



# On Pan-Slavism, Brotherhood, and Mythology: The Imagery of Contemporary Geopolitical Discourse in Serbia

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## INTRODUCTION

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1 Generally used to denote and promote a belief in Slavic unity,<sup>1</sup> the term  
2 'Pan-Slavism' is characterized by a conceptual vagueness that has led to  
3 many different manifestations in the imagining of 'Slavic identities'. In  
4 this regard, the term Pan-Slavism can be viewed as an 'umbrella term'

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Maxwell, A. (2018). 'Effacing Pan Slavism: Linguistic Classification and Historio-graphic Misrepresentation', *Nationalities Papers*, 46(4), pp. 1–21.

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embracing myriad Pan-Slavic projects featuring ethnic, cultural, linguistic, confessional, and socio-political heterogeneity.<sup>2</sup>

In this chapter, we seek to analyse the impact of Pan-Slavic ideas on the framing of Serbia's contemporary collective identity. More specifically, we attempt to answer the question of whether, in what ways, and to what extent Serbian political leaders have framed Serbia's foreign policy, and thus also its identity, by mobilizing Pan-Slavic ideas starting from the period of the democratic changes in Serbia initiated in 2000. In so doing, we are focusing on discursive manifestations of Slavic solidarity through the 'special relations' between Serbia and Russia.

This task calls for some clarifications. Firstly, the term 'Pan-Slavism' used in this chapter is understood as a concept denoting the historical tendency of the Slavic peoples 'to manifest in any tangible way, whether cultural or political, their consciousness of ethnic kinship'.<sup>3</sup> In line with this conceptualization of Pan-Slavism, we argue that Pan-Slavic manifestations range from vague expressions of Slavic cultural solidarity to more or less specific programmes for the political unification or regional grouping of multiple Slavic nations. In this chapter, we also suggest that contemporary forms of Pan-Slavism generated by political elites after 1989 do not necessarily have the ambition of creating a greater, formally sovereign Pan-Slavic entity. They can also be viewed as a 'lower intensity sentiment' within Slavic polities today,<sup>4</sup> i.e., as various manifestations of solidarity and unity, based on Slavic ethnocultural kinship. It is this understanding of the term Pan-Slavism that this chapter is based upon.

Secondly, this chapter is oriented towards discursive manifestations of Pan-Slavic ideas through the relationship between Serbia and Russia. It is argued that post-1989 Pan-Slavism has lost its rationale as an instrument for the mass mobilization of Slavic nations and as a tool of legitimizing Soviet hegemony. In the case of Serbia, however, it has continued to exist

<sup>2</sup> Suslov, M. (2012). 'Geographical Metanarratives in Russia and the European East: Contemporary Pan-Slavism', *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, 53(5), pp. 575–595; Terzić, S. (2006). 'About Eastern and Western PanSlavism (in the XIX and the Beginning of the XX Century)', *Historical Review*, LIII, pp. 317–332.

<sup>3</sup> Petrovich, B. (1956). *The Emergence of Russian Pan Slavism 1856–1870*. New York: Columbia University Press.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Dedominicis, B. (2017) 'Pan-Slavism and Soft Power in Post-Cold War South-east European International Relations: Competitive Interference and Smart Power in the European Theatre of the Clash of Civilizations', *International Journal of Interdisciplinary Civic and Political Studies*, 12(3), pp. 1–17.

34 in some forms—not as an articulated ideology but more as a set of new  
 35 and old myths.<sup>5</sup> This phenomenon is visible through the revival of the  
 36 ‘special relations’ with Russia after 1989, which have assumed various  
 37 discursive manifestations from the 1990s onwards. Hence, this concept  
 38 is becoming something close to Russophilia, expressed in the discursive  
 39 construction by political elites of a Serbian-Russian ethnocultural and  
 40 religious closeness through the concepts of friendship and brotherhood,  
 41 including solidarity, strong national emotions, mutual sacrifice, etc. It  
 42 is argued that Pan-Slavic ideas in Serbia are manifested as a mytholog-  
 43 ized attachment to Russia with different degrees of ‘sentiment intensity’  
 44 depending on the specific context. The focus is on how and to what  
 45 extent Serbian political elites produce geopolitical knowledge and thus  
 46 legitimize brotherly narratives between Serbia and Russia.

47 Thirdly, the period analysed in this chapter covers turbulent years  
 48 in Serbian political history that highlight the importance of the impact  
 49 of Slavic closeness on Serbian-Russian relations. Namely, all Serbian  
 50 governments after 2000 have reaffirmed EU membership as their key  
 51 foreign policy goal, showing their commitment to the European inte-  
 52 gration process and membership in the EU. However, unlike some other  
 53 European post-communist states which, immediately after the Cold War  
 54 and regime change, identified themselves with Europe/the EU, Serbia’s  
 55 process of collective identification with the EU is ambiguous, primarily  
 56 due to its isolation from Europe and the negative ‘reputation’ built up  
 57 during the 1990s—as well as being due, at the same time, to a strong  
 58 emotional attachment to Russia. This isolation has also contributed to  
 59 the prolongation of the use of Pan-Slavic ideas in Serbian-Russian rela-  
 60 tions. At the same time, there was also a need for ‘a story’ about the  
 61 geopolitically imagined position of Serbia after 2000 as situated between  
 62 the EU and Russia. Moreover, the contemporary geopolitical context  
 63 marked by tensions between Russia and the EU amplifies the anxiety  
 64 among Serbian political elites around their geopolitical imagination of  
 65 Serbia. In the light of these trends, this chapter attempts to analyse how  
 66 Serbian political leaders have discursively constructed a ‘balance of anxi-  
 67 ety’ and, more specifically, how they have framed Serbian foreign policy  
 68 in the contemporary context of East–West confrontation.

<sup>5</sup> Perica, V. (2009) ‘Sumrak panslavenskih mitova’, In: Čolović, I. (ed) *Zid je mrtav, živeli zidovi*, Biblioteka XX vek, Beograd, pp. 303–325.

The chapter draws upon official statements and speeches delivered by the Serbian political elite from 2000 onwards, including by prime ministers, presidents of the Republic, and party leaders. Political elites are understood as ‘entrepreneurs of identity’.<sup>6</sup> In the process of promoting change or upholding the status quo, political elites ‘are faced with the task of aligning their political goals with national identity in order to gain power and authority to shape collective action’.<sup>7</sup> Thus, as entrepreneurs of identity, political leaders discursively manage the relationship between continuity and change in identity over time, with a view to constructing the future of a nation.

The chapter relies on critical geopolitics and therefore considers geopolitical discourses as being associated with establishing practices of knowledge production.<sup>8</sup> Critical geopolitics highlights the importance of socially constructed geographies as ways of legitimizing foreign policy doctrines.<sup>9</sup> It understands geopolitics as a discourse that produces geopolitical knowledge. Knowledge is closely linked to power: all power requires knowledge, and all knowledge relies upon and reinforces existing power relations.<sup>10</sup> Thus, knowledge cannot be neutral but shapes power relations. Geopolitical discourses, therefore, are not the ‘language of truth’

<sup>6</sup> Obradović, S. & Howarth, C. (2017). ‘The Power of Politics: How Political Leaders in Serbia Discursively Manage Identity Continuity and Political Change to Shape the Future of the Nation’, *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 48(1), pp. 25–35.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Dalby, S. (1991). ‘Critical Geopolitics: Discourse, Difference, and Dissent’, *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 1(1), pp. 349–363; Ó Tuathail, G. (1996). *Critical Geopolitics*. London: Routledge; Ó Tuathail, G. (1998). ‘Thinking Critically About Geopolitics’, in G Tuathail et al. (eds) *The Geopolitics Reader*. London: Routledge, pp. 1–12; Agnew, J. (2003). *Geopolitics. Revisioning World Politics*. 2nd Edition. London and New York: Routledge; Agnew, J. (2004). ‘Is Geopolitics a Word that Should Be Endowed Only with the Meaning It Acquired in the Early Twentieth Century?’, *Progress in Human Geography*, 28(5), pp. 634–637; Mamadouh, V. & Dijkink, G. (2006). ‘Geopolitics, International Relations and Political Geography: The Politics of Geopolitical Discourse’, *Geopolitics*, 11(3), pp. 349–366; Toal, G. (2003). ‘Re-asserting the Regional: Political Geography and Geopolitics in World Thinly Known’, *Political Geography*, 22(6), pp. 653–655.

<sup>9</sup> Agnew, J. (2003). *Geopolitics. Revisioning World Politics*, op.cit.

<sup>10</sup> Jackson, R. & Sørensen, G. (2013). ‘Post-Positivism in IR’, In: Jackson, R. and Sørensen, G., *Introduction to International Relations. Theories and Approaches*. 5th Edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 235.

88 but ‘seek to establish and assert their own truth’.<sup>11</sup> In other words,  
 89 geopolitical discourses do not merely describe the world, or transmit  
 90 statements and speeches, but rather give meaning or make sense of  
 91 ‘geographical reality’. They produce geopolitical knowledge ‘to aid the  
 92 practice of statecraft and further the power of the state’.<sup>12</sup> In this regard,  
 93 critical geopolitics seeks to reveal the hidden politics of geopolitical  
 94 knowledge, i.e., to deconstruct the ways in which geopolitical knowledge  
 95 is created around international crises, actors, and events.<sup>13</sup> It highlights  
 96 the need for the ‘denaturalization’ of geopolitical imageries through a  
 97 critical approach towards the discourses that shape them, i.e., by chal-  
 98 lenging claims of objectivity and of the independent existence of truth.  
 99 This chapter is focused on so-called practical geopolitics for the establish-  
 100 ment of practices of knowledge production.<sup>14</sup> It examines the geopolitical  
 101 discourses of the Serbian political elite in order to demonstrate how they  
 102 socially construct and politically contest the geopolitical positioning of  
 103 Serbia. In this regard, the chapter sheds light on how the Serbian political  
 104 elites construct narratives about the Serbian-Russian ‘special relationship’  
 105 by using Pan-Slavic sentiments, how they represent this relationship to  
 106 explain crisis situations, and how they develop strategies and solutions to  
 107 these situations.

108 Academic literature exploring Pan-Slavism and Serbian-Russian rela-  
 109 tions is, with rare exceptions, almost exclusively focused on the nineteenth  
 110 century. Some isolated events and periods are especially examined in this

<sup>11</sup> Ó Tuathail, G. (1998). ‘Thinking Critically About Geopolitics’, op.cit., p. 3.

<sup>12</sup> Ó Tuathail, G. & Agnew, J. (1992). ‘Geopolitics and Discourse. Practical Geopolitical Reasoning in American Foreign Policy’, *Political Geography*, 11(2), p. 192.

<sup>13</sup> Ó Tuathail, G. (1998). ‘Thinking Critically About Geopolitics’, op.cit., p. 3; Ó Tuathail G. (2002). ‘Theorizing Practical Geopolitical Reasoning: The Case of the United States’ Response to the War in Bosnia’, *Political Geography*, 21, p. 603.

<sup>14</sup> Ó Tuathail G. and Dalby, S. (1998). ‘Introduction: Rethinking Geopolitics. Towards a Critical Geopolitics’, In: Ó Tuathail, G. and Dalby, S. (eds) *Rethinking Geopolitics*. London: Routledge, p. 5.

111 regard.<sup>15</sup> Despite a plethora of works from different angles on contem-  
 112 porary Serbian-Russian relations from 1990 onwards, those examining  
 113 the role of Pan-Slavic sentiments in the Serbian-Russian relations of the  
 114 period featured in this chapter are virtually non-existent, although there  
 115 are some exceptions.<sup>16</sup> In Serbia, especially in the last 20 years, there has  
 116 been a ‘hyper-production’ of books and articles related to Serbian-Russian  
 117 relations and modern Russian politics and politicians. However, works  
 118 linking Serbian-Russian relations since the 1990s with Pan-Slavic senti-  
 119 ments are virtually non-existent. Hence, the aim of this chapter is to fill  
 120 this gap in the existing literature and to draw attention to the importance  
 121 of this underexplored topic.

122 The chapter will be structured as follows. First, the mythologization  
 123 of the Pan-Slavic geopolitical imagination in Serbian-Russian relations  
 124 will be analysed. More specifically, this section focuses on deeply rooted  
 125 perceptions of Russian-Serbian closeness, based on historical experience  
 126 of war alliances, cultural kinship, and their shared Orthodox religion. The  
 127 chapter then focuses on the period from the disintegration of Yugoslavia  
 128 until the 2000 democratic changes in Serbia. It is argued that Serbia’s  
 129 ‘exceptional’ case in the 1990s created fertile ground for a revival of  
 130 Pan-Slavic ideology through Serbian-Russian relations. The next section  
 131 is devoted to the period from 2000 down to the present. It is argued  
 132 that in this period, although it ceased to exist as an ideology, Pan-Slavic  
 133 sentiments have persisted in the foreign policy discourse of the Serbian  
 134 political elite through a resurgence of old myths of Slavic solidarity in  
 135 order to construct the geopolitical ‘specificity’ of Serbia and to ‘balance  
 136 the anxiety’ arising from East–West confrontation.

<sup>15</sup> E.g., Milojković Đurić J. (1994). *Pan-Slavism and National Identity in Russia and in the Balkans 1830–1880: Images of Self and Others*. New York: Columbia University Press; MacKenzie, D. (1967). *The Serbs and the Russian Pan-Slavism 1875–1878*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press; Petrovich, B. (1956). *The Emergence of Russian Pan-Slavism*, op.cit.; Vovchenko, D. (2016). *Containing Balkan Nationalism: Imperial Russia and Ottoman Christians 1856–1914*. Oxford University Press; Kohn, H. (1960) *Pan-Slavism, Its History and Ideology*. New York: Vintage Books; Terzić, S. (2006). ‘About Eastern and Western PanSlavism (in the XIX and the Beginning of the XX Century)’, op.cit.

<sup>16</sup> Perica, V. (2009). ‘Sumrak panslavenskih mitova’, op.cit.; Cohen, L. (1994). ‘Russia and the Balkans: Pan-Slavism, Partnership and Power’, *International Journal*, 49(4), pp. 814–845; Vujačić, V. (2015). *Nationalism, Myth, and the State in Russia and Serbia*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

137 THE MYTHOLOGIZATION OF THE ‘BROTHERHOOD’  
138 BETWEEN SERBIA AND RUSSIA

139 Historically, Pan-Slavic ideas in Serbia and Russia have not had a common  
140 focus; while Russian Pan-Slavism was primarily directed against Germany,  
141 Serbian Pan-Slavism was always more tied up with anti-Ottoman senti-  
142 ments.<sup>17</sup> The Pan-Slavic ‘traditional friendship’ between Serbia and  
143 Russia can thus be regarded as the spreading of Russian Pan-Slavism,  
144 which emerged under the specific geopolitical context of the Balkan  
145 states striving to free themselves from Ottoman occupation. For Serbian  
146 political leaders under Ottoman rule, the Slavic idea was constructed  
147 in terms of support and help from Russia in their efforts to liberate  
148 themselves from foreign occupation. In their imagery, this was a ‘special  
149 relationship’ based on the cultural kinship and closeness between the two  
150 Slavic Orthodox nations. Throughout almost all the nineteenth century,  
151 Russia was perceived as Serbia’s protector and patron in the Ottoman  
152 Empire. Moreover, this specific context enabled the construction of the  
153 relationship between Russia and Serbia around the concept of brother-  
154 hood, representing Russia as a ‘powerful elder brother’ who protected a  
155 smaller and weaker sibling. Thus, closeness between the two nations was  
156 constructed on an idea of a special relationship creating a meaningful,  
157 natural, almost-familial link between the two nations extending beyond  
158 formal diplomacy and realpolitik.<sup>18</sup>

159 On the other hand, the Russian Pan-Slavic ideology was constructed  
160 on the primacy of Russia among Slavic nations, and on their unity under  
161 its protection.<sup>19</sup> This was in line with the constructed picture of Russia as  
162 leader of an awakened Slavism in the geopolitical imagery of nineteenth-  
163 century Serbian political elites. Russia was constructed as a ‘patron’ (from  
164 the Latin *patronus*, ‘protector’), enabling the construction of a metapho-  
165 rical kinship between Serbia and Russia, i.e., a treatment of non-blood  
166 relations as kin, with all the duties, obligations, and expectations that

<sup>17</sup> Andersen, M. (2000). ‘Russia and the Former Yugoslavia’, In: Webber, M. (ed) *Russia and Europe. Conflict or Cooperation*. London: Macmillan, p. 183.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Pierzynska, J. (2020). ‘With a Little Help from New Friend? Ideas of International Brotherhood in Postcommunist Contexts’, *Europe-Asia Studies*, 72(9), pp. 1554–1576.

<sup>19</sup> Petrovich, B. (1956). *The Emergence of Russian Pan Slavism 1856–1870*, op.cit., p. 103.

167 entails.<sup>20</sup> Such imagined and fictional kinship is devoid of any claims to  
 168 shared ancestry. At the same time, it also implies hierarchy, as reflected  
 169 in the construction of Russia's historical development and its great power  
 170 politics as being of great significance for the determination of the fate of  
 171 small or otherwise disadvantaged states (e.g., Serbia). This patronage is  
 172 well explained in the *Epistle from Moscow to the Serbs* written by Alexis  
 173 Khomiakov in 1860:

174 Let it be permitted to us, your brethren, who love you with profound and  
 175 sincere love and who are spiritually pained at the very thought of any evil  
 176 befalling you, to turn to you with some warnings and counsels (...) we are  
 177 older than you in recorded history. We have passed through more varied  
 178 if not more difficult trials than you.<sup>21</sup>

179 Closeness to Russia was also significant in cultural and religious terms:  
 180 cultural closeness connected to a shared Byzantine heritage led to this  
 181 patron relationship with and closeness to a Russia viewed as an empire  
 182 linked to the Orthodox Christian peoples of the Balkans.<sup>22</sup> At the same  
 183 time, Serbian society of that period was largely traditional, strongly influ-  
 184 enced by patriarchal values, and 'burdened' by the past and deeply rooted  
 185 myths.<sup>23</sup> Traditionally, Serbian people have perceived Russia as culturally  
 186 civilizationally akin to Serbia. This is also due to the intense cooperation  
 187 between the Serbian and Russian Orthodox Churches since the Middle  
 188 Ages.

<sup>20</sup> Neumann, I. et al. (2018). 'Kinship in International Relations: Introduction and Framework', In: Haugevik K. and Neumann, I. B. (eds) *Kinship in International Relations*. London: Routledge.

<sup>21</sup> Petrović, B. (1956). *The Emergence of Russian Pan Slavism 1856–1870*, op.cit., p. 99.

<sup>22</sup> Petrović D. (2020). 'Russia and the Serbs (Serbia) from the Eastern Question to the Contemporary Relations', In: Stojanović, B. and Ponomareva, E. (eds) *Russia and Serbia in the Contemporary World: Bilateral Relations, Challenges and Opportunities*. Beograd: Institute of International Politics and Economics, p. 99.

<sup>23</sup> Varga, B. (2016). 'Beograd i Kijev između Brisela i Moskve', In: *Politika srpskog identiteta: Antizapadnjatvo, rusofilstvo, tradicionalizam*. Beograd: Helsinški odbor za ljudska prava u Srbiji, pp. 163–203; Samardžić, N. (2018). 'Ruski mit u srpskoj istoriji', *Danas*, viewed 03. March 2018, <https://www.danas.rs/nedelja/ruski-mit-u-srpskoj-istoriji/>.



189 The domination of an emotional approach to politics based on  
 190 stereotypes and myths is one of the constants of the Serbian political  
 191 mentality.<sup>24</sup> The ‘feeling’ of political proximity between Serbia and  
 192 Russia—personalized in the spreading of myths of a ‘centuries-old friend-  
 193 ship’, ‘Slavic and Orthodox brotherhood’, and the ‘traditional historical  
 194 ties’ of the Serbian and Russian people—led to the creation by nineteenth-  
 195 century political elites of a notion of Russia as the ‘protector’ of the  
 196 Serbs. This tendency towards the mythologization of historical experi-  
 197 ences of solidarity, strong national emotions, and a common ‘fate’ (such as  
 198 mutual sacrifice/struggle, similar injustice, etc.) has allowed for the persis-  
 199 tence and (re)interpretation of Pan-Slavic ideas about Serbian-Russian  
 200 relations in the discourse of the Serbian political elites over time. Myth-  
 201 ical narrations of the past serve as discursive resources for the present.  
 202 Mythology enables the construction of narratives that give meaning to  
 203 concrete political actions.

204 The strength of a political myth is that it is rooted in ‘common sense’,  
 205 as something that has always been because it is so normal.<sup>25</sup> As George  
 206 Schöpflin notes, myths are based on ‘perception rather than historically  
 207 validated truth about the ways in which communities regard certain  
 208 propositions as normal and natural and others as perverse and alien’.<sup>26</sup>  
 209 A successful political myth is, as Vincent Della Sala rightly stresses, ‘one  
 210 that is rooted in a historical experience but is vague enough so that it can  
 211 continue to serve the purposes for which it was devised’.<sup>27</sup> Hence, histor-  
 212 ical narratives are to be presented as ‘found’ in events rather than placed  
 213 there by narrative techniques, and they cannot ‘be closed’ with the end  
 214 of the events to be narrated. As Hayden White argues, ‘the demand for

<sup>24</sup> Jovanović, M. (2010a). ‘Two Russias: On the Two Dominant Discourses of Russia in the Serbian Public’, In: Ž Petrović (ed) *Russia Serbia Relations at the Beginning of the XXI Century*, Belgrade: ISAC Fund, p. 13.

<sup>25</sup> Della Sala, V. (2010). ‘Political Myth, Mythology and the European Union’, *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 48(1), p. 9.

<sup>26</sup> Schöpflin, G. (1997). ‘The Functions of Myth and a Taxonomy of Myths’, in Geoffrey Hosking, Georg Schöpflin (eds.), *The Myths of Nationhood*, Routledge, New York, p. 19.

<sup>27</sup> Della Sala, V. (2010). ‘Political Myth, Mythology and the European Union’, op.cit., p. 8.

215 closure (...) is a demand for moral meaning'.<sup>28</sup> In other words, a moral  
 216 judgement of events is the principal force of narratives in political myths.

217 The myth of a heroic tradition of struggle is one of the most impor-  
 218 tant elements of the traditional Serbian national identity. The idea of  
 219 the heroism and conscious self-sacrifice of the Serbian people in the  
 220 face of an invincible enemy is deeply rooted in the Serbian collective  
 221 consciousness.<sup>29</sup> During the creation of the Serbian state in the nine-  
 222 teenth century, this myth represented a mixture of longstanding Serbian  
 223 Orthodox Church mythology and nineteenth-century Serbian national  
 224 history.<sup>30</sup> Thus, the mythical narrative of shared sacrifice, struggle, injus-  
 225 tice, and heroism that was constructed between Serbia and Russia in the  
 226 nineteenth century enabled the birth of Pan-Slavic sentiments and drove  
 227 the political activity of the Serbian political elite towards Russia in their  
 228 fight for independence from the Ottoman Empire.

229 Russian 'brotherly patronage' towards Serbia lasted until the major  
 230 political turning point of 1878, when following the Treaty of San Stefano  
 231 and the Berlin Congress, Serbia gained independence from the Ottoman  
 232 Empire. At the same time, due to the 'Westernization' of the Serbian  
 233 political elite, the importance of Russian Pan-Slavism began to fade. This  
 234 was followed by the Russian reorientation of patronage towards Bulgaria,  
 235 leaving Serbia to the Austrian sphere of influence.<sup>31</sup> Political proximity  
 236 between Serbia and Russia was rebuilt during the twentieth century on  
 237 very different and diffuse foundations, explained in a stereotypical manner  
 238 as the political ties between the two states during World War I, or as  
 239 political and ideological empathy between the regimes ruling during the  
 240 Cold War.<sup>32</sup> Pan-Slavic sentiments were absent from the discourse of the

<sup>28</sup> White, H. (1980). 'The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality', *Critical Inquiry*, 7(1), p. 24.

<sup>29</sup> Vujačić, V. (2015). *Nationalism, Myth, and the State in Russia and Serbia*, op.cit., p. 137.

<sup>30</sup> Savić, B. (2014). 'Where Is Serbia? Traditions of Spatial Identity and State Positioning in Serbian Geopolitical Culture', *Geopolitics*, 19(3), p. 691.

<sup>31</sup> Jovanović, M. (2010a). 'Two Russias: On the Two Dominant Discourses of Russia in the Serbian Public', op.cit., p. 16.

<sup>32</sup> Jovanović, M. (2010b). 'In the Shadow of Gas and Politics: Cultural and Spiritual Contacts, Connections and Cooperation Between Serbia and Russia', In: Petrović, Ž. (ed) *Russia Serbia Relations at the Beginning of the XXI Century*, Belgrade: ISAC Fund, p. 184.

241 Serbian political elite until the end of World War II, only to be reawak-  
 242 ened by Stalin's decision to establish the Pan-Slavic Congress as a centre  
 243 of the new Pan-Slav movement,<sup>33</sup> along with the perception by Stalin of  
 244 Yugoslavs as the 'second-ranking Slav nation' and, consequently, with the  
 245 movement of the centre of the Congress from Moscow to Belgrade. The  
 246 Pan-Slavic sentiment was well described in Marshal Tito's speech at the  
 247 Sixth Congress in Belgrade:

248 What would have happened if the glorious Red Army had not existed?  
 249 What would have happened if this state of workers and peasants with Stalin,  
 250 the man of genius, at its head, had not existed, which stood like a wall  
 251 against fascist aggression and which with innumerable sacrifices and rivers  
 252 of blood also liberated our Slav nations in other countries? For this great  
 253 sacrifice which our brothers in the great Soviet Union made, we other Slavs  
 254 thank them.<sup>34</sup>

255 This statement constructs the 'brothers from the Soviet Union' as  
 256 protectors of other Slavs, up to their self-sacrifice and deaths in the liber-  
 257 ation of Slavs from fascist aggression. However, this vision of Pan-Slavic  
 258 ideology was also constructed around solidarity on an ethnic and cultural  
 259 basis, without being tied to a particular imperial force. Thus, after Tito on  
 260 28 June 1948 openly rejected the Soviet Union's narrative that the Slav  
 261 peoples could not preserve their independence without Russia's protec-  
 262 tion, and the resultant rift between him and Stalin marked the end of  
 263 Yugoslav-Soviet Pan-Slavic solidarity, this was replaced by Pan-Russism,  
 264 imposing Russian predominance and leadership not only on Slavic peoples  
 265 but also on Hungarians, Romanians, Uzbeks, and Caucasians.<sup>35</sup> On the  
 266 other hand, Titoist Yugoslavism was created, which can be regarded as  
 267 having some Pan-Slavic characteristics, such as its concepts of brother-  
 268 hood and unity (*'bratstvo i jedinstvo'*) and the adoption as the national  
 269 anthem of a modified version of 'one of the hallmarks of nineteenth-  
 270 century Pan-Slavism, the Slovak song "*Hej, Slované*" ("Hey, Slavs!")'.<sup>36</sup>  
 271 At the same time, however, the Yugoslav political elites led by Tito

<sup>33</sup> Kohn, H. (1960). *Pan-Slavism, Its History and Ideology*, op.cit., p. 305.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 306.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 309–310.

<sup>36</sup> Perica, V. (2002). *Balkan Idols: Religion and Nationalism in Yugoslav States*. New York: Oxford University Press, p. 102.

272 promoted a new form of socialist identity, based on a ‘third way’ between  
 273 the East and the West and focusing exclusively on the Yugoslav nations,  
 274 while neglecting cultural connections with both the East and the West  
 275 and developing a new collective identity that derived less from Pan-Slavic  
 276 ideas.<sup>37</sup>

### 277 ‘BROTHERHOOD’ VS. ‘WESTERNIZATION’ IN THE 1990S

278 The erosion of communist regimes after 1989 created a void in (South-  
 279 )Eastern Europe which was to be filled with alternative ideologies and  
 280 revitalized religions.<sup>38</sup> Although Pan-Slavism had lost its rationale as an  
 281 instrument for the mass mobilization of Slavic nations and as a tool for  
 282 legitimizing Soviet hegemony after 1989, the ‘exceptionalism’ of Serbia  
 283 proved fertile ground for a reawakening of Pan-Slavic ideology.

284 Unlike other East European countries, Serbia was an ‘exceptional’  
 285 example of a country in which the former communist elite managed to  
 286 preserve essential elements of institutional and ideological continuity with  
 287 the old system.<sup>39</sup> Also, and unlike in other cases of state disintegration  
 288 (i.e., the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia), the breakup of the Yugoslav  
 289 Federation within and among Yugoslavia’s successor states erupted in  
 290 violence and led to civil war. In these specific circumstances, the regime  
 291 of the 1990s led by Slobodan Milošević undertook the process of re-  
 292 identifying with the myth of the heroic struggle of the Serbian people.  
 293 The reactivation of national traditions and mythologies and the invocation  
 294 of powerful external threats were at the heart of the Milošević regime’s  
 295 geopolitical discourse. The monopolization of discourse through the mass  
 296 media went hand in hand with the creation of an impression of conti-  
 297 nuity between past conflicts and the current ones,<sup>40</sup> enabling the political

<sup>37</sup> Schwärzler, M. and Zimmermann, T. (2020). ‘Construction of Brotherhood and Unity in Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia After 1945: The Illustrated Magazines *Československo and Jugoslavija*’, In: Zimmermann, T. and Jakir, A. (eds) *Remembering War and Peace in Southeast Europe in the 20th Century*. Split: Sveučilište u Splitu, Filozofski fakultet, pp. 101–108.

<sup>38</sup> Perica, V. (2009). ‘Sumrak panslavenskih mitova’, op.cit., p. 304.

<sup>39</sup> Vujačić, V. (2004). ‘Reexamining the ‘Serbian Exceptionalism’ Thesis’, *Working Paper*, pp. 1–43, viewed 17 November 2020, <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/1mg8f31q#author>, pp. 1–2.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 15.

298 elite to become the defender of the ‘national dignity’ of the Serbs by  
299 re-mythologizing old legends and historical facts.

300 At first, Slobodan Milošević’s regime did not perceive the West as a  
301 threatening Other. It held a geopolitical perception of Serbia as a rampart  
302 and bastion of European civilization.<sup>41</sup> In his 1989 speech occasioned by  
303 the commemoration of the 600th anniversary of the battle in Kosovo,  
304 Milošević stated that in Kosovo, the Serbs had not only defended them-  
305 selves but all of Europe as well. Therefore, anti-Europeanism was not at  
306 the heart of Milošević’s policy; Serbia had always been in Europe, but it  
307 should remain so on its own terms.<sup>42</sup> However, after the ‘disillusionment’  
308 with the policies of Serbia’s old Western allies, which resulted in Serbia’s  
309 international isolation, the old idea of Russia as the only great power  
310 protector of the Balkan Orthodox Slavs resurged.<sup>43</sup> In these circum-  
311 stances, it was ‘only natural’ to turn towards Russia and mythologize  
312 the brotherhood between the two nations. Pan-Slavic ideas in this case  
313 performed the role of ideology: an ideological connection between the  
314 two ‘brotherly socialist states’ was constructed,<sup>44</sup> juxtaposing the Slavic  
315 world and its unity with the West. Thus, Serbia’s identity was constructed  
316 around a discourse representing NATO, the United States, and other  
317 Western organizations in terms of negative identity formation, as oppo-  
318 nents of Pan-Slavic solidarity and as ideologically anti-Yugoslav, i.e.,  
319 anti-Serbian. In this geopolitical imagining, Serbia’s role was conceived  
320 as the final defensive wall in the Western campaign against Russia,<sup>45</sup>  
321 which ‘naturally’ implied support and help from brotherly Russia for  
322 Serbian nationalist politics in order to re-establish a centralized Yugoslav  
323 federation.

<sup>41</sup> Savić, B. (2014). ‘Where Is Serbia? Traditions of Spatial Identity and State Positioning in Serbian Geopolitical Culture’, op.cit., p. 699.

<sup>42</sup> Vujačić, V. (2004). ‘Reexamining the ‘Serbian Exceptionalism’ Thesis’, op.cit., p. 31.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>44</sup> Vukšić, D. (2008). ‘Political-Military Relations Between the Republic of Serbia and the Russian Federation in the Process of Dismemberment of Yugoslavia’, *Monitoring Russia Serbia Relations*. Belgrade: ISAC Fund, p. 62.

<sup>45</sup> As stated by Vojislav Šešelj, President of the Serbian Radical Party (SRS) and former Vice President of the government of the Republic of Serbia headed by Mirko Marjanović in 1998: ‘The Serbs are persistently putting up resistance and defending their homeland. And Russia is sleeping. We are defending Russia as well, and trying to awake it at the same time’ (Jovanović 2010a, p. 17).

324 Anti-Westernism became a powerful tool in the geopolitical imagi-  
 325 nation of Serbia. On one hand, history was not simply equated with  
 326 historical analogies that connected Serbia and Russia, but rather it was  
 327 also interpreted as a fatalistic force with an inexplicable power to repeat  
 328 itself, enabling different manifestations of the victimization of Serbia  
 329 and the essentialization of Serbian-Russian relations. On the other hand,  
 330 the concept of brotherhood generally made it possible to ‘address’  
 331 the marginalization of the brotherly nations. Thus, Serbian geopolitical  
 332 ‘exceptionalism’ was constructed around the spatialized linkage between  
 333 smallness, heroism, and victimhood. In this regard, the concept of small-  
 334 ness was linked to a self-image of strength and greatness in the Serbian  
 335 geopolitical imagination.<sup>46</sup>

336 The power of Pan-Slavic ideas gained momentum during the NATO  
 337 bombing campaign on the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) in 1999.  
 338 The Milošević regime appealed to Pan-Slavic sympathies in Moscow for  
 339 support regarding Kosovo, emphasizing Slavic unity and solidarity.<sup>47</sup>  
 340 NATO’s military action against the FRY was perceived as an act of  
 341 aggression by the powerful ‘West’, while NATO itself was constructed as  
 342 immoral, brutal, and unjust, the threatening Other that jeopardized the  
 343 country’s pursuit of a peaceful solution to the conflict in Kosovo. The  
 344 dichotomy between ‘us’ and ‘them’ was constructed through a narration  
 345 of a foreign (Western) enemy endangering the FRY’s greatest values of  
 346 freedom and independence.

347 At the same time, the narrative of resistance against a foreign (NATO)  
 348 enemy was interpreted as an act of solidarity and unity with Russia. Russia  
 349 came as the natural stronger brother, ready to defend its weaker sibling.  
 350 The essentialization of the concept of brotherhood between Serbia and  
 351 Russia created the ‘truth’ about Serbia as a ‘last line of defence’ against  
 352 ‘Western’ domination. This ‘sentiment’ was put forward by the Yugoslav  
 353 Parliament, which voted on 12 April 1999 for Serbia to join the Union of  
 354 Russia and Belarus, and the Russian Duma decided on it positively four

<sup>46</sup> Cf., Savić, B. (2014). ‘Where Is Serbia? Traditions of Spatial Identity and State Positioning in Serbian Geopolitical Culture’, op.cit., p. 688.

<sup>47</sup> Dedominicis, B. (2017). ‘Pan-Slavism and Soft Power in Post-Cold War South-east European International Relations: Competitive Interference and smart power in the European theatre of the clash of civilizations’, op.cit., pp. 1–17.

355 days afterwards.<sup>48</sup> The Pan-Slavic impulse and the imagination of Serbia  
 356 as important for the ‘common Slavic cause’ was further reinforced by  
 357 the visit to Belgrade in April 1999 of the Belarusian President Aleksandr  
 358 Lukashenko, who, as Mikhail Suslov points out, ‘has always positioned  
 359 himself as a standard-bearer of Pan-Slavism via the political project of the  
 360 Union of Russia and Belarus’.<sup>49</sup> The current president of Serbia, Alek-  
 361 sandar Vučić declared during Lukashenko’s visit to Belgrade in 2019 that  
 362 his prior visit during the NATO bombing in 1999 was ‘a visit to brothers  
 363 and friends’ and that his visit ‘will never be forgotten’.<sup>50</sup>

364 Imagined as a ‘brotherly space’ among socialist countries, the Union  
 365 of Serbia, Russia, and Belarus was a clear testimony of the ‘highest degree  
 366 of intensity’ of Pan-Slavic sentiments, with the creation of some kind  
 367 of mini-variant of the USSR. However, as Dušan Reljić points out, this  
 368 initiative ‘survived only on paper because none of the participants made  
 369 any effort to achieve its great intentions’.<sup>51</sup> More importantly, the Russian  
 370 political elite was suspicious of this Serbian initiative, and President Yeltsin  
 371 eventually blocked the decision on Serbia’s joining the Union of Russia  
 372 and Belarus. Russia’s anxieties over Kosovo were related to the use of  
 373 force employed by NATO, which meant the scaling down of diplomatic  
 374 efforts and concrete Russian participation.<sup>52</sup> Therefore, Russia asserted  
 375 itself as an inevitable actor in the process of diplomatic mediation aiming  
 376 to resolve the Kosovo issue (Chernomyrdin’s shuttle missions). At the  
 377 same time, Russia clearly stated that it would not be dragged into a  
 378 conflict in the Balkans. As stated by Vladimir Putin, then-Secretary of the  
 379 Russian Security Council, Russia could not ‘engage in any military action  
 380 [...] in its present state’.<sup>53</sup> In a similar vein, Viktor Chernomyrdin, when  
 381 explaining his motives for involvement in the diplomatic effort, argued

<sup>48</sup> Suslov, M. (2012). ‘Geographical Metanarratives in Russia and the European East: Contemporary Pan-Slavism’, op.cit., p. 580.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 576.

<sup>50</sup> BETA. (2019). ‘Vučić sa Lukašenkom: Vaša poseta tokom bombardovanja nikada neće biti zaboravljena’, viewed 3 December 2019, <https://beta.rs/vesti/politika-vesti-srbija/120120-yucic-sa-lukashenom-vasa-poseta-tokom-bombardovanja-nikada-nevere-biti-zaboravljena>.

<sup>51</sup> Reljić, D. (2009). *Rusija i zapadni Balkan*. Beograd: ISAC Foundation, p. 7.

<sup>52</sup> Andersen, M. (2000). ‘Russia and the Former Yugoslavia’, op.cit., p. 199.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., pp. 202–203.

382 that Russia ‘stood by Serbia in 1914, but lost seven million people in  
383 WWI as a result’.<sup>54</sup>

384 After the end of NATO bombing and the signing of the Kumanovo  
385 Agreement on 9 June 1999, a battalion of Russian parachutists were the  
386 first to enter Priština and take over the airport, in spite of the impending  
387 NATO deployment. The arrival of the Russians gave the Serbian people  
388 hope that the fraternal help, expected during the NATO bombing, had  
389 finally arrived.<sup>55</sup> Welcoming ceremonies for the arrival of the Russian  
390 soldiers had been organized all over Serbia. As Vidosav Stojanović notes,  
391 ‘The Serbs from Priština greeted the Russians like an army of liberation;  
392 they threw flowers at them, jumped on the tanks, and kissed their Eastern  
393 brothers’.<sup>56</sup> Finally, Russian troops agreed to withdraw without claiming  
394 an independent peacekeeping zone in Kosovo.<sup>57</sup>

### 395 ‘BROTHERHOOD’ AND/OR ‘EUROPEANIZATION’ 396 FROM THE 2000S

397 In September 2000, the Democratic Opposition of Serbia (DOS) won  
398 the election against Slobodan Milošević’s regime. The political changes in  
399 Serbia after 5 October 2000 marked a break with the wars and isolation  
400 of the 1990s and the beginning of the country’s democratic transi-  
401 tion and integration. In this new context, continuity and change can  
402 be traced in the discursive construction, understanding, and interpreta-  
403 tion of the special relationship with Russia as part of Serbia’s geopolitical  
404 imagination.

405 The priority of the first pro-Western government, with Zoran Đinđić  
406 at its helm, was the country’s democratization and Europeanization and  
407 the promotion of ties with the US and the EU, which opened the way,

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p. 203.

<sup>55</sup> Politika. (2020). ‘Rusi držali “Slatinu” pod kontrolom i pre dolaska padobranaca’, viewed 12 June 2020, <https://www.politika.rs/sc/clanak/456067/Drustvo/Rusi-drzali-Slatinu-pod-kontrolom-i-pre-dolaska-padobranaca>.

<sup>56</sup> Stojanovic, V. (2004). *MILOSEVIC. The People’s Tyrant*. London and New York: I.B. Tauris, p. 167.

<sup>57</sup> Dević, A. (2019). ‘The Eurasian Wings of Serbia: Serbian Affinities of the Russian Radical Right’, In: Perry, V. (ed) *Extremism and Violent Extremism in Serbia: 21st Century Manifestations of an Historical Challenge*. Hannover: Columbia University Press, pp. 109–138; Reljić, D. (2009). *Rusija i zapadni Balkan*, op.cit.



408 following the 2003 Thessaloniki European Council, towards its European  
 409 integration, leading to the conclusion of the Stabilization and Association  
 410 agreement (SAA) with the EU in 2008.<sup>58</sup> In parallel with this conver-  
 411 gence with the EU, Serbia's political elite intensified its cooperation with  
 412 NATO, which in December 2006 resulted in Serbia's membership in  
 413 NATO's Partnership for Peace Program.

414 Đinđić's framing of Serbia was constructed around the West and  
 415 Europe as an opposition to the pre-modern past of Serbia. As he put  
 416 it, 'We want European structures and standards to become part of our  
 417 society and for our state to become an equal member of the European  
 418 community of values. Our task is to affirm European values everywhere  
 419 we act, and to prepare the country for a true European integration'.  
 420 Hence, notions of 'Europe-as-identity' and 'Europe-as-EU' were merged  
 421 into one, a democratic polity where a democratic Serbia should secure  
 422 its place.<sup>59</sup> Europe, as the desired end-goal of a democratic Serbia, was  
 423 premised on the compatibility of Serbia's identity with Europe's.<sup>60</sup>

424 Soon, however, Serbia's 'return to Europe' found itself at stake. After  
 425 Đinđić's assassination in 2003, the new government (2004–2008) headed  
 426 by Vojislav Koštunica and the Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS) advanced  
 427 national-conservative lines in its foreign policy discourse.<sup>61</sup> Although

<sup>58</sup> Vukčević, D. (2008). 'Srbija i pridruživanje Evropskoj uniji-značaj političkog dijaloga', in Subotić, M. and Đurić, Ž. (eds) *Srbija- politički i institucionalni izazovi*. Beograd: Institut za političke studije, pp. 235–246; Vukčević, D. (2013). *Evropska unija kao strateški akter. Teorija i praksa bezbednosne i odbrambene politike*. Beograd: Institut za političke studije.

<sup>59</sup> Kostovicova, D. (2004). 'Post-Socialist Identity, Territoriality and European Integration: Serbia's Return to Europe After Milošević', *GeoJournal*, 61, p. 24; Vukčević, D. (2013). 'Effects of the Socialization Process on Europeanization of EU Member States' National Identities', in Petrović, P. and Radaković, M. (eds) *National and European Identity in the Process of European Integration*. Beograd: Institut za međunarodnu politiku i privredu, pp. 41–54.

<sup>60</sup> Vukčević, D. and Stojadinović, M. (2011). 'Proces proširenja EU: koncept «prelivanja»', *Srpska politička misao*, 34(4), pp. 131–152; Vukasović, D. and Stojadinović, M. (2016). 'Srbija između evropskih i evroazijskih integracija', In: Milošević, Z. (ed) *Srbija I evroazijski savez, prijatelj*. Šabac: Centar akademske reči, pp. 252–264; Stojadinović, M. and Đurić Ž. (2017). *Politički mitovi neoliberalizma*. Beograd: Institut za političke studije; Stojadinović, M. (2014). *Noam Čovski i savremeno društvo*. Beograd: Institut za političke studije.

<sup>61</sup> Radeljić, B. (2004). 'The Politics of (No) Alternatives in Post-Milošević Serbia', *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, 16(2), pp. 243–259; Radeljić, B. (2019a).

relations with Russia were only sporadic in the first years of the pro-democratic government, the ‘Kosovo issue’ led to the resurgence of the concept of brotherhood between the two countries in shaping a policy context that enabled Serbia to oppose the recognition of Kosovo’s independence, despite external pressures from the West.<sup>62</sup>

Relations between Serbia and the EU were ambiguous (at least until 2008 and the arrival of the pro-European ruling coalition) for several reasons. First, after the fall of Slobodan Milošević’s regime, key Serbian political parties were unable to agree about the issue of EU integration, either opposing it entirely, like the conservative politicians who presented Europe as ‘anti-Serbian’ (Serbian Radical Party-SRS), or refusing to give it the ‘status of priority’, which resulted in a lack of commitment to Europe as the foundational state identity.<sup>63</sup> On numerous occasions, Vojislav Koštunica himself as Prime Minister expressed anti-Western attitudes, especially regarding NATO bombing and cooperation with the ICTY, using nationalist rhetoric and boycotting progress towards EU integration. Second, the traumatic memory of NATO bombing in 1999, as narrated by the Milošević regime, was also endorsed by Koštunica’s government, which incorporated it into the very identity of the Serbian state. Third, there was perception of a deeply rooted closeness between Serbia and Russia as expressed through ethnic kinship, cultural proximity, and a shared Orthodox religion. As a consequence, and unlike in other Central and South-eastern European countries, EU integration in Serbia has never been a ‘straight line’ but rather has had its ups and downs, ranging from direct confrontation and rejection to enthusiasm and cooperation.<sup>64</sup>

Serbian domestic and foreign policy after 2000 remained largely dominated by the Kosovo issue. A few months after internationally brokered

‘Russia and Serbia: Between Brotherhood and Self-Serving Agendas’, *ENC Analysis*, European Neighborhood Council, EU; Radeljić, B (2019b). ‘Tolerating Semi-Authoritarianism? Contextualising the EU’s Relationship with Serbia and Kosovo’, In: Džankić, J. et al. (eds) *The Europeanisation of the Western Balkans*. Springer Nature, pp.157–180.

<sup>62</sup> Marciaq, F. (2019). ‘Serbia: Looking East, Going West?’, In: Bieber, F. and Tzifakis, N. (eds) *The Western Balkans in the World*. London: Routledge, pp. 61–82.

<sup>63</sup> Stojić, M. (2018). *Party Responses to the EU in the Western Balkans*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan; Subotić, J. (2010). ‘Explaining Difficult States: The Problems of Europeanization in Serbia’, *East European Politics and Societies*, 24(4), pp. 595–616.

<sup>64</sup> Ristić, I. (2009). ‘Serbia’s EU Integration Process: The Momentum of 2008’, *Panoeconomicus*, 56(1), p. 115.

456 negotiations on the final status of Kosovo failed, leading to a unilateral  
 457 declaration of independence by the Kosovo assembly on 17 February  
 458 2008, the Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA) was concluded  
 459 between Serbia and the EU. Soon, however, the signing of the SAA was  
 460 discursively constructed by the Serbian government as a concession not  
 461 only to strengthen reformist forces and the process of Europeanization,  
 462 but also to pressure the Serbian government into recognizing Kosovo.<sup>65</sup>  
 463 Nationalist, Eurosceptic notes were observable in the discourse of Prime  
 464 Minister Koštunica, gradually strengthening towards the end of his term  
 465 as prime minister, particularly after Kosovo's declaration of independence  
 466 in 2008.<sup>66</sup> Addressing the protest rally in Belgrade occasioned by the  
 467 unilateral declaration of Kosovo's independence, he stated,

468 For as long as the State of Serbia exists, we will not recognize what was  
 469 created by violating the principles on which the civilized world rests. We  
 470 are not alone in that struggle. The Serbian people will not forget the  
 471 friendship and unwavering support that President Putin, as head of the  
 472 Russian state, has extended to Serbia.<sup>67</sup>

473 At the same time, Koštunica discursively linked the questions of  
 474 Kosovo and EU membership, and thus enabled the construction of an  
 475 incompatibility between Serbia's political and historical past (Kosovo  
 476 status) and its potential future (EU membership). The Kosovo issue  
 477 was constructed as the essence of the Serbian state, justifying rejection  
 478 of the demands made by the EU.<sup>68</sup> At the same time, the collective  
 479 identity narrative about the traumatic NATO bombing as an act of aggres-  
 480 sion translated into a policy of military neutrality.<sup>69</sup> On 26 December

<sup>65</sup> Subotić, J. (2010). 'Explaining Difficult States: The Problems of Europeanization in Serbia', op.cit., p. 607.

<sup>66</sup> Savić, B. (2014). 'Where Is Serbia? Traditions of Spatial Identity and State Positioning in Serbian Geopolitical Culture', op.cit., p. 710.

<sup>67</sup> *Serbian Orthodox Church* (2008). 'The Promise Is Given, Kosovo Is Serbia as Long as We Live', viewed 25 February 2008, [http://www.spc.rs/eng/promise\\_given\\_kosovo\\_serbia\\_long\\_we\\_live](http://www.spc.rs/eng/promise_given_kosovo_serbia_long_we_live).

<sup>68</sup> Obradović, S. and Howarth, C. (2017). 'The Power of Politics: How Political Leaders in Serbia Discursive Lymanage Identity Continuity and Political Change to Shape the Future of the Nation', op.cit., pp. 25–35.

<sup>69</sup> Ejodus, F. (2014a). 'Beyond National Interests: Identity Conflict and Serbia's Neutrality Towards the Crisis in Ukraine', *Sudosteuroopa*, 62(3), pp. 348–362.

481 2007, the National Assembly of Serbia adopted the Resolution on Protec-  
 482 tion of Sovereignty, Territorial Integrity and Constitutional Order, which  
 483 was not, however, further elaborated in any of the strategic documents  
 484 adopted later,<sup>70</sup> allowing for differing interpretations in different geopo-  
 485 litical contexts. In this very particular context, the adoption of the  
 486 Resolution on Military Neutrality was primarily meant, as Filip Ejodus  
 487 points out, ‘to be a message of friendship to Moscow, from which  
 488 Belgrade expected support in its legal and diplomatic battle to preserve  
 489 its virtual sovereignty over Kosovo’.<sup>71</sup>

490 It is possible to trace some elements of continuity and change in the  
 491 (Pan-)Slavic sentiments behind the Serbian-Russian relationship in the  
 492 discourse of the Serbian political elite from the period 2004–2008. On  
 493 the one hand, anti-Westernism represents a continuity with the discourse  
 494 of the Serbian political elite under Slobodan Milošević. The question of  
 495 Kosovo’s independence was highlighted as an issue putting the coun-  
 496 try’s territorial integrity at risk, inspiring ethnonational(ist) sentiments  
 497 that created an environment conducive to the construction of an external,  
 498 i.e., ‘Western’ threat. On the other hand, the 2004–2008 government  
 499 revived old myths about the historical experiences of Slavic solidarity,  
 500 strong national emotions, and mutual sacrifice and struggle, especially the  
 501 historical debt to Russia for its centuries-long efforts to support Serbia’s  
 502 statehood, church, and people.<sup>72</sup> By stating that ‘Serbia cannot exist

<sup>70</sup> Ejodus, F. (2014b). ‘Serbia’s Military Neutrality: Origins, Effects and Challenges’, *Croatian International Relations Review*, 20(71), pp. 43–69; Vukasović, D. and Mirović Janković A. (2016). ‘Vojna neutralnost Srbije u kontekstu evro-atlantskih integracija’, In: Milošević, Z. (ed) *Srbija i evroazijski savez, prijatnije*. Šabac: Centar akademske reči, pp.173–188; Stojadinović, M. (2009). ‘Srbija pred izazovima’, *Srpska politička misao*, 25(3), pp. 213–230; Stojadinović, M. (2012). *Potruga za identitetom*. Beograd: IPS; Đurić, Ž. and Stojadinović, M. (2018). ‘Država i neoliberalni modeli urušavanja nacionalnih političkih institucija’, *Srpska politička misao*, 56(4), pp. 41–57; Stojadinović, M. (2019). ‘Izazovi malih i srednjih država u multipolarnom svetu’, *Srpska politička misao*, 64(2), pp. 125–138; Stojadinović, M. (2020). ‘Urušavanje demokratije i rađanje neoimperijalnog tipa građanina’, *Srpska politička misao*, 67(1), pp. 61–77; Stojadinović, M. (2012). ‘Demokratija i, rrlri novi svet’, *Srpska politička misao*, 38(4), pp. 121–143.

<sup>71</sup> Ejodus, F. (2014b). ‘Serbia’s Military Neutrality: Origins, Effects and Challenges’, op.cit., p. 51.

<sup>72</sup> Savić, B. (2014). ‘Where Is Serbia? Traditions of Spatial Identity and State Positioning in Serbian Geopolitical Culture’, op.cit., p. 710.

503 without Russia',<sup>73</sup> Prime Minister Koštunica not only re-established the  
 504 old myth of Russia as Serbia's patron but also constructed specific biopo-  
 505 litical bonds between the two countries.<sup>74</sup> Thus, the historical Russian  
 506 Pan-Slavic mission was revived—reflected in a romanticized image of  
 507 Russia as Serbia's older and stronger brother, ready to protect Serbia  
 508 based on family ties—and liberated from formal diplomacy. Russia was  
 509 equated with the romanticized picture of nineteenth-century Russia and  
 510 its historical Pan-Slavic mission, making it in that way inherently pro-  
 511 Serbian and thus the guardian of Serbia. Under this concept, Russia was  
 512 Serbia's only 'way' for economic development and the preservation of  
 513 Kosovo within its borders.

514 This discursive construction of Serbian-Russian relations went hand in  
 515 hand with the internal economic and political consolidation of Russia  
 516 under Yeltsin's successor, Vladimir Putin, who charted a conservative  
 517 course of Russian historical traditionalism and interventionism. Russian  
 518 opposition to the 'Western consensus' on Kosovo independence was an  
 519 illustration of a new, more assertive Russia, ready to challenge Western  
 520 initiatives, particularly when they touched upon sensitive issues such as  
 521 military intervention or Russian domestic politics, including its new pan-  
 522 Orthodox ambitions.<sup>75</sup> At the same time, Russian backing of Serbia was  
 523 perceived by the Serbian government as 'natural' and 'self-evident', as a  
 524 result of the imagined existence of special 'bonds' between the two states.  
 525 Reacting to the signing of the Energy Treaty, Koštunica stated,

526 With Serbia as a political and economic partner in the Balkans, Russia  
 527 has a loyal ally in the heart of Europe, reaffirming its position as a key  
 528 global player. The pipeline deal may also boost Russia's influence as energy  
 529 supplier to the continent.<sup>76</sup>

<sup>73</sup> Vesti. (2011). 'Koštunica: Srbija ne može bez Rusije', viewed 23. September 2011, <https://arhiva.vesti-online.com/Vesti/Srbija/166659/Kostunica-Srbija-ne-moze-bez-Rusije>.

<sup>74</sup> Cf., Savić, B. (2014). 'Where Is Serbia? Traditions of Spatial Identity and State Positioning in Serbian Geopolitical Culture', op.cit., pp. 684–718.

<sup>75</sup> Antonenko, O. (2007). 'Russia and the Deadlock over Kosovo', *Global Politics and Strategy*, 49(3), pp. 91–106.

<sup>76</sup> *Washington Post*. (2008). 'Putin's Likely Successor, Pledging Support for Serbia, Signs Pipeline Deal', viewed 26 February 2008, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/02/25/AR2008022502484.html>.

530 Thus, the concept of the Serbian-Russian partnership and alliance are  
 531 used here to construct Russia as having an important role in counterbal-  
 532 ancing the Western influence on Serbia's politics, and also as positioning  
 533 Serbia closer to Russia and its sphere of influence. At the same time, it  
 534 frames the image of Serbia as an 'exceptional' country because of its role  
 535 in enabling Russia to reaffirm its position as a key player.

536 Between 2008 and 2012, after the rift between the Democratic  
 537 Party (DS) and the Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS), the country was  
 538 governed by a coalition consisting of the bloc 'For a European Serbia -  
 539 Boris Tadić' (Democratic Party, SPO and G 17+) and the Socialist Party  
 540 of Serbia (SPS). Within the coalition, a leading part was played by the  
 541 Democratic Party, which made the European integration one of its key  
 542 foreign policy priorities. This government headed by Mirko Cvetković  
 543 made serious efforts in order to make progress in the European inte-  
 544 gration process. It forwarded the SAA to the National Assembly, took  
 545 concrete steps in cooperation with the ICTY, and gained the UN General  
 546 Assembly's endorsement for its initiative to have the International Court  
 547 of Justice (ICJ) rule on the legality of Kosovo's independence.

548 At the same time, policies concerning Kosovo remained unchanged,  
 549 with the government continuing to refuse to recognize its indepen-  
 550 dence. However, the government was open to intense diplomatic efforts,  
 551 including a proposal for the partition of Kosovo, in order to express its  
 552 willingness to compromise.<sup>77</sup> In parallel with 'Serbia's return to Europe',  
 553 the government maintained its 'special relations' with Russia. The polit-  
 554 ical leadership used the concept of simultaneous friendship with the EU  
 555 and Russia in order to represent the identification of Serbia with both the  
 556 EU and Russia. As stated by former President Boris Tadić on the occasion  
 557 of the 65th anniversary of the victory over fascism in Moscow,

558 Today it was the opportunity to meet our (Russian) friends in an attempt  
 559 to build a new peace on the planet, to meet our European friends and to  
 560 remind them that the idea of a united Europe arose on the foundations of  
 561 the struggle against fascism.<sup>78</sup>

<sup>77</sup> Ramet, S. (2010). 'Serbia Since July 2008: At the Doorstep of the EU', *Sudeuropa*, 58(1), p. 25.

<sup>78</sup> BBC. (2010). 'Dan pobede u Moskvi', viewed 9 May 2010, [https://www.bbc.com/serbian/news/2010/05/100509\\_ve-day](https://www.bbc.com/serbian/news/2010/05/100509_ve-day).

562 Referring to Serbia's path towards the EU, Tadić emphasized that this  
 563 would not prejudice its relations with Russia. 'We will be Russia's best  
 564 friend in the European Union. It will be helpful in all aspects of relations  
 565 between the two countries'.<sup>79</sup> Hence, he constructed Serbia as a 'bridge'  
 566 between the East and the West, projecting an image of Serbia as a liberal-  
 567 democratic and economically, culturally, and technologically modernized  
 568 country, which was ready to overcome its nationalist political culture.<sup>80</sup>

569 At the same time, it is possible to register a discursive shift from the  
 570 previously strict pro-Western attitudes of the Democratic Party towards  
 571 a more centrist position based on the 'in-betweenness' of Serbia in its  
 572 geopolitical imagination. This framing of Serbia's identity added a vision  
 573 of social and material benefits from its geopolitical exceptionality, as well  
 574 as its progress and modernity in the future.<sup>81</sup> Hence, Cvetković's govern-  
 575 ment marked a rupture with the previous government in its discursive  
 576 manifestations of the concept of Serbian-Russian brotherhood: the broth-  
 577 erhood was not constructed on an EU-Russia binary (either/or) but  
 578 rather on Serbia's role as a bridge between East and West, which would  
 579 include the 'peaceful' coexistence of Serbia's identification with the EU  
 580 and with Russia (both/and). In this geopolitical imagination, Serbian-  
 581 Russian relations are constructed as deeply embedded in ethnocultural  
 582 and spiritual terms throughout history. When visiting Moscow to meet  
 583 with President Putin, then-President Tadić declared that

584 the historical relations (between Serbia and Russia) are very profound –  
 585 they run much deeper than those with other peoples and other nations.  
 586 These relations have cultural and spiritual roots but are also based on  
 587 economic cooperation between our countries.<sup>82</sup>

<sup>79</sup> RTV. (2009). 'Tadić: Srbija će biti najbolji prijatelj Rusije u EU', viewed 19 October 2009, [http://www.rtv.rs/sr\\_lat/politika/tadic-srbija-ce-biti-najbolji-prijatelj-rusije-u-eu\\_153695.html](http://www.rtv.rs/sr_lat/politika/tadic-srbija-ce-biti-najbolji-prijatelj-rusije-u-eu_153695.html).

<sup>80</sup> Savić, B. (2014). 'Where Is Serbia? Traditions of Spatial Identity and State Positioning in Serbian Geopolitical Culture', op.cit., pp. 705–706.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., p. 706.

<sup>82</sup> Putin, V. (2005). 'Kremlin Palace', Moscow, viewed 15 November 2005, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/23272>.

588 He added furthermore, ‘And when I attentively studied Russian and  
 589 Serbian history, I saw that these relations were never interrupted’.<sup>83</sup> This  
 590 statement recalls the myth of a centuries-long friendship between Serbia  
 591 and Russia and underlines the profoundness of the cultural and spiritual  
 592 ties between the two countries. He evokes ethnocultural and spiritual links  
 593 between Serbia and Russia as deeply embedded through history.

594 The vision of Serbia as a bridge was accompanied by the pursuit of a  
 595 military neutrality policy by Serbia, while at the same maintaining mili-  
 596 tary cooperation with NATO. As stated by Boris Tadić, ‘Our country has  
 597 been too immersed in wars throughout the twentieth century and every-  
 598 thing we do in the future should be built in such a way that we are never  
 599 involved in any war again, preserving above all human lives and our coun-  
 600 try’.<sup>84</sup> Hence, Serbia was discursively constructed as a country that broke  
 601 away from its previous nationalist strategic culture. This vision included  
 602 various arrangements in the framework of the Pfp, but not membership  
 603 (due to the low levels of public support for NATO membership in the late  
 604 2000s and fresh memories of the 1999 NATO bombing). In parallel with  
 605 NATO, relations with Russia were also intensified by the 2009 signature  
 606 of the agreement on establishing a Serbian-Russian humanitarian base  
 607 (RSHC) in Niš, only 100 km from the borders of Kosovo and Bulgaria,  
 608 with the aim of assisting Serbia and other Western Balkan countries in  
 609 the event of natural disasters and emergency situations. Moreover, in  
 610 2008 Russia and Serbia signed in Moscow the Energy Treaty, which also  
 611 addresses the issue of the South Stream gas pipeline that is supposed to  
 612 transit through Serbia, as well as the sale of a 51% share in the Petroleum  
 613 Industry of Serbia (NIS) to the Russian company Gazprom.<sup>85</sup>

614 The elections in May 2012 brought back to power political forces  
 615 which had been part of the regime in the 1990s. The new government  
 616 was led by the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS), created from a faction  
 617 of the Serbian Radical Party (SRS) which had supported Milošević in the  
 618 1990s. On his first official trip abroad, when he met with the Russian

83 Ibid.

84 B92. (2012). ‘Tadić: NATO bombardovanje je zločin’, viewed 24 March 2012, [https://www.b92.net/info/vesti/index.php?yyyy=2012&mm=03&dd=24&nav\\_catgory=12&nav\\_id=593988](https://www.b92.net/info/vesti/index.php?yyyy=2012&mm=03&dd=24&nav_catgory=12&nav_id=593988).

85 Jović- Lazić, A. and Ladevac, I. (2018). ‘Odnosi Srbije i Rusije- uticaj na međunarodni položaj naše zemlje’, In Proroković, D. and Trapara, V. (eds) *Srbija i svet u 2017. godini*, Beograd: IMPP, p. 175.



619 President Putin, the newly elected Serbian President Tomislav Nikolić  
 620 declared, ‘The only thing I love more than Russia is Serbia’.<sup>86</sup> In the same  
 621 emotional manner, he declared in his farewell address to the outgoing  
 622 Russian ambassador Aleksandar Konuzyn that Serbia was ‘his house’ in  
 623 which he was ‘a good host, not just a welcomed guest’.<sup>87</sup> These state-  
 624 ments raised several questions about the policies of ‘alternatives’ of the  
 625 new government, including its low-key relations with the West and shift  
 626 towards the East.

627 Although many expected a slowdown in European integration and a  
 628 turn towards Russia, the new coalition government (with SPS) stepped  
 629 up its efforts in the process of Serbia’s European integration. It went  
 630 further than the previous governments in resolving the issue of Kosovo  
 631 by signing, in 2013, the so-called Brussels Agreement, accepting a move  
 632 of negotiations with the Kosovo government towards the normalization  
 633 of mutual relations. The Agreement opened the way for an intensifi-  
 634 cation of relations with the EU, and starting in 2014, Serbia formally  
 635 opened membership negotiations. While this policy shift on the issue  
 636 of Kosovo was explained by an official narrative about the necessity  
 637 of Serbia’s ‘making sacrifices’ in order to ‘survive’, the old narrative  
 638 of Kosovo’s non-recognition was reaffirmed.<sup>88</sup> At the same time, offi-  
 639 cial Belgrade maintained its ‘balancing act’ by attempting to keep both  
 640 good relations with Brussels and Russia’s diplomatic support in curbing  
 641 Kosovo’s attempts at becoming a full-fledged member of the international  
 642 community of states.<sup>89</sup>

643 By signing the Brussels agreement and moving forward the EU  
 644 integration process, the new government replaced the discourse of an  
 645 ‘outsider’ with the discourse of a ‘would-be insider’ in terms of the EU.<sup>90</sup>

<sup>86</sup> B92. (2012). ‘Tadić: NATO bombardovanje je zločin’, op.cit.

<sup>87</sup> *Telegraf*. (2012). ‘Srbija je vasa kuća: Nikolić pevao Oj Kosovo...naoprostaju Konuzina’, viewed 13 September 2012, <https://www.telegraf.rs/vesti/politika/337385-nikolic-konuzinu-srbija-je-vasa-kuca-ovde-ste-bili-dobar-domacin-video-foto>.

<sup>88</sup> Subotić, M. and Igrutinović, M. (2019). ‘Ambivalence of the Serbian Strategic Culture’, In: Miklóssy, K. and Smith, H. (eds) *Strategic Culture in Russian’s Neighbourhood. Change and Continuity in an In-Between Space*. London: Lexington Books, pp. 196–198.

<sup>89</sup> Kovačević, M. (2019). ‘Understanding the Marginality Constellations of Small States: Serbia, Croatia and the Crisis of EU-Russia Relations’, *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, 27(4), pp. 409–423.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid*.

646 Through the Brussels Dialogue and intense cooperation with the EU,  
 647 the new government created an image of Serbia as an arduous ‘defender’  
 648 of the European integration process. Europe-as-identity was constructed  
 649 as the most desired political goal. At the same time, Serbian leadership  
 650 also advanced the country’s cooperation with NATO. In January 2015,  
 651 the procedure for the adoption of the Individual Partnership Action Plan  
 652 (IPAP) with NATO was completed and was followed by the adoption  
 653 of a law formalizing cooperation in the field of logistics and the regu-  
 654 lation of the status of NATO forces on the territory of Serbia. These  
 655 developments were attended by an official discourse that agreements with  
 656 NATO, as well as IPAP, were not step towards NATO membership, and  
 657 that Serbia would remain militarily neutral.<sup>91</sup> The ruling elite’s discourse  
 658 has rarely addressed topics related to cooperation with NATO, while at  
 659 the same time often reiterating that Serbia remains military neutral and is  
 660 not interested in joining NATO.

661 In parallel with the development of cooperation with NATO, Serbia’s  
 662 cooperation with Russia was also progressing. The brotherhood between  
 663 the two countries assumed the form of a strategic partnership, concluded  
 664 with Russia in 2013, as well as a bilateral agreement on military coop-  
 665 eration, materialized in the form of joint military exercises ongoing  
 666 since 2014, when a drill called ‘Srem 2014’ took place in Serbia. Since  
 667 2015, annual military drills called ‘Slavic Brotherhood’ involving Serbian,  
 668 Russian, and Belarusian troops have been carried out, while in the same  
 669 period, Serbia and Russia have also jointly organized yearly flight and  
 670 tactical exercises called the Brotherhood of Aviators of Russia and Serbia.

671 The new government thus framed Serbia around a long-term orien-  
 672 tation towards the EU while simultaneously fostering a commitment to  
 673 ‘strategic relations’ with Russia. As in the case of the previous govern-  
 674 ment, Serbia is positioned as a bridge between two opposite geopolit-  
 675 ical poles. At the same time, the government reinvented itself as the  
 676 entrepreneur of Serbia’s modern centre-right.<sup>92</sup> The uniqueness of Serbia

<sup>91</sup> Vukotić, D. (2015). ‘Srbija nije ušla u NATO. A NATO u Srbiju?’, *Politika*, viewed 25 March 2015, <http://www.politika.rs/scc/clanak/322682/Srbija-nije-usla-u-NATO-A-NATO-u-Srbiju>; Vukasović, D. & Mirović Janković, A. (2016). ‘Vojna neutralnost Srbije u kontekstu evroatlantskih integracija’, op. cit.

<sup>92</sup> Radeljić, B. (2019a). ‘Russia and Serbia: Between Brotherhood and Self-Serving Agendas’, op.cit.; Radeljić, B. (2019b). ‘Tolerating Semi-Authoritarianism? Contextualising the EU’s Relationship with Serbia and Kosovo’, op.cit.

677 is constructed by its positioning ‘at the crossroads’. This imagery posits a  
 678 Serbia between Brussels (and Washington) and Moscow, connecting them  
 679 mutually.<sup>93</sup>

680 Russia’s annexation of the Crimea was the greatest challenge for the  
 681 Serbian political elite in its imaginary positioning of Serbia as a bridge.  
 682 Unlike the United States, the EU, and other European candidate and  
 683 non-candidate countries that immediately condemned Russia’s actions  
 684 and urged Russia to withdraw its troops from Ukraine, while at the same  
 685 time imposing sanctions on the leaders and businessmen involved, Serbia’s  
 686 leadership adopted a different stance, abstaining from the voting in the  
 687 UN General Assembly and adopting, as stated by Tomislav Nikolić, ‘a  
 688 position of neutrality with regard to the situation in Ukraine’. Further-  
 689 more, then-Prime Minister Vučić reaffirmed, ‘We support the territorial  
 690 integrity of every country, including Ukraine. But, let’s put it this way, I  
 691 asked that Serbia, for the sake of traditional ties ... maintain its position  
 692 and not introduce sanctions against Russia’.<sup>94</sup>

693 Furthermore, in the Serbian media—especially the tabloids—Kiev has  
 694 for years been portrayed as an ‘enemy’ of Russia and Ukraine as an infer-  
 695 rior state, while Ukrainians were represented as an ‘artificial’ nation that  
 696 wanted to distance itself from its Russian roots.<sup>95</sup> This negative portrayal  
 697 of Ukraine was not, however, present in the early 2000s and especially  
 698 during the ‘Orange Revolution’, when the language used in the media  
 699 space promoted a positive picture of Ukraine, similar to that of the 5  
 700 October Revolution in Serbia, as a symbol of non-violent resistance to  
 701 dictators and rigged elections. At the time, numerous Serbian analysts  
 702 considered the ‘election-triggered colour revolutions’ as a Serbian polit-  
 703 ical ‘export brand’, while former Otpor movement activists who had  
 704 participated in the protests in Serbia leading to the end of the Milošević  
 705 regime travelled to Ukraine and other post-Soviet countries to advise their  
 706 civil activists.<sup>96</sup>

<sup>93</sup> Savić, B. (2014). ‘Where Is Serbia? Traditions of Spatial Identity and State Positioning in Serbian Geopolitical Culture’, op.cit., p. 704.

<sup>94</sup> Poznatov, M. (2014). ‘Serbia’s Careful Balancing Act on Ukraine’, *Euractiv*, 9 May 2014, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/enlargement/news/serbia-s-careful-balancing-act-on-ukraine/>.

<sup>95</sup> Varga, B. (2016). ‘Beograd i Kijev između Brisela i Moskve’, op.cit., p. 174.

<sup>96</sup> Varga, B. (2015). *Evropa posle Majdana*, *Srpski kulturni centar*, Novi Sad, p. 46.

707 The annexation of Crimea by Russia raised questions about the similar-  
 708 ities between the cases of Kosovo and Crimea, including inconsistencies in  
 709 Russia's approach towards the notion of territorial integrity. In his state-  
 710 ment, President Putin made a parallel between Kosovo and Crimea by  
 711 stating,

712 (Russia's) western partners created the Kosovo precedent with their own  
 713 hands. In a situation absolutely the same as the one in Crimea, they  
 714 considered Kosovo's secession from Serbia legitimate while arguing that no  
 715 permission from a country's central authority for a unilateral declaration of  
 716 independence is necessary.<sup>97</sup>

717 This parallel has also been drawn in Serbian foreign policy discourse.  
 718 While affirming respect for the territorial integrity of Ukraine, saying  
 719 that 'Serbia was bombed and we know very well how it looks when  
 720 someone is endangering your territorial integrity', the Prime Minister at  
 721 the time, Aleksandar Vučić also stated, however, that 'it wouldn't be fair  
 722 to introduce sanctions on the state that has never harmed us and has not  
 723 introduced its own sanctions towards us'.<sup>98</sup>

724 Behind this policy of 'neutrality' on Crimea lies a hidden framing  
 725 of events in Kiev through the prism of the 1990s wars in the Balkans.  
 726 The Serbian political elite drew parallels between the 1990s thesis of  
 727 the nationalist 'Serbian Yugoslavia' and the Ukrainian crisis. The conflict  
 728 was constructed on anti-Westernism, i.e., the West was represented as  
 729 seeking to harm Russia and its interests using Ukraine as its tool, while,  
 730 on the other hand, Russia was trying to preserve the national interests of  
 731 Orthodox Russian and the Serbs.<sup>99</sup> By discursively equating Kosovo and

<sup>97</sup> Radeljić, B. (2017). 'Russia's Involvement in the Kosovo Case: Defending Serbian interests or Securing Its Own Influence in Europe?', *Region: Regional Studies of Russia, Eastern Europe, and Central Asia*, 6(2), p. 293.

<sup>98</sup> Subotić, M. and Igrutinović M. (2019). 'Ambivalence of the Serbian Strategic Culture', op.cit., p. 198.

<sup>99</sup> Subotić, M. and Igrutinović M. (2019). 'Ambivalence of the Serbian Strategic Culture', op.cit.; Varga, B. (2016) 'Beograd i Kijev između Brisela i Moskve', op.cit.; Varga B. (2015). *Evropa posle Majdana*, op.cit.

732 Crimea, Serbian official foreign policy discourse was marked by a repre-  
733 sentation of Russia as a victim of the West, just like Serbia was the victim  
734 in the Kosovo issue.<sup>100</sup>

735 The anti-Western sentiments of the Serbian political elite were also  
736 visible later that year, when the commemoration of the centenary of  
737 World War I and the 70th anniversary of the liberation of Belgrade by  
738 the Red Army took place in Belgrade as an important symbol of soli-  
739 darity between two countries. On that occasion, Russian President Putin  
740 was awarded the highest honour (Order of the Republic of Serbia) in an  
741 expression of the reaffirmation of close Russian-Serbian ties and historical  
742 solidarity. On that occasion, President Nikolić declared, ‘Dear brother  
743 Vladimir, the Serbian people are proud that you carry the highest Serbian  
744 order. [...] Russia is a great supporter of Serbia on many issues, and  
745 Serbia is proof to Russia that it can have friends even among small coun-  
746 tries’.<sup>101</sup> The concept of Serbia’s smallness in this statement recalls the  
747 mythologization of the ‘unbreakable bonds’ with Russia, represented as  
748 a ‘generous patron’ towards a small and weak Serbia. Moreover, when  
749 asked if the organization of a military parade during a Russian military  
750 action in Ukraine and amid the criticism from the EU was controversial,  
751 Vučić responded,

752 I do not think it is controversial because this was not just a pointless  
753 parade, it was a parade to mark the liberation of Belgrade. Sorry, but it  
754 was the Russians who took part in the liberation of Belgrade, not some  
755 other people. If others took part in it, we would invite them as well.<sup>102</sup>

756 The brotherly connections here are constructed primarily by the  
757 concept of ‘brothers in arms’ built on a myth of ‘centuries-old friendship’  
758 and historical experiences of solidarity, thus highlighting the importance  
759 of history as the basis of the two nations’ mutual trust, ever-closer  
760 rapport, and further deepening of cooperation.

<sup>100</sup> Subotić, M. and Igrutinović M. (2019). ‘Ambivalence of the Serbian Strategic Culture’, op.cit.; Varga, B. (2016). ‘Beograd i Kijev između Brisela i Moskve’, op.cit.

<sup>101</sup> RTV. (2014). ‘Predsedniku Rusije najviši orden Republike Srbije’, viewed 16 October 2014, [https://www.rtv.rs/sr\\_lat/politika/predsedniku-rusije-najvisi-orden-republike-srbije\\_527291.html](https://www.rtv.rs/sr_lat/politika/predsedniku-rusije-najvisi-orden-republike-srbije_527291.html).

<sup>102</sup> Prelec, T. (2017). ‘Interview with Aleksandar Vučić’, *LSE*, viewed 27 October 2017, <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/lsec/2014/10/29/interview-with-aleksandar-vucic-were-not-asking-for-mercy-but-reforming-serbia/>.

761 After the 2016 parliamentary elections, followed by the 2017 presi-  
 762 dential elections that consolidated the power of the Serbian Progressive  
 763 Party (SNS), discussions around a more balanced policy between the EU  
 764 and Russia are visible in the foreign policy discourse. The government  
 765 repeatedly confirmed that Serbia's ultimate goal was membership in the  
 766 EU, while at the same time highlighting the delay of the Kosovo issue.  
 767 However, the ambiguity of EU policies in the enlargement process in the  
 768 Western Balkans, together with the still distant possibility of EU member-  
 769 ship, go hand in hand with the ambiguity of the geopolitical discourse of  
 770 the Serbian political elite. Although avowedly supporting EU values, the  
 771 slightest criticism coming from the EU results in an official narrative, as  
 772 Branislav Radeljić points out, 'that the West wants to overthrow Vučić,  
 773 that big powers are working against Serbia, and that Russia makes for a  
 774 more honest and reliable friend'.<sup>103</sup>

775 Hence, a continuity with Koštunica's (but also with Milošević's)  
 776 government is visible in the traditionalist and conservative rhetoric of  
 777 the Vučić government's construction of Europe as a blackmailer of  
 778 Serbia. However, it is also possible to detect a change in the 'nature'  
 779 of the anti-Western sentiments of the current government as compared  
 780 to Koštunica's (but also a similarity to the Milošević regime): behind  
 781 the present brotherly relations with Russia lies a hidden political agenda  
 782 of maintaining an alternative to the West, rather than a nurturing of  
 783 common ethnocultural and spiritual ties, perceived as deeply rooted in  
 784 history, between Serbia and Russia.

## 785 CONCLUSION

786 This chapter has focused on the question of whether, in what ways, and  
 787 to what extent Serbian political leaders from the period of the 2000  
 788 democratic changes in Serbia onwards have shaped Serbia's foreign policy  
 789 and thereby also its identity by mobilizing Pan-Slavic ideas. In so doing,  
 790 the chapter has sought to elucidate discursive manifestations of Slavic  
 791 solidarity through the 'special relationship' between Serbia and Russia.  
 792 By arguing that Pan-Slavic ideas in Serbia are manifested as a mytholog-  
 793 ized attachment to Russia with different degrees of 'sentiment intensity'  
 794 depending on specific contexts, the chapter aimed to demonstrate in what

<sup>103</sup> Radeljić, B. (2019a). 'Russia and Serbia: Between Brotherhood and Self-Serving Agendas', op.cit., p. 7.

795 manner and to what extent Serbian political elites produced geopolitical  
796 knowledge and thus legitimized brotherly narratives about Serbia and  
797 Russia.

798 Building on the mythical perception of proximity between the two  
799 countries based on their historical experiences of solidarity, strong  
800 national emotions, and common ‘fate’ (e.g., mutual sacrifice/struggle,  
801 similar injustices), Serbian political elites framed Pan-Slavic sentiments in  
802 different ways. It has been shown that conservative, nationalist regimes  
803 put forward Pan-Slavic arguments mainly in terms of anti-Westernism,  
804 i.e., anti-Europeanism. Conversely, pro-democratic governments used  
805 Pan-Slavic sentiments in terms of a mythological perception of a deeply  
806 rooted closeness between Serbia and Russia based on ethnocultural  
807 kinship. At the same time, the chapter has shed some light on how  
808 Serbian political elites have used a constructed ‘special relationship’ narra-  
809 tive in order to spatially imagine the geopolitical positioning of Serbia. It  
810 has been shown that an idea of the ‘spatial uniqueness’ of Serbia was  
811 advanced, generating different imaginary ‘realities’ about Serbia’s excep-  
812 tionalism and thus framing its positioning within the scope of the present  
813 East–West confrontation.