



Is This What Germany and Russia Have Been Talking About?

- Richard Palmer
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Germany and Russia have been talking a lot lately. German Chancellor Angela Merkel and Russian President Vladimir Putin have met twice in the last four months. The chief of the Russian general staff met Merkel in Berlin in July. The Free Democratic Party's spokesman called the meeting "odd" and surrounded by a "suspicious" silence.

The two nations said the meetings focused on Ukraine, Syria and Russia's new gas pipeline to Germany. These are three significant issues, and I have no doubt that they were discussed.

But there's one more issue of great importance to both powers. I suspect that it too was a topic of conversation. If it wasn't, it soon will be.

More Europe

The Balkans are going through their most significant changes in a decade—if not longer.

Croatia and Slovenia split from Yugoslavia in the early '90s. The Bosnian War ended in 1995. In 1999, NATO forced Serbia to withdraw from Kosovo. Shortly afterward, Croatia and Slovenia were absorbed into the European Union. In 2008, Kosovo declared independence, a declaration that has so far been recognized by only 111 out of 193 United Nations member states.

Over the last decade, not much has changed. The region is full of disagreements and potential disagreements, but these issues have remained frozen.

Until now. Over the last year, Europe has been moving into the Balkans. In 2017, Montenegro joined NATO. The EU has long been reluctant to give membership to the poorer Balkan nations. The euro crisis has dulled its appetite for expensive expansion. Yet over the summer, the EU placed Albania and Macedonia more firmly on the road to EU membership. Provided the two meet certain conditions, they could begin formal membership talks in 2019, with the goal of joining the EU in 2025.

Bringing these two into the EU would be a major boost for European power in the region. Initially, Europe seemed happy with just Croatia and Slovenia. They had the strongest cultural links with Europe, and Croatia's long Adriatic coastline was the most strategically important advantage. But since then, Russia and China have been lavishing money and attention on the region.

Europe is fine with the Balkans being weak. But not so much a weak Balkans dominated by Russia or China. It seems the EU felt it had to do something to bring these countries closer to Europe. "[I]n the long run, [the] Balkans belong strictly to the EU," said former European Commission President Romano Prodi. If Europe can influence the region without having to pay all the costs associated with EU membership, great. But no other power can be allowed to move in.

A Radical New Plan

Much more recently, Kosovo and Serbia have been pushing a radical plan to redraw the borders of the Balkans.

The plan first emerged in July. In what Geopolitical Futures called a “bombshell report,” the Kosovo-based *Gazeta Express* claimed that Russia and the United States had agreed to a possible partition of Kosovo at the Helsinki summit. Under the proposal, Kosovo would give up some regions where ethnic Serbs are in the majority. In exchange, Serbia would recognize Kosovo’s independence. Some Albanian-majority parts of Serbia may also be transferred to Kosovo.

Since then, the proposal has become more public.

Over the weekend, Kosovo President Hashim Thaçi and Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić spoke at the European Forum Alpbach in Austria. Both seemed keen to reach a deal. Until Serbia recognizes Kosovo’s independence, both are locked out of the EU and cut off from the funds that come with EU membership.

Both made it clear they would consider border changes. “Countries of our region, EU member states or other countries in the world should not oppose or be afraid of a potential peaceful agreement between Kosovo and Serbia, even if such a deal might include border correction,” said Thaçi. This was the first time these leaders have openly endorsed redrawing borders.

On the same day, the EU announced that it would mediate talks between the two on September 7.

On August 24, U.S. National Security Adviser John Bolton said that the U.S. would not oppose this kind of land-for-peace deal.

Merkel explicitly rejected the idea last month. But Johannes Hahn, Austria’s EU Commission member, said, “We should leave it to them ... finding a solution will be supported by us if the overall setting is OK.” It remains to be seen how strong Germany’s opposition is and how many beyond Merkel share it.

‘Playing With Fire’

Changing borders so that people live in the country they want to live in seems like common sense. But in Europe, it is dangerous. Changing these borders “would open Pandora’s box,” wrote Geopolitical Futures. “If Kosovo and Serbia start redrawing borders, there is nothing to stop Albania from wanting to redraw its borders with Macedonia, which has a large ethnic-Albanian minority, or Croatia from wanting to redraw its borders with Bosnia, which has a substantial ethnic-Croat population. For this reason, partition has been a nonstarter until now, not just for Balkan countries but also for the United Nations, the European Union and the United States, which together have overseen the development of the region into what it is today. ...

“Changing borders in this part of the world is playing with fire, but putting out one of the biggest border disputes on the European continent might be worth the risk. If it goes wrong, though, everyone involved might wish they had left the fire alone.”

All this change in the most potentially explosive part of Europe must concern Germany. The Balkans is where the major powers of the region—Germany, Russia and Turkey—collide. If Berlin wants to avoid such a dangerous collision, it will have to collude.

We’ve written extensively about how Germany caused the breakup of Yugoslavia in the early 1990s. At the UN, some referred to the breakup of Yugoslavia as “Genscher’s war” because of the role German Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher played in starting it. The Croats have even built a statue in his honor.

Germany went against the world in recognizing Croatia and Slovenia as independent in 1991. “[I]n its unusual assertiveness in moving ahead with a plan to extend diplomatic recognition to the breakaway Yugoslav republics of Croatia and Slovenia, Germany has stirred troubling historical associations,” the *New York Times* wrote at the time. Then U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher said that Germany had “a certain responsibility” for that war. Once underway, Germany violated international law to funnel arms to anti-Serbian forces. “Germany appears to be Croatia’s largest arms supplier during the war, although this is in violation of German law prohibiting the shipments of arms to an active war zone and a violation of the UN arms embargo on Yugoslavia as well,” wrote the *Telegraph* in 1997.

With this region going through some potentially explosive changes, you can guarantee that Germany is watching.

But Putin is watching too. The breakup of Yugoslavia was also a key moment in Russian history. It was the early 1990s, the Soviet Union had just collapsed, and Yugoslavia demonstrated Russia’s impotence. In 1999, Russia strongly opposed the Kosovo War. Its objections were completely ignored.

“We remember 1999 very well,” Putin said in a 2014 speech at the UN. “It was hard to believe, even seeing it with my own eyes, that at the end of the 20th century, one of Europe’s capitals, Belgrade [capital of Serbia], was under missile attack for several weeks, and then came the real intervention. Was there a UN Security Council resolution on this matter, allowing for these actions? Nothing of the sort.”

“When Putin says Russians ‘remember 1999,’ he’s saying that they have *deep emotions* about it to this day,” *Trumpet* editor in chief Gerald Flurry noted in the May 2014 *Trumpet*. “That rage still burns within Vladimir Putin. He has a lot of power and a strong memory about what happened in Yugoslavia.”

Fast-forward to 2018: Russia and Germany are talking a lot even as momentous changes are afoot in the Balkans. Perhaps it is a coincidence: Germany and Russia do have plenty of other big issues to talk about. But the Balkans are definitely on their radars.

Exactly what is going on is not clear. Does Putin believe he can destabilize the region by making borders a subject of debate once again? Does he believe he can create a Russian-backed rival in the region by strengthening Serbia? Is he trying to gain leverage in his dealings with Germany? Does Germany think it can come to some kind of final settlement with Russia over the region, ending the animosity?

Regardless, this Balkan borderland between Islamic, Catholic and Orthodox civilizations will remain a crucial theater of geopolitical confrontation. The 1990s demonstrated the Germans' rising ambition and power as they seized the chance to break up Yugoslavia and extend their influence.

You can read more about this crucial time in our free booklet [Germany's Conquest of the Balkans](#), by Mr. Flurry. The Bible powerfully warns about the role modern Germany will play in the world. But even just this recent history sounds a powerful warning.

If you keep watching the Balkans region, you will undoubtedly understand more about the rising powers in the world.

One of the major political shifts underway is the rise of Germany and its growing enmity with the United States. Mr. Flurry exposed how much of this is already happening in his recent article "[Germany and Russia's Secret War Against America](#)":

Jeremiah 1:13 records God showing the prophet a vision of "a seething pot; and the face thereof is toward the north." This symbolic language is describing modern Germany. Beneath the surface, that nation is full of simmering dissatisfaction with the current world order. Germans are angry at the U.S., and especially furious with President Trump. The imperialistic ambition that prompted Germany to start both world wars is alive and well. It is "seething"!

All the related trends Mr. Flurry talked about in that article—the rise of Germany, Germany's ambition, Germany allying with Russia, and Germany turning against the U.S.—could soon be on display in the Balkans. ■