

«RUSSKIJ MIR»: EXPANDING OF THE INFORMATION INFLUENCE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION IN THE BALKANS

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For the population of the countries of the West, the end of the 20th century was a period of optimistic expectations. The defeat of the Soviet Union and the countries of the socialist bloc, it led in the Cold War, seemed to have finally eliminated the threat of nuclear war. However, the world community underestimated the strength of revanchist sentiments generated among the post-Soviet political elite in the Russian Federation. In the 1990s in Russia, with the active assistance of the ruling circles, the ideology of Eurasianism gained noticeable popularity, according to which Russia was supposed to become the legal successor to the political role of the Soviet Union and, using the methods of “hybrid” war, restore the bipolar architecture of international relations and seize control over the Eurasian continent.

In the far abroad, the main point of “application of force” for the Russian Federation in 1991–2001 became Yugoslavia. By supporting the nationalist regime of Slobodan Milosevic, Russia tried to maintain its presence in the Balkans, as the most important geostrategic region of South-Eastern Europe. Helping Serbians, Russia actively used methods of “hybrid” warfare.

1. Information support for the Milosevic regime in the Russian media with the aim of creating a positive image of Serbian radical Orthodox nationalists, allegedly exhausted in an “unequal battle” against the collective West and its henchmen – the Kosovo Albanians.

2. Tendentious coverage in the Russian media space of NATO military operations in the Balkans in 1995–1999 and investigations of crimes against humanity committed by the Milosevic regime.

3. Sending paramilitary armed forces to Serbia to provide military assistance to Serbian radicals (a significant part of their personnel was formed from Russian nationalists who fought in Pridnestrovie).

4. The use of the Russian contingent of the UN peacekeeping force to escalate interethnic tensions in Kosovo and support Serbian nationalists (the so-called forced march to Pristina on June 12, 1999). Over time, the history of this military action will become one of the fundamental tenets of the “Russkij mir”, according to which “Russians do not abandon their own in the war” and are ready to defend Orthodox Christians anywhere in the world. The history of the forced march to Pristina was reflected in Russian popular culture: the feature film “Balkan Frontier” (2019) and the mini-series “Battalion” (2018) were shot. It is worth noting that these films, glorifying Russian militarism, premiered during the Russian-Ukrainian war.

Thus, the study of Russian-Serbian relations since 1991 provides rich material for a of the Russian Federation’s use of “hybrid war” methods in the Balkans with the aim of establishing the “Russkij mir” and expanding its influence in the international arena.