

# **SERBIA BETWEEN EAST AND WEST:**

## ***BRATSTVO*, BALANCING, AND BUSINESS ON EUROPE'S FRONTIER**

An NCEEER Working Paper by

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## **Executive Summary**

This article critically examines contemporary narratives which frame Serbian politics as a conflict between supporters of a pro-European Union (EU) policy and supporters of closer ties with Russia. Contrary to this narrative, contemporary Serbian political actors increasingly present policies and platforms oriented towards both the European Union and Russia. These developments reflect the contradictory legacies arising from the history of Serbian and Russian diplomatic relations along with the sometimes ambivalent implications of Russia's stance on the issue of Kosovo's independence, Serbian public attitudes towards Russia and recent developments in Serbian-Russian economic relations.

Given the long time frame for EU membership and the current impasse over issues like Kosovo and Serbia's potential NATO membership, Serbia's leaders currently enjoy the luxury of simultaneously deepening ties with both the EU and Russia. However, future developments regarding Serbia's EU membership and the possibility of Serbia's joining NATO will likely present Serbian political elites with mutually-exclusive choices bearing important implications for their relations with either Russia or the EU.

## Introduction

*Бог високо, а Русија далеко*

*God is high above and Russia is far away.*

-Serbian Proverb

Beginning with Russia's threat to veto the Ahtisaari proposal during the summer of 2007, and intensifying with the presidential and parliamentary elections of 2008, the themes of Serbia's increasingly close ties to the Russian Federation and an irreconcilable choice between "the East" and "the West" featured ever more prominently in narratives regarding Serbian politics. Speculation emerged about significant increases in Russian economic involvement and even the establishment of Russian military bases in Serbia. In the aftermath of the elections, popular accounts of the victory of the Democratic Party (DS)-led, "For a European Serbia" (ZES) coalition widely proclaimed that Serbia "chose Europe" over its Eastern rival.<sup>1</sup> Reports on Serbia's 2008 elections framed the contests as a competition between pro-European and pro-Russian, nationalist elements in Serbia's body politic.

Subsequent developments questioned the utility of such a framing of contemporary Serbian politics. In light of the near-Manichean struggle between irreconcilable alternatives depicted in accounts of the elections, actors anchoring both sides of the East-West spectrum began acting out of character. Members of the so-called "Western" government finalized deals for the sale of Serbia's Oil and Gas Industry (NIS) to Russia's Gazprom monopoly at a controversial price while Russian and Serbian officials spoke in unison about Serbia and Russia's historical friendship (*istorijska prijateljstva*) and contemporary strategic and

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<sup>1</sup> For some examples of this narrative see Dan Bilefsky, "Divisive Serbian Vote Offers Stark Choice of East and West," *New York Times*, February 2, 2008; "Serbia Election Victory for Tadic," *BBC News*, February 4, 2008; David Charter, "Pro-EU Reformers Hailed as the Surprise Victors in Serbia's Election," *Times Online*, May 11,

commercial partnerships. On the ostensibly “pro-Russian” side of the political spectrum, the acting leader of the Serbian Radical Party began speaking of opening doors to both Europe and Russia. He subsequently broke from the Radicals to form a new, and thus far highly successful, center right party with European Union aspirations. In terms of overall policy, Serbia’s post-2008 government is pursuing a more “East-West” balanced policy than any previous government.

This article explores the disjuncture between the “East versus West” narrative and the realities of contemporary Serbian political life and argues that, with its simplistic representation of the options facing Serbia’s political elite, this narrative obscures more than it illuminates. Russia and Serbia’s shared diplomatic history provides a more heterogeneous set of legacies than suggested by the underlying assumption of an unalloyed “historical friendship.” Furthermore, survey data suggests that a significant portion of contemporary Serbian society appears to hold simultaneous affinities to both Russia *and* Europe. With regard to Russia’s increased economic influence in the region, while Russia’s economic role in Serbia’s economy certainly has grown its portion of overall investment and trade remains significantly lower and far less diverse than that of the EU member states. Finally, even the most tangible pillar of the current Serbian-Russian relationship—Russia’s “defense” of Kosovo—contains elements which raise doubts regarding the long-term reliability of Serbia’s alleged territorial guarantor.

A better appreciation of the more nuanced, varied and sometimes ambivalent bundle of interests characterizing the contemporary Serbian-Russian relationship helps explain the correspondingly ambivalent policies of Serbia’s ostensibly pro-Russian and pro-Western political actors. Serbia’s political elite currently faces the daunting and sometimes contradictory

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2008; “Serbia’s Pro-West President Claims Election Victory,” *CNN*, June 4, 2008; Dan Bilefsky, “Tilt to West is Seen in Elections in Serbia,” *New York Times*, May 12, 2008.

tasks of maintaining the state's current territorial boundaries, attracting investment in the economy and infrastructure, improving its trade relations with major partners, managing its relations with various international organizations and navigating the complex security structure of the contemporary Western Balkans.

As throughout its history, today's Serbia finds solutions to each of these problems within the sometimes conflicting, sometimes complementary web of Russian and West European interests in the region. Contrary to the popular narrative, the current arrangement of interests allows major Serbian political actors to pursue policies directed towards both the EU and Russia, simultaneously acquiring the benefits of relations with both while avoiding serious costs in terms of broken ties. Nonetheless, although a long timeframe for EU membership and the diplomatic impasse over Kosovo presently offers Serbia this luxury to choose both East and West, pending decisions about EU and NATO membership threaten to solidify nonnegotiable aspects of EU and Russian policy which may force future Serbian governments to opt for one partner over another.

### **Contemporary Serbian Political Actors—East, West, and In-Between**

As indicated above, the recent behavior of Serbia's major political protagonists would likely confound observers steeped in the "East versus West" narrative of Serbian political life. In this respect, the behavior of the ruling DS, touted as the main pro-Western protagonist in the 2008 elections, is particularly illustrative. Though its opponents once labeled the Democratic Party (DS) as the "party of NATO" and accuse it of trading Serbia's national interests for EU membership, DS's President Boris Tadić visited Russia during his 2008 Presidential campaign and later referred to close ties with Russia as one of the "four pillars" of Serbia's foreign policy (second only to the EU). Following the victory of "Western" parties against the "eastern"

opponents, the new DS-led government went on to finalize both a sale of the Zastava auto works to Italy's Fiat, and the sale of NIS to Russia's Gazprom. As described in further detail below, the latter deal effectively handed control of Serbia's entire gas and oil infrastructure to the giant Russian gas monopoly and marked a new era of Russian economic involvement.

In the aftermath of the NIS sale, Russian and Serbian leaders spoke frequently of a commercial and later strategic partnership between the two states. Boris Tadić asserted that, "Russia...thanks to the rise in the price of oil and natural gas, has renewed its economic and foreign policy potential and has been a great friend in supporting Serbia's defense of the integrity of our country in Kosovo and Metohija. This, along with our historical friendship, has undoubtedly placed us in especially close relations with Russia."<sup>2</sup> In another recent interview, DS party official and current Serbian Foreign Minister Vuk Jeremić stated, "Serbian and Russian relations were traditionally close and have lasted over centuries. Russia is one of our most important economic and trade partners and probably the loudest and strongest supporter of Serbia in the international arena with regard to our diplomatic struggle for Kosovo." Denying any dilemma between the EU and Russia, Jeremić stated, "I repeat that we are oriented towards EU membership and we will not back away from the achievement of that strategic-political goal. We will become a member of the European Union, but I think that that will not come at the cost of the exceptionally good relations that we have with Russia."<sup>3</sup>

As indicated by Miroslav Jovanović, archetypical "Easterners" and "Westerners" actually make up a rather small, albeit exceptionally vocal, proportion of Serbia's political spectrum.<sup>4</sup> As

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<sup>2</sup> RTS "Četiri stuba srpske spoljne politike," <http://www.rts.rs/page/stories/sr/story/9/Srbija/123751/%C4%8Cetiri+stuba+srpske+spoljne+politike.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Aleksandar Ćirić, "Diplomata na koktel vakcini," *Vreme*, November 12, 2009.

<sup>4</sup> Miroslav Jovanović, "Two Russias: On the two Dominant Discourses of Russia in the Serbian Public," *Third Report of the Russian-Serbian Relations Project*, ISAC, [http://www.isac-fund.org/download/Monitoring\\_Russia-Serbia\\_relations\\_Report%20III.pdf](http://www.isac-fund.org/download/Monitoring_Russia-Serbia_relations_Report%20III.pdf).

of 2008, the two major actors on Serbia's political scene which came closest to matching pure "Western" and "Eastern" options were the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and the Serbian Radical Party (SRS). Amidst the debates over the sale of NIS to Gazprom, LDP leader Čedomir Jovanović criticized the deal as a step towards Serbia's colonization by Russia and argued that Serbia knelt before Russia in exchange for Kosovo.<sup>5</sup>

On the pro-Russian side, although the Serbian Radical Party (SRS) made occasional statements suggesting very conditional support for the country's EU membership, its leadership also peppers its public remarks with accusations of selling out to EU interests and publishes books with titles such as *West or Russia?* and *Arguments against the European Union*.<sup>6</sup> Along with less spectacular statements in support of closer diplomatic and economic ties with Russia, acting SRS party leader Tomislav Nikolić at various times allegedly mentioned Serbia's becoming a Russian province and welcomed a Russian military presence in the region.

However, in the aftermath of the May 2008 elections, Nikolić broke with the Radicals and formed the new center-right Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) featuring a platform of strongly promoting EU membership alongside productive ties with Russia. The new party attracted the bulk of the Radical party's activists and supporters thereby destroying much of the political base of a party which consistently commanded roughly 30% of the popular vote in post-Milošević elections. SNS leaders Tomislav Nikolić and Aleksandar Vučić characterized the new party as having "doors open to all nations." However, in the course of laundering the "radical" image of the new party's leadership and also broadening their appeal to Serbia's political center,

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<sup>5</sup> Čedomir Jovanović, "Hostages of Political Ambitions," *Poligraf*, December 24, 2008; Transcript of Čedomir Jovanović's speech to the Serbian parliament, September 5, 2008, available at <http://www.ldp.rs/vesti.84.html?newsID=1693>; both originally cited in Miroslav Jovanović, "Two Russias: On the two Dominant Discourses of Russia in the Serbian Public," *Third Report of the Russian-Serbian Relations Project*, ISAC, [http://www.isac-fund.org/download/Monitoring\\_Russia-Serbia\\_relations\\_Report%20III.pdf](http://www.isac-fund.org/download/Monitoring_Russia-Serbia_relations_Report%20III.pdf).

the overwhelming emphasis in Progressive public statements has been European integration. According to recent polls, the SNS currently commands popular support equal to that of the ruling DS.

Hence, the two strongest political options in contemporary Serbia, the Democratic Party and the Serbian Progressive Party, offer voters a virtually identical “mixed” foreign policy consisting of simultaneously closer ties with the EU *and* Russia. Specific political circumstances may find parties occupying policy spaces more closely aligned with one side than the other (for instance, when the Democratic Party of Serbia’s Vojislav Kostunica built the party’s May 2008 parliamentary election campaign almost exclusively on rejecting a Stabilization and Association Agreement), but in terms of consistently pro-European or pro-Russian parties, recent developments leave any quintessentially “Eastern” or “Western” Serbian voters with only two relatively weak choices (LDP and SRS.)

The next sections of this article focus on the roots of the “East *and* West” platforms currently presented by Serbia’s main political actors and provide a simultaneous critique of the faulty logic behind the still-salient “East *versus* West” narrative. First the author addresses the ambivalent bases for the Russian-Serbian “historical friendship” which lies at the center of many permutations of the East versus West narrative. Following this, the author explores three contemporary pillars of the Serbian-Russian relationship including Russia’s “defense” of Kosovo, popular perceptions of shared cultural and political history, and Russia’s inroads into the Serbian economy.

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<sup>6</sup> Dejan Mirović, *Argumenti protiv Evropske unije*, (Belgrade: Parol, 2008); Dejan Mirović, *Zapad ili Rusija* (Beograd: IGAM, 2004).

## Historical Roots

One consistent yet problematic factor at the core of the “East *versus* West” narrative is the presupposition of a consistent historical friendship between Serbia and Russia. A full treatment of the Russian-Serbian relations prior to the 1990s lies far beyond the scope of this present article and a number of classic historical works provide extensive and detailed accounts of Balkan diplomatic history as well as more focused treatment of the Serbian-Russian relationship.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, in lieu of attempting the impossible task of fully reconstruction this history, I instead draw on these and other accounts to establish a number of generalizations relevant to the current debate about Russia’s relations with Serbia.

First, the historical record provides unequivocal support neither for the romanticized visions of Serbian Russophiles nor for cynics portraying Serbian-Russian relations as a history of dashed hopes, betrayal, and fears of dependency. To name just a few prominent examples, Russian intervention in the Balkans during the Serbian Revolution, the Russo-Turkish war of 1877-8, and the Balkan Wars of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century coincided with Serbian gains in autonomy, independence and territory. Diplomatically, the Russian Empire maintained its stance as protector of the Orthodox people’s under the Porte and helped solidify Serbia as a political entity through such treaties as the 1826 Convention of Akkerman and 1829 Peace of Adrianople. When Serbia faced the full brunt of the Austro-Hungarian assault in 1914, Russia dutifully met its obligations and joined in the war.

At the same time, names like the Treaty of Bucharest, San Stefano and the Treaty of Berlin symbolize the triumph of Russia’s great power interests, and at times a sensible interest in

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<sup>7</sup> Barbara Jelavich, *Russia’s Balkan Entanglements, 1806-1914*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Barbara Jelavich, *History of the Balkans*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983); David MacKenzie, *The Serbs and Russian Pan-Slavism: 1875-1878*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967); Leften Stavrianos and Traian Stoianovich, *The Balkans Since 1453*, (New York: New York University Press, 2000).

self-preservation, over concern for the Serbs. When faced with the choice of advancing Russia's interest or incurring further costs in lives, material and international leverage, the Russian Empire frequently sacrificed the Orthodox and Slavic peoples that it had ostensibly sworn to protect. At the beginning of the 1990s, Serbs in Yugoslavia might also be forgiven for rejecting the very idea of a historical friendship between Russia and Serbia following nearly fifty years of turbulent relations peppered by occasional fears of a Soviet invasion. In short, a careful sifting of the historical record might provide ample evidence for both advocates and opponents of closer ties with Russia, but not a single, consistent base of empirical support for either.

Second, even when the observable outcomes of interactions with Russia either clearly benefited or harmed Serbia, the intentions of Russian leaders inevitably remain open to interpretation. The cynic attributes any intervention on the behalf of the Serbs prior to the First World War to Russia's great power interests vis-à-vis the Ottomans or Hapsburgs rather than its desire to assist the Serbs as fellow Orthodox or Slavic peoples. On the other hand, allusions to Russia's "betrayal" of the Serbs at Slobozia, Berlin, Bucharest and elsewhere imply highly unrealistic standards of state behavior. In the most extreme case of the Treaty of Bucharest, what reasonable student of international affairs could expect Russia to continue military operations in support of the Serbian Revolution in the face of Napoleon's invasion?

Finally, mundane considerations of geography, along with historical economic disparities between the East and West, places Serbia in a situation where the bulk of its economy remained linked to "the West" whether in the form of the Habsburg Empire, Germany or today's EU.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> For instance, while trade played only a minor role in the Serbian economy during the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Habsburg Empire overwhelmingly dominated what little trans-border movement of goods occurred. In the three decades before 1875, roughly 80% of Serbia's imports came from the Habsburgs and the monarchy accounted for almost 70% of its imports. Throughout this period, trade with Russia remained negligible. Habsburg merchants undermined their Serbian counterparts and the various treaties sought to establish Habsburg economic domination over the Balkan states. In response, conservative Serbian government's favored Austro-Serbian customs agreements to

This factor detracts from the possibility of Russia becoming an exclusive political and economic “alternative” to the West during the various historical points when St. Petersburg took up pro-Serbian territorial and political causes. Thus, while Russia periodically offered Serbia some means to establish its independence, maintain the integrity of its borders and achieve further territorial aggrandizement, it has never provided a convincingly exclusive path towards *prosperity*. This contributes to a relatively consistent pattern (contingent in part on Russia’s ability to act) of closer ties with Russia during periods of crisis followed by a drift towards the west during more stable eras.

### **Russia and Serbia after 1990**

In more recent times, talk of a special Serbian-Russian relationship remained largely subdued throughout the second half of the 20th century, only to resurface with the collapse of both the SFRY and the USSR. The first relevant sign of a change occurred around a mission by JNA leaders to the Soviet Union on the eve of major hostilities in Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union’s August 1991 putsch. Dragan Vukšić, who was General Kadijević’s Advisor for Foreign Policy Relations at the time, described meetings and exchanges between Kadijević and Soviet Minister of Defense Dmitry Yazov which culminated in a visit by Kadijević to Moscow in March of 1991. While the exact details of the visit remain secret, it was assumed that the purpose was to request help from the USSR for a planned JNA coup.

Kadijević and his aide Vuk Obradović returned empty handed. According to JNA Fifth District Commander Kondrad Kolšek, “Kadijević repeated several times that the Russians are in the mud up to their knees and that they are in no shape to help themselves, let alone us.” In the

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remove protect Serbian trade. Their liberal and nationalist counterparts sought to reduce dependency on the monarchy by raising tariffs. David MacKenzie, *The Serbs and Russian Pan-Slavism: 1875-1878*, (Ithaca: Cornell

event, the JNA coup never materialized. However, the USSR's August putsch was greeted enthusiastically by Obradović who was quoted as saying that there was no doubt about the putsch's success and that "Kučan, Tuđman, and many others are scared to death."<sup>9</sup>

The defeat of the Soviet hardliners and Russia's subsequent independence opened a period of weak Russian influence in the region. Susan Woodward and others have explained Russia's actions during this period as reflecting the country's need to enter into key economic forums like the G-7 and to gain much-needed financial assistance.<sup>10</sup> Weakened and dependent on the West for aid and good will, Russia backed Security Council resolutions restricting the flow of arms to the region as well as those recognizing the independence of Slovenia, Croatia and Bosnia Herzegovina. Russian troops participated in UNPROFOR being stationed in Serbian territories where they maintained close ties with Serbian and JNA military units. Following Dayton, Russian forces also joined IFOR.

Dušan Reljić and others characterize the NATO operations over Kosovo as a turning point in the three-sided relationship between Russia, Serbia, and NATO. Having characterized Russia's post-Soviet policy in the Balkans up until the Kosovo operations as one of bandwagoning with the West, Reljić notes that NATO's lack of an explicit security mandate and its ignoring of Russian opposition created a rift between NATO and Russia which placed the two actors on opposing sides of the Kosovo issue from that point on.<sup>11</sup> Russian responses to the

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University Press, 1967). 20-21.

<sup>9</sup> Dragan Vukšić, "Political-Military Relations between the Republic of Serbia and the Russian Federation in the Process of Dismemberment of Yugoslavia," *The Third Report of the Monitoring Russia Serbia Relations Project*, ISAC, [http://www.isac-fund.org/download/Monitoring\\_Russia-Serbia\\_relations\\_Report%20III.pdf](http://www.isac-fund.org/download/Monitoring_Russia-Serbia_relations_Report%20III.pdf).

<sup>10</sup> Susan Woodward, "International Aspects of the Wars," *Burn this House: The Making and Unmaking of Yugoslavia*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000); Dušan Reljić, "Rusija i Zapadni Balkan," German Institute for International and Security Affairs, <http://www.isac-fund.org/download/Rusija%20i%20zapadni%20balkan.pdf>.

<sup>11</sup> Dušan Reljić, "Rusija i Zapadni Balkan," German Institute for International and Security Affairs, <http://www.isac-fund.org/download/Rusija%20i%20zapadni%20balkan.pdf>; the author also wishes to thank an anonymous reviewer for further emphasizing this.

conflict ranged from Primakov's demonstrative mid-air cancellation of a visit to America, talk of Russian air-defense systems, the sending of a Russian listening ship to the Adriatic and continuing engagement in negotiations between Chernomyrdin and Milošević. While the Russian's ultimately played a key role (along with Ahtisaari) in pressuring Milošević to accept NATO's terms, the final act of the 1999 drama was a rash move by Russian paratroops to seize the airport in Pristina ahead of the arrival of NATO forces. However, reminiscent of the earlier bandwagoning period, Russian troops went on to participate in the peacekeeping operation in Kosovo following the NATO intervention.

The turn of the millennium would usher in major changes in both Serbia and Russia which significantly impacted their respective relationships with one another, with Europe and with the United States. The collapse of the Milošević regime brought in a new, significantly more pro-Western regime which opened Serbia to closer relations with Europe and the United States. At the same time, the transition from Yeltsin to Putin, the subsequent (though not necessarily related) improvements in Russia's economic situation and its greater centralization of political power gave an impression that the worst of Russia's transition—the socio-economic and political chaos of the Yeltsin era—had passed. As Russia gained an element of strength and a greater deal of self confidence and as the Bush administration steadily lost global legitimacy, the Putin administration adopted a more assertive foreign policy.

Nonetheless, a resurgent Russia played few key roles in the Balkans during the period from 2000-2005. Serbia's new, more pro-Western, post-Milošević government focused on improving ties with Europe and the United States and found little incentive to strengthen its relations with what was increasingly seen, at least from the Western perspective, as a

progressively more authoritarian and confrontational Russia.<sup>12</sup> However, by 2005 a number of factors fell into place which provided an opening for Russia to assert its interests in Serbia.

First, 2003 marked a shift to a less flagrantly pro-Western Serbian government following the assassination of Zoran Đinđić and the subsequent establishment of a more national-conservative government under Vojislav Kostunica and DSS. Kostunica, while still supporting integration with the European Union, held a more pessimistic view of the United States and expressed more interest in pursuing other options including closer ties with Russia.

Second, February 2006 also marked the beginning of intense negotiations regarding Kosovo's future status which once again illuminated the fact that many EU states and the United States favored independence for the region. Finally, 2005-2006 also witnessed further stagnation in Serbia's EU prospects with negotiations frozen outright in May of 2006 as part of the EU's response to Serbia's perceived non-cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for Yugoslavia (ICTY).

### **Contemporary Pillars of the Serbian-Russian Relationship**

According to Dušan Reljić, Russia's contemporary salience in Serbia's foreign policy rests on three pillars including Russia's status as a member of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) which allows it to play a key role in the international debate regarding Kosovo, the historical cultural and political connections between the two states and Russia's growing economic influence in the region.<sup>13</sup> Each of these pillars contains elements which counsel Serbia's political actors to both promote closer ties with Russia and to treat Russia's growing

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<sup>12</sup> Dušan Reljić, "Rusija i Zapadni Balkan," German Institute for International and Security Affairs, <http://www.isac-fund.org/download/Rusija%20i%20zapadni%20balkan.pdf>.

<sup>13</sup> Dušan Reljić, "Rusija i Zapadni Balkan," German Institute for International and Security Affairs, <http://www.isac-fund.org/download/Rusija%20i%20zapadni%20balkan.pdf>.

influence with a certain amount of skepticism. Here again, the “East *and* West” stance simply reflects the complexity of Serbia’s existing national interests.

### *Kosovo- ‘Till NATO or Georgia Do Us Part*

Of Relić’s three pillars, Russia’s “defense” of Kosovo in the UNSC remains the most salient and tangible. The reality of Russia’s veto came into focus in early 2007 as the Kosovo talks evolved into the Ahtisaari plan for the province’s “supervised independence.” Accepted by the Kosovars and rejected by Serbia, the Ahtisaari proposal was abandoned at the end of July 2007 after Russia repeatedly affirmed its intention to veto any proposal not acceptable to both sides of the negotiations. On August 10, talks switched to an alternative “Troika” format including the United States, European Union and Russia. Following the failure of this new stage of talks, Kosovo unilaterally declared independence on February 17, 2008. The United States and a number of EU member states quickly recognized the province’s independence, but as of the time of writing, Kosovo enjoys the recognition of only 65 states.

The threat to wield its veto thus solidified Russia’s new role as the sole obstacle to Serbia’s territorial dismemberment—at least in terms of preventing Kosovo from gaining a seat in the United Nations and perhaps other international forums.<sup>14</sup> Not only does the threatened veto deny Kosovo certain important trappings of sovereignty such as a seat in the United Nations General Assembly, but Russia’s international law-based defense of sovereignty and territorial integrity lent further legitimacy to Serbia’s cause. Though impossible to precisely ascertain, it is

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<sup>14</sup> As Stephan Krasner reminds us, a careful analysis of diplomatic history reveals that the recognition of state sovereignty is not a clearly defined and consistent process. Therefore the mere denial of a seat in the UN General Assembly will not necessarily doom Kosovo to legal limbo nor preserve Serbia’s territorial integrity. Describing the conflicting definitions, practices and institutional arrangements surrounding the concept, Krasner concludes that sovereignty is a form of organized hypocrisy determined more by the interests of influential international actors than

likely that the impasse brought about by Russia's threatened veto has impacted the flow of recognitions and brought Serbia time to pursue other diplomatic initiatives such as its successful effort to have the issue taken up by the International Court of Justice.

Nonetheless, while former Russian Ambassador to Serbia has pledged that "in defense of Kosovo, we'll stand fast as we did at Stalingrad," potential inconsistencies in Russia's policies not only undermine the legitimacy of its case before the international community but also cause concern amongst Serbian analysts and policymakers regarding Russia's commitment.<sup>15</sup> From the beginning, critics were quick to point out that, although it based its stance on Kosovo on principals of territorial inviolability and the potentially destabilizing influence of a Kosovo precedent, Russia was engaged on some level in supporting the secessionist side of territorial disputes in former Soviet States like Moldova and Georgia. However, so long as Russia refrained from publicly promoting secession in any of these cases, skepticism regarding its commitment to international norms of sovereignty remained a matter of conjecture. However, the events the surrounding the August 2009 hostilities in Georgia raised remarkably more tangible contradictions in Russia's position.

From the Serbian side, Russia's periodic use of the "Kosovo precedent" in justifying its intervention in Georgia and its subsequent recognition of South Ossetia and Abkhazia awakened skepticism regarding the possibility of a future bargain whereby Russia would somehow sacrifice Kosovo in exchange for Western concessions regarding Georgia. Analysts also noted that Russia's moves in Georgia undercut its previous sovereignty-based arguments regarding the Kosovo issue. As specialist on Serbian-Russian relations and former Political Officer at the

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any objective legal criteria. From this perspective, the practical implications of Russia's veto for Serbia's territorial integrity remain ambiguous. Stephan Krasner, *Sovereignty*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

<sup>15</sup> "U Odbrani Kosovo Stajecemo Cvrsto Kao pod Staljingradom," *Politika*, May 29, 2008; the current ambassador has expressed similar, albeit less dramatic, sentiments. See: "Konuzin: I Rusija i EU," *B92*, November 6, 2009.

OSCE mission in Georgia, Žarko Petrović states, “the Russian response to the recognition of Kosovo’s independence, mindful and consistent until August 2008, when Russia had strong principled position(s) based on the international law and practice, became relative with the changed policy of the Kremlin.”<sup>16</sup>

Quoting Russian President Putin, Petrović pointed to the change in Russian logic from supporting Serbia’s territorial integrity at all costs to adopting a more popular sovereignty view of the state.<sup>17</sup>

The international legal subjectivity of Abkhazia and South Ossetia begins from the moment of their recognition by at least one of the actors in international affairs...therefore, the recognition of Russia is sufficient..From the moral-ethical point of view, the comparison between Kosovo, the Kosovo precedent, and Abkhazia and South Ossetia is completely founded. There are no essential differences, in both cases there are ethnic conflicts and both cases the violation of law occurred.<sup>18</sup>

Statements such as this not only raised concerns about Russia’s long-term commitment to protect Serbia’s territorial integrity, but it also undermined the legitimacy of its arguments before the international community. From a principled stance based on a reasonable interpretation of international law, Russia resorted instead to a starkly interest-based policy of “cherry-picking” international norms in a manner that perfectly mirrored its own criticisms of its US and NATO antagonists.

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<sup>16</sup> Žarko Petrović, “Russian-Serbian Strategic Partnership: Scope and Content”, *ISAC Fund*, <http://www.isac-fund.org/download/Russian%20-%20Serbian%20Strategic%20Partnership%20-%20Scope%20and%20Content.pdf>.

<sup>17</sup> Popular sovereignty refers to the idea that sovereignty is vested in the interests of the people who make up a state. Violations of those interests by the rulers of a state constitute a violation of that state’s sovereignty. Under these conditions, external intervention to restore popular sovereignty does not constitute a violation of sovereignty. See W. Michael Reisman, “Sovereignty and Human Rights in Contemporary Law,” *American Journal of International Law*, 84 (1990): 86-876. For a critique of Reisman’s argument see: Simon Chesterman, *Just War or Just Peace?: Humanitarian Intervention and International Law*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

<sup>18</sup> “Putin Ubezhden, shto Sravnenie Kosovo s Iuzhnoi Osetiei i Abkhaziei Obosnovanno,” *Vesti.Ru*, August 26, 2009, <http://www.vesti.ru/doc.html?id=312289&tid=60713&date=03.09.2008>.

Aside from the ambiguities rising from the hostilities in Georgia, Russia's assertive language surrounding recent debates regarding Serbia's possible NATO membership reveals another potential sticking point regarding Russia's continued support of Serbia's territorial integrity. In the wake of US Vice President Joseph Biden's visit in summer of 2009, debates regarding Serbia's possible NATO membership reached a new crescendo as opposition parties pushed for an immediate referendum on the issue. While it remains unclear as to whether the existing government is seriously considering membership in the near term, the NATO issue certainly provides a useful political gambit for Serbia's right-of-center opposition parties at a time when a pro-EU government capitalizes on majority support for membership in the European Union. With 66.9% of the Serbian population expressing "hostility" towards NATO in a 2009 Gallup poll, opposition parties such as DSS, SNS and others sought stand to gain leverage from accusing the government of furtively leading the country into the alliance and forcing it to publicly address such a controversial topic through a referendum campaign.<sup>19</sup>

With regard to Russian-Serbian diplomatic relations, this debate drew an uncharacteristically aggressive reaction from various officials. In two separate, but closely timed statements, Russia's Ambassador to Serbia, Alexander Konuzin, bluntly warned that Serbia could not have both NATO and Kosovo and the Russian Ambassador to NATO stated that if Serbia joined NATO, Russia would reconsider its stance on Kosovo because "Russians can't be bigger Serbs than Serbs themselves."<sup>20</sup> Two months later, a conference addressing the pros and cons of Serbia's NATO membership was postponed allegedly after the Russian ambassador

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<sup>19</sup> Gallup Balkan Monitor, <http://www.balkan-monitor.eu/index.php/dashboard>.

<sup>20</sup> "Konuzin: Ne Može i NATO i Kosovo," *B92*, February 5, 2010; "Živulović: Stav Rogozina nije Zvanični Stav Moskve," *Blic*, February 8, 2010.

threatened to cancel his attendance at the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Serbian Revolution.<sup>21</sup> Thus, merely three months after Konuzin emphatically stated that Russia would stand “till the end” in support of Serbia’s territorial integrity, such statements suggested that “the end” could come with Serbia’s NATO membership.<sup>22</sup> NATO membership presents a potentially non-negotiable condition for Russia’s continued support for Serbia with regard to the Kosovo issue.

### *Cultural and Political Relations in the Public Mind*

Turning to the second of Reljić’s pillars, for all the talk of a special historical relationship between Serbs and Russians there have been few efforts to determine the extent and primacy of this bond in the two country’s respective societies. As discussed above, Serbia and Russia’s shared diplomatic history leaves a mixed set of legacies. Furthermore, the mere fact of a long history of cultural and political ties between two peoples provides no guarantee of this history’s salience in the minds of citizens facing their individual daily struggles in countries undergoing political and economic transformations. Given these points, how strongly does the oft-cited historical friendship actually resonate within Serbian society?

Limited publicly-available data exists regarding Serbian attitudes towards Russia. However, a survey undertaken in 2005 on the occasion of the fifth anniversary of the Milošević regime’s collapse asked respondents to choose between “states” (the EU was amongst the choices) that Serbia should rely on in its foreign policy. The aggregated responses and their distribution by party support provide some picture of public attitudes at the time and how they vary according to party affiliation.

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<sup>21</sup> “Konuzin protiv Konferencije o NATO?” *B92*, April 9, 2010, [http://www.b92.net/info/vesti/index.php?yyyy=2010&mm=04&dd=09&nav\\_category=11&nav\\_id=423206](http://www.b92.net/info/vesti/index.php?yyyy=2010&mm=04&dd=09&nav_category=11&nav_id=423206).

<sup>22</sup> “Konuzin: I Rusija i EU,” *B92*, November 6, 2009.

Table 1. Public Support for Foreign Policy Oriented toward Different International Actors, 2005

	On Which State Should Serbia Rely in its Foreign Policy						
	All	SRS	SPS	DSS	DS	Other	Against all Parties
<i>Russia</i>	34%	65%	65%	43%	9%	15%	30%
<i>European Union</i>	32%	11%	11%	35%	66%	61%	27%
<i>None</i>	18%	13%	15%	12%	11%	8%	25%
<i>Neutral States</i>	9%	6%	5%	3%	6%	4%	11%
<i>United States</i>	5%	1%	0%	3%	8%	12%	5%
<i>China</i>	3%	4%	5%	4%	0%	0%	3%

The survey shows roughly equal levels of support for a policy oriented toward Russia or the European Union (Respondents could only choose one.) As one might expect, parties which at the time promoted a more Euro-skeptic and pro-Russian policy tended to attract support from respondents expressing more pro-Russian sympathies. The more exclusively pro-European (again, in 2005) DS drew the most support from respondents favoring a strongly pro-EU policy. The strength of the EU option amongst supporters of “other parties” most likely reflects the inclusion of a number of smaller pro-European parties (G17+ and LDP, for instance) under this label. The highly polarized picture presented by these figures might explain the existence of clearer East versus West distinctions in party platforms during elections following the period during which the survey was undertaken.

Research conducted by *Agencija Politikum* provides a more current picture of attitudes towards Russia and the prospects for EU membership. In a survey focused on public opinion regarding the issues of Kosovo and Serbia’s international relations, respondents were asked in two separate questions whether they were for Serbia’s entrance into the European Union and whether they were for the “closest” ties with Russia.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>23</sup> “Kosovo, Mediji, i Strateske Spoljnopoliticke Integracije (April 2008)”, *Agencija Politikum*, 1300-respondent representative survey of Serbia without Kosovo. Most recent survey conducted on March 24 to April 1, 2008. [http://starisajt.nspm.rs/MBI/politikum7\\_kosovo1.htm](http://starisajt.nspm.rs/MBI/politikum7_kosovo1.htm).

Table 1. Serbian Attitudes toward EU and Russia

	Are You for Entrance into the EU? (%)			Are You for the Closest Ties with Russia? (%)		
	Yes	No	Don't know	Yes	No	Don't Know
<i>October 2007</i>	71.55	21.26	7.20	59.31	25.38	15.31
<i>December 2007</i>	66.96	25.79	7.25	57.35	26.27	16.39
<i>February 2008</i>	67.23	22.81	9.97	60.30	24.42	15.28
<i>April 2008</i>	63.89	22.44	13.67	58.81	24.39	16.79

Given the aggregated nature of the data and the somewhat peculiar form of the survey question, the information in Table 1 offers a somewhat limited, yet nonetheless intriguing, glimpse into the nature of support for the European Union and Russia. On the one hand, it is clear that support for entrance into the EU is consistently higher than support for closer ties with Russia. However, the numbers also question the extent to which the population is currently polarized into exclusively pro-EU versus pro-Russian camps. Simple arithmetic indicates that, within each iteration of the survey, *at least* 23-31% of the respondents are simultaneously for EU accession and for the closest ties with Russia.<sup>24</sup> The apparent prevalence of respondents who currently support close ties with both Russia and the EU likely contributes to the current trend towards the depolarization of major political parties on the East-West policy spectrum.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>24</sup> An interview with a prominent ruling party official and current vice-speaker of the Serbian parliament who has access to more extensive public opinion data further supported this observation regarding the duality of Serbian voters on the East-West issue. Interview with Gordana Čomić, Belgrade, March 16, 2010.

<sup>25</sup> While this has little direct impact on Serbian public opinion it is interest to contrast the Serbian data with Russian public opinion surveys regarding Serbia and Kosovo. When asked about their level of knowledge about the situation in Kosovo shortly following the widespread violence in the province in April 2004, 44% of respondents indicated that they “knew” about the events, 34% indicated that they had “heard something” and the balance claimed either no knowledge or had difficulty responding. Of those who either knew of the events or had heard something of them, 53% had trouble attributing the cause of the violence to one side or another and only 11% placed blame for the outbreak on the Albanian side. When asked whether respondents personally felt a special sympathy towards the Serbian people or whether they related to them in the same way as they related to any other European people, 75% of answered “the same way as to other European People,” while only 8% claimed “a special sympathy.” Another survey shortly following Kosovo’s declaration of independence produced similarly unimpressive results. When asked how they related to Kosovo’s declaration of independence, 27% of respondents said “negatively,” 10% “positively, “44% “indifferent” and 19% said “difficult to say.” In response to a question regarding Russia’s

## *Trade and Investment*

In recent years, much has been made of Russia's increased economic presence in Serbia and recent statements by Russian President Medvedev and other Russian officials have gone so far as to speak of a new commercial partnership between the two countries. In 2006, Russian-Serbian trade was valued at \$2.5 billion and Russian investment in Serbia from the period from 2000-2004 amounted to \$400 million.<sup>26</sup> President of the Serbian Chamber of Commerce, Miloš Bugarin, stated that between 2000 and 2009, trade between Serbia and Russia increased ten-fold.<sup>27</sup> In proportional terms, for the period from 2006-2008 (the most recent years for which aggregated annual data is available), Russia ranked in first place amongst importers to Serbia, accounting for 14% to 16% of Serbia's total. This placed it well ahead of Serbia's traditionally strongest trading partner, Germany. Russia figured less prominently as a consumer of Serbian exports ranking 5<sup>th</sup> for all three years with 4.8 to 5% of Serbia's total exports. Major Serbian exports to Russia included medicine, paper products, petroleum byproducts, and foodstuffs.<sup>28</sup> Serbian companies were also heavily involved in construction in Russia with the total value of construction projects in Russia ranked in second place to Montenegro in 2007-2008.

The significance of these figures changes somewhat when one considers the nature of Russia's trade interests in the region and also compares Russia's trade figures to the more relevant—at least in terms of the East versus West narrative—entity of the European Union. Russia

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appropriate response to the declaration, 36% responded that it should not recognize Kosovo's independence, 21% that it should and 43% responded "difficult to say." Taken together the two surveys reveal a rather low level of public attentiveness and support for Serbia's stance on the Kosovo issue at two critical points in the recent development of the Kosovo issue. "Kosovo: Provozglashenie Nezavisimosti," *Baza Dannykh FOM*, <http://bd.fom.ru/report/map/d080922>; "Sobytiia v Kosovo," *Baza Dannykh FOM*, <http://bd.fom.ru/report/map/dd041326>.

<sup>26</sup> Milan Milošević, "Srbi i Putin," *Vreme*, June 12, 2007.

<sup>27</sup> "Ruske Investicije u Privredu Srbije preko 580 Miliona Dolara," *SEEBiz*, <http://www.seebiz.eu/sr/makroekonomija/srbija/rusija-u-srbiju-do-sad-investirala-580-miliona-dolara,39147.html>.

<sup>28</sup> Milan Milošević, "Srbi i Putin," *Vreme*, June 12, 2007.

imports a rather limited range of products to Serbia with highly lucrative petroleum and energy products making up the lions share (77% in 2008) of the total. Furthermore, despite seemingly impressive bilateral trade figures presented above, Serbia's trade volume with the EU during 2006-2008 far exceeded that of its trade with Russia. Trade with the EU during this period accounted for 48.3 to 52.3% of Serbia's total exports and for 47.2 to 49.6% of imports. Thus, as throughout its history, Serbia's total volume of trade with Russian continues to lag significantly behind its trade with Europe as a whole. At the same time, the nature of Serbia's trade with Russia bears the marks of energy dependency rather than a vibrant and diverse trading relationship. Russian imports are overwhelmingly concentrated in the energy sector and Serbia maintains a large trade deficit with its Eastern partner.

Starting in 2008, public officials and mass media focused increasing attention on the growth of Russian investment in Serbia. In terms of aggregate foreign direct investment, for the period from 2000-2007, Russia ranked in 17<sup>th</sup> place--just behind the United States.<sup>29</sup> However, with Gazprom's 2009 purchase of a controlling share in NIS, Russia jumped to seventh place behind Austria, Greece, Norway, Holland, Italy, and Slovenia for total investment between 2000 and 2009.<sup>30</sup> While the vast majority of these investments focused on the energy sector, Russian investors' purchases of the bus maker Ikarbus, Serbia's largest tourist agency 'Putnik', Belgrade tire manufacturer Rekord, and others indicated some minor diversification in investments. Russia also recently entered the Serbian banking sector, but it is believed that the new banks will focus primarily on serving Russian businesses.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> "Strane Direktno Investicije u Republici Srbiji," Serbian Chamber of Commerce presentation, May 2008.

<sup>30</sup> Sekulić. N., "U Srbiju Ušlo Devet Milijardi Evra", *Press*, October 21, 2009.

<sup>31</sup> "Kontroverzni Rezultati Ruskog Biznisa u Srbiji," *Biznis & Finansije*, March 8, 2009.

Nevertheless, vigorous pronouncements regarding Russia's new investments mask lesser publicized problems in this ostensibly burgeoning relationship. To give just a few examples, a free trade agreement signed between Serbia and Russia in 2000 has still not been ratified by the Russian Duma.<sup>32</sup> While then-Premier Vojislav Kostunica personally met with Aeroflot's director Valery Okulov and Russian magnate Oleg Deripaska during negotiations to possibly purchase JAT Airways (Okulov) and a portion of the state-owned mining enterprise RTB Bor (Deripaska), both deals failed to materialize.<sup>33</sup> During March of 2009 Alexander Konuzin warned Russian investors about the risks of investing in Serbia.<sup>34</sup>

In this particular instance Konuzin's spokesperson focused on the claim that Russian investors would buy enterprises only to find out that their liabilities were higher than initially stated in the existing sparse documentation. Singling out cases like the Ikarbus privatization, Lukoil's purchase of Beopetrol and Gazprom's purchase of NIS, the spokesperson stated that "in Serbia the seller doesn't know what he sells and the buyer doesn't know what he's buying." Other problems arose from bureaucratic obstacles and legal issues left over from previous owners. In June of the same year, Konuzin warned that Russian investors may lose faith in the Serbian market because Serbian companies would not buy products produced by Russian firms in Serbia and that European investors like Fiat were considering moves into areas of production (in this case, buses) which could compete with established Russian firms.<sup>35</sup> Responding to statements by Konuzin and others, the Serbian side complained that Russian companies were not

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<sup>32</sup> Dragica Pušonjić, "Nismo Iskoristili sve Sanse na Ruskom Tržištu," *Blic*, February 23, 2010.

<sup>33</sup> Želimir Bojovic, Maja Bjelajac, and Enis Zebic, "Ruske Investicije sve Značajnije," *Radio Free Europe*, Oleg Delipaski.

<sup>34</sup> "Konuzin Upozorava Ruske Investiture," *B92*, March 11, 2010.  
[http://www.b92.net/biz/vesti/srbija.php?yyyy=2010&mm=03&dd=11&nav\\_id=416896](http://www.b92.net/biz/vesti/srbija.php?yyyy=2010&mm=03&dd=11&nav_id=416896).

<sup>35</sup> "Konuzin: Ruski Investitori Mogu da Izgube Poverenje u Srbiju," *Tanjug*, June 24, 2009.

honoring agreements and later backing out of deals.<sup>36</sup>

Regardless of the net benefits of Russian-Serbian economic relations, one other notable factor regarding Russia's economic interests in Serbia centers on their importance within the context of Serbia's EU aspirations and Russia's thus far consistent support for Serbia's future accession. While the East versus West narrative implies that Russian investment and trade presents an "alternative" to that of the EU and other Western states, both the nature of the investments and Russia's continuing public support for Serbia's EU membership, suggests that Russia's trade and investment is complementary to, and even contingent upon, Serbia's future integration. Given the limited potential of the Serbian domestic market, Russia's purchase of NIS is most logically a function of its desire to establish the South Stream pipeline as another alternative route to supply energy to Europe and to thus strengthen its leverage over countries hosting portions of existing pipelines. Russian investors' limited investments in other portions of the Serbian economy would also likely reach their fullest potential only through access to the lucrative EU market.<sup>37</sup>

Therefore, what some Western and Serbian Russo-skeptics view as a zero-sum, neo-mercantilist economic contest between Russia and Europe is more plausibly an effort by Russian investors to use Serbia as friendly linkage to the European market.<sup>38</sup> With regard to the economic issues, Serbian political actors are not being pressured to choose between East and West—in fact, certain investments may be contingent on their remaining open to both Russia and

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<sup>36</sup> "Kontroverzni Rezultati Ruskog Biznisa u Srbiji," *Biznis & Finansije*, March 8, 2009.

<sup>37</sup> Thanks to journalist Dejan Anastesejvić for pointing out this logic.

<sup>38</sup> Nevertheless, beyond the logic of expanding markets, Russia also expresses hope that a Russian-friendly Serbia would somehow advocate Russian interests within the framework of the EU. This was perhaps best summed by statements by Russia's ambassador to Serbia who encouraged Serbia to enter the EU, but to hold to its Slavic and Orthodox roots. In Konuzin's words, "It's not so much a question as to whether (Serbia) needs to enter the EU, but that, amongst its new friends, it doesn't forget its old. Some states of Eastern Europe too quickly forgot their good relations with Russia." Konuzin: I Rusija i EU," *B92*, November 6, 2009.

Europe.

### **Neither East nor West—for Now**

To summarize this admittedly diverse and somewhat ambiguous set of observations, the casting of Serbia's foreign policy in simple East vs. West terms appears premature. While the 2008 Presidential and Parliamentary elections featured specific actors who presented voters with an East-West choice, major parties either presented de facto "East *and* West" options or adjusted their rhetoric and policies to security and economic realities in the post-election period. This contemporary depolarization of Serbian political parties with regard to policy towards Russia and the European Union reflects a set of international and domestic conditions that counsel pragmatism rather than an exclusively "Eastern" or "Western" policy orientation.

In the short to medium term, Serbian-Russian relations facilitate Serbia's achievement of specific political and economic goals within the broader context of Serbia's relations with Europe and other Western actors. Russia's "defense" of Kosovo bought critical time for Serbia to mount a diplomatic offensive which has contributed to the current impasse over the province's future status while avoiding head-on confrontation with major Western actors. Although the reality of trade and investment relations with Russia fall short of more optimistic popular accounts, Serbia also benefits from Russia's involvement in its energy sector and the prospect of future earnings related to the proposed South Stream pipeline. Furthermore, the currently ambivalent state of Serbian public opinion allows major political protagonists to present a pragmatic "East *and* West" mix of policies without incurring the wrath of a polarized electorate.

However, questions arise over the longer term prospects for this status quo strategy-- particularly as Serbia approaches the threshold of EU membership. In the spring of 2010, this

threshold remains far off with both analysts and the public now expecting membership no earlier than 2018.<sup>39</sup> Nonetheless, barring any major changes in resolve on either the Serbian or EU side, the two parties may eventually be forced to make some decision regarding Kosovo and perhaps even the NATO membership issue. Were this to occur, the web of interests which currently complements Russia and Serbia's "historical friendship" will transform into mutually exclusive choices which will either destroy the Russian-Serbian partnership or undermine Serbia's prospects for EU membership.

Much depends on whether Kosovo's status will ultimately, despite recent Serbian, European and American statements to the contrary, become a deciding factor in Serbia's eventual EU membership. Recent interviews with key figures in Serbia's ruling party and main opposition party elicited optimistic statements to the effect that, when the time for admission comes, neither the EU nor its individual member states will make membership conditional on Serbia's recognition of independence.<sup>40</sup> With 22 of 27 EU member states currently recognizing Kosovo as an independent state, and with the final step in the membership process being ratification by the parliaments of all member states, there appears to be at least some grounds to question this optimism. If Kosovo becomes an actual or de facto condition for membership, then Serbia's entrance into the European Union would entail both concessions on its current borders and also the loss of Russia's most tangible piece of political leverage in this part of the Balkans.

As indicated by the above-discussed statements by Konuzin and Rogozin, a serious bid by the Serbian government to join NATO presents another potential watershed for the current "East *and* West" status quo. While the Serbian government has thus far avoided major public

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<sup>39</sup> "Građani: Srbija u EU oko 2018," *B92*, November 18, 2008; "Status Kandidata 2011, Srbija u EU 2018," *Blic*, 9 February 2010; Branko Mikašanović, "Lempi: Srbija u EU Izmedju 2014 i 2018," *VOAnews.com*, April 23, 2010, <http://www1.voanews.com/serbian/news/interviews/john-lampe-interview-eu-serbia-04-23-2010-91938434.html>.

<sup>40</sup> Interview with Gordana Čomić (DS) and Nebojša Stefanović (SNS), Belgrade, March 16, 2010.

initiatives towards deepening its ties with NATO beyond its current membership in the Partnership for Peace (an organization in which Russia also participates), Russia's vigorous entrance into the opposition-initiated debate suggests a willingness to condition its continued support for Serbia's territorial integrity either on Serbian military neutrality or its participation in Russia's proposed European Security Pact. The potential implications of Serbia's decision to pursue NATO membership is underlined by the fact that Konuzin and Rogozin's statements represent the first time that Russia has publicly presented the Serbs with something akin to an ultimatum since first taking on the mantle of Serbia's "territorial guarantor."

For now, Serbia's ruling government tenuously rides a crest of balanced interests and policy impasses, biding its time in the hopes of finding resolutions to potential conundrums regarding Kosovo and Serbia's place in Europe's evolving international structure. However, the existing constellation of foreign interests regarding Serbia's future EU membership, Kosovo's status, and NATO expansion threaten to force potentially costly decisions on current and future governments. Changes in the international climate or a successful attempt by the opposition to place certain issues onto the domestic political agenda could easily disturb the current equilibrium and compel Serbia to choose between its Eastern territorial guarantor and Western promises of prosperity.