

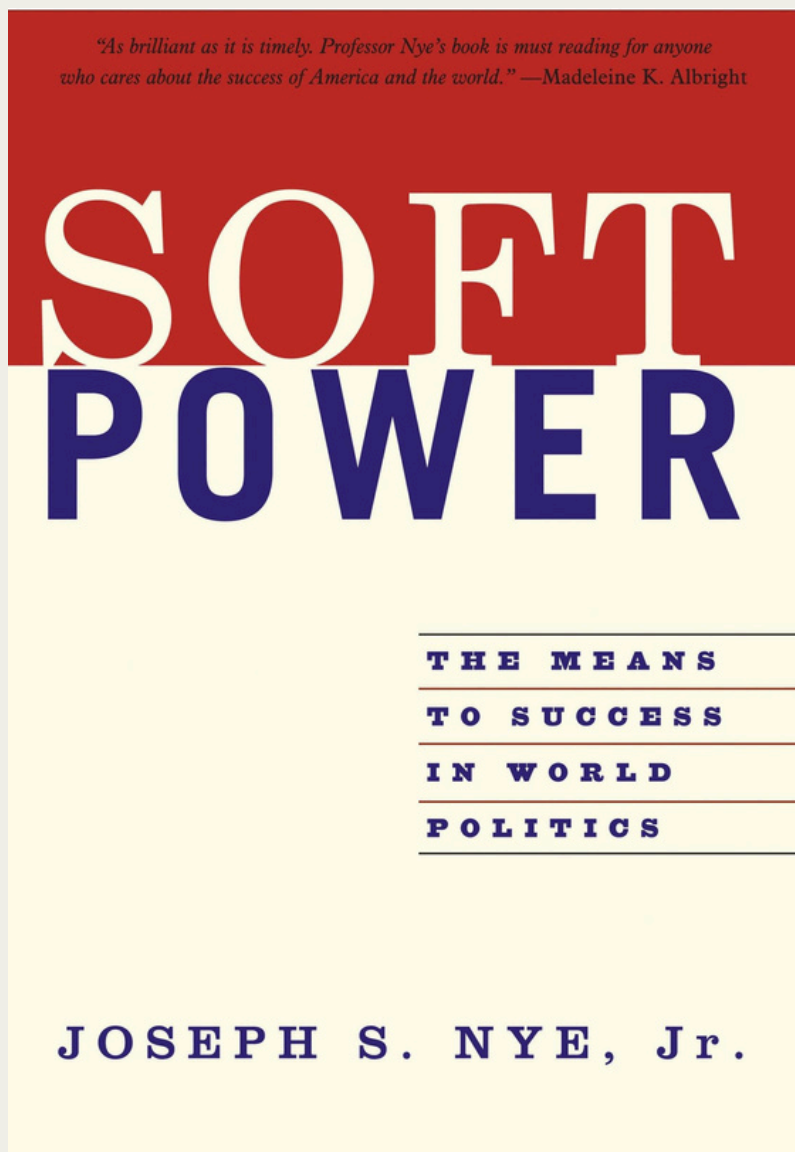


Exercise of Soft Power by External Actors in the Western Balkans





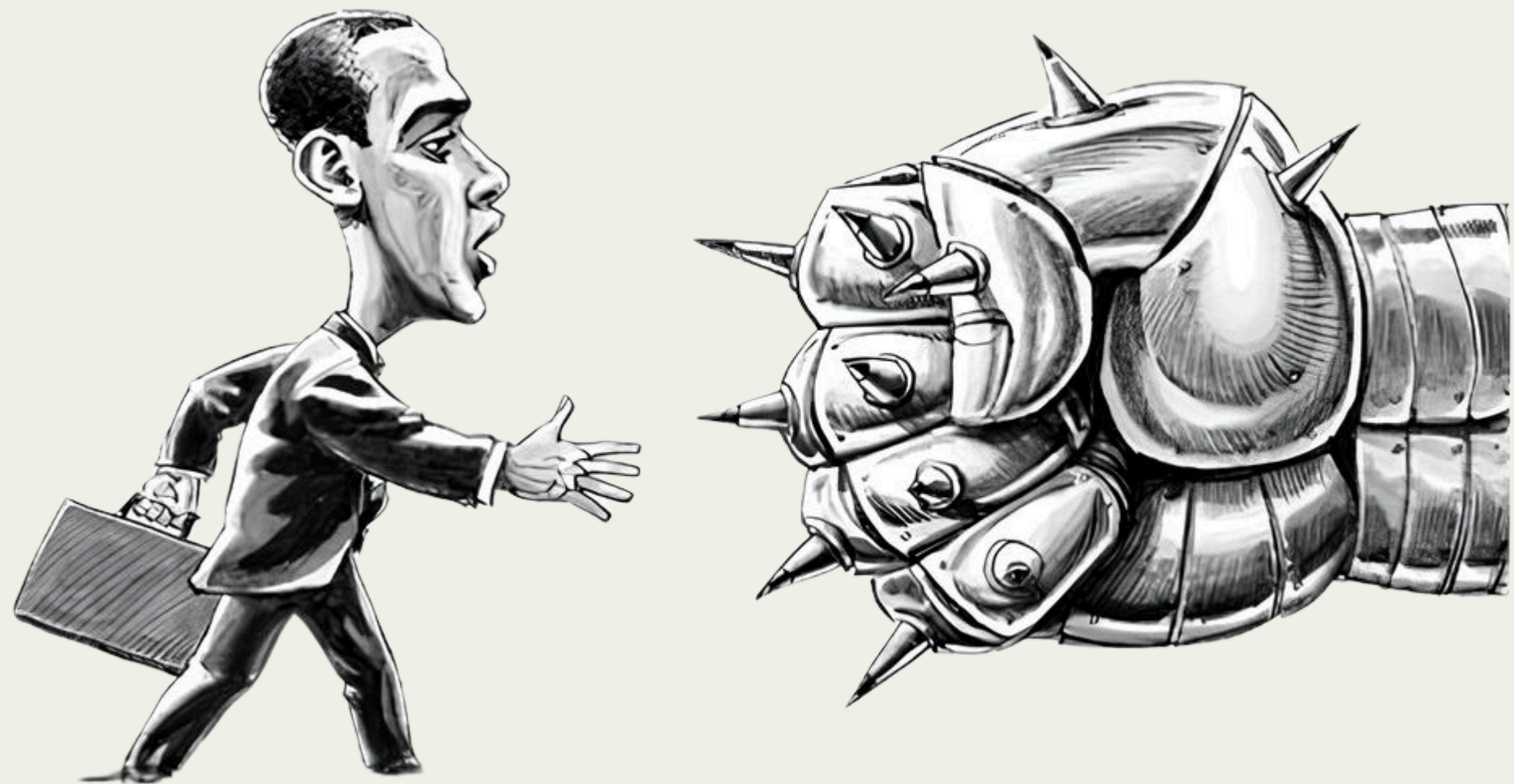
Joseph Nye



SOFT POWER

“an indirect way to get what you want”

getting others to want the outcomes that you want





Western Balkans



EUROPEAN UNION

- Peacebuilding Efforts after the Breakup of Yugoslavia
- Enlargement Policy -> Strongest Soft-Power Tool

EUROPEAN UNION

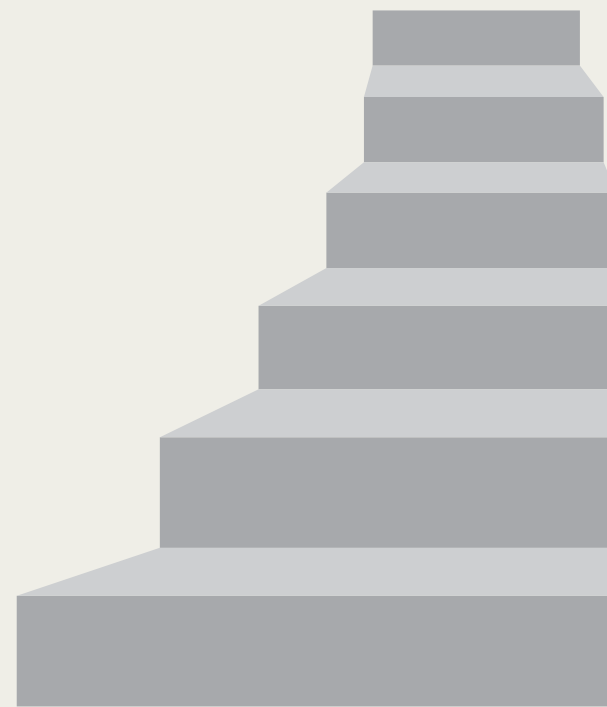
Towards EU Membership

Stage 1: Association

Stage 2: Reaching the decision to open negotiations

Stage 3: From the decision to the opening of negotiations

Stage 4: The Accession Negotiations



EUROPEAN UNION

Towards EU Membership

Negotiating Clusters

- Fundamentals
- Internal Market
- Competitiveness and Inclusive Growth
- Green Agenda and Sustainable Connectivity
- Resources, Agriculture and Cohesion
- External Relations

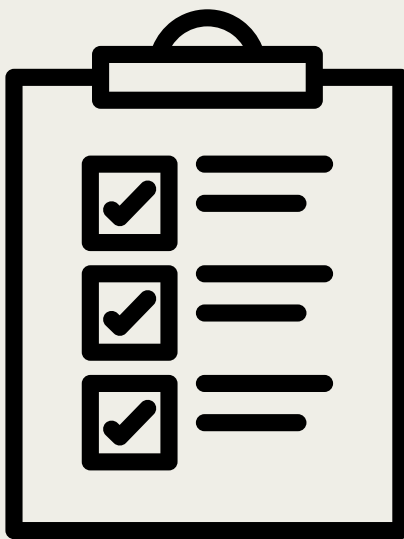


EUROPEAN UNION

Towards EU Membership

Copenhagen Criteria

- (a) that the candidate country has achieved stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities
- (b) the existence of a functioning market economy as well as the capacity to cope with competitive pressure and market forces within the Union
- (c) Membership presupposes the candidate's ability to take on the obligations of membership including adherence to the aims of political, economic and monetary union.



EUROPEAN UNION



October 2024: Opened
Negotiations



December 2021: 22 out of 35
Chapters opened, provisionally
closed 2



December 2024: 33 out of 35 Chapters
opened, provisionally closed 6

EUROPEAN UNION



December 2023: Screening Process
Completed



December 2023: European Council
decided to open accession
negotiations with Bosnia



January 2024: Not a candidate
status, benefits from visa-free
travel

EUROPEAN UNION



Rule of Law and Democratic Reforms

The EU actively promotes democratic governance, the rule of law, and anti-corruption measures. By supporting independent institutions, civil society organizations, and judicial reforms, the EU strengthens democratic resilience in the region.

Cultural and Educational Diplomacy



Erasmus+



Economic and Financial Assistance

The EU is the largest trade partner and investor in the Western Balkans. Through financial instruments like the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA), the EU provides funding for infrastructure, education, governance reforms, and environmental projects.

EUROPEAN UNION

Serbia: Stability Over Democracy?



Cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY)
2008 - Serbia transferred Ratko Mladic to the ICTY



Stabilisation and Association Agreement
in 2008

Normalization of relations
with Kosovo
Brussels Agreement (2013)



Accession Negotiations
(2014)

EUROPEAN UNION

North Macedonia: A Different Approach



Wiretapping scandal exposing high-level abuses of power, leading to mass protests known as the "Colorful Revolution."



Przino Agreement 2015

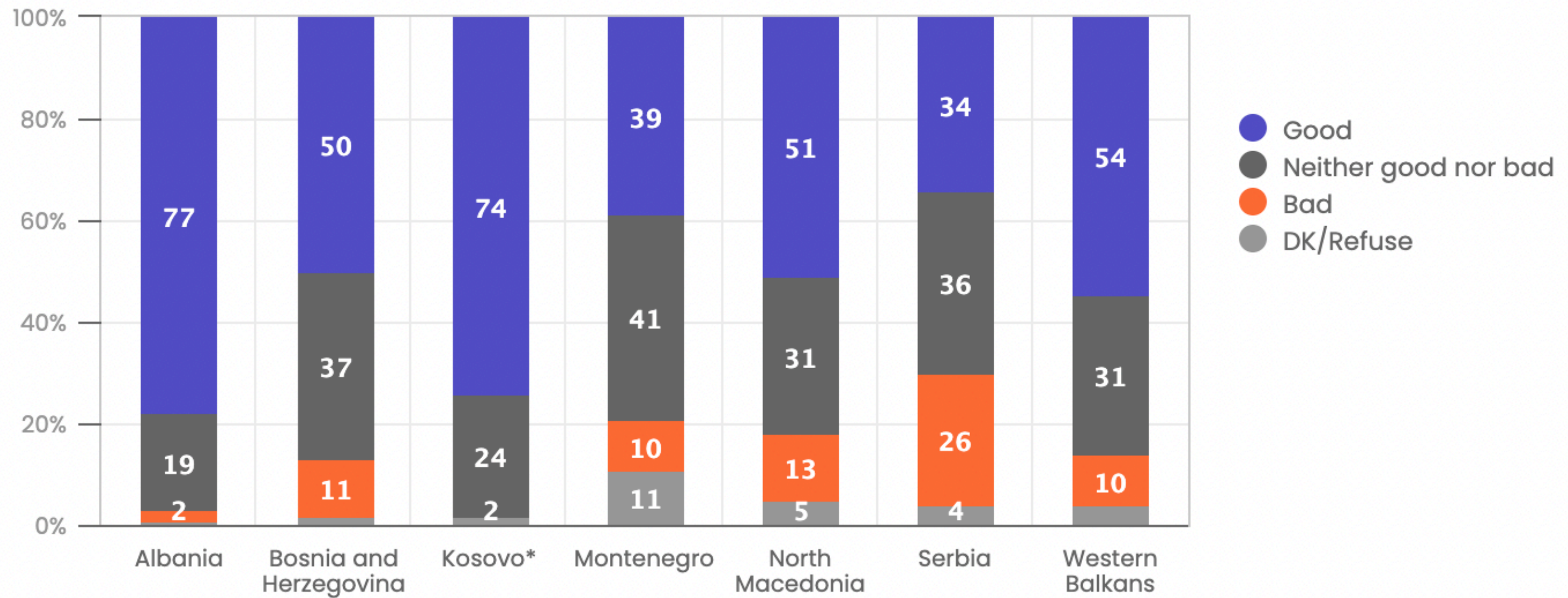


Pro-European Government
Zoran Zaev

Prespa Agreement 2018



Do you think that EU membership would be good, neither good nor bad, or bad?



Russia

Geopolitical Importance

- The Western Balkans are at the crossroads of East and West, making them a strategic focal point in great-power competition.
- Western Balkans are not a foreign policy priority for the Kremlin.
- Russia ensures it maintains a certain degree of influence in the region to counterbalance Euro-Atlantic integration.



Russia

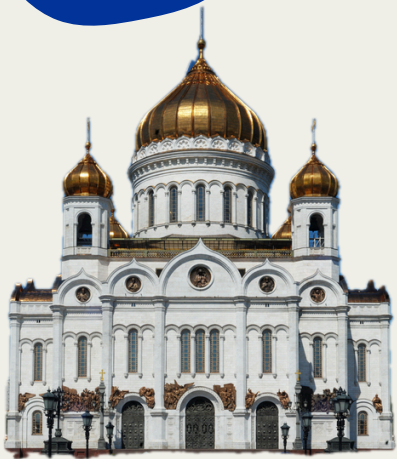
Historical - Cultural - Religious Ties

Historical Ties: In the 19th century, Russia supported Slavic revolts against the Ottoman Empire. Russia has historically supported Serbia, particularly during the Balkan Wars (1912–1913) and World War I, when it positioned itself as a protector of Slavic nations against the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empires.

Cultural Ties: The Russian language and literature have influenced Serbian and other Slavic cultures, with many classic Russian literary works being widely read and appreciated in the region.

Russia

Historical - Cultural - Religious Ties



The shared Eastern Orthodox Christian faith is a key link, with the Serbian Orthodox Church maintaining strong ties to the Russian Orthodox Church.



Russia has also provided financial and political support for Orthodox religious sites, such as its contributions to the completion of Belgrade's Saint Sava Temple, one of the largest Orthodox churches in the world.



Kostantin Malofeev, a billionaire close ally of Putin runs the Charitable Foundation of St. Basil the Great, largest Russian Orthodox charity foundation in the Balkans, promoting a pan-Slavic narrative. This religious framing provides legitimation for anti-Western domestic and foreign policies, especially in Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Montenegro.

Russia

Strongest Allies



President of Serbia
Alexander Vucic



President of
Republic of Srpska
Milorad Dodik

Russia

Fueling Influence Energy Dependencies

Energy Mix - % of Gas

- Serbia - 14.4%
- Bosnia and Herzegovina - 2.7%
- North Macedonia - 9.3%



100% Depending on Russian Gas
Deforming Market Competition

Cluster 3: Competitiveness and Inclusive Growth
Cluster 4: Green Agenda and Sustainable Connectivity
Cluster 6: External Relations

Russia

Asymmetric Operations

Media Outlets

- Journalists are directly funded by Moscow.
- Anti-Western narratives, foster regional instability, and portray any change to the status quo as hostile. Content reaches Bosnian, Croatian, and Montenegrin audiences.



Radicalization

- Accused of organizing youth camps and research initiatives that serve as radicalization hubs.
- Ejup Maqedonci: “these activities encourage criminal operations in northern Kosovo, further destabilizing the region and boosting security risks”

China



Geopolitical Importance

- Common post-communist background
- Vital transit route for the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)
- Key gateway to EU markets

China

14+1 Framework -> Platform -> Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)



China

Investments and Debt Traps

Montenegro's Bar-Boljare highway project ->
China Road and Bridge Corporation (CRBC)
China Eximbank could claim Montenegrin
territory.

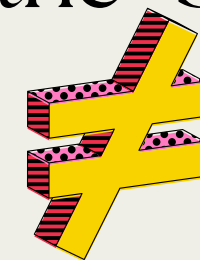
Montenegro's debt to China constitutes 22%
of its GDP



North Macedoniagovernment
borrowed over \$800 million from
China Eximbank for two highways:
Miladinovci-Shtip (completed in
2020) and Kichevo-Ohrid

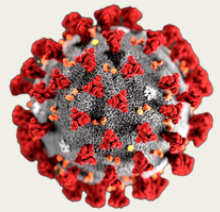


Serbia's collaboration with
Huawei on the “Safe Society”



Chapter 10 “Information
society and media” (Cluster 2)

China



COVID-19

Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić described Xi Jinping as a “brother of the Serbian people” while characterizing EU solidarity as a “fairy tale.”

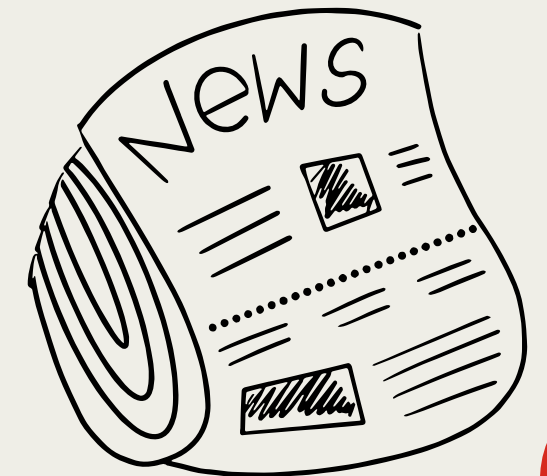


Partners with media agencies in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, and Serbia

Serbia’s Ministry of Culture and
China’s State Council Information
Office



- University exchanges, sinology programs, and cultural centers in Tirana and Belgrade
- In Montenegro, China’s embassy has funded educational institutions, encouraging a collaboration between the University of Donja Gorica (UDG) and Chinese universities and business entities



Western Balkans' public opinion on China (2022)

The public opinion of the Western Balkans on China in 2022.

Highly Favorable Somewhat Favorable Somewhat Unfavorable Highly Unfavorable Don't Know

Serbia



Montenegro



North Macedonia



Bosnia and Herzegovina

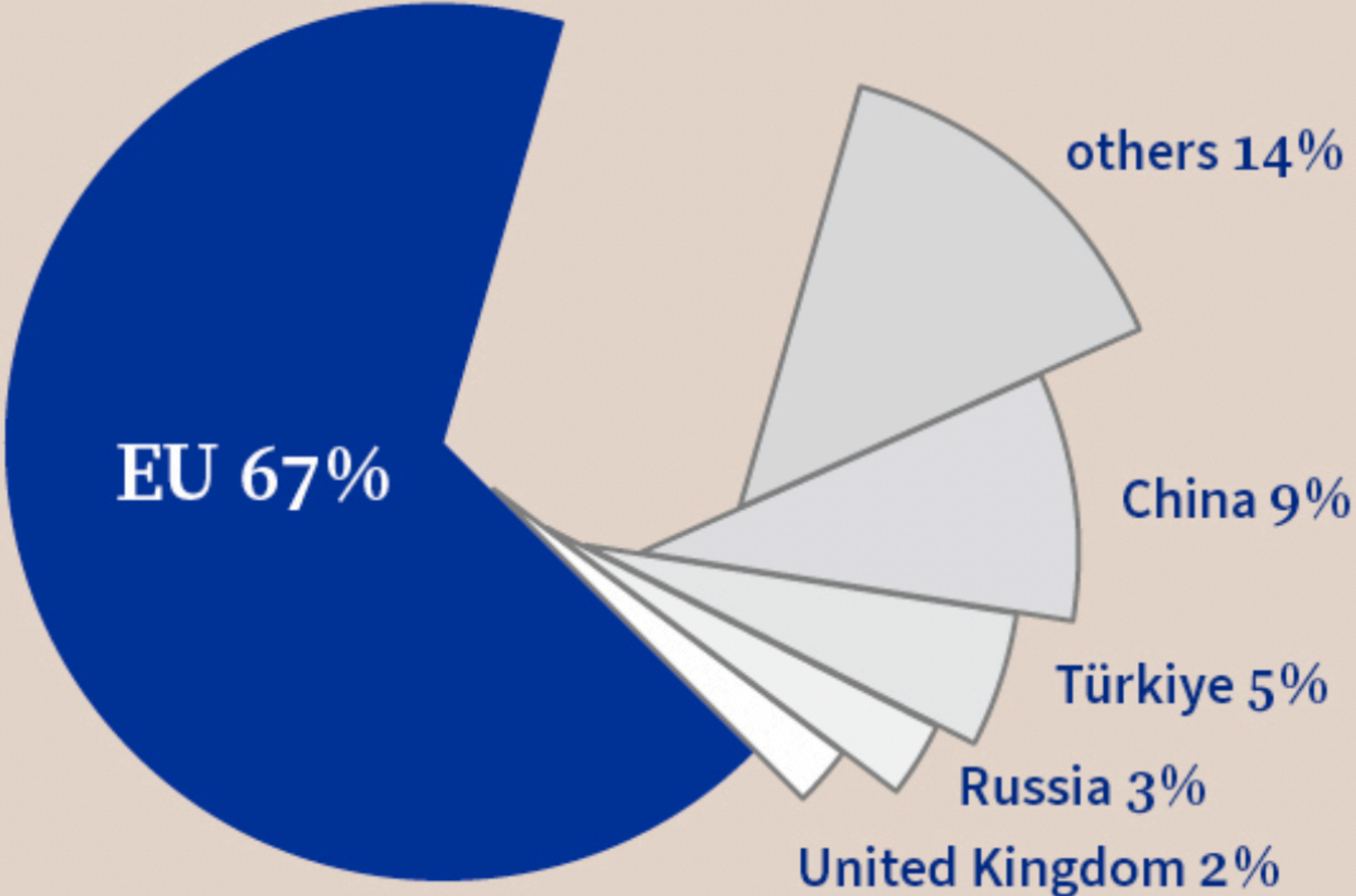


Kosovo



Source: [Center for Insights In Survey Research \(CISR\)](#) • [Get the data](#) • Created with [Datawrapper](#)

Western Balkans' main trading partners (2023)



USA

Education



FULBRIGHT
Scholar Program

- Nurturing a network of pro-Western intellectuals and professionals
- The Fulbright Program provides opportunities for students, scholars, and professionals from the Western Balkans to study, teach, or conduct research in the U.S., and vice versa.
- Many Fulbright scholars in the Western Balkans focus on fields like law, political science, journalism, and human rights, reinforcing democratic governance and civil liberties.
- In a region where EU, Russian, and Chinese influences compete, the Fulbright Program serves as a counterbalance to authoritarian soft power efforts.

USA

Recent Events



U.S. Agency for International Development -
Funding Freeze



\$1.4 Billion Project for Albanian Riviera
Environmental Concerns



Secretary General Rutte visits to
Sarajevo and Pristina



Donald Trump Jr visits Serbia,
meets President Aleksandar
Vucic

THANK YOU!