



THE INFLUENCE OF RUSSIA IN THE WESTERN BALKANS: THE  
CASE OF KOSOVO AFTER INDEPENDENCE

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THE INFLUENCE OF RUSSIA IN THE WESTERN BALKANS: THE  
CASE OF KOSOVO AFTER INDEPENDENCE

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# **THE INFLUENCE OF RUSSIA IN THE WESTERN BALKANS: THE CASE OF KOSOVO AFTER INDEPENDENCE**

## **ABSTRACT**

Western Balkan is an important region for Russia in addressing itself as the main player and increasing its influence and power over the states of this region. Russia's view on Western Balkan is also related with competing with other actors that can be USA, NATO, EU, in the way of minimizing their role and increasing the role of Russia in WB region. This thesis focuses on exploring the way that Russia influences Western Balkan. It will give a focus on capabilities and instruments that Russia has on influencing the region. In particular this thesis focuses on the case of Kosovo. The influence that Russia has in Kosovo since Kosovo declared its independence, the threats that Kosovo faces from Russia on its security issues, and the way that Kosovo deals with these challenges coming from Russia.

**Key Words:** Western Balkan, Russia, influence, threats, security. Kosovo

# **INFLUENCA E RUSISE NE BALLKANIN PERENDIMOR: RASTI I KOSOVES QE NGA SHPALLJA E PAVARSISE**

## **ABSTRAKT**

Ballkani Perendimor eshte nje rajon I rendesishem per Rusine per te adresuar veten si nje lojtar kryesor dhe te rris influencen dhe fuqine mbi vendet e ketij rajoni. Pikepamja e Rusise kundrejt Ballkanit Perendimor eshte gjithashtu e lidhur me konkurencen me aktoret e tjere si SHBA, NATO, BE, ne menyre qe te minimizojte rolin e tyre dhe te rrise rolin e Rusise ne Ballkanin Perendimor. Kjo teze jep eksploron menyren se si Rusia influencon ne Ballkan. Jep fokus ne aftesite dhe instrumentat qe Rusia ka per te influencuar ne Ballkanin Perendimor. Ne vecanti kjo teze fokusohet ne ceshtjen e Kosoves .Influenca qe ka Rusia ne Kosove qe pas shpalljes se pavarsise se Kosoves, kercenimet me te cilat perballet Kosova nga Rusia ne ceshtjet e sigurise dhe menyra se si Kosova I menaxhon keto sfida.

*Fjalët kyç: Ballkani Perendimor, Rusia, influence, kercenimet, siguria. Kosova*

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My final gratitude goes to my family for always supporting me and encouraging me to do my best always.

## **DECLARATION**

I hereby declare that this Master's Thesis *The Influence of Russia in the Western Balkans: the case of Kosovo after independence*, is based on my original work except quotations and citations which have been duly acknowledged. I also declare that this thesis has not been previously or concurrently submitted for the award of any degree, at Epoka University, any other university or institution.

Ersilda Prenga

2023

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

EU	European Union
WB	Western Balkans
USA	United States of America
NATO	The North Atlantic Treaty Organization
IAC	International Advisory Committee of Organizations of Reserve Officers
CSTO	Collective Security Treaty Organization
UNSCR	United Nations Security Council resolution
UNMIK	United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo
ASM	Association of Serb Majority
HUPX	Hungarian Energy Exchange
KIPRED	Kosovo Institute for Policy Research and Development
KSF	Kosovo Security Force
EULEX	European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo
CSDP	Common Security and Defense policy
PSA	Stabilization -Association Process
SAPD	Stabilization and association process dialogue
MCC	Millennium Challenge Corporation

# I. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Problem Statement

Russia is one of the main actors in world politics and in this way it has also influence in Western Balkan countries. Western Balkans can be considered as stage where it can rise its influence and find more support against its competition with the west. Western Balkan in general has been unstable, and influence that Russia has in this region remains important. In this type of situation Russia projects to work as an arbitrator on specific issues related with internal or foreign policies by strengthening its position in the region.

An influence in Western Balkan that would keep the region unstable, leads to serious issues that can be different such as political crisis, which can escalate in armed conflicts. It remains a problem because the level of ethnic emotions and desire of changing the borders remains high in WB. This thesis attempts to clarify the influence that Russia has in Western Balkan and particularly in Kosovo.

It will provide information about the influence that Russia has in WB by studying the case of Kosovo. The way that how this influence has affected Kosovo since it was declared independent. It will analyse the challenges and threats that Kosovo has from the Russian influence in WB, since one of the focuses that Russia has is its influence in Serbia, giving Serbia a support on the interests that it has on Kosovo. This thesis will give recommendations on how those threats should be addressed from a small country like Kosovo.

## **1.2 Research Question**

The research question that this thesis has in focus is:

How Russia influences the state of Kosovo, since Kosovo independence?

Objectives:

- Focusing on identifying instruments that Russia uses to influence Kosovo.
- Threats that Russian influence can bring to Kosovo security.

## **1.3 Organization of the Thesis**

The first chapter gave an introduction to the topic, includes the objectives and research question and gives an organization of the thesis. In the first chapter it will give an introduction of influence that Russia has in the Western Balkans. The second part of the study will give a theoretical background on Russia soft power policy towards WB particularly Kosovo and more information about the concept of security and security threats that Kosovo faces from Russian influence. In the third section will be provided the methodology that is used and how the way that most of the data has been collected.

All this data will be analyzed in the fourth section where will be presented also the case of Kosovo, focusing mostly in political, economic, and social ties between Russia and Kosovo after its independence. Role of Russia in Kosovo, in terms of its impact on regional stability and security. The impact of Russian investment and trade on the economic development of Kosovo. The role of media and propaganda in shaping public opinion about Russia and its influence in Kosovo. Role of Russia in the ongoing dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia.

## **1.4 Russia influence in WB**

Several authors establish a connection between Russia and the Western Balkans by on their shared historical pasts (Kaplan, 2013) claims that Russia has historically focused its attention on the countries of the Western Balkans. The Western Balkans have long-standing historical relations with the Russian Federation, which also serves as a soft power

buffer for the region. Along with its European neighbors, the Western Balkans have become a front in Russia's geopolitical conflict with the West.

(Brzezinski, n.d) asserts that after the end of the Cold War, America failed to deal with Russia, giving Russia the motivation to concentrate on regaining its power in the states of the former Soviet Union and beyond. Russia's Economic Influence and Soft Power Russia has significant influence, especially among Serbs, as a result of cultural and historical ties. Historical connections are linked to the pan-Slavic movement of the 19th century and the founding of Russia for Serbia and the Ottoman Empire.

When we discuss about the influence of Russia in Western Balkan we will discuss also about the strategic interests and tools that Russia uses to influence WB. Russia is driven, is from geopolitics issues which it combines with economic interest that it may have on the region ,by expanding its economic influence and also it is driven by historic and cultural bonds. Such as the bonds that it has with south Slavs and nations that are orthodox like Serbia in which it tries to exercise its soft power more since the cultural ties are stronger.

In general when it comes into economic influence and social interest WB countries approach more towards the West (Bechev, n.d).

The historical ties between Russia and the Western Balkans, have had a significant impact on current relationships between these regions. Russia has been connected with this region in different aspects, as cultural,political,economic aspects.Some key aspects remain:

1)Cultural ties: Russia and the Western Balkans, share a long history of cultural and religious ties, including through the influence of the Orthodox Church in the region. These ties have played a role in shaping the cultural identities of people in the region and continue to influence relationships today.

2)Political ties: Russia has historically maintained close political ties with various countries in the Western Balkans. During the Cold War, the region was seen as being of strategic importance to the Soviet Union, and Russia has continued to maintain an interest in the region.

3)Economic ties: Russia has also maintained economic ties with the Western Balkans, including through trade and investment. These ties have had a significant impact on the economies of these countries and have shaped their relationships with Russia.

4)Historical conflicts: The history of the Western Balkans, has also been shaped by conflicts and tensions, including wars and ethnic conflicts. These conflicts have contributed to the region's instability and have had a lasting impact on relationships between these countries and with Russia.

5) Geopolitical significance: The Western Balkans, is seen as being of geopolitical significance, given its location at the crossroads of Europe and the wider Mediterranean region. This has led to competition between regional and international actors, including Russia, over influence in the region.

Russia and the Western Balkans have had a complex relationship due to geopolitical and historical factors. Russia has traditionally been supportive of the Balkan states, particularly Serbia, due to their shared Slavic and Orthodox Christian heritage. However, the Western Balkans are also seen as key regions for Europe's security and stability, and therefore NATO and EU enlargement in the region has been a priority for the West. As a result, Russia has opposed the integration of the Western Balkans into NATO and the EU and has sought to maintain its influence in the region through political, economic, and cultural ties.

The cultural influence of Russia in the Western Balkans has primarily been through the influence of the Orthodox Church and the Russian language, particularly in countries with significant Orthodox populations such as Serbia. Additionally, Russia has had political influence in the region through its support of Serbian and other Slavic nationalist movements, as well as its close ties with various political leaders in the region. The USSR also had a strong presence in the region during the Cold War, providing aid and support to communist governments in the area. However, Russia's influence in the Western Balkans has waned in recent years due to the decline of its political and economic power, as well as increased European and Western influence in the region.

The Russian government is mobilizing state-controlled firms, including energy giant Gazprom and state bank Sberbank, to make investments across the region that it reckons will increase its political influence. Moscow has also proven adept at blurring the lines between official and unofficial state action, often channeling its support through proxies. It cultivates influence through a variety of nongovernmental avenues, such as support for

clubs, schools, sports teams, religious centers, media, and veterans groups. The rise of this soft power gives Russia leverage with a wide swath of society while providing the Kremlin with deniability.

Russia has a significant influence in the Western Balkans region, mainly through its energy supplies, political ties, and cultural connections. Some countries in the region, such as Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, maintain close political and economic ties with Russia, while others like Montenegro and Kosovo have closer ties with the West. Russia also tries to counteract the EU and NATO enlargement in the region and advocates for their neutral stance in the international arena.

Russia has a significant economic influence in the Western Balkans region through energy supplies, trade, and investments. It supplies the region with natural gas and oil, which provides a source of energy security. Russia also has a strong presence in the regional economy, with investments in various sectors such as tourism, infrastructure, and industry. However, the Western Balkans countries are also seeking closer economic ties with the EU and NATO, which could limit Russia's economic influence in the long term.

Russia has a significant influence in the Western Balkans region through its natural gas supplies. The region heavily relies on Russia for its energy needs, which provides Moscow with significant leverage over the countries in the region. Russia's state-controlled gas company, Gazprom, supplies gas to countries in the region through pipelines, and it is also involved in various gas-related infrastructure projects. The dependence on Russian gas creates interdependence between the region and Russia, which can be used by Moscow to advance its political and economic interests in the region.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

In this chapter is going to be discussed the theoretical framework of the soft power and security concepts, in order to have a better understanding of the ways that Russia influences WB and particularly Kosovo. By understanding this concept it can be identified ways of exercising soft power and what can be considered as a security threat for Kosovo from the Russian influence.

### **2.1 Russia influence toolbox**

#### **2.1.1 Coercion**

(Bechev, n.d) stated that Coercion, means using of punishment in order to shape the way that other states behave by using military forces or economic sanctions. For Western Balkans coercion is not so much significant compared to other regions that are exposed to Russia. Examples of soft coercion practiced on WB consist on trade embargoes and cyber-attacks. Until it joined NATO in 2015–17, Montenegro, once Russia's closest ally in the former Yugoslavia, was a target in the most recent round. The restrictions that Russia imposed by prohibiting the visit of Prime Minister Milo Djukanovic and the leadership of the nation's ruling Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS) and limiting the import of local wines are an example of soft coercion.

#### **2.1.2 Co-optation**

One of the instruments that Russia uses on WB is Cooptation. One of the things that Russia does is building relations and creating alliances with local power holders in Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina Republika Srpska. Types of motivations for choosing Russia for collaboration vary.



Benefits can come from rents that are a form of direct monetary gain. So, Serbia is positioned with Russia in order to gain influence on the Kosovo issue. As a result, Serbia has allied with Russia in an effort to influence the Kosovo issue, but it has also done so because previous administrations have attempted to profit from investments and business links, no doubt involving bribes and side payments. Milorad Dodik has also found Russia to be a crucial ally in his efforts to strengthen his hold over Republika Srpska and fend off pressure from the West, the major Bosnian parties that support further centralization of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the opposition in the entity with a majority of Serbs (Bechev, n.d.).

### **2.1.3 Subversion**

Subversion is mostly executed in means which are covered and it is understood as hybrid or political warfare. It doesn't exist a particular agreement that informs if one hybrid action has achieved a step in an escalatory ladder that would directly lead to use of armed forces. Tactics of subversion consist on (dis)information campaigns and support in an open or hidden way for the anti-Western actors like parties or civic associations. In the Balkans an example of subversion is the effort of blocking the accession on NATO of Montenegro in 2015-2016 and North Macedonia in 2017-2018. In these two cases Moscow used the existing internal crisis to stop expansion of NATO (Bechev, n.d.).

## **2.2 Soft power**

(J., N. 2017) refers to the concept put forward by, that a country's influence can be exerted not just through military and economic means (hard power), but also through attraction and persuasion (soft power). Soft power is based on the ability of a country to shape the preferences of others through its culture, political values, institutions, and foreign policies, making others more willing to align with it. Nye argues that soft power is a valuable tool for achieving foreign policy objectives, as it reduces the need for coercion and creates more lasting and stable relationships. Soft power is the ability to obtain preferred outcomes by attraction rather than coercion or payment. The ability to combine hard and soft power into successful strategies where they reinforce each other could be considered "smart power". A country's soft power relies on three resources: culture, political values, and

foreign policies. Here are some examples of soft power that countries and political leaders use to influence international relations:

1. Business and trade: This type of soft power centers on the allure of a country's business acumen, the success of its economy, and ability to innovate..
2. Culture: This is a country's power to influence others through its cultural riches, such as art, literature, music, or even pop culture..
3. Education: Educational soft power is when a country becomes a desirable destination for international studies due to high-quality institutions and scholars.
4. Governance: Soft power in governance means respect for freedom and democracy for citizens, resulting in a civil society.
5. International relations and diplomacy: Public diplomacy in foreign affairs and contributions to global development are potent sources of soft power. Being able to handle public affairs, like international conflicts between superpowers, with diplomacy is a soft power.

### **2.3 Soft power of Russia**

According to (Loss, 2021) due to a lack of soft power, Russia is falling behind. It is difficult to say with certainty whether it lacks the resources or is unable to develop soft power in a methodical manner. There is no doubt that both of these factors play a role in this situation. Imperialism and communism left a heavy mark on Russia's soft power. The use of soft power is especially difficult because both the Tsarist and Russian regimes were incredibly oppressive. Russia, on the other hand, refers to Slavic customs, an admiration of the Russian spirit, and the acceptance of Russian culture in the West. He also employs symbolic language and sees himself as the head of Eastern Christianity and a keeper of Orthodox Church heritage. The necessity to uphold human rights or other regulations, but not as a tool of repression or persecution, is still not ingrained in the Russian mentality. Even the power's actions against the opposition serve to reinforce its position since it gives the populace more assurance that it is in charge of the nation's affairs.

Even if there is a mismatch between the ideals that are claimed and how the system really carries them out, this does not stop Russians from criticizing the government. It is challenging for Russia to develop soft power through a noticeable shift in foreign policy, and it is even more challenging to win over people's hearts and minds without using force.

To promote Russian tradition outside of Russia, clear steps have been done. These initiatives show how governments, semi-official foundations, favored media, the church, and the diaspora work together so that soft power tools are employed correctly to sustain influence in areas of particular interest to Russia. But, political practice demonstrates that Russia is more inclined to utilize coercive force to settle disputes.

## **2.4 Foreign Policy as an Element of Soft Power**

According to (Loss, 2021), despite the fact that it has the necessary resources, Russia continues to have trouble using soft power. Sometimes it seems that using power plays or making alliances based on fear would be a quicker method to accomplish a goal, but these tactics show how ineffective Russia's foreign policy is. Russia has soft power resources, but due to a lack of talent or a standout, alluring cultural initiative, it is unable to adapt to and utilize the soft power formula. The Russian Federation skillfully employs military and economic means in its foreign policy, demonstrating its uncompromising attitude in line with the nature of these tools. It takes a little more work to use various tactics based on more subtle soft power techniques. One of the key components of conventional diplomacy for accomplishing foreign policy goals is soft power.

Djokic, A. (2020), discusses that soft power consists on means offered by civil society and also methods and technologies like information, communication and humanitarian. Soft power that Russia uses in WB countries is related with historical ties, cultural ties that include language, religion or education, media and communication and economic ties. Russia in the WB has had relations with some countries before the EU and USA. This has generated in positive and negative consequences. Russia soft power influence is mostly seen in Serbia because the historical ties between Russia and Serbia are stronger. Here can be mentioned the same religion that this countries share, their language consist on slavic language. This common collective identities create a stronger influence of Russia in Serbia of soft power. Author A. Djocik states that soft power is more easily spread if two countries have strong cultural ties because one factor that can destroy soft power is also lack of cultural ties (Djocik, A. 2020).

(Bechev, n.d) found that when it comes to diplomacy, Russia's major alliance in the WB is with Serbia. The Russian partnership with Serbia has been built on Russia's opposition to Kosovo's independence. Belgrade has sought Moscow's help in rebalancing the power balance with Pristina, which has been backed by the US and other key EU/NATO nations in the past. It has been crucial in keeping Kosovo out of international organizations such as the UN and its agencies(Bechev, 2019).According to the author in the case of the unilateral declaration of independence by the Kosovars before the International Court of Justice (ICJ), Russia aided Serbia. However, this approach was found to be ineffective. The shift of Serbia towards the EU as a mediator between Belgrade and Pristina resulted from a court judgment in 2010 that the statement had not been violated international law.Despite the fact that the judgment was a major setback for Russia, it was not excluded from the Kosovo conflict as a UN Security Council member. Russia's veto of a UN Security Council resolution defining the Srebrenica atrocities as genocide in July 2015 served as a reminder to political players of the country's diplomatic clout. Serbia's refusal to join Western sanctions following the annexation of Crimea is also a source of Russian assistance. Even today Serbia refuses to put sanctions on Russia about aggression in Ukraine.Russia has cultivated ties with the Republika Srpska as well. In 2016, it backed President Milorad Dodik in his fight against the West by organizing a referendum to declare January 9 as "Citizenship Day" for the Serb-majority country. Focused on encouraging independence, Moscow has done all possible to prevent the Bosnian Serb leadership from being censored by the Implementation of Peace Council(Bechev, n.d).

## **2.5 Instruments of Soft Power**

Many historically molded events that reference Russia's past are what promote the growth of Russian soft power. Advantageous factors include its large diaspora and common language. The political systems of the post-Soviet states are likewise characterized by a profusion of little, weaker political parties that are open to Russian influence. Commercial interests are additional crucial elements. Several local organizations, including commercial ones, get involved in the post-Soviet republics' politics and finances in favor of Russia (Loss, 2021).

The Russian Orthodox Church is both an important component of culture and a means of establishing authority. The Russian Church asserts its singularity as the one source of authority for the one and only true religion, providing a moral and religious justification for the authority attained by the authorities. This viewpoint is reflected in the idea that Moscow is the Third Rome, the successor to the imperial, cultural, and spiritual goals of the ancient Romans and the Byzantine Empire. Because of this, the Russian government frequently uses religious justifications and the Church's backing for its objectives. The fact that President Vladimir Putin proclaimed 2007 the Year of the Russian Language on November 4, 2007, on the occasion of Union Day, demonstrates the importance of language in soft power. This effort aimed to popularize a favorable image of Russia and raise interest in the language and culture of that nation among the rest of the globe(Loss, 2021).

## **2.6 Security**

Refers to the set of ideas and concepts used to understand and analyze security issues and problems. It provides a lens through which to view and make sense of the various threats, risks, and challenges to national and international security. The framework includes various schools of thought, including:

1. Realism: Emphasizes the role of power, self-interest, and military strength in maintaining security.
2. Liberalism: Views security in terms of individual freedoms, democracy, and international cooperation.
3. Constructivism: Argues that security is socially constructed and shaped by norms, ideas, and beliefs.
4. Critical security studies: Examines the power dynamics and inequalities in security and the role of security in perpetuating these dynamics.
5. Human security: Broadens the definition of security to include non-military threats to individual and collective well-being, such as poverty, disease, and human rights abuses(Buzan, n.d).

Each of these frameworks offers a different perspective on security and can be used to analyze different security issues. The choice of which framework to use depends on the nature of the security problem and the goals of the analysis.

The concept of security implies the feeling of being safe and secure, the lack of threats, and the management of future risks. However, the concept of security does not only evoke such positive connotations as being safe and free from danger. Inherent in the concept is also the association of objects such as guns, security technologies and even wars—objects not necessarily contributing to making society and the world more secure (Jarvis, Holland, 2014). (Wolfers, n.d, p, 481) defines 'security, in an objective sense, measures the absence of threats to acquired values, in a subjective sense, the absence of fear that such values will be attacked'.

Security is taken to be about the pursuit of freedom from threat and the ability of states and societies to maintain their independent identity and their functional integrity against forces of change, which they see as hostile. The bottom line of security is survival, but it also reasonably includes a substantial range of concerns about the conditions of existence. Quite where this range of concerns ceases to merit the urgency of the “security” label (which identifies threats as significant enough to warrant emergency action and exceptional measures including the use of force) and becomes part of everyday uncertainties of life is one of the difficulties of the concept (Buzan, n.d).

## **2.7 Security threats that Kosovo can face from Russia**

Security is the main issue for a country. That's why protecting security is very important. Especially for the regions which are fragile and in order to maintain its security its necessary influence from international actors. Influence of this international actors should be very carefully seen because for their particular interest can raise conflicts in a region like Western Balkan region, that could have consequences that escalate also in armed conflicts, because of previous historical development. Threats to security can consist in violation of human rights, actions that lead to violence, to particular citizens. The most frequent case of security being violated is the war in Ukraine, where has happened violation of human rights. This type of security threat influence and present a fear in the Western Balkan region too.

When it comes to security Western Balkan countries have tried to save their security. With the last attack of the Russia against Ukraine Western Balkan countries found their situation problematic, in terms of their security. Albania condemned the aggression that happened

and has contributed with this crisis by offering its availability to Ukrainian citizens(Stronski, 2019).

This invasion has been also condemned by state authorities in Bosnia, Montenegro. When it comes to Kosovo this crisis in Ukraine has generated a feeling of fear. Since Kosovo is positioned with the West, it fears that its security may be threatened by the Russian influence that exists in Serbia. For Russia a statement that Kosovo may have against this aggression may be also a pretext to start conflicts. This conflict could benefit Russia since Kosovo is positioned with the West, in rising its threats to West(Stronski, 2019).

## **2.8 Risks that Kosovo possesses that leave space to Russian influence**

(Zamfir, R, 2020) identifies risks and vulnerabilities that can lead external actors to influence Western Balkan countries. From this issues that countries of WB have other actors like Russia can expand their influence on the region. Vulnerabilities consist on four areas that can be economy, society, politics and foreign policy and security. In general risks consist on concentration of power. High level of corruption is another risk that Western Balkan countries face. Also we can mention state capture and organized crime as other risks that concern WB countries. And another vulnerability of the WB countries is impunity of political elites. This vulnerabilities leave space for other actors like Russia to find areas to set place or influence about their interests. This problems like concentration of power can provide space for actors which have bad influence to maneuver and wake ethnic nationalist views and feelings. When it comes to society problems consist on societal divisions and ethnic nationalism. One of the main actors about harmful influence over societies remains media. Continuous efforts from the government and allied media to undermine journalists have left societies without a significant overseer and advocate against propaganda. About the economy vulnerabilities consist on corruption and policies about economy that are weak and poor. Also involvement of nationalist feelings in economic policies such the Kosovo case on raising tariffs on Serbian and Bosnian goods in 2018. About foreign policy, countries which are more weak on formulating their foreign and security policy are more exposed to foreign influence than the ones with a clear foreign policy (Zamir, 2020).

In this literature review developing concepts of power as it is soft power, helps understand better the way that Russia has tried to influence WB and particularly Kosovo. Also analyzing security as a concept helps identifying the issues that can be considered as threats to security, in this case Kosovo security.

As the authors stated soft power is more easily exercised by countries that share the same interests, cultures and values. From this point of view it's very clear that soft power of Russia will be more related to Serbia. Even though Russia may try to exercise soft power influence in Kosovo, it remains limited because Kosovo is more oriented to the West in developing cultural, social, economic ties. According to the literature review WB is a region of interest for Russia because of its political ties with some of the countries. Its historical ties with countries like Serbia make an easier way to engage in the region and expand its influence through soft power because of the shared culture, religion ties with some of the ex-Yugoslavia countries. Its strategy consists on developing economic ties in the region, by raising its influence in the region and having more open opportunities in participating in situations that affect the WB countries which can have an interest also for Russia. As the author states influence of Russia comes also because of the opportunities, the risks and vulnerabilities that Western Balkan countries face that leave space for Russia to exercise its influence.

For WB Russian influence can be also a threat to security taking in consideration the latest development with the invasion of Ukraine, which brings fear to WB countries that have frozen conflicts. In summary, Russia has "limited" soft power. It is constrained for a variety of causes. First of all, it is impossible to conceptualize Russia's possession of a western notion intended for liberal countries and supporting global principles. Russia does have soft power assets, some groups find its political and value system appealing. However, because Russia views soft power differently than other countries, giving the state priority, its influence will always be dependent on the government's budget, which is funded in part by the sale of oil. This implies that the price of a historically volatile good will determine how influential Russia is. Russian soft power is also geographically restricted to Europe and the post-Soviet region. There are boundaries to which social groups will be receptive to Russian soft power, even within this geographical area. For instance, right-wing Europeans, Russian diaspora, and post-Soviet elites are all receptive audiences.



Through a variety of strategies, including cultural diplomacy, media outlets, and backing for pro-Russian political parties, Russia has been striving to expand its soft power influence in Kosovo. However, due to its divisive position on Kosovo's independence and support for Serbia, its operations have been constrained. It is also challenging for Russia to establish a sizable presence in Kosovo because the majority of the population is pro-Western and has close relations to the US and EU. Additional investigation could focus on the precise strategies and actions taken by Russia in its soft power attempts in Kosovo, as well as the success and difficulties it encountered.

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

This study is based on qualitative data. To comprehend people's views, experiences, attitudes, behavior, and interactions, qualitative methods are used. It produces data that is not numerical. Researchers from several disciplines are paying more attention to the integration of qualitative research into intervention studies. Qualitative research uses small samples and is expressed in simple language. Cases selected on the basis of opportunity or purpose are used in qualitative work. It is frequently centered on specific people, things, and circumstances, which lends itself to an idiographic style of analysis (Gerring, 2017).

This study is a qualitative research that analyzes the way that Russia influences in Western Balkans, focusing on the state of Kosovo. In this thesis I will work on literature that helps me achieve the objectives of this thesis. This study is a qualitative research because it is based on non-numerical data and the analysis provided is based on information gathered from secondary documents or reports in order to understand the role, instruments and the areas of influence of Russia in the Western Balkan and how Kosovo is influenced by Russia and the way that it manages this influence. Existing literature was gathered in order to help having the right information for this topic. In order to conduct this research I analysed information from different existing literature, reports, media reports, documents about Russian foreign policy. Then are analyzed reports Kosovo institutions, and also world institutions reports, that help to prepare the analysis of the threats and challenges that Kosovo faces from Russia since its independence. Some of the resources are from: US Department of State, Danish Institute for International Studies, Ministry of foreign affairs of the Russian Federation, International Peace Institute, NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, Institute for the Study of Human Rights, Columbia University, Republic of Kosovo, Energy Regulatory Office, Institute for Regional and International Studies, LSE, EU Foreign Affairs, European Union Office in Kosovo.

## **4.CASE OF KOSOVO**

In this chapter is analysed the influence that Russia has in Kosovo ,the political and social ties between Kosovo and Russia .Role of Russia in Kosovo in terms of its impact on regional stability and security.Also is discussed the impact of Russia investments on the economic development of Kosovo. The role that media and propaganda have in shaping public opinion about Russia and its influence in Kosovo. Also is discussed the ongoing dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia and the role that Russia plays in this dialogue. Lastly are analysedthe threats that Kosovo faces after Ukraine war, EU and USA support towards Kosovo and recommendation on solution of Russian threats.

### **4.1 Political, and social ties between Russia and Kosovo after its independence**

The conflict in Kosovo and the NATO military intervention have caused the worst crisis between the West and Russia since the Cold War and the fall of the Soviet Union, and they also constitute the biggest impasse in ties between the two sides. Russian diplomacy held that the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia's geographical integrity was untouchable, both within the Contact Group and as a member state. As a result, the Russian government insisted on upholding the status quo in Kosovo and the Balkans while attempting to preserve open international borders. Indeed, there were hardly any divisions or arguments between Russia and the West at the outset of the crisis about Kosovo's position as an independent province inside the boundaries of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Jashari,n.d).

Regarding Kosovo's independence, Russia the declaration of independence by Kosovo prompted the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation's Information and Press Department to issue a statement on February 17, 2008, in which it claimed that the declaration of independence by Kosovo violated the sovereignty of the Republic of Serbia, the United Nations Charter, UNSCR 1244, the tenets of the Helsinki Final Act, the framework for Kosovo's constitution, and the agreements reached by the high-level Contact Group. In this statement, it was made clear that Russia fully supported how the Serbian government had responded to the events in Kosovo and that all it wanted in return was for the country to regain its territorial integrity.

Russia anticipated that the UN Mission in Kosovo and the NATO-led Kosovo Force would act right away to carry out their mandates in accordance with the Security Council's approval. This included nullifying the decisions of Pristina's self-governing institutions and enacting harsh administrative sanctions against them. Russia demanded that the UN Security Council convene an emergency meeting right away to assess the situation and take decisive action to resume the political resolution process in accordance with UNSCR 1244. It was hard for the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs to ignore the risk that the Kosovo leadership's policies have increased tension and interethnic strife in the region (Ministry of foreign affairs of the Russian Federation information and press department 216-17-02-2008).

By preventing the UN from recognizing Kosovo's independence, Moscow presents itself as a supporter of Serbia's territorial integrity. As a result, Serbians are more likely to support Russia, and Belgrade is under pressure to keep cordial ties with Moscow. High-level diplomacy aims to strengthen this connection, as seen with Putin's official visit to Belgrade in 2019. With Serbia purchasing additional Russian armaments, such as air defense systems, anti-tank weapons, and drones, bilateral military connections have grown. They train together as soldiers, and some American strategists claim that a Russian-run charity in Nis, Serbia, is a front for information gathering in the region. Unofficially, Russian nationals assist in funding and managing nationalist and paramilitary organizations, including contentious military-style boot camps for young Serbs (McBride, 2022).

## **4.2 The impact of Russian investment and trade on the economic development of Kosovo**

Natural gas exports in particular are the key tool of Russian foreign policy. Energy exports are used by Russia as a security tool with multiple purposes. In order to manage the gas pipelines that travel from Eurasia to Russia and then to Europe, Moscow would be able to regulate the gas prices for its consumers. Moscow wants to get into long-term agreements with the Balkans and other nations, preventing them from freely purchasing gas at genuine market pricing. These "take or pay" provisions are essential to the whole Russian industry (Blank, 2013).

Oil and gas prices have reached their highest levels in almost a decade as a result of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which has also forced numerous nations to reevaluate their energy supplies. Russian oil exports to international markets are the greatest in the world, according to the International Energy Agency. One of the most significant resources used in the European economy is its gas. Due to a lack of gas infrastructure, Kosovo is not directly connected to the Russian or Ukrainian energy markets; yet, the shock has still had an impact on the country's developing economy. Kosovo purchased electricity from the Hungarian Energy Exchange market due to a scarcity of energy, which was adversely impacted by the energy crisis and Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Kosovo is currently creating its 2022–2031 energy plan. The government of Kosovo has a number of options, none of which, with the exception of expenditures in energy efficiency, are "no regrets" scenarios. A sizable portion of families moved from using coal and wood heating sources to electric ones during the winter of 2021–2022, which caused a sizable spike in energy demand, which peaked at 1,400 MW (Office of the Energy Regulator, 2022). The Ukraine crisis has highlighted the need to invest in additional producing facilities, making enhancing energy security a priority. As the New Kosovo fiasco demonstrated, it is expensive to build a new coal-fired power station, and given the possibility that Kosovo would have to enact a carbon tax or emissions trading system, the price per MWh would be excessive. The Ukraine crisis has highlighted the need to invest in additional producing facilities, making enhancing energy security a priority. As the New Kosovo fiasco demonstrated, it is expensive to build a new coal-fired power station, and given the possibility that Kosovo would have to enact a carbon tax or emissions trading system, the

price per MWh would be excessive. Kosovo has the technical capacity to switch to renewable resources using solar and wind technology, according to World Bank studies (World Bank, 2018). Higher security will also be possible thanks to investment in new interconnection lines, regional market integration, and secondary and tertiary reserve investments. The draft Energy Strategy 2022–2031 reveals that among the government's initiatives to support the nation's transition to the energy transition are funding agreements worth €227.3 million with the Millennium Challenge Corporation for battery storage and €64 million with Germany's KfW for solar heating and electricity production, in addition to auctions (Ministry of Economy, 2022). The final goal of the strategy is to produce 35% of the electricity from renewable sources (Berdoniqi, 2022).

Due to the deadlock in bilateral relations brought on by Kosovo's independence and Russia's unwillingness to recognize it, as well as the traditionally close links between Russia and Serbia, economic operations between Kosovo and Russia have been restricted since 2008. According to data for the first half of 2017, Kosovo imported items from Russia for about 10 million euros and exported a small amount of commodities to that country, compared to the almost 450 million euros it spent on goods from the EU-10. Even little trade was conducted with Russia in prior years, but it now appears to be expanding. According to Central Bank of Kosovo, the country imported commodities worth 9.9 million euros from Russia in 2015, and 12.4 million euros in 2016. Russia intends to strengthen its economic influence in Kosovo through investments or contributions to the Serbian community living in northern Kosovo, where Kosovo's central authority exerts only limited control. For instance, media reports from 2011 said that approximately 30 truckloads of help for Serbs were shipped from Russia to Kosovo. Due to the convoy's disregard for Kosovo Customs regulations, it had difficulty entering the country. Moreover, Moscow had given ten trucks to the Civil Defense, a Serbian organization operating illegally in Kosovo's northern region. One of the main pillars of cooperation between Russia and Kosovo is the energy industry. Kosovo imports 650 million liters of oil annually since it lacks a refinery of its own. The Kosovo Oil Distributors Association's representatives point out that a significant portion of the oil that looks to come from Serbia and Bulgaria actually comes from Russia. A political incident involving Russia's role in the energy industry also occurred. In December 2016, Kosovar authorities charged Marko Djuric, the director of the Office for Kosovo in the Government of Serbia, with violating

the sanctions imposed on Russia by the Kosovo government by opening gas stations there. The stations were operated by a Serbian enterprise connected to Gazprom Neft of Russia, which was listed among those particularly prohibited from doing business in Kosovo or having their assets frozen(Project:Western Balkans at the Crossroads,2022).

The impact of Russian investment and trade on the economic development of Kosovo is a complex and multifaceted issue. Russian investment and trade can also be used to exert political influence in Kosovo and undermine its sovereignty. Balancing foreign investment: While Russian investment and trade can be beneficial for Kosovo's economy, it is important to balance these with investments from other countries and international organizations to diversify the economy and reduce dependence on a single partner. While Russian investment and trade have the potential to support economic development in Kosovo, they also carry risks and challenges that must be considered.Although Kosovo is located on a substantial bed of lignite coal seams, the nation is unable to utilize these resources due to corruption and incompetence. Due to untapped resources and a KEK power unit that runs incredibly inefficiently, the newly independent state (officially since February 2008) suffers from severe electrical shortages(Ralchev,2012,p.7).

### **4.3The role of media and propaganda in shaping public opinion about Russia and its influence in Kosovo**

Media and propaganda play a significant role in shaping public opinion about Russia and its influence in the Western Balkans, including Kosovo. Russia has state-controlled media outlets such as RT and Sputnik, which have been used to spread pro-Russian propaganda and disinformation in the Western Balkans, including Kosovo.Sputnik has offices in different countries across the world and its content is available in different languages. While the claim is to offer an objective account of events taking place across the world, different reports proved that the Russian-owned news agency plays a significant role in Kremlin's propaganda by spreading fake, pro-Russia and "anti-Western" content in different areas of the world and on different platforms (Knezevic,2022).

These media outlets can be used to shape public opinion by presenting a biased and misleading view of events and issues in the region. Russia has also been reported to use social media platforms to spread disinformation and manipulate public opinion in the

Western Balkans, including Kosovo. This can be done by creating fake news and propaganda, spreading conspiracy theories, and using bots and other forms of automation to amplify messages and reach a wider audience. Russia has been reported to engage in disinformation campaigns in the Western Balkans, including Kosovo, aimed at undermining public trust in local governments and institutions and spreading false information to manipulate public opinion.

(KIPRED,2021) found analyzed statements, press conferences, articles and other documents from Russia that were published from June 1 to August 15 2021. The report calculated that "out of 500 news articles directly or indirectly related to Kosovo, 96 or 19.2 percent of them contained misinformation. According to the report, the largest number of articles containing disinformation were published by Sputnik Serbia (71 articles), followed by TASS (nine), Russia Today (four), UNZ (four), Sputnik International (three), Russian Insider ( two). ), The Duran (two) and Newsfront (one).The report concludes that Russia is trying to undermine Kosovo's citizenship and Western engagement in Kosovo and the region, and to change the narratives about war crimes in the former Yugoslavia, thus undermining the foundations of international justice. Russian media articles have also accused Kosovo of oppressing local Serbs and the Serbian Orthodox Church, and of not respecting the agreement to create an Association of Serb-Majority Municipalities.

In one article on March 26, 2021, Maria Zakharova, a spokeswoman for the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, accuses Kosovars of atrocities perpetrated against Serbs in 1998–1999. Acting under the cover of NATO aggression, militants from the so-called Kosovo Liberation Army committed terrible crimes, including the kidnapping of Serbs, whose organs were then removed and sold. In another statement dated June 17, 2021, she accuses the US of arming an Albanian military force in Kosovo, which, according to her, constitutes the potential for the outbreak of conflict in the region. Washington intends to establish an "army" on that land, which is a clear and flagrant violation of UN Security Council Resolution 1244, according to her declaration. Following the arrests of the former president, Hashim Thaçi, and the former speaker of the Assembly of Kosovo, Kadri Veseli, in November 2020, the Specialized Chambers of Kosovo received appreciation from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia among others. Additionally, a report from the Kosovo Institute for Policy Research and Development (KIPRED) in March 2021 found that the Russian-controlled media are very active in disinformation campaigns against Kosovo (SOT.COM.AL. 2022, 08 27).



#### **4.4 The impact of Russian interference in the domestic politics of Kosovo, including its impact on the country's democratic institutions and rule of law**

Russian interference in the domestic politics of Kosovo has been a significant issue, with the country being seen as a potential sphere of influence for Russia in the Western Balkans. The impact of this interference on Kosovo's democratic institutions and rule of law can be significant and has the potential to undermine the country's stability and security

Russian interference in Kosovo has also raised security concerns one of the concerns is Russia spies case on Kosovo. The Government of Kosovo declared a person non grata. On May 31, 2019, the Prime Minister of Kosovo, Ramush Haradinaj, announced that Mikhail Krasnoshchenkov, official of the UNMIK mission, officially, but in reality, a Russian agent. The decision was taken against a person who works as an international staff member at the United Nations and has been ordered to leave the territory of the Republic of Kosovo. Krasnoshchenkov, on the day that the Kosovo Police had carried out an action in the northern part of the country, had blocked the road preventing them from carrying out the police operation. He was also arrested there. In the same year, two other Russian women were suspected of having infiltrated Kosovo. In one case it is about Jana Minochkina, who was caught stealing in a clothing bar in Pristina. She worked for a United Nations program, but information from security agencies suggested she was a spy. Minochkina is married to an Albanian from Albania. Because she had immunity as an UNMIK official, the Kosovo authorities could not take the case further (Ahmeti ,Hoxhaj;Albanian Post,2022) .

Another situation is the one with Julia Genadievna Luchevnikova, who was denounced by the citizens, after being identified by taking pictures of the institutions of the Republic of Kosovo. Vjosa Osmani declared Denis Vangerskii and Alexey Krivosheevit as unwanted persons in the territory of Kosovo. They were two officials of the Liaison Office of the Russian Federation in Kosovo. The reason for their deportation was “violation of national security and constitutional order of the Republic of Kosovo”.(Ahmeti ,Hoxhaj;Albanian Post , 2022).

The Minister of Foreign Affairs of Kosovo, Donika Gërvalla, has announced that another Russian has been added to the list of non grata, who this time spied under the guise of the UNMIK official, Andrey Nikolaevich Antonov. Antonov has been engaged in adding the pro-Russian element to the blockades that took place in the north of Kosovo in September 2021, when the Serbs opposed measures for reciprocity with license plates (Ahmeti, Hoxhaj; Albanian Post, 2022).

#### **4.5 Role of Russia in the ongoing dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia and its impact on regional stability and reconciliation**

Russia has played a significant role in the ongoing dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia and its impact on regional stability and reconciliation. Some of the ways in which Russia has influenced the dialogue and its impact on the region: Mediation role: Russia has attempted to play a mediating role in the dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia, offering to facilitate negotiations and broker agreements between the two sides. This has been aimed at advancing Russian interests in the region and consolidating its influence in the Western Balkans. Political influence: Russia has also attempted to exert political influence over both Kosovo and Serbia, using its ties to political parties and leaders in both countries to advance its interests and undermine those of the international community. Obstacle to reconciliation: Russia's involvement in the dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia has also been seen as an obstacle to reconciliation between the two sides, with some suggesting that Russia's interests in the region are not aligned with those of the international community and that it is seeking to undermine efforts to resolve the conflict (Hasani, 2022).

Impact on regional stability: Russia's role in the dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia has also had an impact on regional stability and security, with some suggesting that Russia's actions in the region have contributed to heightened tensions and instability. Controversial positions: Russia's positions on key issues in the dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia, such as the recognition of Kosovo's independence, have also been controversial and have led to criticism from the international community. Since it began in 2011, this EU-facilitated dialogue has resulted in the signing of over 30 agreements, some of which have been advantageous to both countries, such as the freedom of movement, the integration of

judicial and police structures in northern Kosovo Serb municipalities, and Kosovo's participation in regional initiatives(Hasani,2022).

However, neither side has wanted to discuss the most delicate problems. The 2013 agreement to establish the Association of Serb-Majority Municipalities (ASM) is still not in place in Kosovo, and the current administration there has adopted a rigid stance toward negotiation that assumes a successful agreement on "mutual recognition." Kosovo is still the target of Serbia's ongoing diplomatic offensive, which prevents it from receiving international recognition or joining any organizations.It desires the establishment of ASM and will not sign a binding agreement before that occurs. The ASM agreement is unpopular in Kosovo due to concerns about the increased autonomy that Kosovo Serbs would receive if it were to be implemented as well as the potential increase in Belgrade's authority over a portion of Kosovo's territory.The conflict between Kosovo and Serbia allowed Russia to exert further influence in the area. On the other hand, Russia also used the "orthodox brotherhood" between the Serbs and the Russian people to justify its involvement in the Balkans.Thus, Russia had the opportunity to introduce itself and even impose itself as a "alternative" mediator during the ongoing "normalization" debate between Kosovo and Serbia, which was started by the EU.The EU's role as this process' mediator has drawn repeated criticism from Russian President Putin for failing to produce tangible outcomes. As a result, Russia has a propensity to downplay the part the EU should play in this process and portray it as failed.Despite not participating actively in the debate, Russia has the capacity to take part in it. Russia is a key player in the conversation and has the ability to block Kosovo's admission to the UN and full international recognition as an independent state thanks to its veto power in the UN Security Council.Due to these circumstances, Russia had numerous chances to sway the Kosovo-Serbia discussion process in favor of Serbia. But for the dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia to be successfully concluded, the EU-mediated discussions must result in a binding agreement that contains all of the political and technical agreements that Kosovo and Serbia have signed.One could argue that the main assurance of fruitful relations between Kosovo and Serbia is a legally enforceable agreement. Additionally, this would lessen Russian influence in the area(Hasani,2022).

## 4.6 Kosovo threats after Ukraine War

Serbia has once again shown that it is a liability to the EU and NATO by refusing to criticise Russia's war on Ukraine. Moscow could take advantage of this opportunity to increase unrest in the Balkans and lessen Western influence there. The geopolitical trajectory of Serbia needs to be addressed by the EU and the US with more determination since it poses a threat to other nations in the region(Morina,2022).

Kosovo because of the invasion of Ukraine has had tension because of its past .This as a result of past conflict with Serbia and the linkage of Russia with Serbia .For Kosovo Russia emerging this fast in Ukraine ,creates a real problem for Western Balkan countries too. The 1998 Kosovo conflict was the conclusion of years of Yugoslavia official repression of ethnic Albanians, it came nine years after Slobodan Milosevic abolished Kosovo autonomy, placing the province under direct Belgrade administration.The battle between Yugoslav forces and the guerilla Kosovo Liberation Army lasted until June 1999, when NATO launched a three-month bombing operation against Serbia in an attempt to drive Milosevic forces out of Kosovo. When the Ukraine war broke out, Kosovo was eager to declare its support: a government building was lit up in the Ukrainian flag yellow and blue colors. Kosovo has also offered support to 20 Ukrainian journalists and committed to take in 5,000 refugees.

Through its military-intelligence base in Serbia, Russia's intervention in the region is likely to intensify. Provoking incidents in Kosovo to "defend" the Serb minority, as it claimed to do with Russian-speaking residents in eastern Ukraine, could be in the Kremlin's script. Russia's invasion of Ukraine, according to Kosovo Prime Minister Albin Kurti, reveals that "the Western Balkans are in even greater danger than the Baltic nations and Moldova, because Russia would have divided some of its military force there"(Lumezi,2022).

Serbia and Russia have a mutual cultural affinity and a stable political partnership, making Belgrade a crucial actor on the periphery of Putin latest military expedition, inexorably drawing Kosovo onto the list of flashpoint sites in the region that could experience a war spillover. Serbia does not recognize Kosovo as an independent country, and there are fears that the conflict in Ukraine would give Serbia the capacity to invade the country northern regions, which are primarily populated by ethnic Serbs. Serbia finds itself in a tough

situation after relying on Russia backing in the area and over the Kosovo problem for so long. What Russia has done in Ukraine empowers Kosovo to press for more its recognition. Serbia, on the other hand, can no longer rely on Russia to back up its denial of Kosovo statehood. If Moscow were to help Belgrade in this circumstance, it would be widely mocked and would have no diplomatic standing. The issue remains, however, reports that Kosovo has dispatched mercenaries to Ukraine, which, in the worst-case scenario, may be used as a justification for Serbian or Russian military intervention. Kosovo is still firmly pro-Ukraine and has vowed its complete support to Kyiv. Following a meeting with US Ambassador to Pristina Jeff Hovenier, President Vjosa Osmani said she is working with friends to prevent any destabilization in the region. Kosovo, like Albania, is fiercely pro-EU and pro-US, and owes a debt of gratitude to NATO for saving it from Serbian aggression and genocide during the Kosovo-Serbia war. The only genuine pro-Russian attitude comes from ethnic Serbs and pro-Serbian political parties, which de facto support the Moscow regime. They have limited clout and will have no influence over the country political or security policies( Hasani, 2018).

The Assembly of Kosovo also discussed the crisis in Ukraine and adopted a 12-point resolution. In addition to condemning Russian aggression against Ukraine, the Assembly opposed the approach and conduct of countries linked to Russian aggression and terror against Ukraine, starting with its northern neighbor, Serbia.

The Assembly urged the government, in addition to the readiness to house 20 Ukrainian journalists, to coordinate all further actions with international partners, as well as to express readiness for the eventual accommodation of up to 5,000 refugees from Ukraine. He also called for the creation of a special fund to help the Ukrainian people, coordinated between the two respective governments, Kosovo and Ukraine. Kosovo has also become more interested in joining NATO as a result of the situation in Ukraine. A European state does not need to be a member of the United Nations to join NATO, according to the North Atlantic Treaty of 1949, the alliance's founding instrument. It must, however, recognize the treaty's principles and contribute to Euro-Atlantic security (Article 10). By presenting Western support and the legitimacy of the action as "humanitarian," NATO's military intervention in Kosovo has introduced a new paradigm to the world community. This portrayal, nevertheless, wasn't without controversy, and it spurred a discussion about

international law and order. Russia has supported Serbia in the international arena, opposing the Western viewpoint and denouncing the involvement in Kosovo as unjust and against international law. Russia has so utilized the Kosovo situation as a strategic opening to take back control of the global order(Hasani, 2018).

Kosovo's accession to NATO would benefit the alliance in two ways: it would strengthen the alliance's southern wing, and NATO would protect Kosovo's territorial integrity under the Article 5 reciprocal protection clause, even if it meant that NATO-led KFOR's international peacekeeping base would close soon. Turkey and Croatia support Kosovo's NATO membership, while US Congressman Ritchie Torres, a New York Democrat, wrote to US President Joe Biden in support of Kosovo's goals. In addition, following the suspension of Russia by the Council of Europe, the government of Kosovo declared that it will apply for membership. Kosovo will step up its diplomatic efforts in the hopes of joining NATO, the EU, and the Council of Europe. She has crucial assistance in achieving at least one of her objectives. According to Manuel Sarrazin, Germany's special ambassador for the Western Balkans, Germany supports Kosovo's participation in the Council of Europe. Kosovo's government also hopes to gain EU candidate status this year, with Croatian President Zoran Milanovic endorsing Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina's EU aspirations (Reka,2022).

#### **4.7USA and EU support toward Kosovo sovereignty**

With equal opportunity and protection for all of its residents, Kosovo will become a just and wealthy democracy within Europe with the aid of the US government. The three objectives of peace, justice, and prosperity are the focus of US foreign assistance to Kosovo. Support from the US facilitates peace by facilitating the normalization of relations between Kosovo and Serbia and fostering interethnic cooperation inside Kosovo. The US national security goals in Kosovo are advanced by security assistance, such as education, training, and military hardware. These goals include the gradual and transparent transformation of the Kosovo Security Force (KSF) into a modern, multiethnic, NATO-interoperable force, with a territorial protection mandate(U. D. O. S.,2021).

U.S. assistance aims to create accountable and transparent government institutions, such as the police and the judiciary, in order to fight corruption, strengthen the rule of law, and contribute to the creation of a society where marginalized and vulnerable groups (beginning with women) have equal access to opportunities and a voice. Since 2017, the Ministry of Justice has been in charge of a multi-year study of the justice industry with the goal of creating a strategy and putting it into action. These initiatives continue to receive considerable backing from the EU and the US. In order to increase prosperity, US support strengthens competition in the private sector, aids Kosovo in securing its energy security, enhances a welcoming investment climate, and aims to unleash the potential of an entrepreneurial class, including a vibrant and expanding technology sector (U. D. O. S. ,2021).

Additionally, the United States is collaborating with the Kosovo government to put into effect the MCC Threshold Program, which promotes Kosovo's credible energy landscape and responsible governance. The new Compact program, which is centered on energy supply and is being developed jointly by the Government of Kosovo and MCC, is anticipated to be approved by the end of 2021. To preserve a safe and secure environment and complete freedom of movement for all Kosovo civilians, US troops continue to be a part of the NATO-led Kosovo Force (KFOR). Of the 28 nations sending soldiers, the United States provides the most KFOR. The State Partnership Program, run by the Iowa National Guard and established in 2011, seeks to establish and grow relationships with the KSF over time, aiding Kosovo in advancing security and interregional cooperation. The connection between Iowa and Kosovo now includes commercial, trade, and academic cooperation in addition to the security sphere. The only nation with a consulate in Des Moines, Iowa, is Kosovo. In the State Cooperation Program, this partnership exemplifies best practices (U. D. O. S. ,2021).

The European Union has, since 1999, taken the lead in global efforts to create a new future for Kosovo, according to the European Union Office in Kosovo. Being a member of the larger Western Balkans region, Kosovo has a very distinct European worldview. The European Union Office in Kosovo is essential to advancing European standards and implementing the EU agenda in the region. The office makes ensuring that Kosovo and EU institutions are in constant political and technical communication. Through its Special

Representative (EUSR), which advises and assists the Kosovo government, organizes the EU's presence in Kosovo, and promotes human rights and basic freedoms, the EU is also involved there. Additionally, the European Union Mission for the Rule of Law in Kosovo (EULEX), which is part of the Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP), supports the relevant institutions of the rule of law in Kosovo as they work to become more effective, sustainable, multiethnic, and accountable while remaining free from political interference and in strict accordance with European best practices and international human rights norms(European Union Office in Kosovo,2021).

The Stabilization-Association Process (PSA) is the foundation for EU strategy in relations with Western Balkan nations up until those nations' eventual union membership. All sides benefit from the EU's cooperation with the Western Balkans, which fosters peace, stability, freedom, security, and justice as well as prosperity and a high standard of living. PSA encourages regional collaboration, stabilization and the shift to a market economy, as well as preparedness for EU accession.

As part of the Stabilization and Association Process Dialogue, the EU has regularly met with Kosovar authorities (SAPD). This tracks the development of the EU enlargement process (see Economic Relations section below). The Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA) between the EU and Kosovo entered into force on April 1, 2016, and as a result, subcommittees have been formed to develop the SAA's framework for interaction. Thirteen EU member state embassies in Kosovo, several of which are in charge of their own financial support initiatives, collaborate with the European Union Office in Kosovo. There are representative offices in four additional member states. There are numerous non-governmental organizations operating in Kosovo from EU nations. In addition to our financial support, the EU has a number of measures to encourage economic development in the context of the Stabilization Association Process (PSA, see above), which aims to bring Kosovo in line with European standards. These mechanisms include trade concessions and treaties(European Union Office in Kosovo,2021). International integration is an effective instrument that Kosovo as a small state need to use. This policy has to be promoted more and to be considered as a key foreign policy alternative. In this way Kosovo will open a lot of possibilities to increase its appeal to other states in globalized world. In this regard, most of the scholars argue that large states have greater



chances of going it alone, if they choose so, whereas small states have a strong incentive to join organizations to enhance their relative power to achieve foreign policy goals (Marleku ,2012).

#### **4.8 Recommendations on solutions of Russian threat**

In order to face the threats that can come from Russia Kosovo needs to strengthen its national security.) The security of territorial integrity and sovereignty is the main focus of the 2022–2027 Kosovo security policy. Protection of territorial integrity and sovereignty is carried out in complete coordination and collaboration with the presence of an international military presence commanded by NATO as well as with Kosovo's strategic allies (Kosovo Security strategy 2022-2027, p.10).

Building and Maintaining a Strong Defense System Institutions for security and defense are further strengthened through ongoing investments in people, technology, and defense systems. The main duty of the Kosovo Security Force is to defend the independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity of the Republic of Kosovo against potential dangers and threats. For the aim of achieving goals and completing the mission, the Kosovo Security Force develops and maintains military assets for defense, mobility, and manoeuvrability, as well as other combat support capabilities. Institutions in the Republic of Kosovo will develop the skills essential for quickly identifying and countering hybrid threats that are organized and directed by adversarial governments, organizations, groupings, or individuals in collaboration with other states and partner organizations. The Republic of Kosovo intends to increase spending on defense up to 2% of GDP, which will result in higher budgetary plots and expenditures across the board for security. The organizational structure of the security and defense sector will continue to be revised in order to accommodate the changing security environment and new duties required for the implementation and maintenance of the most important national interests. In accordance with local circumstances, conditions, and resources, the Republic of Kosovo will also evaluate the potential of building an adequate reserve force model and that of a conscription service in line with modern Western Countries' practices. The Republic of Kosovo is dedicated to fostering the growth of the defense industry. One of the most important challenges is energy sustainability, which has a direct impact on national

security, economic growth, and citizen welfare. The Republic of Kosovo will take action to strengthen the management of the energy sector, deal with shifting energy markets in the area and in Europe, numerous emergencies and catastrophes, aging infrastructure, hybrid threats, and cyberattacks. The improvement of existing and new renewable energy capacity, investments in energy infrastructure (interconnection and storage), the advancement of policies and implementation measures for renewable energy, and energy efficiency as a whole are the means by which the security of the energy supply and the sustainability of this sector are achieved(Kosovo Security strategy 2022-2027, p.17).

International Relations :The interest and aspirations of the people of Kosovo for membership in Euro-Atlantic organizations, such as NATO, the European Union, and the United Nations, as the only assurance of long-term peace, stability, and security in the region, are reflected in the foreign and security policy of the Republic of Kosovo. With the complete collaboration and coordination of Kosovo's friends and partner nations, Kosovo will step up its diplomatic efforts to realize this strategic objective. Foreign policy will improve international subjectivity in this regard, particularly by recognition from the five EU nations that have not yet recognized Kosovo. Developing and strengthening bilateral ties as well as joining international and regional security groups play a specific significance in maintaining security.

The foundation of bilateral relations continues to be the development of a strategic relationship with the Republic of Albania, with a particular focus on the strengthening and deepening of ties and partnerships with the United States of America, its allies in Europe, and the region's neighbors. In order to be a dependable partner and a contributor to peace in the region and beyond, Kosovo will align its foreign and security policy with that of the EU. Kosovo supports friendly nations in maintaining peace and security and is a member of the international coalition fighting terrorism. A sign of Kosovo's commitment to international security is its increased involvement in military operations abroad and its planned reception of humanitarian evacuations of refugees. The Republic of Kosovo bases its foreign policy on the values of justice, cooperation, and good neighborliness, as well as peace and stability with other nations in the region and beyond. In light of this, Kosovo encourages good neighborly relationships, is dedicated to strengthening strategic ties and regional partnerships, and actively participates in regional organizations and initiatives that

advance the country's integration into the European Union and the conclusion of dialogue with Serbia through mutual recognition (Kosovo Security strategy 2022-2027, p.18).

## CONCLUSIONS

### 5.1 Conclusions

To conclude this thesis provides the knowledge about the way that Russia has influenced Western Balkan, its influence is important but also needs attention from the Western Balkans countries as it is a fragile region. Russia's point of support in the Western Balkan region has been Serbia and it continues to be, in this way being one of the main supporters of Russia influence in the Western Balkan. As discussed in the thesis different authors state that Russia has been engaging in the region through its cultural ties, its political ties, economy and history. One of the interests of Russia in the Western Balkans seems to prevent the region to have closer linkage with the West like EU or NATO. When it comes to political situation between Kosovo and Russia, Russia prevents the UN from recognizing Kosovo as an independent state.

Considered a significant actor in the Western Balkans is Russia. Russia has fought to keep its influence in the region and has traditionally had strong relations with Serbia. In addition to using its veto power in the UN Security Council to prevent efforts to recognize Kosovo's independence, Russia has supported Serbia both militarily and economically. Russia has also attempted to improve ties with other Western Balkan nations through investments in the energy sector and other sectors. Concerned about Russia's position in the Western Balkans is the EU and NATO, which aim to promote stability and integration in the region. The EU and NATO are attempting to counter the impact of Russia, which they perceive as a possible source of destabilization, through expanded participation and support for democratic institutions in the Western Balkans. In conclusion, Russia has had a variety of influences on Kosovo, which declared its independence from Serbia in 2008.

Russia has supported Serbia's claim that Kosovo's independence is unconstitutional and hasn't acknowledged Kosovo as a sovereign state. Russia has used its veto power in the UN Security Council to oppose any resolution that would validate Kosovo's independence. In addition, Russia has economic ties with Serbia that it has exploited to impact Serbia's foreign policy toward Kosovo. These linkages include mining and energy. Russia has given Serbia military assistance, training, and the sale of weapons and other gear. This military collaboration is thought to be a strategy for preserving Russian power in the Balkans. Since the Western Balkans is a problematic point, more work needs to be done to create reliable institutional frameworks. It is important to pay more attention to the dangers that these nations face, such as the weak state institutions and the corruption that makes it possible for other actors to exert influence. It is important to leverage these issues to its advantage.

According to how Kosovo should respond to Russian influence, it is usual for nations to try to maintain equilibrium in their interactions with a number of significant international actors, including Russia, in order to advance their own domestic objectives. The government and people of Kosovo would have to evaluate the situation in light of Russian threats in order to decide the best way to advance the security and interests of their nation. This could entail a variety of actions, such as expanding diplomatic engagement with Russia and addressing their concerns, or working more closely with other nations and international institutions to reduce Russian influence. In addition to considering its own national interests and the welfare of its citizens, Kosovo must act in accordance with international law and its responsibilities as a member of the international community. It might also be helpful in this regard to ask allies and other friendly nations for help and guidance.

In conclusion some of the points that Kosovo can focus on to ensure its security are:

- Strengthening its defense capabilities: Kosovo can invest in its military and security forces to enhance its ability to defend against any potential threats.
- Building strong partnerships: Kosovo can seek to strengthen its relationships with other countries and international organizations, such as NATO and the European Union, to increase its security through collective defense and cooperation.
- Fostering stability and security in the region: Kosovo can work with its neighbors to address regional security challenges and promote peace and stability.

- Encouraging economic development: A strong and growing economy can help Kosovo to address social and political challenges and enhance its overall security and stability.
- Addressing internal security challenges: Kosovo can focus on addressing internal security challenges, such as organized crime, corruption, and extremism, to ensure the safety and well-being of its citizens.
- Maintaining a strong rule of law: Kosovo can ensure that its justice system is effective, transparent, and impartial, and that the rights of its citizens are protected and upheld.

## **5.2 Future expectations**

This thesis has provided some recommendations on how Kosovo countries should react towards Russian influence. Especially in this thesis is provided information about how the structures of EU should act in order to minimize the role of Russia in the region, specifically after the invasion of Ukraine. It would be better that future researches on this topic add some interviews or questionnaires with appropriate state authorities, about the way that Russia influences WB region and Kosovo.

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