

DOI 10.4467/2543733XSSB.23.013.18439

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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SERBIA AND RUSSIA IN THE POST-YUGOSLAV ERA: POLITICAL, ECONOMIC AND SECURITY DIMENSIONS

Abstract

This article analyzes the post-Yugoslav Serbian-Russian political, economic and security connection. The research examines bilateral cooperation and its effects on regional and global security using history, political science and international relations. Ideological affinities, political maneuverings, economic dependency and mutual security interests define the relationship, which has major ramifications for Balkan stability and European security. The essay continues by examining the policy implications of the Serbian-Russian alliance for regional and global players and suggesting future research options in light of the changing geopolitical landscape.

Keywords: Serbia, Russia, post-Yugoslav era, political dimension, economic dimension, security dimension, geopolitics, political economy, regional stability

Theoretical Framework: Post-Yugoslav Era, Geopolitics, and Political Economy

The complicated interaction of geopolitics and political economy appears as a crucial theoretical framework in historiographical analyses of international relations, especially those connected with the post-Yugoslav period. The disintegration of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia created a complicated geopolitical environment marked by ethno-nationalist conflicts, political realignments and the pursuit of economic and security alliances¹.

¹ Josip Glaurdić, *The Hour of Europe: Western Powers and the Breakup of Yugoslavia* (Yale University Press, 2011); Peter Radan, *The Break-up of Yugoslavia and International Law* (Routledge, 2004); Nebojša Vladislavljević, "The Break-up of Yugoslavia: The Role of Popular Politics", in: *New Perspectives on Yugoslavia* (Routledge, 2010), pp. 159–76; Viachaslau Yarashevich and Yuliya Karneyeva, "Economic Reasons for the Break-up of Yugoslavia", *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, 46.2 (2013), pp. 263–73.



Given this complex environment, the relationship between Serbia and Russia has emerged as a particularly compelling case study which includes a variety of elements that need a thorough examination.

The purpose of this piece of research is to explain the numerous aspects of the Serbian-Russian relationship in the post-Yugoslav period, diving into the political, economic, and security factors that have molded this multifaceted partnership. The study attempts to illuminate the fundamental causes driving the Serbian-Russian alliance, drawing on a multitude of academic literature, primary sources and empirical data, with a special focus on the role of ideology, diplomatic engagements and mutual interests. The use of a geopolitical framework enables an examination of the power dynamics and strategic interests that underpin the Serbian-Russian relationship, while the inclusion of the political economy enables an examination of the economic interdependence and resource distribution that have contributed to the alliance's evolving nature. The study tries to produce a comprehensive understanding of the complex web of forces that shaped the Serbian-Russian relationship in the post-Yugoslav period by applying this interdisciplinary approach.

Research Question: Analyzing the Multifarious Dimensions of the Serbian-Russian Relationship

This academic investigation is guided by a primary research topic that seeks to understand the many facets on which Serbia's and Russia's post-Yugoslav relationship rests. The primary goals of the analysis are to lay out the conditions that led to the formation of this alliance and to discuss the effects those conditions will have on regional peace, safety and prosperity. Motivated by a need to fully comprehend the mutually beneficial nature of the Serbian-Russian connection, the inquiry seeks to untangle the intertwined web of political, economic and security forces that have created it.

In order to achieve this objective, the analysis aims to respond to various sub-questions, including:

- What are the political dynamics between Serbia and Russia in the post-Yugoslav period and how have shared histories, cultures and ideologies affected them?
- How have trade, investment and energy cooperation been influenced by economic interests and interdependence in the formation of this alliance?
- What effects have security concerns and military cooperation had on regional peace and the structure of European defense?

The research aims to answer these subquestions in order to take a more in-depth look at the complex Serbian-Russian relationship and provide light on the larger geopolitical and political-economic factors at play in the post-Yugoslav period.

Scope and Limitations: from the Dissolution of Yugoslavia to the Present Day

In light of the multifaceted nature and extensive period of time covered by the Serbian-Russian connection, it is highly necessary to define the parameters of this academic investigation, both in terms of its extent and its confines. The period from the disintegration

of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (1991–1992) to the present day is the primary subject of the examination. This time frame incorporates the creation of Serbia as an independent state as well as the following development of its relationship with Russia. This temporal demarcation enables a comprehensive examination of the myriad dimensions that have shaped the alliance while also providing a manageable framework within which to conduct the investigation. In other words, it enables a comprehensive examination of the myriad dimensions that have shaped the unofficial alliance.

It is vital to accept the limits inherent in this research, given the enormity of the subject matter and the restrictions imposed by the available sources. It is essential to do so because it is critical to acknowledge the limitations inherent in this study. The study cannot offer a comprehensive explanation of every facet of the relationship between Serbia and Russia, nor can it go into every nuance and subtlety that has defined the connection. None of these things is possible. The analysis, on the other hand, takes a thematic approach and integrates data from a wide variety of primary and secondary sources in order to provide a robust and insightful examination of the primary political, economic and security dimensions that have been the foundation of the alliance. This was accomplished by adopting a thematic approach. In addition, due to the fluid character of international relations and the ever-shifting character of the geopolitical environment, it is necessary to acknowledge that the findings taken from this research are liable to change when new events take place. The insights and findings that are presented in this article are a snapshot of the Serbian-Russian relationship at a particular point in time and as such, they should be interpreted with the understanding that the alliance may continue to evolve in response to shifting political, economic and security dynamics.

Historical Context

The Dissolution of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia

Political Dynamics and Ethno-Nationalist Tensions

Understanding the chaotic breakup of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia requires looking at it through the lens of the political dynamics and ethno-nationalist conflicts that plagued the area during that time period. This is necessary in order to have a full picture of what happened². With Josip Broz Tito's passing in 1980, the power structure, which had been kept in a precariously fragile balance under his direction, started to fall apart and become unstable. When the once-uniting force began to wane, long-suppressed ethnic rivalries and nationalist emotions began to emerge, both of which contributed to the slow disintegration of the Yugoslav federation³.

² Joshua Kaldor-Robinson, "The Virtual and the Imaginary: The Role of Diasporic New Media in the Construction of a National Identity during the Break-up of Yugoslavia", *Oxford Development Studies*, 30.2 (2002), pp. 177–87; Carole Rogel and Carole Rogel Poirier, *The Breakup of Yugoslavia and Its Aftermath* (Greenwood Publishing Group, 2004).

³ Sergey Asaturov and Andrei Martynov, "The Resurgence of Nationalism: The Breakup of Yugoslavia", *EUREKA: Social and Humanities*, (5), 2020, pp. 39–42; Anthony Oberschall, "The Manipulation of Ethnicity: From Ethnic Cooperation to Violence and War in Yugoslavia", *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 23.6 (2000),

Nationalist movements gained popularity inside the component republics in the late nineteen-eighties and early nineteen-nineties. This was driven in part by economic problems, political instability, and the development of opportunistic political players. The most prominent character in this respect was Slobodan Milošević, who rose to power in Serbia by taking advantage of nationalist feelings and fueling ethnic tensions. His rise to power is what made him the most remarkable figure in this regard. His belligerent rhetoric and policies not only exacerbated the divisions that already existed within the federation, but they also galvanized nationalist movements in other republics, further eroding the fragile unity that had once defined the Yugoslav state. During his time in office, he served as president of the Yugoslavian Federation⁴.

A series of unilateral declarations of independence were made by Slovenia and Croatia in 1991, followed by the Republic of Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1992. These declarations were precipitated as a result of the growing influence of nationalist leaders and the weakening of the federal structure. These separatist efforts gave rise to a complicated web of territorial disputes and ethno-nationalist conflicts, which, in the end, resulted in the violent dissolution of the Yugoslav state and the establishment of Serbia as an independent country. The pursuit of a “Greater Serbia” by Milošević and his followers prompted intense confrontations over disputed areas and boundaries, and the newly constituted state of Serbia found itself at the core of these disputes. Milošević employed nationalist rhetoric, but his political stance was primarily populist, promoting Yugoslavism and justifying military intervention in Slovenia and Croatia based on constitutional law. The concept of “Greater Serbia” was mainly propagated by Vuk Drašković and Vojislav Šešelj. After Yugoslavia’s dissolution, Milošević sought to unite regions inhabited by Serbs, supporting armed conflicts led by Croatian Serbs and Serbs in Bosnia and Herzegovina. However, his main concern was his position on the international political stage. As a result, he abandoned Serbian interests in Croatia in 1995 and severed ties with Bosnian Serb leader, Radovan Karadžić.

The international community struggled to come up with an adequate response to the developing crisis as the situation in the area descended deeper into anarchy. In an effort to put an end to the bloodshed and restore stability, the United Nations, the European Union, and NATO all made efforts to mediate peace discussions, apply economic penalties, and eventually engage militarily in the conflict. The prolonged conflicts and shifting alliances that characterized this period further complicated the geopolitical landscape of the Balkans, giving rise to new power dynamics that would shape the trajectory of the Serbian-Russian relationship in the post-Yugoslav era. The protracted conflicts and shifting alliances that characterized this period also contributed to the complexity of the geopolitical landscape of the Balkans.

pp. 982–1001; Kristen P Williams, “Internationalization of Ethnic Conflict in the Balkans: The Breakup of Yugoslavia”, *Ethnic Conflict and International Politics: Explaining Diffusion and Escalation*, 2004, pp. 75–94.

⁴ Shale Horowitz and Min Ye, “Nationalist and Power-Seeking Leadership Preferences in Ethno-Territorial Conflicts: Theory, a Measurement Framework, and Applications to the Breakup of Yugoslavia”, *Civil Wars*, 15.4 (2013), pp. 508–530; Iva Vukušić, *Serbian Paramilitaries and the Breakup of Yugoslavia: State Connections and Patterns of Violence* (Taylor & Francis, 2022).

Economic Transitions and the Regional Power Vacuum

The situation was accompanied by profound economic transitions and the creation of a regional power vacuum, which further exacerbated political instability and influenced the evolving relationship between Serbia and Russia. The dissolution of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was accompanied by profound economic transitions and the creation of a regional power vacuum⁵. Yugoslavia's economy, which had been defined as a centrally planned, socialist model, was brought to its knees as a result of the dissolution of the federal system and the subsequent hostilities that followed. The newly independent governments were required to undertake significant economic changes in order to transition to market-oriented economies and repair their shattered infrastructures. These reforms included the introduction of new taxes and the privatization of state-owned industries.

In the face of these problems, Serbia, much like its neighbors, sought aid and investment from outside sources in order to ease the restructuring of its economy. Russia, a strong regional force with historical and cultural links to Serbia, emerged as a crucial player in the Balkans, offering economic assistance and political backing to the embryonic Serbian state. These relationships helped Russia establish Russia's role as a key player in the Balkans. There has been a power vacuum in the area, and Serbia and Russia share the objective of reducing Western influence in the Balkans. These two factors acted as driving forces in the expansion of the economic collaboration between the two countries.

As Serbia negotiated the challenging process of economic change, the country was forced to face the need to strike a balance between its goals of stronger connections with Russia and its goals of integration into the European Union⁶. This precarious balancing act has been a reoccurring element in the post-Yugoslav trajectory of Serbia, and it has helped shape the country's political, economic and security ties with both Russia and the European Union. The interplay of these competing interests and alliances has had a profound impact on the many dimensions of the Serbian-Russian relationship, which will be further explored in the subsequent sections of this analysis. These competing interests and alliances have been exacerbated by the interplay between them.

The Emergence of Serbia as an Independent State

Political Challenges and Territorial Disputes

When Serbia emerged as an independent state in the wake of the disintegration of Yugoslavia, it was confronted with a multitude of political issues and territorial conflicts that would determine its path in the post-Yugoslav period. The area had been engaged in ethno-nationalist wars, which had resulted in disputed boundaries, large-scale population

⁵ Milica Zarkovic Bookman, "The Economic Basis of Regional Autarchy in Yugoslavia", *Soviet Studies*, 42.1 (1990), pp. 93–109; Dražen Marjanac, "ECONOMIC ASPECTS OF BREAKUP OF YUGOSLAVIA", *Zbornik Radova Ekonomskog Fakulteta u Istočnom Sarajevu*, 11, 2015, pp. 83–92.

⁶ Marten Van Heuven, "Rehabilitating Serbia", *Foreign Policy*, 96, 1994, pp. 38–48; Valentina Vukmirović and others, "Foreign Direct Investments' Impact on Economic Growth in Serbia", *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, 23.1 (2021), pp. 122–143.

displacements, and deep-rooted animosities among the numerous ethnic groups⁷. Under the leadership of Slobodan Milosevic, the Serbian government became entangled in a series of bloody battles to maintain control over crucial areas. These battles were most notable in Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and subsequently in Kosovo.

The settlement of these territorial conflicts, which often included international mediation and involvement, had a considerable influence on the political landscape of Serbia as well as on its ties with the governments that are located in its immediate vicinity. Both the Dayton Agreement of 1995, which put an end to the Bosnian War, and the NATO aggressive “intervention” in Kosovo in 1999, which eventually led to the eventual declaration of independence by the predominantly Albanian-populated province in 2008, were particularly consequential for the evolving political dynamics of Serbia. In 1995, the Dayton Agreement brought an end to the Bosnian War. In 1999, NATO intervened in Kosovo⁸.

Not only did these events redraw the borders of Serbia’s territory, they also left the country with a heightened feeling of insecurity and a strong desire to form powerful international alliances in order to protect its national interests. The historical, cultural and political ties with Russia provided a natural foundation for the strengthening of the Serbian-Russian relationship in this context, as both nations sought to navigate the complex geopolitical landscape of the post-Yugoslav era. In this context, the strengthening of the Serbian-Russian ties was a natural foundation for the strengthening of the Serbian-Russian relationship in general.

Economic Challenges and the Necessity for External Alliances

In the aftermath of the disintegration of Yugoslavia, the nascent nation-state of Serbia was presented with a plethora of political issues as well as territorial conflicts. Moreover, the new nation-state was also challenged with formidable economic obstacles. Serbia was left with damaged infrastructure, high unemployment and skyrocketing inflation as a result of the breakdown of the Yugoslav economy and the destructive consequences of the lengthy hostilities. As a direct result of these economic challenges, Serbia was driven to initiate extensive reforms with the goal of shifting from a communist economic system that was based on central planning to one that is based on free market principles⁹. Because of the complexity of the process, the reconstruction and modernization of the Serbian economy required aid from outside sources, investments and the formation of new economic alliances. Russia has emerged as a crucial partner in this attempt, giving financial backing,

⁷ Roberta Cohen and Francis M Deng, *Masses in Flight: The Global Crisis of Internal Displacement* (Brookings Institution Press, 2012); Dario Spini, Guy Elcheroth, and Rachel Fasel, “Towards a Community Approach of the Aftermath of War in the Former Yugoslavia: Collective Experiences, Social Practices, and Representations”, *War, Community, and Social Change: Collective Experiences in the Former Yugoslavia*, 2014, pp. 3–23.

⁸ Christopher Greenwood, “International Law and the NATO Intervention in Kosovo”, *International & Comparative Law Quarterly*, 49.4 (2000), pp. 926–934; Albert Legault, “NATO Intervention in Kosovo: The Legal Context”, *Canadian Military Journal*, 1.1 (2000), pp. 63–66.

⁹ Vladimir Simović and Tanja Vukša, “When Did a Transition to Capitalism Start in Serbia?”, *The Political Economy of Eastern Europe 30 Years into the “Transition” New Left Perspectives from the Region*, 2022, pp. 41–64; Miodrag Vujošević and Zorica Nedović-Budić, *Planning and Societal Context – The Case of Belgrade, Serbia* (Springer, 2006).

investments in important areas such as energy and infrastructure as well as access to its enormous market. This economic collaboration was supported by a common goal to offset the influence of the West in the Balkans and to establish some degree of regional autonomy. In the post-Yugoslav era, when both countries were attempting to navigate the challenges and opportunities presented by the rapidly shifting regional context, the necessity for external alliances, particularly with Russia, played a crucial role in shaping the economic dimensions of the Serbian-Russian relationship. This was especially true with regard to Russia.

Political Dimension: Interplay of Ideology, Diplomacy, and Mutual Interests

Ideological Affinities: Orthodox Christianity, Slavic Cultural Ties, and Shared Historical Experiences

It is impossible to have a complete understanding of the political component of the Serbian-Russian relationship in the post-Yugoslav period without first looking at the ideological similarities that have linked the two countries together. The deep impact of Orthodox Christianity, cultural links to Slavic peoples, and common historical experiences have all led to the formation of a robust and long-lasting alliance between Serbia and Russia. This alliance was formed in the early twentieth century. Both the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Russian Orthodox Church have played significant roles in the formation of the national identities and cultural narratives of their respective countries, making Orthodox Christianity a powerful force that brings the two countries together and serves as a unifying force between them¹⁰. This religious connection not only helps to cultivate a sense of spiritual kinship, but also reinforces the perception of a common destiny that is rooted in the defense of Orthodox values and traditions against what are perceived to be external threats, such as the secularism of the West and the expansionism of Islam.

Both Russia and Serbia have a common Slavic cultural heritage, which has played a significant role in the development of a strong feeling of kinship and mutual understanding between the two countries. A collective identity that transcends national boundaries and emphasizes the perception of a shared history and common values has been engendered among the Slavic peoples as a result of the shared linguistic, literary and artistic heritage as well as the historical experience of living under the dominance of the Ottoman Empire and the Habsburg Empire. These ideological affinities have been further strengthened by the shared historical experiences of Serbia and Russia, particularly in their respective struggles against the Ottoman Empire and their long-standing resistance to Western imperialism¹¹. These historical experiences have also served to strengthen the ideological affinities between Serbia and Russia. The Battle of Kosovo in 1389, which has been mythologized in both Serbian and Russian historiography as a symbol of heroic defiance against foreign oppression, serves as a potent example of the confluence of religion, culture and history in the

¹⁰ Andrew Evans, "Forced Miracles: The Russian Orthodox Church and Postsoviet International Relations", *Religion, State & Society*, 30.1 (2002), pp. 33–43.

¹¹ Shaun Narine, "NATO and the New Western Imperialism", *Seeking Order in Anarchy*, 2016, 197–218.

relationship between Serbia and Russia. The battle has been mythologized in both countries as a symbol of heroic defiance against foreign oppression¹².

The said ideological similarities have served as a solid basis for the political alliance that has existed between Serbia and Russia in the post-Yugoslav era. This alliance has shaped the diplomatic interactions that have taken place between the two countries as well as the strategic goals that lie beneath their shared interests. The interplay of ideology, diplomacy and mutual interests is therefore a crucial element in understanding the political dimension of the Serbian-Russian relationship, which will be further explored in the subsequent sections of this analysis. This aspect of the relationship will be discussed in greater depth in the following paragraphs.

Diplomatic Maneuverings: Leveraging Historical Connections to Forge Contemporary Alliances

In the realm of diplomatic maneuverings, Serbia and Russia have deftly leveraged their historical connections and ideological affinities to skillfully forge contemporary alliances that serve their respective national interests in the post-Yugoslav era. These alliances have served Serbia and Russia well in the pursuit of their respective goals in the post-Yugoslav era. Both countries have capitalized on their shared heritage and mutual interests to strengthen their diplomatic cooperation and coordination on the international stage as a direct result of the interaction between these factors – this has had a significant influence on the political aspect of the relationship between Serbia and Russia.

One of the most prominent expressions of this dynamic can be seen in the constant diplomatic assistance that Russia has offered to Serbia in the wake of the war in Kosovo. This support has been supplied by Moscow on a regular basis. Russia has steadfastly defended Serbia's territorial integrity and sovereignty, making use of its veto power in the United Nations Security Council to prevent Kosovo's membership in international organizations and to shield Serbia from the possibility of sanctions or other unfavorable political consequences¹³. This has happened despite the fact that the vast majority of the international community has recognized Kosovo's independence. This diplomatic support has not only strengthened Serbia's standing in the area, but it has also helped Russia achieve its larger strategic goals of competing with Western dominance in the Balkans and establishing itself as a worldwide force. Both countries have interests in this area that align with one another, which has further strengthened their political alliance and made it easier for them to work together in a variety of international forums and multilateral efforts.

In addition to the similarities presented above, the cultural similarities and historical ties that exist between Russia and Serbia have made it possible for the two countries to engage in high-level diplomatic visits and exchanges, which have helped to cultivate per-

¹² Florian Bieber, "Nationalist Mobilization and Stories of Serb Suffering: The Kosovo Myth from 600th Anniversary to the Present", *Rethinking History*, 6.1 (2002), pp. 95–110.

¹³ Oksana Antonenko, "Russia and the Deadlock over Kosovo", *Survival*, 49.3 (2007), pp. 91–106; Colin Warbrick, "I. Kosovo: The Declaration of Independence", *International & Comparative Law Quarterly*, 57.3 (2008), pp. 675–690.

sonal relationships and a sense of trust among their respective political elites¹⁴. These interactions, which frequently draw upon the shared historical narratives and cultural symbols that define their national identities, serve to reinforce the perception of a special relationship that goes beyond the ordinary bounds of diplomacy and international politics. This perception is important because it helps to shape public opinion. This close-knit relationship has been cultivated and nurtured through the skillful use of historical connections and shared values. One sign of this close-knit relationship is the frequent consultations that take place between the political leadership of both countries. Another sign of this close-knit relationship is the mutual support that is given to each other's diplomatic initiatives.

In addition to these diplomatic maneuverings, Serbia and Russia have also worked to expand their political alliance via a variety of bilateral agreements and cooperation initiatives in fields such as defense, the sharing of information, and the fight against terrorism¹⁵. These collaborative efforts not only serve the economic interests of both countries, they also show their commitment to a common vision of regional security and a multipolar global order that poses a challenge to the hegemony of the West.

As is clear from the points made above, the political aspect of the Serbian-Russian relationship in the post-Yugoslav era is characterized by a complex interplay of ideology, diplomacy and mutual interests. This complex interplay has been facilitated and enhanced by the astute leveraging of historical connections and cultural affinities. Historical connections and cultural affinities include the fact that both countries were once fighting against the Tripartite Pact. Both countries were able to traverse the tumultuous waters of the post-Yugoslav environment and establish their separate positions as regional players in the changing geopolitical order as a result of the complicated web of circumstances that has defined the outlines of the Serbian-Russian alliance. In the next parts of this research, we delve further into the economic and security aspects of this connection. In doing so, we throw light on the diverse and interrelated nature of the relationships that Serbia and Russia share in the modern period.

The Role of International Organizations: UN, EU, and NATO

The political aspect of the relationship between Serbia and Russia in the post-Yugoslav era has been significantly shaped by the involvement of international organizations such as the United Nations (UN), the European Union (EU), and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization¹⁶. These organizations have played a crucial role in this process. They have not only played a significant role in the political, economic and security landscape of the region, they have also served as arenas for the manifestation of the ideological, diplomatic and strategic dynamics that define the Serbian-Russian alliance. In other words, these

¹⁴ Nikola Kosović, "What Makes Russia so Popular in Serbia? Origins of Russian Soft Power", 2016; Jan Muš, "Peripheral Position of the Balkans and Its Future Relations with Russia", *Russia in the Balkans. Threat or Opportunity?*, 2015, p. 107.

¹⁵ Mariya Hake and Alice Radzyner, "Western Balkans: Growing Economic Ties with Turkey, Russia and China", 2019.

¹⁶ Elena Ponomareva, "Quo Vadis, Serbia", *Russia in Global Affairs*, 69.1 (2020), pp. 158–79.

organizations have not only played a significant role in the landscape of the region but have also served as arenas.

Russia's constant support for Serbia's position in the United Nations on crucial matters, most notably supporting Kosovo's independence, has been shown by Russia's use of its veto power in the United Nations Security Council to preserve Serbian interests. This diplomatic support has been essential in upholding Serbia's territorial claims and acting as a check on the influence of Western nations, who have for the most part, advocated Kosovo's independence. On the other hand, the European Union has been a source of both collaboration and a cause of dispute in the relationship between Serbia and Russia. Moscow has viewed the enlargement of the EU and the prospect of Serbian accession with skepticism, perceiving it as an encroachment on Russia's traditional sphere of influence in the Balkans¹⁷. Despite the fact that Serbia has attempted to strike a balance between its aspirations for European integration and its close ties to Russia, Moscow has viewed the enlargement of the EU and the prospect of Serbian accession with skepticism. While Serbia strives to negotiate the opposing interests of its two main foreign partners, it has made striking a delicate balance a recurring subject in its diplomatic maneuverings. This delicate balancing act has been a recurrent topic in Serbia's diplomatic maneuverings.

Particularly in light of the 1999 intervention that NATO conducted in Kosovo, NATO, which is the premier Western security body, has been a significant topic of dispute in the relationship between Serbia and Russia. The military intervention, which Russia vehemently opposed, has left deep scars in both Serbian and Russian perceptions of the alliance, reinforcing their mutual distrust of Western intentions in the region and heightening their shared sense of vulnerability. The intervention was also strongly opposed by the United States.

Recognition of Kosovo's Independence and Serbian-Russian Alignment

The alignment of Serbia and Russia in the post-Yugoslav period has been further intensified as a result of the recognition of Kosovo's independence by the majority of the international world. This includes the United States of America and the majority of the member states of the European Union. As previously mentioned, Russia has steadfastly protected the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Serbia by using its diplomatic and political power to oppose the international recognition of Kosovo.

This alignment has served Russia's broader strategic objectives, as it seeks to counter-balance the influence of the West in the Balkans and assert its own status as a global power. In addition to bolstering Serbia's position on the international stage, this alignment has also served Russia's broader strategic objectives. The mutual interests and shared values that underpin the Serbian-Russian alliance in this context have been instrumental in shaping the political cooperation and coordination between the two countries, reinforcing the perception of a special relationship that goes beyond the ordinary bounds of diplomacy and international politics.

¹⁷ Colleen A Rankin, "International Agendas Confront Domestic Interests: EU Enlargement, Russian Foreign Policy, and Eastern Europe", 2012.

The Realpolitik Approach: Balancing Pragmatism and Ideological Affinity

Domestic Political Considerations and the Influence of Key Political Actors

The relationship between Serbia and Russia in the post-Yugoslav era has been shaped not only by the interplay of ideology, diplomacy, and mutual interests but also by the realpolitik approach that both countries have adopted in order to navigate their respective domestic political landscapes¹⁸. This has been a significant factor in the development of the Serbian-Russian relationship. It has been a central feature of this approach to striking a balance between pragmatism and ideological affinity. Key political actors in both Serbia and Russia have been attempting to reconcile their strategic goals with the constraints and opportunities presented by their respective domestic political environments. The approach that Serbia will take towards its relationship with Russia has been significantly shaped by the impact of significant political players in the country, such as the Serbian Progressive Party, which is now in power and the numerous coalition partners with whom it works. While the government has maintained very strong ties with Moscow, it has also pursued a pragmatic foreign policy that seeks to strike a balance between its historical and cultural affinity for Russia and the economic and political benefits of European integration. While the government has kept its ties with Moscow very strong, it has also pursued a pragmatic foreign policy. This delicate balancing act has been made more difficult by the influence of nationalist and pro-Russian factions within the Serbian political spectrum. These factions have advocated for a closer alignment with Moscow and resistance to the influence of the West. This has made the act of striking a balance more difficult. As Serbia attempts to navigate the challenges and opportunities presented by its dual aspirations for European integration and a robust partnership with Moscow, its realpolitik approach to its relationship with Russia has been significantly influenced by the delicate interplay of these competing domestic political forces. This influence has had a significant impact on the realpolitik approach that Serbia has taken.

The Impact of Global Power Shifts on the Serbian-Russian Relationship

The Serbian-Russian relationship has also been profoundly affected by the broader shifts in global power dynamics, which have seen the rise of emerging powers, such as China and India, and the relative decline of Western hegemony. These shifts have seen the rise of emerging powers such as China and India. Due to the shifting nature of the geopolitical environment, both Serbia and Russia have been presented with new possibilities to express their interests and to build new alliances that pose a threat to the existing order in the world.

In this environment, both countries have taken a realpolitik strategy, which may be described as a pragmatic acknowledgment of the necessity to adjust to these shifting power

¹⁸ Vladislav B Sotirović, "Russia's Balkan Politics: From the Politics of Pan-Slavic Reciprocity of the Tsarist Russia to the 'Realpolitik' of the Republic of Gazprom Russia", *Српска Политичка Мисао*, 1, 2016, pp. 83–109.

dynamics while still keeping their ideological affinity and shared interests. This has resulted in the expansion of their bilateral cooperation in areas such as trade, investment, and the development of infrastructure as well as the cultivation of new partnerships with non-Western powers that share their vision of a multipolar world order. Both of these developments have taken place as a direct result of the aforementioned situation¹⁹.

The impact of these global power shifts on the Serbian-Russian relationship has been a critical factor in shaping the *realpolitik* approach that both nations have adopted in the post-Yugoslav era. Both nations adopted this approach in their search to strike a balance between their ideological affinity and mutual interests as well as the pragmatic realities of a rapidly changing international landscape.

Economic Dimension: Integration, Investment, and Energy Interdependence

Bilateral Trade Relations: the Evolving Economic Partnership

Throughout the post-Yugoslav period, the economic component of the relationship between Serbia and Russia has been characterized by an increasing integration, increased investment and a rising energy dependency between the two countries. The dynamics of economic complementarities and the shared aim to diversify each other's trading portfolios have been the driving forces behind the continuous development of bilateral trade relations, which have been the defining characteristic of the developing economic relationship. Both Russia and Serbia have complementary economic structures and resource endowments, which they have used to their advantage in order to build a commercial partnership that is mutually advantageous and encompasses a diverse variety of industries. Although agricultural items, machinery and manufactured goods make up the majority of Serbia's exports to Russia, the country's eastern neighbor is also a source of imports for Serbia in the form of energy resources, raw materials and high-tech equipment²⁰. This economic complementarity has facilitated the steady growth of bilateral trade, as both nations have sought to exploit their respective comparative advantages and minimize their reliance on traditional trading partners in the West.

The sector-by-sector study of the economic component of the connection between Serbia and Russia indicates a complex and comprehensive collaboration that spans a wide range of businesses and services across a wide variety of sectors. As a result of Russia's ban on food imports from Western countries and the preferential access granted to Serbian products as a result of the free trade agreement between the two countries, Serbia has emerged as a major exporter of fruits, vegetables, and processed food products to the Russian market. This has allowed Serbia to capitalize on the opportunities presented by both of these policies. The rehabilitation of Serbia's manufacturing base has been significantly aided by Russian investments in the industrial sector, notably in the sectors of heavy in-

¹⁹ Radmila Dragutinović Mitrović, "Serbia between the European Union and the Euroasian Economic Union: What Does Trade Statistics Demonstrate?", 2021, p. 120.

²⁰ Bojan Matkovski and others, "The Agribusiness Sector as a Regional Export Opportunity: Evidence for the Vojvodina Region", *International Journal of Emerging Markets*, 17.10 (2022), pp. 2468–2489; Marta Szpala, "Russia in Serbia – Soft Power and Hard Interests", *OSW Commentary*, 150.1 (2014).

dustry, automotive production and military manufacture. This is especially true in the case of heavy industry. These investments have not only made it easier to share technological know-how and other expertise, they have also made it possible for more people to find work and have contributed to the general expansion of the economy in Serbia.

The Serbian-Russian relationship has been defined by rising cooperation in the sectors of banking, telecommunications and tourism in the segment of the service economy known as the services sector. Russian banks and financial institutions have built a considerable presence in the Serbian market. As a result, they are able to provide chances for lending and investment to Serbian firms, which in turn helps to promote economic links between Russia and Serbia. In addition, the consistent increase in the number of Russian tourists visiting Serbia has contributed to the development of the country's developing tourism sector and has further strengthened the cultural and interpersonal linkages that are the foundation of the larger bilateral relationship. Therefore, the economic dimension of the Serbian-Russian relationship in the post-Yugoslav era has been characterized by an increasingly integrated and diversified partnership that spans a wide range of different sectors and industries. This is a reflection of the mutual desire of both countries to strengthen their economic ties and to enhance their interdependence in an era of shifting global power dynamics.

Russian Investments in Serbia: Strategic Positioning and Economic Leverage

The Privatization Process and Russian Acquisitions

Russia has been presented with considerable opportunities to buy important assets and to establish its economic presence in Serbia as a result of the privatization process that is now taking place in Serbia. In the wake of the collapse of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, Serbia began on a series of market-oriented reforms with the intention of liberalizing its economy and luring international investment. These changes were designed to attract foreign investment. These changes have included a number of important components, one of the most important being the privatization of state-owned businesses and Russian investors have been among the most active players in this process.

The Russian government has focused its purchase efforts in Serbia on key industries including energy and telecommunications, as well as infrastructure and heavy industry. The purchase of the Serbian oil company NIS by Gazprom Neft, the acquisition of a controlling stake in the Serbian telecommunications company Telekom Srbija by the Russian firm Mobile TeleSystems (MTS), and the involvement of Russian state-owned enterprises in the construction and modernization of key transportation and energy infrastructure projects are all prominent examples of Russian investments.

The Role of Russian Investments in the Serbian Economy

The inflow of Russian investments in Serbia has played a key role in the economic growth of the nation as well as its integration with the economies of the surrounding area

and the world as a whole. Not only have Russian investments provided much-needed capital for the modernization and expansion of Serbia's industrial base, they have also facilitated the transfer of technology, expertise and management know-how to the Serbian economy. This has enabled the modernization and expansion of Serbia's industrial base. Because of this, the country's productive capacity has increased, job opportunities have been created, and the country's gross domestic product has increased overall. In addition, Russian investments have been a significant source of economic influence for Moscow in its dealings with Belgrade. This has been the case for a number of reasons. Not only has the strategic positioning of Russian companies in key sectors of the Serbian economy strengthened their mutual interdependence, but it has also provided Russia with a significant degree of influence over the decision-making and policy-making processes that are involved in the economic activities of the Serbian government. As both countries have sought to strike a balance between their individual interests and goals in the post-Yugoslav era, this economic leverage has been essential in shaping the broader political and security dimensions of the Serbian-Russian relationship. This has been the case as both countries have attempted to move on from the Yugoslav era. Therefore, the role of Russian investments in the Serbian economy has been multifaceted and complex, reflecting the interplay of strategic positioning, economic leverage and mutual interdependence that characterizes the broader economic dimension of the Serbian-Russian relationship in the post-Yugoslav era. This is a reflection of the interplay of strategic positioning, economic leverage and mutual interdependence that characterizes the Serbian-Russian relationship in the post-Yugoslav era.

Energy Interdependence: the Geopolitics of the Gas Sector

The energy interdependence between Serbia and Russia has been a central feature of their bilateral relationship in the post-Yugoslav era, with the gas sector playing a particularly significant role in shaping the geopolitics of their economic partnership²¹. This interdependence has been a central feature of their bilateral relationship since the end of the Yugoslav wars. The South Stream project is one of the most notable instances of this dependency. It is a planned natural gas pipeline that was originally meant to deliver Russian gas over the Black Sea and through the Balkans to European markets, therefore avoiding Ukraine. The South Stream project had notable significance for both Russia and Serbia from a strategic point of view since it had the potential to not only improve the mutual energy security of both countries but also strengthen their economic and political connections in the area. However, the project was met with significant challenges and was ultimately scrapped in 2014 as a result of political and regulatory pressures from the European Union and the United States. These political and regulatory pressures viewed the project as a tool for Russian geopolitical influence in Europe, and they viewed it as a threat to European security.

²¹ Dejan Brkić, "Serbian Gas Sector in the Spotlight of Oil and Gas Agreement with Russia", *Energy Policy*, 37.5 (2009), pp. 1925–1938.

Because of the cancellation of the South Stream project, the vulnerability of Serbia and Russia's energy interdependence has been brought to light, as has the influence of external actors in shaping the dynamics of the economic partnership between the two countries. These repercussions have had profound effects on the relationship between Serbia and Russia. Both countries have been motivated to investigate alternative energy infrastructure projects as a result of the cancellation of the project. These projects include the TurkStream pipeline, which has the potential to reduce the reliance of both countries on the traditional transit routes used by Russia to export gas.

Energy security and the diversification of energy sources are becoming more important for both Serbia and Russia as a result of the geopolitics surrounding the gas industry. In the case of Serbia, the country's significant dependence on gas imports from Russia has left it vulnerable to the possibility of supply disruptions as well as price volatility. As a result, the government has been compelled to investigate alternative sources of energy and to invest in the development of Serbia's domestic energy infrastructure. In recent years, Serbia has made efforts to diversify its energy sources by increasing its use of renewable energy sources, such as hydroelectric and solar power, and by pursuing regional energy cooperation initiatives with its neighbors in the Western Balkans. These efforts have allowed Serbia to increase its use of renewable energy sources such as hydroelectric and solar power. These efforts have been directed on weaning the country off of its reliance on gas imports from Russia and improving the overall energy security of the country.

In the years after the fall of the Yugoslavian government, two of the most important priorities for Russia have been the diversification of the markets to which it sells its exported energy and the creation of alternative transit routes for the gas it ships abroad. The geopolitics of the gas industry has not only made Russia vulnerable to the dangers of overdependence on the European market, but it has also increased the country's susceptibility to the shifting regulatory and political climate in the EU. As a consequence of this, Russia has worked towards the goal of diversifying the locations to which it ships its energy exports by pursuing new pipeline projects like Nord Stream 2 and TurkStream and by increasing its position in the Asian energy market.

In conclusion, the energy interdependence between Serbia and Russia in the post-Yugoslav era has been a key factor in shaping the geopolitics of the gas sector. Both countries are attempting to strike a balance between their respective mutual interests and strategic objectives while navigating the complex and ever-changing landscape of global energy markets.

Security Dimension: Military Cooperation and Regional Stability

Military Collaboration: Arms Deals and Joint Military Exercises

The Evolution of Serbian-Russian Military Cooperation

The security aspect of the Serbian-Russian relationship in the post-Yugoslav era has been characterized by a deepening military collaboration, which includes arms deals, joint military exercises and the sharing of military expertise and technology. This has

occurred during the time period after the fall of the Yugoslavian state. The convergence of their strategic objectives and the reciprocal desire to increase their respective military capabilities in the context of a dynamically shifting security environment in the area have been the driving forces behind the development of this collaboration. As a direct result of the collapse of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the ensuing wars that broke out in the Balkans, Russia has identified Serbia as one of its most important regional partners for the purpose of bolstering their military ties. This partnership has been marked by a steady expansion of bilateral military ties, including the provision of Russian military aid and technical assistance to the Serbian Armed Forces, the establishment of joint military training and exchange programs and the participation of Serbian and Russian forces in joint military exercises, such as the Slavic Brotherhood exercise series. This expansion of military ties has been a significant factor in the success of this partnership.

The Impact of the Arms Trade on Regional Security Dynamics

The exchange of military hardware between Serbia and Russia has been an essential part of the joint military efforts of both countries and has had a major bearing on the way in which regional security is shaped. Exports of Russian weapons to Serbia have included a diverse selection of cutting-edge weaponry, such as fighter planes, tanks and air defense systems. These exports have played a significant role in the modernization of the Serbian military as well as the enhancement of its ability to engage in battle. Concerns have been raised by Serbia's neighbors and the wider international community as a result of the influx of Russian arms into Serbia. This is because the influx of Russian arms into Serbia has the potential to alter the regional balance of power and to fuel tensions in an already fragile security environment. Some people believe that the expanding military relations between Serbia and Russia might make current fault lines in the Balkans much worse, which would be detrimental to the chances of achieving long-term peace and stability in the area. The proponents of the Serbian-Russian arms trade, on the other hand, argue that it is a legitimate expression of their sovereign right to pursue military cooperation and to ensure their own security in the face of evolving regional and global threats. In other words, they believe that the arms trade is an acceptable way for the two countries to exercise their right to pursue military cooperation. They maintain that the increasing military cooperation between Serbia and Russia should not be viewed as a factor that contributes to instability in the region but rather as an essential component of their broader bilateral relationship and a reflection of their shared commitment to maintaining the stability and security of the region.

In short, the security aspect of the Serbian-Russian relationship in the post-Yugoslav era has been characterized by an increasingly close military collaboration, with arms deals and joint military exercises serving as key pillars of their partnership. This has been the case in the era after the fall of the Yugoslav federation. As both countries strive to strike a balance between their respective national interests and long-term strategic goals in the context of a regional security landscape that is both complex and constantly shifting. The question of how the impact of this collaboration on the dynamics of regional security will play out remains up for debate.

Avenues for Further Research

What might be added, yet falls beyond the scope of this work (as the conflict in Ukraine is ongoing), is that from the onset of the conflict (i.e. the Russian invasion of Ukraine), Serbia has maintained a measured stance, declining to support the imposition of sanctions while voting alongside the international community against the nature of the war in the United Nations – a move that was criticized by Russia. However, Serbia's position has undergone significant changes in recent months, particularly with regards to its war narrative. Notably, at the Davos summit held in late 2022, Serbian President Aleksander Vučić expressed his belief that Donbas and Crimea belong to Ukraine and that Serbia's future path is in the European Union, with no other alternatives. This significant shift in Serbia's position could signal a broader reevaluation of its relationship with Russia and a greater alignment with Western Europe, particularly given Serbia's stronger economic ties with the latter. It is worth noting that these recent developments mark a departure from Serbia's historical affinity with Russia, a relationship that has endured since the end of the Cold War.

Conclusion

The purpose of this investigation was to shed light on the numerous facets of the Serbian-Russian relationship in the post-Yugoslav period. These facets include political, economic and security concerns. According to the results of this research, the Serbian-Russian partnership has undergone significant change over the course of the past three decades. This change has been brought about by a nuanced interplay of ideological affinities, diplomatic maneuverings, economic interdependence and shared interests in the realm of mutual security. In the realm of politics, the ideological and cultural ties between Serbia and Russia have played a significant role in helping to foster their alignment. Furthermore, the realpolitik approach has enabled both countries to strike a balance between pragmatism and ideological affinity in the pursuit of their strategic objectives. The economic dimension has witnessed the development of a partnership that is characterized by trade, investment and energy interdependence. Russia has played an essential role in Serbia's economic development and energy security, and this interdependence has contributed to the evolution of the partnership. In conclusion, the security component has seen a strengthening of military coordination and the sharing of information and counterterrorism cooperation, all of which have substantial consequences for regional stability and the larger European security architecture.

In order to provide a meaningful contribution to the growing theoretical knowledge of geopolitics and political economy in the post-Yugoslav period, the purpose of this research was to throw light on the many different facets of the connection that exists between Serbia and Russia. This research has provided a nuanced and all-encompassing account of the complex dynamics that lie at the foundation of the post-Yugoslav era by analyzing the various factors that have shaped this relationship and examining its impact on the regional and global security landscapes. The research was executed by examining the various factors that have shaped this relationship. In doing so, this study has also provided insights into the broader processes of geopolitical realignment, economic integration and security cooperation that have characterized the post-Yugoslav era. As a result, our understanding of the forces and interests that have shaped the contemporary world is enhanced.

The findings of this study have important policy implications for both Serbia and Russia as well as for other regional and global actors who are attempting to navigate the complex web of political, economic and security interests in the post-Yugoslav era. These implications are important for both Russia and Serbia. They are also important for other regional and global actors. Politicians in Belgrade and Moscow need to continue to achieve a delicate balance between their ideological inclinations and pragmatic concerns while also taking into account the larger regional dynamics and the interests of other players. This delicate balance must be maintained. For Serbia, this means maintaining a strategic partnership with Russia while also pursuing its goals of European integration and the fostering of constructive relations with other regional actors, such as NATO and the EU. Additionally, Serbia must work to improve its relations with other international organizations, such as NATO and the EU. Consolidating Russia's influence in the Balkans and maintaining its strategic cooperation with Serbia without prompting counterbalancing attempts by Western countries or escalating regional tensions is a challenge for Russia. This challenge must be met in order for Russia to be successful. For other regional and global actors, the developing relationship between Serbia and Russia highlights the necessity to adopt a nuanced and context-specific approach to engagement in the Balkans, acknowledging the diversity of interests and the complexity of the regional security environment. This is because of the fact that the Balkans are home to a number of conflicting and competing interests. This requires encouraging conversation and collaboration, cultivating mutual trust and understanding and tackling the underlying causes of insecurity and instability in the area. Specifically, this involves promoting communication and cooperation.

The analysis that is offered in this article is only a snapshot of the connection between Serbia and Russia in the post-Yugoslav period, a relationship that is susceptible to continuous change and adaptation as the regional and global circumstances continue to develop. As a result, further study on this subject should continue investigating the feasible futures of the Serbian-Russian cooperation in the context of developing tendencies and obstacles in the global system. Examining the impact of new technologies and the digital revolution on the economic and security dimensions of the Serbian-Russian relationship could be a potential avenue for future research. Other potential avenues for research could include: exploration of the role of non-state actors, such as multinational corporations and civil society organizations, in shaping the bilateral partnership; evaluation of the implications of the growing Sino-Russian cooperation for Serbia's strategic orientation and its relations with other countries. Future research can contribute to a more nuanced and dynamic understanding of the Serbian-Russian relationship in the post-Yugoslav era by shedding light on these and other pertinent questions. This can help policymakers navigate the complex and ever-evolving landscape of international politics in the twenty-first century.

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