

Belgrade's Balancing Act Between East and West Tested by Ukraine World

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Recent remarks by Ukraine's Ambassador to Serbia Oleksandr Aleksandrovych (pictured) have irked many in Belgrade. (file photo)

By [Gordana Knezevic](#) for RFE/RL, Nov 19, 2017 Ukraine has long expressed unhappiness about the presence of Serbian volunteer fighters among the Russia-backed separatist forces it is battling in its eastern regions. But Ukraine's ambassador to Serbia, Oleksandr Aleksandrovych, seriously ratcheted up tensions when he not only [accused Russia](#) of using its propaganda and security services to lure Serbians to fight against Kyiv, but hit close to Belgrade's heart by suggesting in an interview that Moscow was using Serbia to sow discord in the Balkans. He rattled off a long list of alleged Russian destabilization efforts in his November 1 interview with the Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (BIRN): "Russia trains Serbian mercenaries to kill Ukrainians. Russia used Serbian extremists to make a coup d'état in Montenegro. Russia encourages Serbian separatism in [the Serb-dominated Bosnian entity of] Republika Srpska to destabilize Bosnia and Herzegovina.... Russia uses the Serbian factor to destabilize Macedonia. Russia plays an active role in putting Serbian Kosovars against Albanian Kosovars. Russia sells its airplanes to Serbia to create tensions with Croatia." The ambassador used those examples to highlight Kyiv's reasons to question Serbian intentions when it comes to their relationship. "When you have Serbian politicians traveling to Crimea and praising Putin for his 'wise and strong policies', when you have Serbian mercenaries [fighting in separatist-held territories], when you have Serbia voting in the UN against Ukraine -- all of that naturally creates a negative image of Serbia in Ukraine," Aleksandrovych said. Aside from Serbia's 2016 vote against a UN resolution calling for international monitoring of the human rights situation in Ukraine, Aleksandrovych's verbal volley referred to actions not officially endorsed by Belgrade: a trip to Crimea taken in early November by members of the opposition Radical Party, and, of course, the contentious Serbian volunteer fighters. […] [https://www.rferl.org/a/balkans-withou ... aine-russia/28862554.html](https://www.rferl.org/a/balkans-without-ukraine-russia/28862554.html)