History

The area of today's Serbia was at one time part of the ancient country of Illyria. The Romans conquered it in 168 BC and governed it as the province of Moesia. In 395 AD it became part of the Byzantine Empire. In the 7th century Serbs settled in the area west of the Morava River and subsequently gave allegiance to the Byzantines.

About 1168, the Great Zupan Stefan Nemanja, founder of the Nemanjic Royal Dynasty, united the Serbs and established the first kingdom of Serbia. Serbia gradually expanded until, under King Stefan Dušan (1331-1355), it controlled much of what is now Serbia, Montenegro, Albania, and Greece. After the death of Dušan in 1355, the kingdom of Serbia began to weaken. Meanwhile, the Turkish Ottoman Empire was expanding. In 1459, after the Serbian army suffered a series of defeats, Serbia came under direct Ottoman rule. In 1815 Milos Obrenović led a successful revolt, freeing most of Serbia from Ottoman domination. His son Prince Mihailo Obrenović engineered a total Ottoman withdrawal from Serbia in 1867.

During the Russo-Turkish War of 1877 to 1878, Serbia and Russia joined forces to defeat the Ottomans in the Balkans. The 1878 Congress of Berlin recognized Serbia as an independent state.

Serbian relations with its north neighbor Austria-Hungary deteriorated badly during the so-called Pig War (a customs dispute, 1905-1907) and worsened after 1908 when Austria-Hungary annexed Bosnia and Herzegovina. In 1912 and 1913 Serbia took an active part in the Balkan Wars, gaining both prestige and territory—Serbia received part of Macedonia, part of the Sandžak, and Kosovo. Austria-Hungary then became alarmed by Serbia's growing strength in the Balkans.

Tension was already extremely high in June 1914 when the heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, Archduke Francis Ferdinand, and his wife were assassinated by a Serb nationalist at Sarajevo, Bosnia. The Austro-Hungarian government held Serbia responsible and declared war, an incident that led to World War I.
In August 1914 Austria-Hungary invaded Serbia, occupying it by December 1915. The Serbian army and government went to exile to the Greek island of Corfu in 1916. France, Russia, and the United Kingdom had entered the war in support of Serbia, and Serbia emerged as one of the victors in the conflict.

After the war, in 1918, the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes was created, renamed the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in 1929.
In 1941, during World War II, the Germans invaded Serbia and placed most of it under direct German military occupation. After Germany and the other Axis Powers were defeated in 1945, a Yugoslav federation was declared.

From 1946 to 1991 Serbia was part of a larger federal state of Yugoslavia, which consisted of Serbia and five other republics: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, and Slovenia. That Yugoslav state broke apart in 1991, when several of the republics declared their independence. In 1992 Serbia and Montenegro proclaimed themselves the successor state to the former Yugoslavia and took the name Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY). The FRY adopted a new constitutional charter in 2003 that gave the constituent republics more autonomy and changed the country's name from the FRY to Serbia and Montenegro. This union dissolved in June 2006 when Serbia and Montenegro became separate, independent states.