



Content Committee: Russia

Lisa Likhacheva

E-mail: likhache@student.ethz.ch

1 Kosovo / Serbia Conflict Overview

2 Russia's Stance on the Kosovo Conflict

According to the official position of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Balkan region "remains an important area for Russian foreign policy," as a result of the "common history, strong bonds of friendship, . . . common Slavic roots and cultural and religious affinity with [peoples of this part of Europe], as well as by [Russia's] longstanding involvement in the regional processes." Russia is firmly opposed to Kosovo's unilateral proclamation of independence and continues to consider Kosovar territory part of Serbia, based on the UN Security Council Resolution 1244.[1]

The UN Security Council Resolution 1244 authorizes the UN Secretary-General to "establish an international civil presence in Kosovo in order to provide an interim administration . . . under which the people of Kosovo can enjoy substantial autonomy within the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia." The interim administration was to allow for the "development of provisional democratic self-governing institutions," which would enable a return to peace and normality in Kosovo's territory.[2] The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs interprets the resolution as "enshrin[ing] the territorial integrity of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, the legal successor of which is Serbia." [1]

Furthermore, it is useful to note that the present situation provides Russia with a great degree of influence in the Balkan region. For as long as Serbia doesn't recognize Kosovo, it remains dependent on Russia's veto power in the UN Security Council, so as to prevent international recognition of Kosovar independence. Thus, the resolution of the conflict appears to go against Moscow's longterm geopolitical interests: no longer reliant on Russia, Serbia could deepen its ties with NATO and the EU, thus significantly curbing Russia's influence in the region. And indeed, Russia has been leveraging the connections between the members of the Russian political and national security establishment with their Serbian counterparts, who tend to be opposed to a compromise with Kosovo, to thwart the progress towards conflict resolution. The great popularity that the Russian President, Vladimir Putin, enjoys in Serbia provides another avenue for cementing nationalistic sentiment, which may be detrimental to progressing towards a resolution.[4] In fact, reacting to the U.S. President's Administration inviting top Kosovar and Serbian official for talks at the White House, Russia's Foreign Minister warned that Russia "w[ould] not allow attempts to rewrite . . . history" and would "advocate such approaches that will not infringe on the interests of Serbia," thus providing what was widely interpreted as an indication that any resolution of the conflict or progress in the peace talks would need to be approved by Russia.[5]

Interestingly, the present cordial relation between Russia and Serbia is a fairly recent development. Starting in the 1950s, the Soviet Union's heated relations with Yugoslavia were slowly normalized. However, Yugoslavia remained a leading member of the Non-Aligned Movement, a group of countries intending to remain neutral in the Cold War. After the dissolution of both the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia in the early 1990s, the political relationship had been neglected up until the start of the Kosovo War, during



Fig. 1: The relative positions of Serbia and Russia (in red). Kosovo is shown in green.

which Russia aligned itself with Serbia and condemned NATO's bombing of Yugoslavia. After the election of Vladimir Putin in 2000, the diplomatic and business relations between the two countries continued warming. As of right now, a subsidiary of Gazprom – the Russian state-owned energy corporation – is the majority shareholder in Serbia's oil and gas company, with a stake of 56.15% (with the Republic of Serbia holding 29.87%).[6]

3 References

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