North Atlantic Council

Research Report

The Question of:

The Growing Russian Influence on the Balkans

Introduction

Ever since World War One, the Balkan's has been an area of tension. Greece, Albania, Macedonia, Bulgaria, Romania, Serbia and Montenegro make up the Balkan's however, the Balkan's is home to many different ethnic minorities. The controversy has been over the ethnic minorities and the fight for independent territory. Over the years, the border within the Balkans has changed many times, especially after gaining independence from the Ottoman Empire and Austrian-Hungarian Empire. (The Balkan's, Classroom of the Future).

The Russian Federation has always been linked to Serbia, first due to the common Slavic and religious roots but now due to oil and gas ties and political support. As for the rest of the Balkan's, the Russian Federation has attempted to influence the regions many times through coups, disinformation campaigns and pro-Russian politics, causing them to not be very close to the other Balkan nations. (Keys to Understanding Russia's Relationship with Serbia, NATO Association).

From the Balkan Nations, only Bulgaria and Greece are members of the European Union despite on-going talks between the EU and other Balkan nations in regards to possible membership in the future. Additionally, from the Balkan's, Albania, Bulgaria, Greece, Montenegro and Romania are members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). With Serbia, Yugoslavia and Macedonia being NATO partner countries.

Since the beginning of the Cold War, there has always been tension between primarily the Russian Federation and the United States of America. Recently, the United Kingdom has joined in, taking the US's side. Despite the height of the Cold War being over, the tension has not released and the Balkan's are feeling the impact of that. As said by Serbia's ex-economy minister, "Serbia and the rest of the Balkans are a pawn in a great game of powers between Russia, the EU and the US". (Do the Western Balkans Face a Coming Russian Storm?, European Council on Foreign Relations). Western nations have been attempting to pull the Balkans to their side by encouraging them to join NATO and the EU. However, Russia has been against this as they view it as a direct attack against themselves. Essentially, the West and Russia are using the Balkan states to show their sphere of influence.

The Committee

The North Atlantic Council (NAC) is a political decision-making body and has "effective political authority and powers of decision". (North Atlantic Council, NATO) It was founded in 1949 by Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, The Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, The United Kingdom and The United States of America due to clause 9 in the North Atlantic Treaty. This treaty was signed by all nations mentioned previously, with the main purpose to work together in order to defend themselves from pro-communist nations, namely the Russian Federation, at the time named the USSR.

The treaty formed the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, commonly referred to as NATO. Clause 9 states that members of NATO will form a council where each nation will be represented in order to discuss matters concerning the nations of NATO.

The council is also responsible for having a subsidiary body to be used when necessary and the creation of a defence committee. This defence committee will be used when one or more nations are attacked and all of NATO believes the attack was toward NATO and not just the nation itself. The committee was also established to help aid each other and help all nations develop. (NATO, Its Purpose, History and Members, The Balance).

Rules of Procedure

The most important difference between the normal Rules of Procedure and the RoP of the NAC is the fact that every nation has veto powers. As the NATO needs a unanimous consensus as they are setting up a Draft Communiqué, a document concerning the opinion of the council on a certain matter.

Statements

The goal of the NAC isn't setting up a resolution on a topic, but the production of accords: statements. While writing statements, you do not have to stay put to the rules when writing a resolution; you can write anything you like, as long as:

1. It stays a point-wise statement.
2. It contains a committee-wide vision and consensus.

The course of debate will be almost identical to normal MUN-debate with resolutions, but there will be a few adjustments.

1. All delegations will have a very short policy statement on each issue, so every delegate knows the view of each delegation on the topic.
2. After that, there will be a lot of lobbying time, in order for all delegates to form a consensus between all member states.
3. After lobbying, debate starts according to ad-hoc rules. Delegates can hand in amendments for the statement, the chair will set debate time and after time has elapsed, delegates will vote on the amendment.
4. After time on the issues has elapsed, the committee will vote on the statement, which has to be passed unanimously.

N.B. These rules of procedure are formed to simulate the North Atlantic Council as well as possible. However, when the Student Officers believe the Rules of Procedure hinder the course of debate, they can, in consultation with the Executive Staff, decide to set aside these rules of procedure and proceed with normal Rules of Procedure, with debating a resolution and holding on to specific rules on phrasing.

Key Terms

North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)

A collective agreement founded by Western nations to form an alliance, primarily against Communist nations. Founded in 1949.

Warsaw-Pact

A treaty signed between the Soviet Union, Albania, Poland, Romania, Hungary, East Germany, Czechoslovakia and Bulgaria. This was signed in response to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

Subsidiary Body
A body or panel belonging to a committee or council responsible for monetary matters.

Kosovo
A partially recognized state that declared independence from Serbia in February 2008.

European Union (EU)
A political and economic union of many European nations with the aim to make Europe a stronger continent, build allies and make countries stronger.

Belgrade
The capital of Serbia

Kremlin
A fortified complex in the capital of Russia, Moscow. Used to refer to the government of the Russian Federation.

Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO)
A collective defence alliance between the Russian Federation, Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. It was created in 1992, essentially an opposition to NATO.

The Cold War
A time period of 1947 to roughly 1991 of political tension between the West and East of Europe. Primarily between Capitalism and Communism. The 'war' never experienced direct conflict between the two major powers but fighting did occur in Vietnam and Korea.

Sphere of influence
An area of land that is officially independent however, is under influence by another nation.

Satellite states
A country that is officially independent but is under heavy political, economic, social and military control from another nation. A nation under the sphere of influence.

Mandate System
A system adopted by the League of Nations (the equivalent to the UN before WWII) to help dissolve colonies whereby larger and developed nations would look after new nations and help them to develop.

General Overview

When the Russian Empire became the USSR, a Communist nation, the Western powers feared the consequences. Communism is the opposite of Capitalism, a political ideology followed by in the West. The Western powers saw Communism as a threat to their society and feared that Communism may spread. Essentially, this prompted the Cold War. The tension was primarily between the USA and the USSR. This prompted the iconic Space Race among many other competitions.

Despite tensions being not as heightened nowadays, the tension and competition are still there. An example of Russia's ambition was shown during the Ukrainian crisis in 2013. Prior to this, NATO had been working on relations with Russia when Russia joined the North Atlantic Cooperation Council in 1992, but due to numerous events, this cooperation has been suspended multiple times. It was suspended in 2008 during the Russian military action in Georgia and once again in 2013 due to Russian military intervention in Ukraine. (Relations with Russia, NATO). Still to this day, NATO believes that the Russian Federation shows an unstable and dangerous use of military power along with aggressive and influential behaviour. On the other hand, The Russian Federation feels threatened due to the creation of NATO and their negative behaviour towards Russia's political ideas.

One of the most recent standoffs between the West and Russia occurred in March of this year, 2018, when a former Russian spy and his daughter were found unconscious due to a nerve agent attack. The attack placed the former spy, who had been a double-agent for the UK and was now residing in England, in critical condition. It was believed that the Russian Federation was behind the attack despite Russian denial. The attack prompted the UK government to expel 23 Russian diplomats from the United Kingdom. To which Russia replied by expelling 23 British diplomats from Russia. With continuing rowing over the situation, Russia then expelled a total of 50 British diplomats. (Russia spy poisoning: 23 UK diplomats expelled from Moscow, BBC).

The Balkans has always been an area up for dispute due to the constant unrest. This makes the area 'up for grabs'. Any larger nation has the possibility to become allies with the Balkan nations and exert influence over the area. Russian influence on the Balkans dates back to the last century but that doesn't mean the situation has cleared up. First of all, Russian relations with Serbia. Serbia and the Russian Federation are strong allies. Both nations have a strong history of Slavs which brings the two together, it also sparks Russian interest in the country as it is a possible place to expand. However, the alliance strengthened in 2008 when a part of Serbia, Kosovo, voted for independence despite the refusal by Serbia to give consent. While the situation was taken to the International Court of Justice in 2010, the Russian Federation was the primary country to support Serbia in going against the creation of Kosovo. Despite the Russian and Serbian alliance, Kosovo became an independent nation. It is important to note that Serbia is still experiencing high tensions with Kosovo over the issue of independence.

Their alliance has been put on display many times like when Serbia changed the date of the commemoration of Belgrade's liberation due to the Red Army. It was changed to a different date so that Putin could attend the ceremony. After the agreement over Kosovo, Serbia started becoming closer with Russia shown by the increase in military cooperation between the two. The Russian Federation then granted Serbia access to a collective defence alliance called the CSTO. This showed that Russia had 'won' Serbia to the West's dismay. The West experienced the strength of this alliance in 2016 during the Ukrainian Crisis when sanctions were placed on Russia but Serbia refused to join in. They publically spoke out against the sanctions, making it clear just how important the alliance was to the Serbians. (Keys to Understanding Russia's Relationship with Serbia, NATO Association).

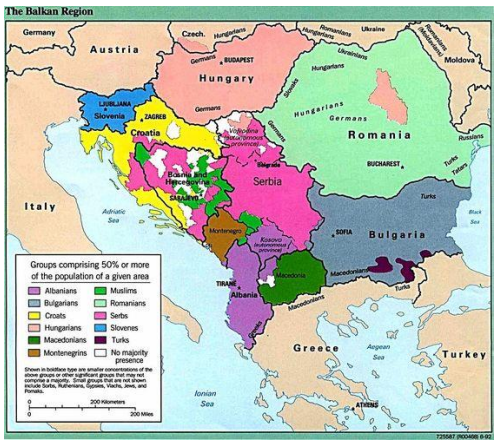
Russian influence in the Balkans was clear during the general election in Macedonia during 2006. There were thirteen political parties competing for votes during this election and the types of political parties already indicate how unstable the area was. There were parties such as the Bosnian Democratic League and the Turkish Democratic Party. Both these parties were campaigning for a government that will have close ties with foreign countries, possibly leading to an annexation of Macedonia. This shows that in Macedonia, there were many individuals of different backgrounds, ethnicities and beliefs, creating grounds for large dispute. (General Elections in Macedonia 5th July 2006, Robert Schuman).

Despite the civil tension during this election, there was also tension from abroad, specifically from the Russian Federation. There was a political party called the VMRO, the leader of this party had close relations with the Kremlin. Due to this, the leader, Nikola Gruevski, produced Russian propaganda by managing to control a majority of the news outlets in Macedonia. He based his political campaign on promoting Putin and the Eastern Orthodox Church. In the elections of 2006, he became the Prime Minister of Macedonia. While in power, he implemented controls that were similar to those of the Kremlin such as banning NGO's for spreading views from the West, discouraging feminism and gay rights. Furthermore, during Gruevski's time in power, the US State Department expressed that they felt as if the Gruevski administration was fueled by "voter intimidation, widespread pressure on civil servants, vote buying, (and) coercion" and they felt as if Macedonia was abusing multiple human rights laws. (The Russian Connection: Macedonian Politics, The Hawk Eye).

The unrest in the Balkan area is also shown through the history of Yugoslavia. Yugoslavia was a nation created through the Mandate System after WWI. After WWII, the US made Yugoslavia a top priority as they saw the unrest present. Yugoslavia broke away from Russia's sphere of influence, and unlike many other Eastern Nations at the time, became a more liberal society. However, the nation was filled with many different religions, ethnicities and opinions on WWII, causing large divisions to break out. Furthermore, in 1989 Communism in Eastern Europe collapsed and slowly the USSR broke down, causing instability in the area. Prior to the downfall of the USSR, all Yugoslavian's had one thing in common despite all their differences, the motivation to not fall under the USSR's sphere of influence so as the USSR began to collapse, Yugoslavian's no longer had a common enemy. This resulted in two years of war from 1990 – 1992. By the end of this war, due to Bush diverting his attention to the Soviet Union, Germany and the Persian Gulf Crisis, there was no more Yugoslavia, but instead Macedonia, Bosnia Herzegovina, Montenegro, Slovenia, Croatia and Serbia. (The Breakup of Yugoslavia 1990-1992, Office of the Historian).

The current situation in the Balkans is still very unstable and tense. Macedonia and Greece are at a 26-year-old battle over the name of 'Macedonia'. When Yugoslavia was still a nation, it had a republic named Macedonia which then became independent. Conversely, to the North of Greece, there is also a piece of land, bordering the Republic of Macedonia, to which the Greeks also name Macedonia. The conflict is over who should be able to call their land 'Macedonia'. Additionally, Greece believes that the Republic of Macedonia also stretches onto Greek land and the Greeks Macedonia. Greek, attempting to convince the Republic of Macedonia to give over the name, has blocked Macedonia from joining the EU and NATO seeing as Greece is already a part of both organizations. This has meant that Macedonia is constantly struggling to gain economic, political and social stability. (Parallels, National Public Radio).

A large reason for the unrest in the Balkan region is down to the fact that there are many different ethnic minorities, all fighting for recognition. These are explained in **Major Parties Involved.** The map below shows a rough estimation of the placement of ethnicities in the Balkan region.



For many years, the European Union has expressed their openness towards the Balkan states possibly joining the EU. This change is supported by a large majority of the population in the Balkans as it implies social, political and economic stability. However, the applications and talks have been delayed many times, making it a very long process. Furthermore, the instability in the Middle East has managed to divide the West's attention greatly. This has allowed Russia to exert further influence over the region, especially when it comes to pushing the Balkan nations away from the joining the EU and having stronger ties with Europe. Moreover, the EU and Western allies have lost credibility recently in the Balkans due to Brexit, the long talks with the EU and the little amount of aid received. This has created the idea that Western advances to the Balkans have been non-systematic and not serious. As a reply, the European Commission released a new strategy when it comes to making Balkan States, member nations. (Neglected Backwater: Russia's Growing Influence in the Balkans, Geopolitical Monitor).

Major Parties Involved

North Atlantic Treaty Organization – NATO is one of the two main sides of this conflict. All NATO members are allies and want to work together. Furthermore, they all tend to feel the same way about the Russian Federation and are attempting to deviate from Russian influence on the Balkans and any other nations. Their interest in this problem is down to the fact that if Russia gains influential powers, it is a loss to the West as they are losing power.

The Russian Federation – Russia is the other main side in this conflict. Russia tends to be an outsider in many world alliances, especially due to the creation of NATO, as shown by their creation of the CSTO. By many other nations being allies against the Russian's they have the desire to prove themselves strong. They are able to do this by influencing the Balkans and gaining power. Historically, there has always been tension between Russia and Western powers but due to diplomacy, it has remained peaceful and most nations have attempted to work through the differences.

The EU – The EU aims at European cooperation. The EU is seen to be closely linked with Western Europe. They are important in this conflict because if Balkan nations join the EU, it is seen as a loss to Russia because they are no longer able to exert as much influence.

The Balkans – The Balkans are the heart of this conflict because they are being used and, in some cases, being taken advantage by NATO and the Russian Federation over a feud that has nothing to do with the Balkan states.

Albanians - Albania makes up a population of roughly five million but only three and a half million actually live in Albania with almost two million living in Kosovo and the remaining living in the Republic of Macedonia. Majority of Albanian's are Muslim with small minorities being Eastern Orthodox Catholic.

Greeks - A population of over ten million people. Majority of Greeks live in Greece, with most being Eastern Orthodox. The remaining population lives all over Europe with large amounts residing in Turkey, Cyprus and Southern Albania.

Hungarians – Otherwise known as Magyars, make up of over 90% of the population living in Hungary. Compared to other Balkan states, Hungary has the least amount of ethnic minorities residing in their nation.

Timeline of Events

April 1949 – NATO was founded amid airlifts into West Berlin in fears of another blockade, otherwise known as a major occurrence during the Cold War

1991 – The Russian Federation joins the North Atlantic Cooperation Program

1992 – The Yugoslavian War ends, ending Yugoslavia as a nation but producing many new countries

1997 – The NATO-Russia Founding Act is produced, providing the basis for relations with Russia

July 2006 – Macedonian general elections occurred whereby a Russian-inspired political leader gained control of the nation

February 2008 – Kosovo official declares independence from Serbia, creating a new nation despite Serbia's condemnation

Spring 2008 – Russia supported the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan by providing means of transportation through Russian territory

August 2008 – Russia militarily intervenes in Georgia, causing NATO powers to suspend cooperation with Russia

September 2014 – During a NATO summit in Wales, NATO powers condemn Russia for the recent annexation of Crimea and urge Russia to comply with international law

July 2016 – During a NATO summit in Warsaw, NATO powers condemn Russia's destabilising policies and actions which they believe create aggressive influences over the Balkan region. Furthermore, Russia is condemned for supporting the Syria regime and allowing military intervention

October 2016 – General elections were held in Montenegro. During the Election Day, an attempted coup occurred led by Russia citizens

Previous attempts to solve the issue

The first major attempt to solve this issue occurred in 1991 when the Russian Federation joined the North Atlantic Cooperation Program (NACC). This was during the time that the USSR was dissolving and becoming the Russian Federation, allowing for more communication and cooperation with Western powers. However, Russia joining the NACC was amidst the Cold War, therefore, many of the topics discussed due to this new alliance concerned Cold War tensions such as Russia withdrawing their troops from the Baltic region. Cooperation occurred mainly on security situations seeing as it was a common issue. This cooperation was fairly successful and paved a new path for future relations. (North Atlantic Cooperation Council).

During the NATO Summit held in Paris in May of 1997, both NATO and The Russian Federation signed the NATO-Russia Founding Act. The aim of this act was to secure relations between the two sides, build an undivided Europe and work towards cooperation. The content of the act includes aims to build a stronger and safer Europe by working together to oppose terrorism, aggressive nationalism, chemical weapons and the abuse of human rights among many other items. The act also states that both sides refrain from using force or threats against each other and will respect the sovereignty and independence of the other nation.

The Act also discusses the creation of Permanent Joint Council whereby NATO members and the Russian Federation will meet to discuss political or safety issues, develop joint initiates where both sides will work together and make joint decisions. The Act stresses the importance of items that both sides have in common in order to achieve more successful cooperation. Common items include nuclear safety, conflict prevention, regional air traffic safety, combatting terrorism, fighting drug trafficking and improving public understanding of Russia-NATO relations. (Founding Act, NATO)

When it comes to Russian influence in the Balkans, NATO powers have attempted to get Balkan states to become NATO powers or a member of the North Atlantic Cooperation Council. By doing so, the NATO powers would have a greater influence over the Balkan States and they would take away the power of influence that Russia has over the Balkan region. Furthermore, NATO would hopefully produce economic and political stability, reducing the chances of the Balkan regions going to Russia for help.

Furthermore, NATO powers that are also EU members such as Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany and France are using their positions in the EU to encourage the EU to accept applications from Balkan nations when it comes to applying to join the EU. This is important because by being a member of the EU, strong alliances are formed with the West. Additionally, economic stability is almost guaranteed, making Russia less important to the Balkan States. So far this has been a good idea and has successfully worked with Bulgaria and partly with Greece but as for the other states, the application process has taken far too long, causing Balkan States to lose hope in the West.

The European Commission has acted slowly when it comes to granting EU membership to Balkan nations which have deterred a few nations, such as Serbia, from being completely invested in EU membership. As a response, the European Commission produced the 'EU Strategy for the Western Balkans'. This is the first strategy created by the European Commission concerning a specific region, implying that it is important for the EU that Balkan States continue working towards membership.

The EU Strategy for the Western Balkans stresses the fact that all nations must meet the criteria in order to become a member. However, the Strategy addresses issues that most Balkan States face, especially when it comes to joining the EU. They explain tactics to overcome these issues and stress the importance of cooperation between nations, especially between neighbouring nations. The European Commission set out an action plan in order to help Balkan States to move towards membership quicker. (Strategy for the Western Balkans, European Commission).

The Future

Currently, many Balkan States have applied for EU membership. The first likely candidate is Kosovo, despite the fact that not all EU Member States recognize Kosovo as an independent state. In order to meet EU criteria, Kosovo must tackle the lack of freedom of speech and the lack of minority rights. Kosovo seems to be a controversial nation, therefore, it can be viewed as peculiar that the EU sees Kosovo as a strong possible candidate. The reasoning behind this could be over the fact that Kosovo is an enemy of the Russian Federation, and if the West were to be influential over Kosovo, it would harm the Russian Federation.

The second most likely candidate for EU membership is Bosnia-Herzegovina despite Bosnia not yet formally applying. The reasoning for likely EU membership is that the EU is already heavily invested in Bosnia by maintaining a peace and police force there. However, the constant ethnic quarrels and political instability is a red flag for EU when it comes to membership.

As for the other Baltic States, Macedonia applied for membership in 2004 and was confirmed as a candidate just one year later. The European Commission is in favour of opening membership talks after Macedonia has made successful reforms when it comes to tackling corruption and the denial of human rights. However, due to Greece being an EU member and being a part of the 'Macedonia name argument', Greece has been urging the EU to decline membership for Macedonia. Talks need to continue between the EU and Macedonia and especially between the Republic of Macedonia and Greece over the name 'Macedonia'.

Montenegro has been in talks with the EU since 2012 over joining the EU and they have constantly been tackling issues such as enforcing law and fighting organized crime and corruption. But talks have been going on for very long. The Prime Minister of Montenegro is confident in their chances of joining the EU and wants to join before neighbouring nations, however, Montenegrin's are growing tired of the constant talks.

Last but not least, Serbia. They applied for membership in 2009 but were only confirmed as a candidate in 2012. Serbia's path to joining the EU has been the slowest of all the Balkan States which has drawn Serbia closer to the Russian Federation. The EU demanded cooperation between Serbia and Kosovo in order for membership to be applicable. Due to this, Serbia has shown "political courage" however, it is expected that Serbia will only join the EU after 2020. If the West wants Balkan nations to become EU members, then they should encourage quicker application processes and further talks between the EU and Balkan nations. (EU Enlargement: The Next Seven, BBC)

The Strategy for the Western Balkans produced by the European Commission was helpful strategy created but it has been shown that the Balkan States still need further help to tackle issues that are preventing them from gaining EU membership.

Important Decisions a Resolution Must Take

It is important to know that these possible solutions or points to think about are just for guidance. All delegates may proceed in whichever direction they believe is best for their nation and their alliances. It is also important to think and look further than these solutions in order to create a more beneficial resolution.

For many years there has been social unrest in the Balkan region due to the many ethnic minorities. Additionally, many populations are living in nations that are not there own (example, Albanians living in Kosovo). This causes tension and unrest between nations and groups. This itself will never allow for the nations to join the EU, furthermore, it allows for Russia to exploit the situation which has been done many times before. Therefore, it is important that ethnic minorities have freedom of speech and are heard and understood. In some extreme cases, it may be relevant to hold independence referendums to create nations which are socially stable.

As for political instability, corruption has always been an issue. Elections need to be transparent and it would be beneficial if the following couple of elections are overseen by trustworthy organizations such as the EU or NATO. This will allow for a fair election and will also set the precedent for following elections. Additionally, the Russian Federation would not intervene in elections knowing that Western powers are overlooking, this would avoid situations like the 2016 Montenegrin elections and the 2006 Macedonian elections.

As for relations between Balkan regions, it is important that these remain stable and show signs or cooperation. UN-mediated talks between Greece and the Former Yugoslavian Republic of Macedonia are vital concerning the issue over 'Macedonia'. Or, solutions to the situation need to be presented, such as officially naming Macedonia the Republic of Macedonia and declaring Greece's Macedonia as Greece's Republic of Macedonia. It is important not to pick sides as if Macedonia's side is taken, Greece will continue to exclude Macedonia from the EU. And if Greece's side is picked, Macedonia may want nothing to do with Greece and the EU and may turn to the Russian Federation.

Russian propaganda and Russian-led disinformation is an issue that continues to divide nations and, therefore, it is important that this is put to an end. This could be through enhanced internet monitoring but it needs to be noted that many citizens may worry about being watched constantly when on the internet.

Finally, it is important that Russia-NATO cooperation continues in order to create a more peaceful situation. Talks over the recent nerve agent attack need to occur to settle the situation and return diplomats to their respective embassies to continue political cooperation. After that, projects concerning peace and security need to be started between NATO and Russia. By doing so, the two sides will work together and it will ensure future cooperation for at least a number of years.

Further Reading

https://www.nato.int/cps/su/natohq/official_texts_25468.htm - The NATO-Russia Founding Act
https://ec.europa.eu/commission/news/strategy-western-balkans-2018-feb-06_en - The Strategy for the Western Balkans
https://www.geopoliticalmonitor.com/neglected-backwater-russias-growing-influence-in-the-balkans/ - General overview of Russian influence in the Balkans
https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/eu-brussels-russia-moscow-kremlin-balkans-ukraine-jean-clauder-juncker-vladimir-putin-nato-latest-a8226786.html - Information over EU and Russia battling for the Balkan region

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