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RUSSIAN-SERBIAN RELATIONS

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Analysis

Russia's Voice Heard in Serbia

By Dušan Reljić, Berlin

Abstract

Vladimir Putin has reason to thank the Western powers: They have allowed him to succeed where Stalin failed, namely in securing Russian political and economic influence in Belgrade. By supporting the Albanian demands for Kosovo's secession and ignoring Serbia's interests, the US and most Western European countries have paved the way for Moscow. For the first time since the Cold War, Russia has managed to gain a foothold in a part of Europe that the West considers to be part of its own sphere of influence.

History of a Troubled Relationship

The voice of orthodox Russia will be heard across Serbia this coming July, as part of an agreement between the two countries signed at the beginning of 2008. Three "top choirs" from Moscow and a number of Russian soloists will travel to several Serbian cities and give free open-air performances. In the interests of maintaining traditional "cultural and spiritual links," the shows will be supported by the Moscow International Fund for the Unity of Orthodox Countries.

There has not been such harmony between Belgrade and Moscow since 1948, when Tito broke with Stalin. Subsequently, the relationship between Belgrade and Moscow was determined solely by the pursuit of their often contradictory interests: The Soviet Union was the Eastern hegemon, while Yugoslavia was one of the pioneers of the Non-Aligned Movement. There was no mention of fostering "spiritual links" or other special sentiments; on the contrary, the Yugoslav People's Army, which long remained the fourth-largest military force in Europe, trained hard in the defense of both its western and its eastern borders. At the same time, Yugoslavia received arms and financial loans from both blocs. During the Cold War, both Moscow and Washington were intent on "not losing" Yugoslavia to the other side. The stability of Yugoslavia was of decisive importance for maintaining the status quo in Europe, as the then German chancellor Helmut Kohl put it in the mid-1980s.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union and the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact, the structural foundations of Europe shifted – and thus the stability of Yugoslavia was suddenly put to the test. The West forged alliances with the former Communists of Slovenia and Croatia, who had abruptly converted to democracy. Moscow's money was on Serbian despot Slobodan Milosevic. In the course of the Yugoslav wars of succession (from the conflict in Slovenia in 1991 to the fighting in Macedonia in 2001), Moscow

found to its dismay that it did not have the necessary political and military potential to project its power to this part of Europe. During the long decade of conflict, Moscow was continually determined to gain influence on the external diplomatic and military interventions on the territory of former Yugoslavia. As it turned out, however, the US was generally able to assert itself, rarely taking into account the opinions of its EU partners, much less those of Russia. Moscow's frustration reached a peak in the spring of 1999, when the US ignored Russia's protests and had NATO bomb Serbia for almost three months.

NATO-Bombing Shows Russian Weakness

Russia's experience in Southeastern Europe prompted Vladimir Putin to state bitterly that those who are weak are beaten and kicked by the strong. Under his leadership, the Kremlin reached the firm conclusion that Russia should never again be weak, as it had been under Boris Yeltsin. It was precisely because Russia had failed so miserably in 1999 to dissuade the US from deploying NATO's war machine against Serbia that the diplomatic wrangling beginning in autumn 2005 over the future status of the Serbian province became an overriding issue for Moscow. Frozen conflicts in the post-Soviet space are of secondary importance for Moscow in this context. Russia is mainly interested in gaining equal standing with the US on the global political scene.

Strangely enough, Moscow's very obvious sensitivity with regard to the issue of Kosovo was ignored by Western diplomats. Martti Ahtisaari from Finland and his Austrian deputy Albert Rohan waved aside questions as to whether they really believed that Moscow would agree to their plan for Kosovo without further ado. The UN negotiators had given in to Kosovar Albanian demands for secession by presenting a plan for "supervised independence" of the province in early 2007, despite the fact that President Putin and his

Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov had already stated the Russian position in no uncertain terms a year earlier in conversations with top-ranking US diplomat Rosemary DiCarlo at the Kremlin: Moscow would only consider a solution for Kosovo that had been worked out amicably by Serbs and Albanians together. In other words, a separation of Kosovo against the wishes of Belgrade was under no circumstances an acceptable option for Russia.

While the US chief negotiator in Kosovo Robert Wisner subsequently described the refusal of Russia to follow the US policy on Kosovo as “unbelievably regrettable,” the US did not budge an inch on its support for the Albanian cause in Southeastern Europe – any more than it did in any other current disputes with Moscow. After the Kosovo Albanians had declared their independence on 17 February 2008, Wisner offered an interpretation of the US position in several interviews. He stated that the Kosovo issue was of importance to Washington because the US was also responsible for security in Europe. Russia, on the other hand, had no such interests, according to the seasoned diplomat, and it is not contiguous to Serbia, but was, on the contrary, remote from Serbia. Russia and the US should not try to interfere in each other’s backyards, according to Wisner.

However, Moscow was trying to secure access to Kosovo, and the US was determined to demonstrate that such meddling would not be accepted. Wisner’s remarks on geography are problematic because the US is much further away from the Balkans than Russia is, but his frankness is nevertheless revealing: From the US point of view, Russia’s participation in security matters is obviously not required when it comes to European affairs. All suggestions for cooperation that the State Department has made towards Moscow refer to possible joint security policy efforts relating to Afghanistan or the campaign against international terrorism, i.e., in areas where the US has interests of its own. But no such offers have been made with regard to Kosovo or the stationing of missile defense systems in Eastern and Central Europe, or other topics where Washington does not believe Moscow could or should be pursuing its own interests.

The US Goal is to Keep Russia Out of the Balkans

There can be no question: If Russia was indeed a neighbor of Serbia, or if the two states were at least connected via friendly countries that would have permitted Russia military aid to pass through to Serbia if necessary, neither the NATO campaign against Serbia in 1999 nor the West’s recognition of the Kosovo Albanians’ declaration of independence in 2008 would

have occurred. However, the US had made precautions, as Moscow became painfully aware already in 1999: The new NATO members Romania and Hungary denied overflight permission for aircraft carrying reinforcements for Russian troops that had captured the airport at Pristina before the arrival of NATO forces. Moscow’s surprise move, which had been intended to at least amend the outcome of the NATO campaign against Serbia, ended in humiliation: Russian soldiers at Slatina Airport were cut off from reinforcements, so that Moscow was forced after a few weeks to subordinate its forces in Kosovo to the NATO command. In 2003, Putin withdrew the last forces from Bosnia and Kosovo, stating that Moscow no longer wanted to support the misguided Western policies in these crisis-ridden areas.

Furthermore, at this point, hardly any political surfaces remained onto which Russian influence could have been projected: Russia no longer had any suitable allies in Serbia immediately after the Milosevic regime was overthrown in Serbia. Even the national-conservative groups still vividly remembered how emissaries from Moscow were sent on 5 October 2000, when the police and military had finally withdrawn support for Milosevic, to the election winner Vojislav Kostunica in order to convince him to agree to a compromise with the old regime. Milosevic’s brother (who had previously served as ambassador to Moscow), his widow, and his son enjoy political asylum in Moscow to this day. Also, Serbian intelligence agents and army generals who served under Milosevic have found refuge in Russia after the despot had been toppled. This fact serves as a clear warning to the pro-Western forces in Belgrade: Moscow is keeping these people in reserve in case the balance of power in Serbia should shift back towards the supporters of the old regime.

After Kosovo’s Independence: Serbia Pushed towards Russia, Away from EU

Such a return might already be the case after the parliamentary, provincial, and local elections in Serbia on 11 May 2008. There is a real chance that eight years after Milosevic’s downfall, his political successors may get their opportunity. The West’s approach to the issue of Kosovo has undermined the position of the pro-European forces: President Boris Tadic (Democratic Party – DS) promised after his narrow win over his nationalist-populist opponent Tomislav Nikolic (Serbian Radical Party – SRS) both to pursue EU accession and to enshrine the retention of Kosovo in the country’s constitution. However, this position no longer appears credible after Paris, London, and Berlin have signaled to Belgrade that Serbia will only be allowed to join the EU after it relinquishes its claims to Kosovo.

While this “Troika” cannot speak for all EU members, since Spain, Romania, Slovakia, Greece, and Cyprus do not intend to recognize Kosovo’s independence, an impasse has ensued, even though Brussels continues to argue in favor of the prospect of EU accession for Serbia: No government in Belgrade will ever be able to sign a document that implies any kind of acknowledgement of Kosovo’s secession. On the other hand, a majority of EU countries have extended recognition to Kosovo, and will therefore not wish to sign a treaty with Serbia as long as it continues to maintain its claim to Kosovo.

The convergence between Serbia and the EU seems therefore to have reached a stalemate – and a political impasse always includes the danger of reverting to bad habits. A Serbia that refuses to move towards the EU will increasingly have to seek the proximity of Russia. Moscow’s ambassador to Belgrade, Aleksandar Alekseev, never tires of repeating that Russia is extending friendly support without strings attached to Serbia at one of the most difficult times in the history of the nation. Moscow’s NATO ambassador Dmitry Rogosin has voiced his outrage at the West’s “rape of Serbia,” but has confirmed that Moscow continues to support Serbia’s EU accession, though not its integration into NATO. This position also represents the majority of public opinion in Serbia. That is why populist Nikolic as well as the politically languishing acting Prime Minister Kostunica emphasize that they support the closest possible ties with Russia as well as joining the EU, though only if the EU respects the territorial integrity of Serbia. Since Serbia only has a very restricted range of options for external alliances, President Tadic is not in any position either to reject the extended hand of the “Russian friends” – especially because a very real Russian instrument of power is taking shape in Southeastern Europe.

Fast-Growing Economic Cooperation Between Serbia and Russia

As a counterpart to the German-Russian “North Stream” project, there are plans to build a Russian-Bulgarian-Hungarian-Italian-Serbian natural gas pipeline dubbed “South Stream.” In order for Serbia to get access to this project, the country was forced in early 2008 to sell the state-owned petroleum company NIS to Gazprom at a knock-down price. While the transaction has not yet been finalized, since the Serbian parliament has been dissolved and can therefore not sign off on the contract, which also requires some further negotiations, there are good reasons to assume that any future government in Belgrade will support this deal. In return for the involvement of Gazprom, Serbia will receive assurances of long-term

oil and gas deliveries. Furthermore, the Serbian state coffers will receive transit fees as part of the “South Stream” project.

There is already talk of further massive Russian investments not only in Serbia, but also in the Serbian part of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Currently, approximately 60 percent of Serbia’s foreign trade is with EU states – the country’s greatest single exporting company is US Steel (which owns the Smederevo steel works) – while Russia only accounts for 11 percent. However, this balance could now shift rapidly in favor of Russia. Overall, Russia will indeed have an important economic and political voice in Belgrade and in this part of Southeastern Europe for the first time since 1948.

The Danger of Kosovo Instability

Under the auspices of the US, the West has ignored the Serbian points of view and interests in the debate over the future status of Kosovo. The course pursued by the West has consistently been portrayed as being the only conceivable option, which a priori precluded any consideration of Russian concerns. At most, there was a willingness to accept a certain deceleration in the secession of Kosovo, in order to “make it more palatable for the Serbs.” This uncompromising stance was, presumably, based on the assumption that Serbia was unable politically and militarily to do any damage to the West; nor was Russia seen as being capable of enforcing its own point of view in the matter of Kosovo. Both of these assumptions have proven to be correct in the sense that the proclamation of Kosovo’s independence has created a *fait accompli* and is irreversible. However, the Serbian resistance, aided by Russia, is now concentrating on a focal point where any possible Western “victory” in Kosovo may yet come at a substantial political and military cost: in the almost exclusively Serbian-populated northernmost point of the province around the town of Mitrovica. While the State Department has pointed out that it considers the protection of Kosovo’s “territorial integrity” to be a task for NATO, Belgrade’s tactics are apparently aimed at deepening the already existing factual separation in the north in order to prevent the issue of Kosovo from stabilizing. Any military action on the part of NATO would most likely lead to an exodus of the Serbian population and create major international fault-lines. Moscow has warned NATO several times not to exceed KFOR’s mandate.

In any case, Russia is emerging in this part of Southeastern Europe as precisely the kind of actor that the US has tried to prevent: As an inevitable protective power for Serbian interests – in the same way that the US has long acted as a patron of the Albanians. It remains to be seen how the EU will fulfill its role

in the field of tension between the US and Russia as a self-declared “driving force” in conflict transformation for Kosovo and the region: At this point in time,

the outlook for a successful mission looks less promising, while the prospect of a rollercoaster ride is much more likely.

Translated from German by Christopher Findlay

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Further reading:

- “Law and Politics in the Conflict over Kosovo,” An online dossier of the Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, Berlin, www.swp-berlin.org (in German).
- Svetlana Lur'e, “Iskustvo razrushat' predopredelennosti,” *Zhurnal politicheskoi mysli Rossii*, no. 28 (February 2008), <http://www.politklass.ru/cgi-bin/issue.pl?id=955>
- Ivan Krastev, “What to do about Russia's Newfound Taste for Confrontation with the West,” *Brussels Forum Paper Series* (March 2008), http://www.gmfus.org/brusselsforum/2008/doc/krastev_web.pdf

Analysis

Kosovo, Serbia and Russia

By Predrag Simić, Belgrade

Abstract

The debate over the independence of Kosovo, which Serbs consider to be their southern province, has divided the United States and Russia. It is seen as a possible precedent in international relations, which might affect the future of the Western Balkans, as well as many other territorial and ethnic conflicts in the world. This conflict represents a clash between the interests of the Serbian and Albanian populations in Kosovo, as well as two principles of international law: the territorial integrity of sovereign states versus the right of peoples to self-determination (the third and the seventh principles of the “Helsinki Decalogue”). Russia is among the countries likely to be affected by the Kosovo precedent, as it faces similar problems domestically in Chechnya and throughout the territory of the former Soviet Union – e.g. in South Ossetia, Abkhazia, and Transdniestria. Moscow supports Belgrade's position that Kosovo's independence would not be the final stage of the breakup of Yugoslavia, but the starting point of a new round of conflicts, with consequences that could spill beyond the borders of the Western Balkans.

NATO Campaign Strains Ties with Russia

The NATO campaign against Yugoslavia in the spring of 1999 put relations between Russia and the West to the toughest test since the early 1980s. For the first time since the Cold War, Russia and NATO found themselves on opposite sides of an armed conflict. The reason for the fierce Russian response was not the Kosovo crisis alone, but accumulated Russian discontent with the direction of NATO's transformation after the Cold War. Contrary to Russian expectations, NATO had outlived its Cold War opponents, started to expand to the East, and demonstrated an intention to use force beyond the territory of its member-states without the per-

mission of the UN (i.e. without the consent of Russia and China).

The Kosovo crisis revealed the consequences of this process to the Russian political elite and confirmed their fears. Moscow drew at least three conclusions from the 1999 crisis. First, despite the fact that nuclear arms still make war between Russia and NATO unlikely, Russia and NATO could find themselves on the opposite sides of regional conflicts. Therefore, Moscow became increasingly ready to oppose NATO ambitions to rise above the UN and the OSCE, where, unlike NATO, Russia had representation. Second, institutions that were believed to have become the cornerstones of

the new partnership between Russia and NATO did not pass the test of the Kosovo crisis. One of the priorities of Russian diplomacy therefore became to restrain NATO while cooperating increasingly closely with the EU and OSCE. Third, despite its weakness and disturbances in relations with NATO, Russia remained an important actor on the international scene, particularly for the UN, OSCE, EU, Contact Group and G-8, which are becoming more important as a framework for Russian engagement in addressing Kosovo and other regional crises.

After Milošević, Serbian Hopes in West Disappointed

Milošević's resignation in October 2000 and the subsequent democratic changes in Serbia shifted Belgrade closer to the West and encouraged expectations that it would be possible to gradually stabilize the situation in Kosovo and find a compromise solution to the dispute. Such expectations seemed to gain credence in the spring of 2001, when a crisis broke out in the Preshevo Valley, which is located in Southern Serbia and is home to a strong Albanian community that is supported by Albanian groups in Kosovo. Contrary to the former policy of Milošević, the new authorities in Belgrade turned to NATO, the EU and the OSCE for help. Ultimately, the crisis was resolved by political means and almost without any casualties, which reinforced the pro-Western orientation of Serbia.

Therefore, the Serbian public expected that the West would react resolutely when a new wave of violence against Serbs in Kosovo broke out on 17 March 2004. However, such expectations were frustrated when in early 2005 first the International Crisis Group (ICG) and then political figures close to the former Clinton administration (i.e. Richard Holbrooke, former Ambassador to U.N., Morton Abramowitz, former Assistant secretary of State for Intelligence and Research and one of the founders of the ICG, U.S. Congressman Tom Lantos and others) forwarded a request to determine the "final status" of Kosovo, meaning its independence from Serbia. The Bush administration soon came onboard and launched an initiative supporting these plans in the UN Security Council. Although the report of the UN General Secretary's special representative Kai Eide criticized the state of human rights and the results of international administration in Kosovo, the Security Council, at the initiative of International Contact Group, at the end of 2005 abandoned the former "standards before status" policy in favor of a "standards and status" policy and entrusted former Finnish President and former member of the ICG board Marti Ahtisaari with the job of launching negotiations between Belgrade and Prishtina about Kosovo's "final status." Although

Serbian-Albanian negotiations in Vienna during 2006 produced no results, in early February 2007, Ahtisaari presented his proposal for the "limited independence" of this Serbian province and soon submitted it to the UN Security Council.

Serbs reacted negatively to the requests for Kosovo's independence and the Ahtisaari plan. Pro-democratic groups in Serbia were forced to make the difficult choice between losing a significant portion of the country's national territory and further European and Euro-Atlantic integration. Serbs have a strong connection to Kosovo since it is where the Serbian state was founded and the most important monuments of Serbian civilization are located. It is also a place where the Serbian population is under great pressure because about 226,000 Serbs and other non-Albanians have been expelled from Kosovo since June 1999. The West's pressure in support of the Ahtisaari plan provoked discontent among the Serbian public. Many feared that Kosovo's independence would lead to a new cycle of crisis in Serbia, particularly in the Preshevo Valley (with a strong Albanian community) and Sandzak (Rashka in Serbian) with a large Muslim community, as well as across the region. Many Serbs assumed that these problems had been overcome with the end of the Milosevic era and the subsequent implementation of democratic changes between 2000–2007.

The consequences were soon felt in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where the "limited independence" proposal for Kosovo disturbed the post-Dayton political balance and increased inter-ethnic tensions. The Serbian public was particularly angered by Ahtisaari's February 2007 statement that "someone must pay the price of Milosevic's Kosovo policy," which directly threatened the integrity of key political promises made by Serbia's democratic and pro-European parties after 2000 (the key slogan of the anti-Milosevic opposition during the winter protests in 1996 and in October 2000 was "We are Europe," i.e. that the democratic opposition could end the decade-long crisis and isolation and integrate Serbia into the European and Euro-Atlantic communities).

Equally troubling for Serbia's pro-Europe parties was the situation within the EU after its major enlargements in 2004 and 2007, which caused great resistance among the old members for further EU expansion, making it unlikely that Serbia and other Western Balkans countries would be admitted soon. The failure of the EU Constitutional referendum in France and the Netherlands in May and June 2005 coincided with increased Western pressure on Serbia for Kosovo independence, sending a strong message that membership in the EU was not a short-term prospect. The situation surrounding the EU sharply polarized Serbian society during the election campaign at the end of 2006,

bringing supporters of the former regime back onto the political stage. These groups advocated that Serbia shift away from its pro-European political orientation. Although pro-European parties won the parliamentary elections of January 2007, publication of the Ahtisaari plan in February caused a political crisis, which postponed the establishment of a new coalition government until May, returned the Kosovo crisis to the top of the political agenda, and united all Serbian parties in an effort to preserve national sovereignty.

Kosovo's Impact on Russia

The situation in Kosovo had a powerful impact on Russia. First, many saw Ahtisaari's plan for "limited sovereignty" in Kosovo as a risky precedent for other countries with ethnic problems. Russia fell into this category, as it only recently started to come out of the long-lasting crisis in Chechnya and must address the problems of Abkhazia, Southern Ossetia, and Transdniestria. Therefore, determining the "final status" of Kosovo became a problem which directly affected its national interests.

Secondly, after its negative experiences during the 1990s in the former Yugoslavia, Russia became very sensitive to any disturbances of the existing balance in the Balkans and to changes in the present world order. Moscow has not forgotten that during the 1990s Serbia was a "metaphor for Russia" for many in the West and that NATO military interventions against the Serbs in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1995 and against Serbia in 1999 revealed Russia's weakness, sending a strong message that it should abandon its interests in the Balkans and in Europe.

Third, differences between the American and Russian policy toward Kosovo coincided with the aggravation of relations between Washington and Moscow resulting from the US initiative to deploy a missile defense shield in Poland and the Czech Republic, the war in Iraq, and other issues that top the agenda of international problems. Russia managed in the meantime to greatly recover from the consequences of the breakup of the Soviet Union and to reinforce its economic and political power in Europe and the world owing, primarily, to oil and gas exports, as well as an increasingly wide range of industrial (particularly military) products.

Finally, the precedent of Kosovo independence for international relations is also a test for Russia's role as a permanent UN Security Council member. In this forum, Russia found itself defending fundamental principles of international law, such as the inviolability of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of UN members. In an interview given to a group of leading European papers on 3 June 2007, Russian President Vladimir Putin explained Russia's position on Kosovo in the follow-

ing way: "We advocate dialogue and the implementation of international law, which implies respect for the territorial integrity of states. If we decide to give preference to the principle of ethnic self-determination over territorial integrity, that should be done everywhere in the world, particularly in Southern Ossetia, in Abkhazia and Transdniestria. In the West, such a solution would unleash separatisms in Europe. Look at Scotland, Catalonia, the Basque country ... I do not think that a European nation like Serbia should be humiliated in an effort to bring it to its knees. We need to be patient, opportunities for reaching compromise have not been exhausted yet." Putin's position was countered by US President George Bush, who after the failed US-Russian consultations on Kosovo and during the G-8 Summit in Germany took the stand that "Ahtisaari's plan can no longer be postponed," while during his visit to Albania in June 2007, he openly spoke in favor of independence for Kosovo.

US-Russian Disagreement over Kosovo

Open conflict between the American and Russian presidents at the G-8 summit in Heiligendamm (Germany) on the Kosovo issue in June 2007 was prevented by the proposal of French President Nicholas Sarkozy to launch a second round of Serbian-Albanian negotiations for a limited period of 120 days. However, this round of negotiations ended in failure in October and reinforced Western support for the Albanian position, leaving no choice to the Serbian government but to lean on Russian support, which was confirmed with the signature of the accord between Belgrade and Moscow on the South Stream Russian gas pipeline in February 2008.

The decision of the United States and major Western states to recognize Kosovo's unilaterally declared independence (UDI), disregarding the Serbian and Russian opposition and the blockade in the UN Security Council, only deepened the differences between the USA and Russia. This decision confirmed Moscow in its belief that Washington decided to marginalize the Russian influence by acting outside the framework of international law and disregarding the UN and OSCE.

The West expected that Russia would respond to UDI with the recognition of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. However, instead Moscow apparently decided to advance its position as the guarantor of the provisions of the UN Charter and hence the interests of the states that are concerned with the consequences of the Kosovo UDI on their security. While the US intends to strengthen its position by pushing the largest possible number of allies and partners to recognize Kosovo outside the framework of the UN, Russia most probably will try to bring the US back within the in-

ternational system and prevent the escalation of the Kosovo problem into a new quasi-Cold-War dynamic. This course of action may be further strengthened by the immediate consequences of Kosovo's UDI in Macedonia (the collapse of the coalition government), Israel (Gaza strip), and China (unrest in Tibet), as well as with the enthusiastic response of the separatist forces in some other multiethnic countries.

Thus, Kosovo moved near the top of international issues on which Moscow and Washington have divergent positions. The dispute is now second only to the issue of the American anti-missile shield in Europe, as shown by the failure of two presidents to find a compromise, despite several meetings in mid-2007 and the first part of 2008.

This problem also became a domestic policy issue both in the United States and in Russia because of the Russian parliamentary and presidential elections (December 2007 – March 2008) and the American presidential elections (November 2008), forcing the EU to make an awkward choice between two options, each of which may have long-lasting consequences. Although the leading West European countries backed Ahtisaari's

proposal on "limited independence" for Kosovo, the inability for compromise in the UN Security Council called into question the legitimacy of this decision. Without UN backing, the EU could hardly assume responsibility for sending its civil and military mission (Eulex) to Kosovo as envisioned by Ahtisaari's plan. This precedent might force certain EU members to choose between possible risks for their own security and their loyalty to achieving a common European foreign policy and coordinating these efforts with the US. African (South Africa) and Asian (China, Indonesia) members of the UN Security Council also treated Ahtisaari's plan with caution, fearing that a possible precedent might encourage secessionist movements and open the issue of changing existing international borders.

Seven years after the NATO intervention against Serbia, the establishment of an international civil and military administration, and Milosevic's descent from power, the "Kosovo problem" has again unleashed the spirit of nationalism. For Moscow it has become one of the major problems in relations with Washington, but Russia is certainly not the only federation in the world facing this challenge.

About the author:

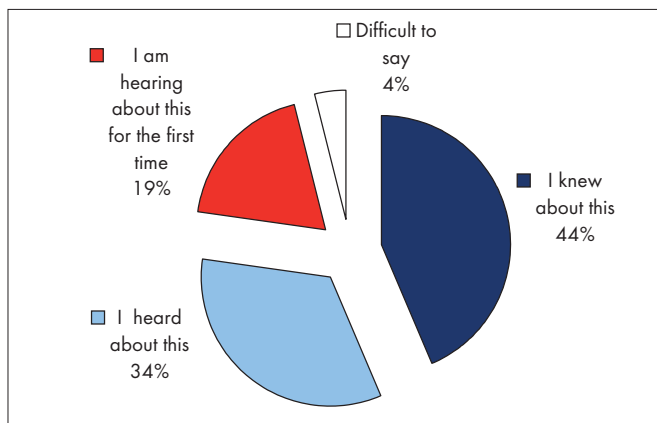
Predrag Simić is a professor at Belgrade University.

Opinion Poll

Russian Popular Opinion Concerning the Issue of Kosovo

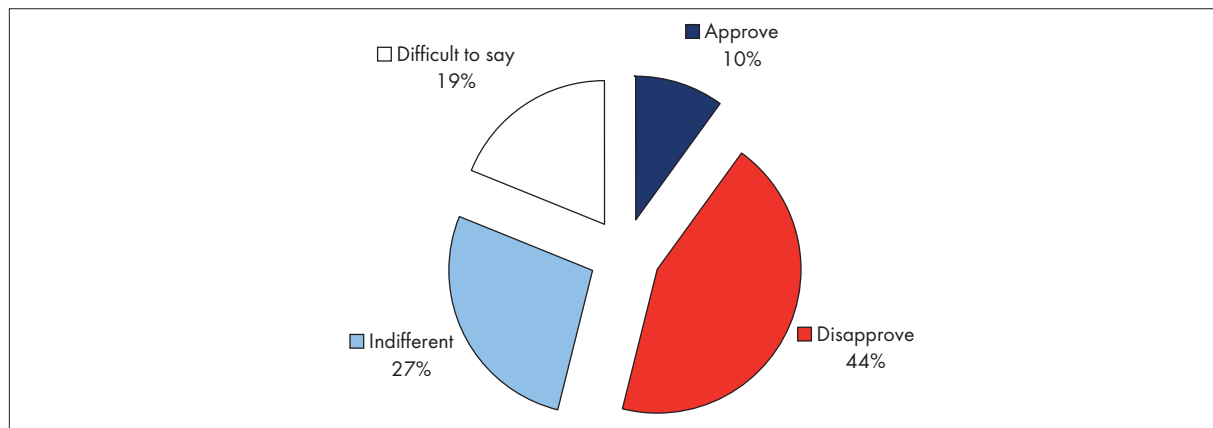
Attitudes Towards an Independent Kosovo

The Kosovo region is a part of Serbia that is inhabited for the most part by Albanians. A few days ago, Kosovo declared its independence from Serbia. Do you know anything about this, did you hear anything about this, or are you hearing this for the first time?



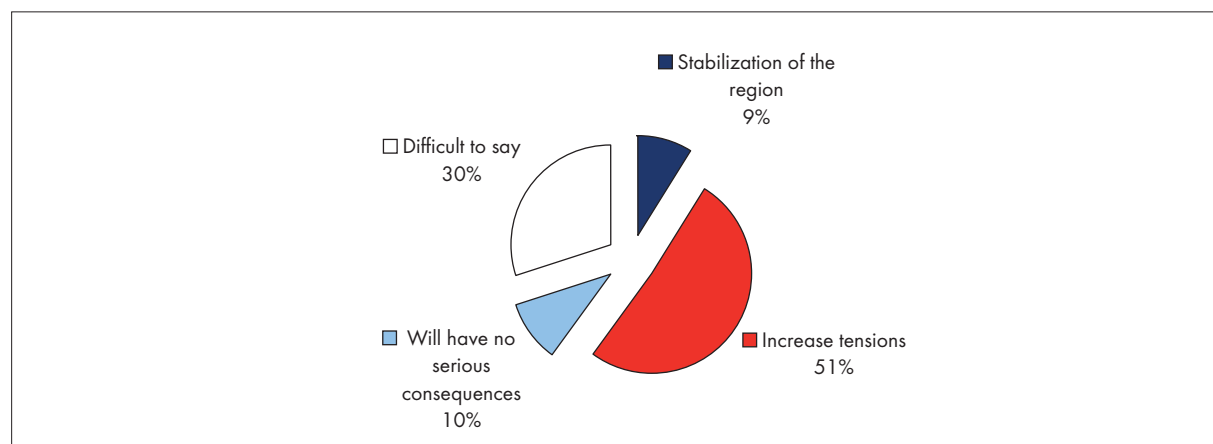
Source: Public Opinion Foundation, FOM. <http://bd.fom.ru/report/map/dominant/dom0809/d080922>, 29 February 2008

What is your attitude towards an independent Kosovo: do you approve, disapprove or are you on the whole indifferent?



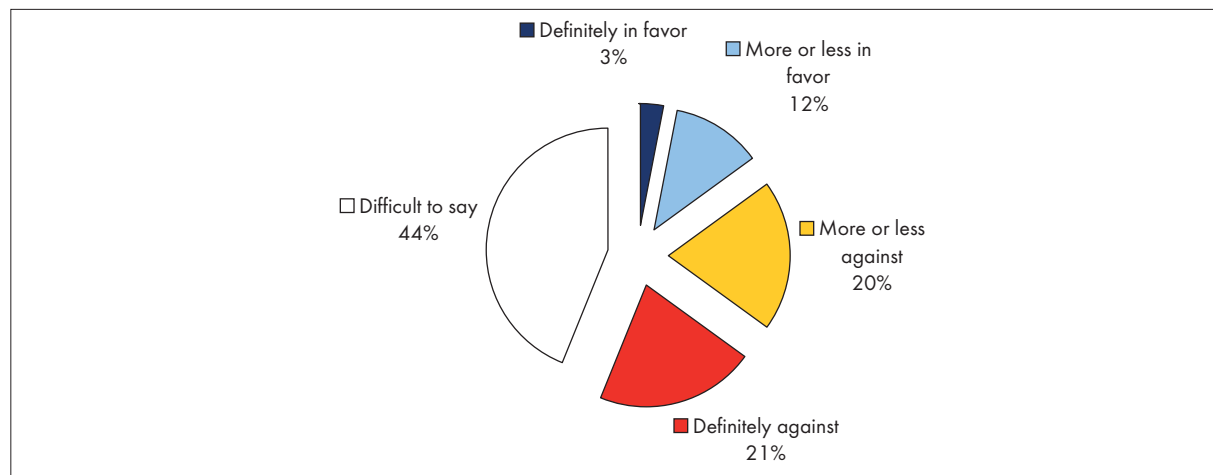
Source: Public Opinion Foundation, FOM. <http://bd.fom.ru/report/map/dominant/dom0809/d080922>, 29 February 2008

Will Kosovo's declaration of independence lead to a stabilization of the situation in the region, increase tensions in the Balkans, or have no serious consequences?



Source: Levada Center, <http://www.levada.ru/press/2008030408.html>, 5 March 2008

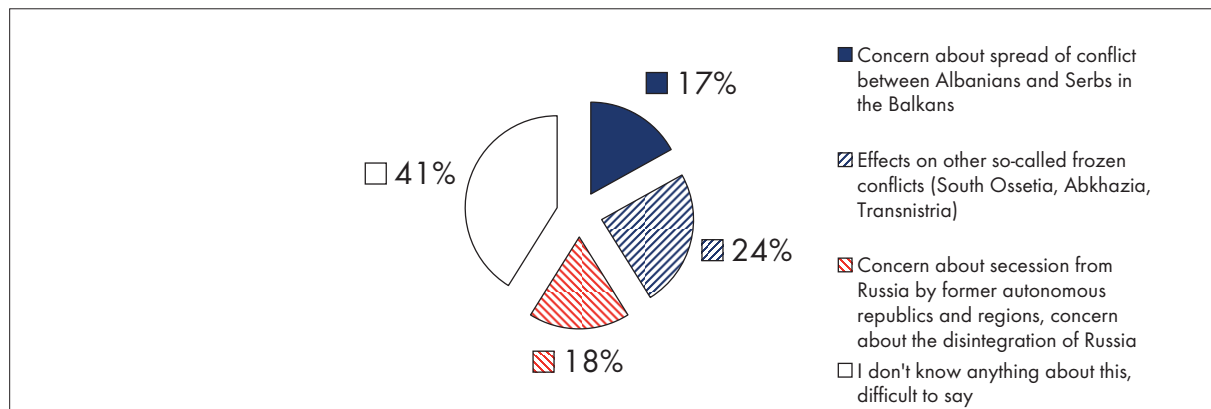
The USA and some states in the EU have recognized the independence of Kosovo. What is your opinion on this?



Source: VTsIOM, <http://wciom.ru/novosti/press-vypuski/press-vypusk/single/9828.html>, 17 March 2008

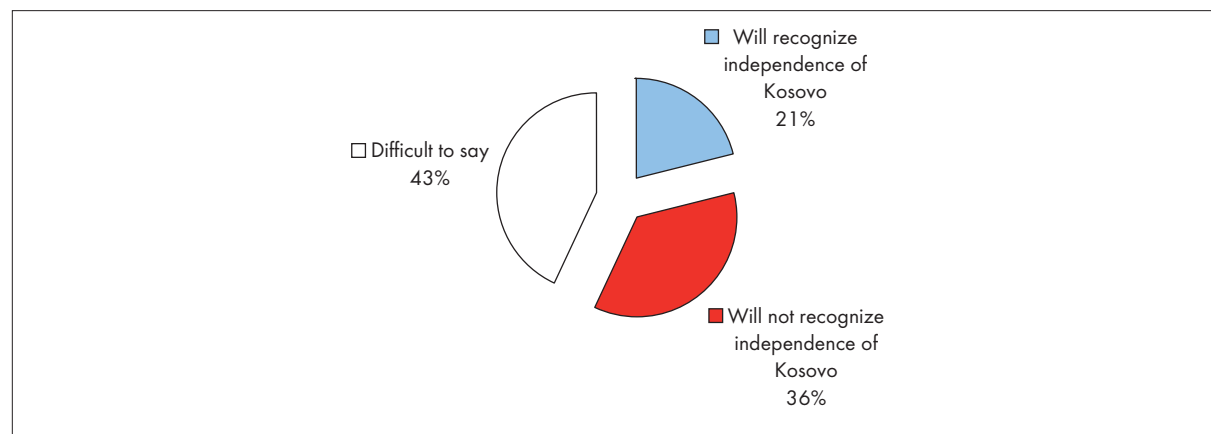
Assessments of Russian Foreign Policy

Why does the Russian government speak out so vehemently against the independence of the autonomous region Kosovo?



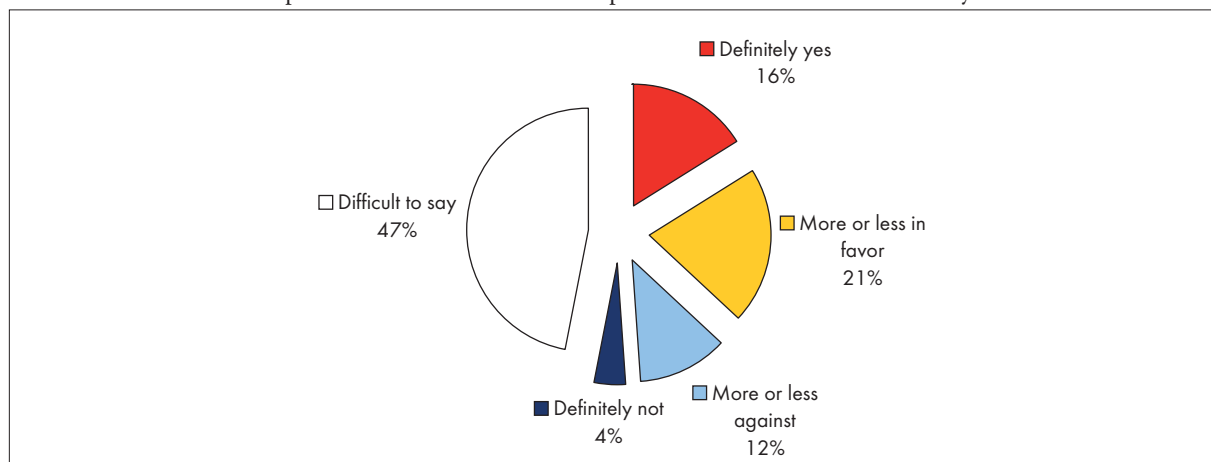
Source: Levada Center, <http://www.levada.ru/press/2007121101.html>, 12 December 2007

What do you think – will Russia recognize the independence of Kosovo or not?



Source: Public Opinion Foundation, FOM. <http://bd.fom.ru/report/map/dominant/dom0809/d080922>, 29 February 2008

If the UN decides to recognize the independence of the autonomous region of Kosovo regardless of Serbian protest, should Russia exercise the power of veto which it has as a permanent member of the Security Council of the UN?



Source: Levada Center, <http://www.levada.ru/press/2007072301.html>, 23 July 2007

Compiled by Stefan Langkabel

About the Russian Analytical Digest

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Research Centre for East European Studies [Forschungsstelle Osteuropa] at the University of Bremen

Founded in 1982 and led by Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Eichwede, the Research Centre for East European Studies (Forschungsstelle Osteuropa) at the University of Bremen is dedicated to socialist and post-socialist cultural and societal developments in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe.

The Research Centre possesses a unique collection of alternative culture and independent writings from the former socialist countries in its archive. In addition to extensive individual research on dissidence and society in socialist societies, since January 2007 a group of international research institutes is participating in a collaborative project on the theme "The other Eastern Europe – the 1960s to the 1980s, dissidence in politics and society, alternatives in culture. Contributions to comparative contemporary history", which is funded by the Volkswagen Foundation.

In the area of post-socialist societies, extensive research projects have been conducted in recent years with emphasis on political decision-making processes, economic culture and the integration of post-socialist countries into EU governance. One of the core missions of the institute is the dissemination of academic knowledge to the interested public. This includes regular email service with nearly 15,000 subscribers in politics, economics and the media.

With a collection of publications on Eastern Europe unique in Germany, the Research Centre is also a contact point for researchers as well as the interested public. The Research Centre has approximately 300 periodicals from Russia alone, which are available in the institute's library. News reports as well as academic literature is systematically processed and analyzed in data bases.

The Center for Security Studies (CSS) at ETH Zurich

The Center for Security Studies (CSS) at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (ETH Zurich) is a Swiss academic center of competence that specializes in research, teaching, and information services in the fields of international and Swiss security studies. The CSS also acts as a consultant to various political bodies and the general public.

The CSS is engaged in research projects with a number of Swiss and international partners. The Center's research focus is on new risks, European and transatlantic security, strategy and doctrine, state failure and state building, and Swiss foreign and security policy.

In its teaching capacity, the CSS contributes to the ETH Zurich-based Bachelor of Arts (BA) degree course for prospective professional military officers in the Swiss army and the ETH and University of Zurich-based MA program in Comparative and International Studies (MACIS), offers and develops specialized courses and study programs to all ETH Zurich and University of Zurich students, and has the lead in the Executive Masters degree program in Security Policy and Crisis Management (MAS ETH SPCM), which is offered by ETH Zurich. The program is tailored to the needs of experienced senior executives and managers from the private and public sectors, the policy community, and the armed forces.

The CSS runs the International Relations and Security Network (ISN), and in cooperation with partner institutes manages the Comprehensive Risk Analysis and Management Network (CRN), the Parallel History Project on NATO and the Warsaw Pact (PHP), the Swiss Foreign and Security Policy Network (SSN), and the Russian and Eurasian Security (RES) Network.

Any opinions expressed in Russian Analytical Digest are exclusively those of the authors.

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