



Serbian and Russian Relations: The Future Implications for Serbia's Accession to the European Union

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Abstract

Russian interference within Western Balkan affairs has successfully inhibited their accession to the European Union (EU). This paper explains how the relationship between Serbia and Russia developed since the end of the Cold War and what the foreign relations between the two countries, and other external actors, will look like in the future. Exploring this relationship will illustrate the importance of historical backgrounds within international relations and could give insight on what Serbia's future accession to the EU will look like. The first part of this paper will present a brief background on EU relations with Serbia and the power of Serbian minorities in neighboring countries. Afterwards, a comparative event history analysis and quantitative data from the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, the Government of the Republic of Serbia, the Serbian National Bank, Eurobarometer and the Observatory of Economic Complexity will be used together to gather evidence of Russian interference throughout different institutional aspects of Serbia. Agreements, public opinion, military exercises and direct / indirect actions will be used to assess the amount of Russian interference and its effects on Serbia and the Serbian minorities that exist in other countries within the Western Balkans. Additionally, an analysis of Serbian political parties and the recent elections bolsters the findings that the current two-track policy, which involves extensive cooperation with Russia and Serbia, will reach a breaking point and Serbia will have to choose one primary ally.

Presented at the Transatlantic Students' Conference
Addressing Diplomatic, Economic, and Migration Challenges in Southeastern Europe
James Madison University
Florence, 23-27 April 2018

Introduction

Russia has shown an increasing interest in the Western Balkan region in the last couple of decades, and this area has become a stage for geopolitical competition between the East and the West. Russia's numerous policy initiatives aimed at Serbia and the Serbian minorities in the neighboring countries, like Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Kosovo, have been part of a larger plan aimed at obstructing the integration of the Western Balkan states with Euro-Atlantic democratic structures and maintaining an area of instability and frozen conflicts in European Union's (EU) near neighborhood. Russia's policy has successfully interfered with internal Balkan affairs and has become increasingly effective due to the EU states' diminishing support for Balkan countries' European integration (Szpala 2014, 1).

While Russia presents itself as a major actor which assists Serbia and the Western Balkan states, it exercises most of its power through increasing energy dependence and promoting instability within the region. In reality, the European Union is a more significant trade partner than Russia to the region and is the main actor contributing to Serbia's development. Serbia and its minority populations serve as important actors in the Western Balkans and control the stability of the region through the political power that they possess. The Serbian-EU accession talks and the Russian attempts to thwart them are contributing directly to the current political climate in the Western Balkans. Therefore, this paper will attempt to explain how the relationship between Serbia and Russia developed since the end of the Cold War and what the foreign relations between the two countries, and other external actors, will look like in the future. Exploring this relationship will illustrate the importance of historical backgrounds within international relations and could give insight on what Serbia's future accession to the EU will look like.

Literature Review

EU Relations with Serbia

The European Union is the most important foreign trading and investment partner of Serbia, a state that is struggling to increase the attractiveness of its own market environment to attract as many foreign direct investors as possible. At the same time, Serbia is attempting to strengthen its strategic position and importance to the European Union even before entering the European Union. Within Serbia, unemployment has fallen below 20 percent and

exports increased by almost 50 percent from 2009 to 2014. Considering its geographic position and connections with countries of the Western Balkans, Serbia is an important junction point for Europe and the Western Balkans (Vošta & Janković 2016, 122).

Power of Serbian Minorities in Neighboring Countries

Serbian ethnic minorities living in Western Balkan countries are used by the Serbian Government to exacerbate political conflicts and inter-ethnic conflicts throughout the region by using their geopolitical influence. Russia's strengthening of their influence among Serbian minorities allows Moscow to influence the internal situations in Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo through pressuring authorities in Belgrade. For example, Serbian minorities were used to cause unrest and turmoil in Montenegro after their elections in October of 2016. After the pro- North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) incumbent Prime Minister, Milo Đukanović was elected, powerful Russo-Serbian criminal forces attempted to kill Milo through a coup d'état (Politico 2017). The coup was allegedly orchestrated by two Russian intelligence officers who are currently on trial for their crimes. These actions indicate that Serbian minorities still play a strong role in neighboring countries, like Montenegro, and some will take drastic action to prevent countries from Westernizing and joining NATO.

Serbian nationalist minorities within Bosnia and Herzegovina have hindered its overall progress to conform to European Union standards. The Republic of Srpska held a referendum in September of 2016 that resulted in 90 percent of voters supporting secession from the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. European institutions have deemed this referendum illegitimate, but the inter-ethnic and political consequences still impact the country (Bashkurti 2016).

Kosovo's independence is still not recognized by Serbia and has always been a contentious subject in negotiations between the European Union and Serbia. Serbian minorities face economic exclusion through lack of access to employment, limited political participation and poor access to public services, including education and justice (Minority Rights Group 2017) Some Kosovar Serbs are heavily influenced by Belgrade and took guidance from Serbia when it demanded that they boycott the parliamentary elections in September of 2007. Additionally, the top official of Belgrade for Kosovo, Marko Djuric, said that the majority of the Serbian population will use dinar in Kosovo and not the euro. The use of the Serbian local currency in

Kosovo is evidence of Belgrade using its Serbian minority group in Kosovo as a source of instability (Bashkurti 2016).

Serbia's influence in Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo over the last decade show that significant pressure will be needed to quell the interference of Serbian minorities within internal politics and stability of the region. The interference and instability are thought to be fueled by Russia, but most scholars are unsure of how the European Union and Russian influence will affect Serbia. This paper will seek to prove that Russian interference exists in Serbia throughout its trading industry, energy sector and the political landscape.

Methodology

A comparative event history analysis of scholarly articles and quantitative data from the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, the Government of the Republic of Serbia, the Serbian National Bank, Eurobarometer and the Observatory of Economic Complexity will be used together to gather evidence of Russian interference throughout different institutional aspects of Serbia. The timeline focus of this inquiry will begin with the end of the Cold War until present day because that marked the end of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. Most of the quantitative data will focus on the last decade to provide relevant statistics and accurate assessments of the current situation between Russia and Serbia. Historical relevance, beginning with the 20th century, will be taken into account to properly frame the political environment of Serbia and the Western Balkans. Assessing the amount of interference and its effects will be measured through Russian influence on Serbia and the Serbian minorities that exist in other countries within the Western Balkans. Types of agreements, public opinion, direct and indirect actions will be recorded to draw the proper conclusions.

This paper will survey the international relationship that exists between Serbia and Russia and analyze how Russia has tried to influence Serbia over the last two and half decades and what Russia's intentions might be in conducting such activities, such as providing military equipment or financial resources. A historical reflection of the bilateral relationship between Serbia and Russia will be presented first to frame this empirical discussion. The Russian influence over Serbian and other Western Balkan elections, or attempt to influence them, will also be analyzed and discussed in a broader sense. The paper will explore any connections between Serbia's candidacy as an EU member state and Russia's behavior towards Serbia.

History of the Serbian Political Landscape

The history of Serbs begins during the reign of the Ottoman Empire in the Balkans when Albanian Muslims were the privileged group compared to the Orthodox Serbs. After the Balkan Wars from 1912-1913, the Serbs were victorious and had a strong position right before the formation of Yugoslavia in 1918. The second World War changed the power dynamics because Italy sponsored Kosovo and it became part of Greater Albania. The Serbs took over Yugoslavia in 1945 in the name of brotherhood and unity. Albania challenged Serbian power once again by becoming fully autonomous in 1974 and then Milošević brought Serbians to power once again (Vujacic 1996, 769). Each of these occurrences that involved role reversals in power invoked unpleasant memories and instances of persecution that reinforced the poor memories. In addition to the geopolitical differences, there was a status-differentiation along ethnic and national lines (Vujacic 1996, 770). The constant revival of negative historical memories in the Western Balkans led to the increase in solidarity based around ethnicity and geo-political factors.

Russians and Serbs share a common history that has played an important role in their relationship throughout the 20th and 21st century. Their shared religious beliefs of Christian Orthodoxy, historical struggle against the Ottoman Turks and struggling on the same side in the First and Second World Wars explains Russia's attempts to conjure Balkan nationalism for their benefit in Serbia and the neighboring Balkan states (Vujacic 1996, 776). This shared history explains Russia's reluctance to support any form of military intervention against Serbia.

Serbian-Russian Relationship

Russian Influence on Serbia

The Western Balkan area is an important region for Russia because it is an area where other regional actors, like the United States (U.S.) and the European Union, are competing for influence. The region is also a prime location for the proposed energy supply routes that will lead to Europe and carry Russian natural resources. Serbia is the largest country in the Western Balkans and has significant Serbian minorities within neighboring countries that influence their political systems as well, so successfully influencing Serbians is in the best interest of Russia to promote their initiatives within the region. Moscow influences Belgrade, the capital of Serbia, by increasing its energy dependence on Russia, supporting its position on Kosovo and its refusal to

recognize it as a sovereign state, developing contacts with Serbian minorities in the region, fueling separatist movements and by gaining control of Serbian businesses (Szpala 2014, 1).

Russia increased Serbian energy dependence by increasing its control over Serbia's fuel and gas sector in 2008 by acquiring the Serbian company NIS (Szpala 2014, 2). Through this acquisition, Russia has gained full control of the oil processing sector in Serbia and controls 82% of the fuel market (Bijanić 2012) Through NIS, Russia has control over Serbia's only gas depot, therefore having a monopoly over the extraction of gas and oil within Serbia. Now, 98.8% of Serbian gas consumption is from Russia (Szpala 2014, 2). Apart from the energy sector and gas imports, Russia's role in Serbia's economy has been insignificant. Russia's investments, from 2005 to 2013, only consisted of 4.5% of all foreign investments in Serbia (National Bank of Serbia 2017).

Russian leaders have visited Serbia to use their prestige to conjure Serbian affection toward Russia. President Dmitri Medvedev visited Serbia in 2009 and Prime Minister, at the time, Vladimir Putin visited in 2011. In an attempt to improve relations with Belgrade, both leaders committed to investing over a billion U.S. dollars, but this money still has not been invested to this day (Beta 2011). Serbian proponents of Russia see Moscow as a valuable partner and Serbian media often publicizes potential development aid and other Russian investment plans to the public. 47 percent of Serbs believe that Russia is the largest supplier of developmental aid to Serbia, when in reality, the U.S. and EU provide 89.49% of the developmental funds (European Integration Office 2014, 19). Putin's visit to Belgrade was aimed at strengthening the pro-Russian groups within the Serbian ruling elite and confirm that it is in Russia's zone of influence (Szpala 2014, 7)

Serbia granted Russia preferential tax rates in 2000 to increase trade between the two countries. Russia still has not ratified this agreement, but it has increased trade. Russia accounts for only 10% of Serbia's imports and its exports to Russia have decreased from 7.7% in 2012 to 5.4% in 2016 (Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia 2014, 1). It is important to remember that Serbia has not received substantial economic benefits from dealing with Russia recently. Seven agreements, memorandums and protocols have been signed with Russia, but they mostly address the performance of agreements that are already active and do not build the current relationship between the two countries (Szpala 2014, 7).

Geographic proximity between Serbia and Russia also affects their current relationship. Russia has established numerous institutions dedicated to Russian interests within Serbia, such as branch offices of The Russian World organization and representatives of the International Fund for the Unity of Orthodox Nations within Sad and Belgrade in 2005 (Szpala 2014, 4). Other offices for Russian organizations like the Russian Institute of Strategic Research and the Gorchakov Public Diplomacy Fund have been established in Serbia as well. This increase in Russia focused institutions have led to the creation of Serbian language versions of Russian news portals like their news channel RT or their Voice of Russia broadcasting network.

Russia has financially supported far-right and eurosceptic organizations, political parties and nongovernmental organizations with a favorable view of Moscow in Serbia, such as: Dveri, Orbaz, Nasi and Treca Srbija. Russia tries to convince Serbs that joining Western organizations like NATO and the European Union are not in their best interests by promoting instability. Russia repeatedly tries to portray themselves as a significant ally that contributes developmental aid and as an irreplaceable trade partner. The pro-Russian organizations established in Serbia promote the shared culture between Serbia and Russia and criticize the pro-European actions of the current government (Szpala 2014, 5).

Military cooperation between Russia and Serbia is another aspect of their dynamic relationship. In 2013, Serbia and Russia signed a joint military cooperation agreement and in 2014 they both engaged in a military exercise involving 200 Russian paratroopers (Radio Free Europe, Radio Liberty [RFE/RL] 2014). This military exercise is an important connection between Russia and Serbia that sends signals to external actors like the U.S. and the European Union; the exercise took place in the northern city of Nikinci, which is only 50 kilometers from the border with the NATO member state of Croatia (Ibid). A month afterward, Putin visited Belgrade for a Serbian military parade. Serbia implemented two military exercises with Russia armed forces in 2015 (deemed “Slavic Brotherhood” exercises), conducted two more Slavic Brotherhood 700-troop military assault exercises with Russia and Belarus in Serbia in November of 2016 and another military exercise in June of 2017 (Dragojlo 2016a; RFE/RL 2017). The military exercises and visit by Putin are messages Moscow is sending to the world that indicate Russia has an ally within Europe. While Serbia has expressed it will not join NATO, it is a Partnership for Peace partner and recently deepened its cooperation with NATO in 2015 through an individual Partnership Action Plan (NATO 2017). The Partnership Action Plan is extremely

relevant for Serbia's foreign relations because it is considered the highest level of cooperation possible for a non-member country with NATO (Dragojlo 2016b). Serbs and their political parties have not forgotten the 1999 NATO bombings and still blame the "West" for Kosovo's secession from Yugoslavia (Marcinkowski 2015, 59). Since Vučić has taken office, Serbia has upheld a policy of military neutrality, which is how it can still have ties with the European Union, NATO and Russia at the same time. This relationship will cause difficulties between the European Union and NATO in future talks of accession.

Analysis

Russia has proven that it is directly challenging Serbia's accession to the European Union and the process of reconciliation in the Western Balkans through direct interference in Serbian affairs. Currently, Russia does not have much to offer to Serbia's authorities, which are reluctant to make more concessions towards Russia. However, Moscow has already gained a strong position in Serbia, which is due to the country's dependence on Russian natural resources, and in particular, strong support for Russian policy on the part of Serbian elites and society. The traditional pro-Russian attitudes have been strengthened as a result of a series of Russia-inspired, wide-ranging soft power initiatives which have proved so successful that a large part of society has begun to believe that Russia's interests are consistent with Serbia's. The relationship between Russia and Serbia is defined by Moscow's goal to sabotage EU efforts to increase rule of law and other democratic principles within Serbia that would help them accede to the European Union. If Russia is able to convince enough Serbians and elites to abandon accession to the European Union and align with Russia, it would be a significant blow to the Western Balkan region and decrease stability in the region.

Serbia and the European Union

The European Union has been an important actor that has affected the dynamics of the relationship between Serbia and Russia. Establishing stability and rule of law in the Western Balkans has been recognized as a high priority for the European Union since the late 90's and is still at the forefront of EU foreign policy. Bilateral negotiations for accession between the European Union and Serbia began in March of 2012 when Serbia was declared as an official candidate country. Serbia is in the process of fulfilling the various 35 chapters of the acquis

communautaire; it has completed two so far and has 12 open chapters (European Commission 2017). Visa free travel from Serbia to the European Union existed since December of 2009; over 9,000 ERASMUS (European student exchange program) participants existed between 2015-2016 and the EU invested over 30 million euro to modernize Serbian universities from 2012 to 2014 (Ibid). Customs duty free trade between the two entities since 2000 has led to the European Union being Serbia's largest trading partner; European Union trade accounted for 65 percent of the foreign direct investment in Serbia for 2016 (Ibid).

Table 1- Foreign Direct Investments in Serbia in 2014 (In EUR Millions and in %)

Country	In Millions of EUR	In %
Netherlands	372,685	33,6
Austria	119,231	10,7
Italy	101,130	9,1
Greece	89,696	8,0
Luxembourg	85,460	7,7
United Kingdom	57.619	5,2
Hungary	55,827	5,0
France	51,509	4,6
Denmark	49,809	4,5
Germany	36,524	3,3
EU 28	1.109,324	100

From the National Bank of Serbia (2015)

Recently, the President of the European Commission, Jean Claude Juncker, announced a plan for enlargement of the Western Balkan states in the 2017 State of the Union address. This announcement outlined more definitive plans for the Balkan states to accede to the European Union based on merit and fulfilling the *acquis communautaire*, the stringent and tiered level of requirements that need to be met before accession to the European Union is granted by the other member states. This renewed the EU's vision of the region as a geostrategic investment in a

stable, strong and united Europe based on common values (European Commission 2018a). The new strategy clearly spells out that the European Union is open to further accession when the individual countries have met the criteria and it has stated that fundamental reforms and good neighborly relations are necessary. Constant Russian interference and Serbia's choice to align with Russia will jeopardize the future accession of Serbia to the European Union. Serbia is in a better position than most Western Balkan countries on meeting the proposed date of 2025 for accession because it is one of two Western Balkan states already engaged in accession discussions. It is important to know that the proposed date of 2025 is not a strict deadline for all Western Balkan states to accede to the European Union and that only a few of the states can accede, or none at all (European Western Balkans 2018). The leader of the Directorate General on Neighborhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations (NEAR), Commissioner Johannes Hahn officially presented the new EU strategy and privately met with Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić in early February of 2018 (European Western Balkans 2018). Commissioner Hahn urged Serbia to implement the hard reforms and to establish a diplomatic relationship with Kosovo so that the state can accede by 2025. President Vučić and Commissioner Hahn spoke at a joint news conference together and Hahn said that, "the EU perspective is real, and the country now has a unique opportunity to grasp it" (RFE/RL 2018). After reaffirming that the European Commission will always be there to support Serbia, Vučić said that there are a number of obstacles in Serbia's path and that it will be up to the citizens to choose Serbia's path. Commissioner Hahn stated that the EU will not support bilateral disputes and made it clear that Serbia must implement a legally binding normalization agreement with Kosovo before it can join the European Union, which falls under Chapter 35 (Hahn 2018). After meeting with Serbian Prime Minister Ana Brnabic, Commissioner Hahn said he had a very good and constructive meeting with her (Hahn 2018). Hahn also met with representatives of Serbia's civil society, media and opposition parties.

The newly released European strategy sets out an action plan with six concrete flagship initiatives targeting specific areas of common interest: rule of law, security and migration, socio-economic development, transport and energy connectivity, digital agenda, reconciliation and good neighborly relations (European Commission 2018b). In addition to these clear goals and thresholds that must be met, the European Commission plans to gradually increase funding to the Western Balkans under the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance until 2020 (Ibid). In 2018 alone, €1.07 billion of pre-accession assistance for the Western Balkans is already allocated, on

top of the nearly €9 billion given from 2007-2017 (Hahn 2018). In addition to Commissioner Hahn, EU ministers of Foreign Affairs, President Juncker and High Representative Federica Mogherini plan on visiting the Western Balkan region in 2018. This official release of a more tangible path for accession of the Western Balkans by 2025, increased funding to the region, private meetings between Commissioner Hahn and Serbian officials and the joint press conference with the Serbian President can be seen as direct threats to Russian influence within Serbia. The European Union also plans on increasing Serbia's socio-economic development by assisting them in their World Trade Organization accession process. These are all political messages that the European Union is sending to Russia through the promotion of liberal values in the Western Balkans, specifically within Serbia. Russia could decide to intensify their relations with Serbia as a result of these political advances by the European Union or instigate different Serbian groups to increase conflict between Serbia and Kosovo to interfere with the accession and negotiation process.

Serbia and its Mutual Connections with the European Union

The potential accession of Serbia to the European Union is not only for geopolitical reasons, but for economic ones as well. The European Union could use Serbia as a platform for economic interests because of its physical connection between Europe, Asia, the Middle East and the Mediterranean. Serbia can also secure transit from EU countries to the East, and vice versa, especially with the transportation of oil, gas and other energy infrastructure related entities. The European Union is also interested in extending its political influence on Serbia and its nearby territories (Vošta & Janković 2016, 120).

The European Union would like to expand its banking services market to Serbia, extend its sales network of EU's wholesale chains and set up new companies to gain duty-free access to the Russian market (Vošta & Janković 2016, 120). The European Union is also interested in the fruitful agricultural land Serbia has to offer; both the European Union and Serbia signed an agreement that began in September of 2017 that allowed EU citizens to purchase natural resources in Serbia (Ibid). The financial relationship between the European Union and Serbia has been nurtured by tax breaks, the regulation on conditions and increasing ways of attracting foreign direct investment within Serbia. For example, the European Union will fund Serbian investment projects within the manufacturing sector if Serbia ensures the creation of a certain

number of jobs for a specific amount of euro invested; Serbia needs to ensure the creation of at least 40 new jobs for an investment of 500,000 euro (Vošta & Janković 2016, 130).

Table 2- Advantages of Serbia for Attracting Foreign Direct Investment

Favorable Geographical Position	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Includes areas with 7.5 million inhabitants • It is located on the Balkan Peninsula and it represents the link between the Eastern, Western, Northern and Southern Europe • Moderate continental climate
Free Trade Agreements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interim trade agreement with the EU; • CEFTA agreement; • Agreement with the signatory countries EFTA; • Free Trade Agreement with Russia; • Free Trade Agreement with Belarus • Free Trade Agreement with Kazakhstan; • Free Trade Agreement with Turkey; • The preferential trade regime with the US.
Fiscal Advantages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exemption from VAT payment for the entry of goods into free zones, as well as for the provision of transport services and other services concerning the entry of goods; • Exemption from VAT payment for the turnover of goods and services in the free zone; • Exemption from VAT payment for the turnover of goods among the users of two free zones; • Exemption from VAT payment for the use of energy resources; • Exemption from individual tax burdens for direct foreign investment.
Customs Facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exemption from payment of customs duties and other import charges for the goods specified for performing activities and building of facilities in the free zone (manufacturing materials, equipment and construction material).
Benefits of Local Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local government can bring a decision on the advantageousness of facilities

	<p>construction and infrastructure on the territory of the free zone. These advantages are related to the adoption of decisions on the exemption from paying local taxes and fees, which are the responsibility of local governments, e.g. urban construction land management fees, fees and costs of the municipal administration, fees for the use of construction land, charges for urban requirements and permits, access to local infrastructure of water and sewerage, local services taxes etc.</p>
Financial Benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free movement of capital, profits and dividends; • Funds from the budget of the Republic of Serbia for financing investment projects in the manufacturing and service-providing sector, which may be the subject of international trade.
Effective Management in the Free Zone (One Stop Shop)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Logistics services at discounted prices: organization of transport, shift of the costs, shipping services, agency services, insurance services, bank job etc.
Total and Fast Customs Procedure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Existence of a customs department in each of the free zones; • Customs procedure in the free zones is simplified.

From Vošta & Janković 2016, 130-131

The previously described economic benefits for Serbia are major advantages for its accession to the European Union. It is important to remember that the European Union wants Serbia to join because of their important geopolitical location within an EU safety zone that has a complex and challenging history. As Vošta and Janković described, the accession of Serbia can lead to the expansion of the wholesale chains sales network, expansion of the EU's banking services market and favorable buying of enterprises (134). Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan are members of a rival customs union called the Euroasian Economic Union, but the European Union can use Serbia for the establishment of new joint enterprises for the purpose of duty-free entry to the markets of these countries (Vošta & Janković 2016, 134).

The Political and Social Spheres within Serbia

Serbian Politics

Aleksandar Vučić, previous Prime Minister of Serbia and current President, embraced the two-track policy initiated in 2008 by President Boris Tadić that seeks EU membership while maintaining close relations with Russia. After opening negotiations to join the European Union in 2014, Serbia set a five-year goal to meet all the necessary requirements. Even though Serbia should be harmonizing its foreign and security policy with the European Union's, it has not joined the European Union's numerous sanctions against Russia.

Serbian President Vučić and scholars familiar with Serbia have stated multiple times that Serbia's ability to accede to the European Union or whether to cooperate with Russia will depend on the will of the citizens. It is important to view the political groups that are based around gathering support of the citizens and look at which political narratives seem to garner the most support for these various political groups.

President Vučić's political party, the Serbian Progressive Party, formed in October of 2008, has become more EU-oriented since its formation, but still cannot fully commit to the Union's objectives. The April 24, 2016 national elections that occurred in Serbia were conducted successfully with the necessary EU chapters for accession in mind; Serbia's EU accession was a priority goal defined by the government program. A 2016 European Commission report found that inclusiveness, transparency, quality of law-making and effective oversight of the executive need improvement and must be changed (European Commission 2016, 4). The 2016 election had a 56 percent turnout and the incumbent prime minister, Aleksandar Vučić (Serbian Progressive Party- SNS) maintained a majority of 131 seats out of the 250 (European Commission 2016, 6). Vučić's Serbian Progressive Party and the Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS) are coalition partners that have capitalized on the fragmented opposition forces (Parties and Elections in Europe 2016). Some members of the SPS are widely perceived to pursue the Kremlin's objectives and hold high-level government positions such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Dačić, and the Ministry of Energy, Aleksandar Antić (Marcinkowski 2015, 63). While additional stakeholders, like civil society, were more involved within this election, the European Union called for a more enabling environment for civil society to ensure a comprehensive policy dialogue (European Commission 2016, 8). The Serbian Progressive Party won the Belgrade local elections in February of 2018 and received around 40 percent of the vote, which signals that this party will likely win the

majority in the upcoming parliamentary elections next year and Vučić will retain his political influence within Serbia for the next four years (Čeperković 2018).

Serbia's Civil Society

Figure 1, within the appendix, shows that the European Union is the leader, by far, of international development assistance grants to Serbia in the last 15 years, but Figure 2 says that only 27 percent of Serbian citizens have heard of a project financed by EU funds (Government of the Republic of Serbia 2016). This finding indicates that there is a large disparity between the positive actions the European Union is taking within Serbia and the knowledge of any such activities occurring by the citizens. This disparity could be related to the increased activities Russia is performing in Serbia to influence public opinion and signal that their efforts are working. Not only are the Russian efforts to undermine support for the European Union working, but Figure 4 shows that citizens actually think Russia is donating more money to Serbia than anyone else; 25 percent of citizens think Russia is the largest donor and 21 percent believe the European Union is the biggest one (Government of the Republic of Serbia 2016). Figure 3 describes a general decline in Serbian civil society's support for EU accession from 2009 until 2016. In late 2009, 73 percent of Serbs would have supported EU accession, but in 2016, the citizens against accession more than doubled and only 47 percent of citizens are pro-accession (Government of the Republic of Serbia 2016). Figure 5 shows that Serbia's accession to the European Union is almost equally viewed as a good, bad or neither good nor bad thing among the general population (Government of the Republic of Serbia 2016). These various figures demonstrate that the divided stance of the Serbian government is reflected within civil society as well and will make the implementation of certain EU chapters more difficult.

Conclusion

Russia has constantly been trying to prevent the Western Balkan countries from joining the European Union and other "Western" institutions like NATO. This paper explained Russia's extensive efforts to discourage Serbia from acceding to the European Union and how Russian interference within Serbia has impacted its current political affairs and will affect its future relationships. Growing tensions between Russia and the European Union can directly affect the accession of Serbia to the European Union in a negative way as well. If Russia continues to

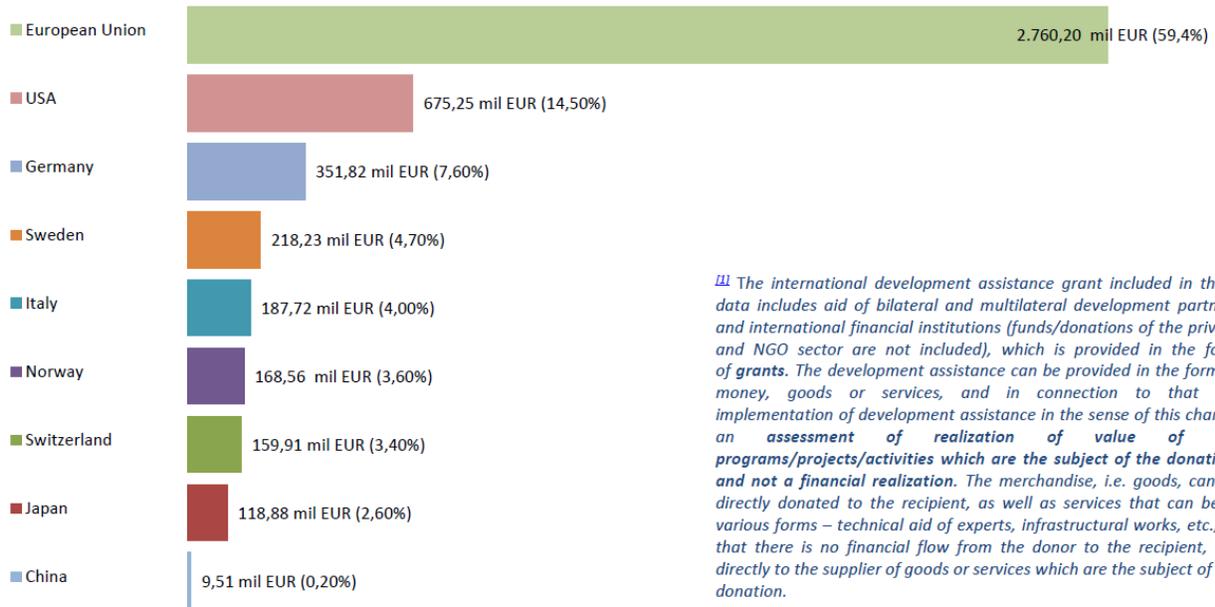
successfully court enough anti-EU support throughout Serbia and its minorities in the Western Balkans, then Serbia could regress in its accession progress if they think that it is not in their best interest to join the European Union.

This paper proves that there is a significant amount of tension between the relationships that Serbia has between the European Union and Russia. Serbia seems to be increasing its openness to the European Union based on its increased trade relations, by signing on as a partner to NATO and agreeing to participate in other EU institutions like the European Defense Agency. On the other side, Serbia decided to engage in multiple military exercises with Russia every year since 2014. Russia still has control over some Serbian political elites and is actively trying to sway the public perceptions held by Serbian civil society. In the near future, the executive branch of Serbia will need to make a choice and decide whether or not aligning Serbia with the European Union or Russia is the path that it wants to pursue. Eventually, the current two-track policy that involves extensive cooperation with Russia and Serbia will reach a breaking point and Serbia will have to choose one primary ally.

Appendix:

Figure 1: EU Accession Support

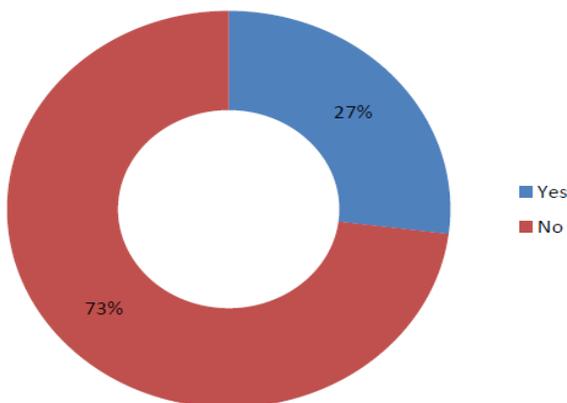
And the situation is actually as follows: Assessment of realization of international development assistance grant to Serbia in the period from 2000-2015 (in millions of euros)^[1]



^[1] The international development assistance grant included in these data includes aid of bilateral and multilateral development partners and international financial institutions (funds/donations of the private and NGO sector are not included), which is provided in the form of grants. The development assistance can be provided in the form of money, goods or services, and in connection to that the implementation of development assistance in the sense of this chart is an assessment of realization of value of the programs/projects/activities which are the subject of the donation, and not a financial realization. The merchandise, i.e. goods, can be directly donated to the recipient, as well as services that can be in various forms – technical aid of experts, infrastructural works, etc., so that there is no financial flow from the donor to the recipient, but directly to the supplier of goods or services which are the subject of the donation.

Source: Government of the Republic of Serbia (2016)

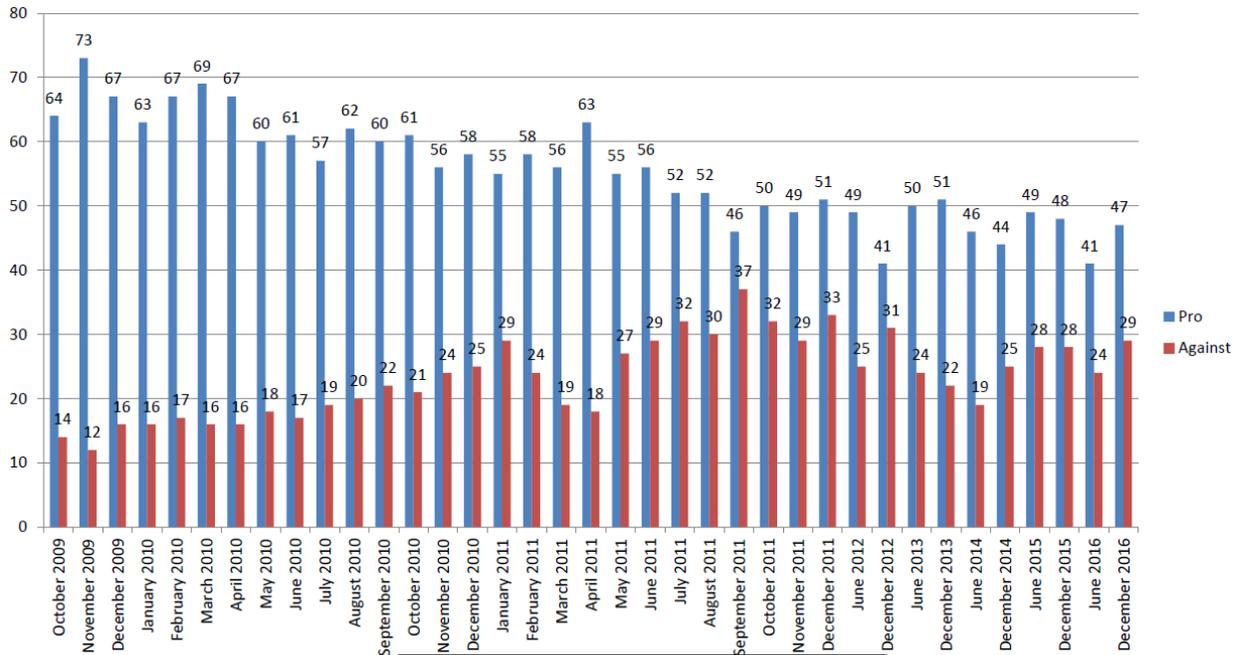
Figure 2: Interest in the European Union
Have you heard of a project financed by EU funds?



Source: Government of the Republic of Serbia (2016)

Figure 3: EU Accession Support

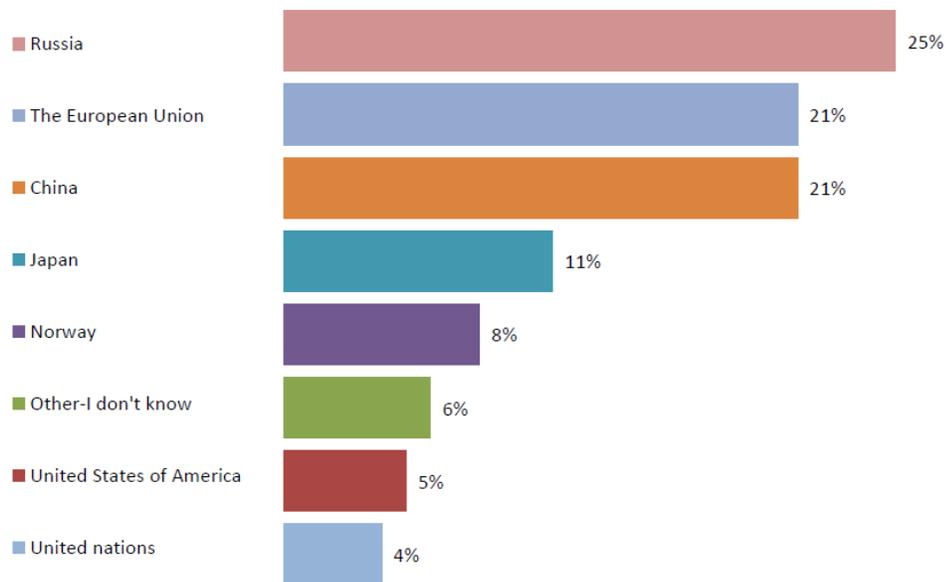
If there was a referendum tomorrow with the question: "Do you support the accession of our country to the European Union", what would you vote for?



Source: Government of the Republic of Serbia (2016)

Figure 4: Interest in the European Union

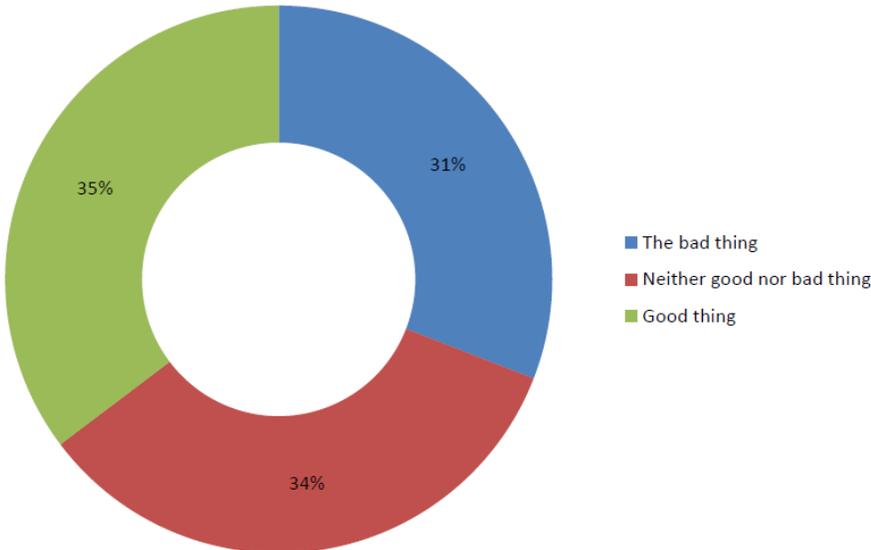
In your opinion, which countries have been the biggest donators to Serbia from 2000 onwards?



Source: Government of the Republic of Serbia (2016)

Generally speaking, our country's accession to the European Union would be:

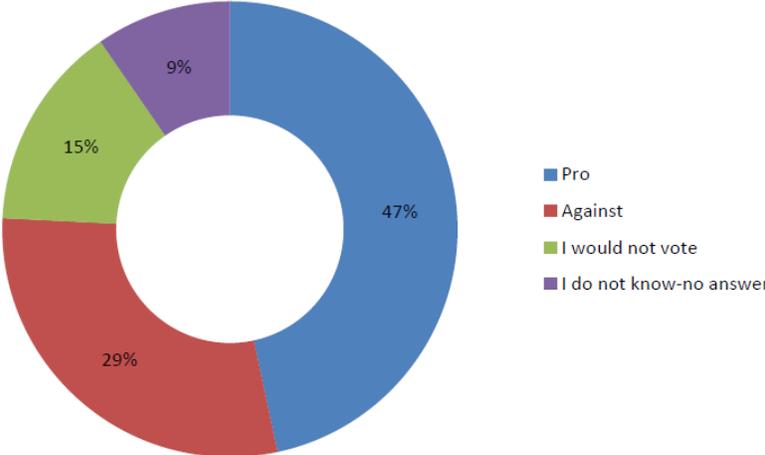
Figure 5: EU Accession Support



Source: Government of the Republic of Serbia (2016)

Figure 6: EU Accession Support

If there was a referendum tomorrow with the question: "Do you support the accession of our country to the European Union", what would you vote for?



Source: Government of the Republic of Serbia (2016)

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