have benefited the most from Russian aid, leading Serb groups and Serbia itself to become some of the most avid supporters of Russia within Europe since the dissolution of the USSR.

Russia's Influence and Interests in the Western Balkans

The Western Balkans are key in Russia's geopolitical war with the West, particularly the European Union and NATO. Using its cultural, historical, and political ties to the region Russia has attempted to counterbalance Western influence by supporting nationalist sentiments, exploiting regional vulnerabilities, and imposing dependence through the economic and energy sectors. Serbia, the Republika Srpska, and other actors have played crucial roles in maintaining Russia's foothold, while EU enlargement plans have remained unrealized, leaving even more space for its increasing influence.

Regardless, even though Russia has increased its investments in the region, especially in the energy sector, its economic presence has diminished as a result of the various sanctions that followed the annexation of Crimea. Still, Moscow's influence is notable due to certain strategic assets and partnerships in the energy sector. More specifically, its gas reserves, and generally energy infrastructure, supply most of Serbia's, North Macedonia's, and Bosnia's gas. Specifically, Serbia, to the EU's discontent, signed a three-year gas supply contract with Russia in 2022.

It is undeniable then that Russia influences the region of the Western Balkans through the energy sector. In addition to that, however, Russia maintains strong ties

with certain political leaders in the region, such as the president of the Republika Srpska, Milorad Dodik, and Aleksandar Vučić, president of Serbia. These relationships allow Russia to cause instability, by supporting Serbia in Kosovo, and hold great influence over the region, particularly when it comes to EU integrations and sanctions against them.

Finally, Moscow has implemented a form of “Hybrid Warfare” by unleashing cyber-attacks, clandestine operations, and disinformation campaigns to destabilize pro-Western governments and display its strength to its allies. Specifically, the Russian-Serbian Humanitarian Center in Niš, Serbia, allegedly serves as a center of operations and radicalization activities aimed at undermining the “Western-imposed stability”.

The objectives Russia tries to achieve through all the aforementioned tactics are threefold. First, Moscow desperately wants to preserve the status quo in areas that benefit it, for example in Republika Srpska which offers it a direct strand of control over BiH. Second, Russia wishes to slow down and eventually stop the EU and NATO integration attempts, in order to preserve its own influence. Finally, there exist specific economic and strategic interests, such as Russia’s energy distribution in the region, which plays a big role in its economy and offers it leverage over the Balkan countries, and as an extension, a way to take part in the endeavors of Europe as well.

Russia’s Actions in the Region

Russia has established bilateral military ties with Serbia, ensuring great influence over it. More specifically, Serbia is purchasing Russian arms, including air defense systems, anti-tank weapons, and drones. Not only that, but their militaries also carry out joint exercises, and some US policymakers claim that a Russia-run humanitarian center in Serbia is a front for Russian intelligence in the region. It is also alleged that Russia helps fund and organize paramilitary and nationalist groups, including certain youth military-style training camps, such as the one on Mount Zlatibor.

The approach towards Kosovo constitutes proof of Russia’s obstruction and engagement in the region of the Western Balkans. Despite its initial acceptance of the Security Council’s Resolution 1244, which placed Kosovo under international administration, Russia has undermined Kosovo’s independence. Additionally, Russia has vetoed Kosovo and has criticized the European Union’s mediation efforts, in hopes of stalling the official international recognition of Kosovo.

Russia’s support of Serbia and Serb ethnic groups has led to cultivating good relations with the Republika Srpska. By directly supporting the Serb entity and Milorad Dodik, Russia officially declares its support for separatism and nationalist

sentiments in BiH. Meanwhile, Bosnia and Herzegovina wishes to become a Member State of both NATO and the EU. However, Russia and the Republika Srpska, through these actions, lead Bosnia and Herzegovina to remain a state that does not fulfill the criteria that would make it eligible for membership.

The Russian Federation attempts to gain support from the public in the Western Balkans via the spread of propaganda. Through a Serbian news website named *Sputnik Srbija*, it uses disinformation as a tool to fuel its agenda. Messages such as “The EU and NATO are weak and not united” and “NATO is aggressive and provocative”¹⁹ appear on the website, radicalizing the public’s opinion and ideology against Western powers.

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

| Date | Description of event |
|-----------------------|--|
| March 1989 | Slobodan Milošević annuls Kosovo’s autonomy. |
| December 1990 | Elections held in Bosnia and Herzegovina; establishment of tripartite government. |
| June 25th 1991 | The declarations of independence of Slovenia and Croatia; this marks the beginning of the Yugoslav Wars. |
| November 1991 | Declaration of “Serb Autonomous Regions” within Bosnia and Herzegovina |
| February - March 1992 | Referendum on the Independence of Bosnia and Herzegovina |
| March 3rd, 1992 | Declaration of Bosnia and Herzegovina’s independence |
| April 7th, 1992 | Start of the Bosnian War |
| 1996 | The KLA first appears. |
| February 28th, 1998 | Start of the Kosovo War |
| March 1998 | First attempt to reach a ceasefire in Kosovo by the Contact Group |
| February 1999 | Negotiations for Kosovo in Rambouillet, France |

¹⁹ Bechev, Dimitar, et al. *Russia’s Footprint in the Western Balkan Information Environment: Report Summary*. NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, 30 Apr. 2020, stratcomcoe.org/pdfjs/?file=/publications/download/russias_footprint_in_wb_executive_summary_30-04_v2-2.pdf?zoom=page-fit.

| | |
|---------------------|--|
| March 24th, 1999 | NATO's campaign against the Serbian military |
| June 9th, 1999 | Kumanovo Peace Agreement |
| June 10th, 1999 | UNSC Resolution 1244 is passed. |
| June 11th, 1999 | Official end of Kosovo War. |
| June 12th, 1999 | Deployment of KFOR |
| February 17th, 2008 | Kosovo's declaration of independence from Serbia |

RELEVANT RESOLUTIONS, TREATIES AND EVENTS

Kumanovo Peace Agreement

The Kumanovo Peace Agreement was signed on June 9th, 1999 by NATO and the FRY/Serbia. It stated that the FRY/Serbia was to remove all of its troops, police, as well as withdraw politically from Kosovo.

UNSC Resolution 1244

UNSC Resolution 1244 was adopted on June 10th, 1999, making Kosovo an international protectorate, splitting a significant number of roles within its borders among international organizations, such as NATO, OSCE, the UN, etc.

Dayton Peace Accords

The Dayton Peace Accords, signed on November 21st, 1995, officially put an end to the Bosnian War. It split Bosnia and Herzegovina into a Bosniak-Croat federation and a Serb republic and established the IFOR which was later deployed to fulfill its mandate; supervising the implementation of the terms of Dayton.

UNSC Resolution 1088

The UNSC resolution 1088 was adopted on December 12th, 1996. It mandated the Stabilization Force (SFOR), the successor to the IFOR, and, like the IFOR, its goal was to secure peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE ISSUE

Rambouillet Talks

The Rambouillet Talks were peace negotiations held in early 1999 between Yugoslavia and Kosovo Albanian leaders, facilitated by NATO, aimed at preventing further

conflict in Kosovo. The proposed agreement offered Kosovo significant autonomy while allowing NATO troops to oversee its implementation. However, the talks failed when Serbian President Slobodan Milošević refused to accept NATO's demands, leading to NATO's subsequent air campaign against Serbia.

Ahtisaari Plan for Kosovo

The Ahtisaari Plan, developed by UN Special Envoy Martti Ahtisaari in 2007, proposed a framework for Kosovo's supervised independence from Serbia. It included provisions for protecting minority rights, decentralizing power to Serb-majority municipalities, and international oversight. Although the plan became the basis for Kosovo's 2008 declaration of independence, it was never adopted by the UN due to opposition from Serbia and Russia, leaving Kosovo's status disputed.

Vance - Owen Peace Plan

The Vance-Owen Peace Plan, proposed in 1993, aimed to end the Bosnian War by dividing Bosnia and Herzegovina into 10 semi-autonomous provinces based on ethnic lines, while maintaining Bosnia as a single state. It was accepted by Bosniaks and Croats but rejected by the Bosnian Serbs, who wanted more territorial control, leading to the plan's failure and continued conflict.

Owen - Stoltenberg Peace Plan

At a conference in Geneva chaired by David Owen and Thorvald Stoltenberg, Presidents Milosevic and Tudjman reworked the Vance-Owen Plan to produce a plan which again divided Bosnia along ethnic lines into three republics forming a loose union with a federal constitution. It was rejected by President Izetbegovic as a partition of Bosnia and events, namely the intensification of the war between Croat forces and the Bosnian Government, overwhelmed any serious consideration of it as a solution to the war.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Reviving and implementing the Brussels Agreement

The Brussels Agreement of 2013 was a significant step towards normalizing relations between Kosovo and Serbia, particularly concerning the integration of Serb-majority municipalities into Kosovo's institutional framework. However, several provisions of the agreement, especially the formation of the Association of Serb Municipalities, have not been fully implemented due to political resistance from both sides. For this reason we suggest

reviving discussions under the EU-facilitated dialogue to ensure that both Serbia and Kosovo fulfill the commitments of the Brussels Agreement. Another solution would be to establish an independent monitoring body, possibly under the OSCE, to oversee and report on the implementation of the agreement, ensuring accountability from both Kosovo and Serbia.

Institutional reforms within Bosnia and Herzegovina

The complex political structure established by the Dayton Accords has created inefficiencies and deadlock in Bosnia's governance, which has contributed to ongoing tensions between the three ideologically separate states. For this reason, we propose to launch a constitutional reform process aimed at simplifying Bosnia's power-sharing structure to reduce such political deadlock and foster greater cooperation between ethnic groups. This should include reducing the number of administrative units and ensuring that central government institutions play a stronger role in governance, thereby streamlining decision-making processes.

Countering external influence

We suggest enhancing media literacy programs and promote independent journalism in the region to mitigate the impact of foreign propaganda. Additionally, the EU and other international financial institutions should offer infrastructure investment packages to the Western Balkans that promote development in key sectors like transport, digital infrastructure, and education, reducing the need for reliance on Russian financial aid.

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