

Kosovo and Metohija

– *How to Achieve a Righteous and Sustainable Solution* –

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Abstract

Confrontations and misunderstandings between Serbian and Albanian populations in Kosovo and Metohija represent more or less challenging security issue during the period from the end of the 20th century until today. Current situation is nothing more than the reflection of the processes that started long ago, back in the medieval time, and lasted through distant and recent history. Instant “solutions” that almost always were imposed from the great powers didn’t really solve any of numerous problems between two peoples, but only deepened and widened the significant conflict potential at this neuralgic spot in the Western Balkan. Therefore, problems in Kosovo and Metohija will be analyzed from both historical and geopolitical perspectives in order to suggest how to achieve a righteous and sustainable solution for the benefit of all citizens in Kosovo and Metohija.

Historical Frame

Misunderstandings concerning Kosovo and Metohija are deeply rooted in the past – reaching out until nowadays. Therefore, it is justified to quote the old Latin phrase: “*Historia magistra vitae (est)*” meaning that we should study the past if we want to predict the future. Accordingly, and looking back through time, history teaches us that under the Serbian Emperor Dušan (14th century), the Albanians were recognized as one of the equal peoples – based on social status and not on ethnicity (similar like in most of the European monarchies of that time). Mixed marriages were made in order of achieving mutually beneficial new alliances. Furthermore, Serbians and Albanians even fought together against the Ottoman Empire. However, after the death of Skanderbeg¹ the intense Islamization of the Albanians started which marked the end of the calm and peaceful period of the Serbian – Albanian relations. Most of the Albanians accepted Islam under the Ottoman Empire because of the pragmatic reasons (e.g. tax exemption as all other privileged parts of society). Afterwards they were willingly engaged in oppression of Serbian Orthodox Christians. In that time, the most prominent protectors of Islam were Grand Viziers of the Ottoman Empire with the Albanian origins.² Thus, the seed of the greater confrontations has been sown, especially in the period during and after the 17th century and until the end of 19th century. It could be stated that the most important reasons that caused problematic and challenging relations between two peoples were the Great Serbian Migration (1690) and serious conflicts after the liberation wars of Serbia and Monte Negro against the Ottoman Empire, in the period after the year 1876.

On the other hand, the Albanians from Kosovo and Metohija prefer to represent themselves as the “victims of Serbian hegemony”. There is no doubt that every great historical or/and geopolitical change led to great (and mostly – unrealistic) expectations on both sides, causing in

¹ Gjergj Kastrioti who is known as Skanderbeg was an Albanian feudal lord and military commander who led a rebellion against the Ottoman Empire. There are contrary claims between Serbian and Albanian historians about the origins and religion of this famous historic person. However, Skanderbeg (1405–1468) became an Albanian national myth (that was created relatively late – only after the end of the 19th century).

² Grand Vizier Sinan Pasha ordered the burning of Saint Sava's remains at the Vračar Plateau – Belgrade, in 1594. Saint Sava was the founder and the first Archbishop of the Serbian Orthodox Church as well as the first diplomat and founder of the Serbian Monastery Hilandar that still exists at Mount Athos. Today, at the Vračar Plateau there is the Saint Sava Temple – the biggest Christian church in the Balkans.

the same time enlargement of the conflict potential. In that sense – and after more than five centuries – Serbian side expected final return to occupied area of Kosovo and Metohija (after the great Kumanovo Battle victory against already ill Ottoman Empire, in the year 1912). On the opposite side, Albanians projected their own national interest (later called “Great Albania”) and this idea was set only 34 years before the said battle and winning back of the birthplace of League of Prizren³ under the Serbian governance. As it was proclaimed – The League of Prizren pleaded to establish autonomy within the Ottoman Empire and to “defend the wholeness of the territories of Albania” bearing in mind the consequent losses of territories after the war. However, great powers had no understanding for Albanian expectations and their demands were harshly refused.

During 20th century, especially after the Second World War – in Tito’s Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia – Albanians enjoyed the privileges of equal social opportunities like no other ethnic minority in the world.⁴ While President Tito – as the absolute leader – was alive, Albanians in Kosovo and Metohija made no trouble, but the ideas of League of Prizren were there – just below the surface. Accordingly, and soon after Josip Broz Tito passed away (1980), old intentions of the Albanians from Kosovo and Metohija were liberated. Therefore, first serious riots occurred in the year 1989 after the cancelling of the autonomy from 1974 that clearly was leading to the secession.⁵ In any case, one thing led to another and ten years later Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was bombed under the NATO campaign. After this

³ The League of Prizren (1878) was founded in Prizren – Kosovo and Metohija, by the Albanians, after the conclusion of the Russo–Turkish War (1877–1878) and following the subsequent Treaty of San Stefano and Congress of Berlin.

⁴ The Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia provided the widest possible autonomy for the Albanian minority, as well as for all other minorities (like equal participation in the local governance, education and media on the languages of the minorities etc). The Constitution from the year 1974 provided forming of two autonomous regions: Vojvodina (in the north of the Socialist Republic of Serbia) and Kosovo and Metohija (in the south of the Socialist Republic of Serbia) and this may be considered as the first step towards the disintegration of the former Yugoslavia. Ironically, there were (and there are) no ethnic confrontations in Vojvodina (with more than 25 minorities – Hungarians, Slovaks, Croats and others) in comparison with the Kosovo and Metohija (where the Albanians are the most represented nationality). Also, it is worth to mention that there were no other autonomous regions in the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia (although, for example, significantly large number of Serbian citizens lived in the Socialist Republic of Croatia – where they were inhabited for centuries like the barrier for the breakthrough of the Ottomans to Western Europe – what was known as “Military Krajina”). During the wars in former Yugoslavia, more than 30 years ago, great majority of Serbs who lived in that and other parts of Croatia were expelled and the final result was the exodus of some 250.000 Serbian citizens from Croatia. In the same time, large number of Serbs (who used to be one of the main constitutive nations in former Yugoslavia) were left shattered out of the reach and protection of today’s Serbia.

⁵ Everything started in the mine Trepča with false hunger strike of the Albanian miners and soon the state of emergency in Kosovo and Metohija were introduced and Pandora’s box was opened.

unprecedented action Kosovo and Metohija was legally recognized as an autonomous province within the Republic of Serbia and pursuant to UN Security Council Resolution 1244 of June 10th 1999 it is under the temporary civil and military administration of the United Nations. Accordingly, the state of Serbia is conducting a peaceful, diplomatic and legal efforts to solve numerous open issues despite the fact that provisional institutions of self-government in Priština unilaterally declared independence on February 17th 2008 (contrary to the fundamental principles of international law).

Geopolitical Frame

Among various global turmoils – probably the most influencing one is ongoing war in Ukraine. We are witnessing the reconstruction of the (only until few years ago) established balance in Europe and wide world. It seems that the said balance (no matter how fragile and sensitive it was) – now is in the state of entropy that is threatening to make irreversible and possibly fatal changes in almost all areas of our lives: economy, energy, security, etc. Accordingly, America doesn't want to accept the multipolar nature of the “newest world order”⁶ and is doing everything to maintain the position of the “leader of Western democracy” with no regard about the consequences. Important and very powerful tool in “unifying” of the West is NATO, which keeps on spreading to the East. Today, while the war in Ukraine is raging, almost no one can remember the famous (or notorious) sentence that French President Emmanuel Macron said less than four years ago: “*What we are currently experiencing is the brain death of NATO*”.⁷ Emmanuel Macron obviously had the conscience about the necessity that “*Europe ... needs to start thinking of itself strategically as a geopolitical power; otherwise we will no longer be in control of our destiny*”. Sadly, Emmanuel Macron has largely given up and today European Union seems more like one of the states of the USA (and definitely without serious “thinking of itself strategically” – as Mr. Macron pointed out four years ago). Hence, voices for the European strategic independence are mostly silenced, with only few bright exceptions.⁸

⁶ This phrase has just been made up for this article by the author.

⁷ <https://www.economist.com/europe/2019/11/07/emmanuel-macron-warns-europe-nato-is-becoming-brain-dead>

⁸ Emmanuel Macron seriously objected and questioned recent appointment of Professor Fiona Scott Morton (from USA) as Chief Economist of Directorate General in EU – Brussels. Immediately afterwards, Ms. Scott Morton decided to withdraw from her new position because of the “political controversy” (that was caused by Macron's statements that the said appointment was “dubious” and “extremely worrying”).

Something similar happened in the French neighborhood, where the last European “steel lady” – Ms. Angela Merkel – has stepped down from the political scene. There is no doubt that the world is missing her wise and distinctive resolving of complex political issues from the long period she was obtaining duty of the German Chancellor. It looks like she was one of the last politicians who had integrity to act firmly whenever it was necessary, but also to find the path of compromise in the best interest(s) of all sides when it was seemingly impossible. Accordingly, it was very surprising to observe how easily Olaf Sholz (among other things) gave up from the pipeline “North Stream 2” – especially knowing that lack of cheap energy will not stimulate the GDP rise for German (and European) economy.

Besides above mentioned factors, geostrategic frame for the situation in Kosovo and Metohija should be completed by adding unavoidable implications from other global, regional and sub-regional factors, like the situation in Indo Pacific region including efforts to restrain China. Also, more and more important role of Turkiye – influencing the situation in the Western Balkans – must be stressed.

Having on mind above described circumstances – international, diplomatic and political position of the Republic of Serbia is extremely complex and sensitive. Burden of the wars in former Yugoslavia is often being imposed to Serbia (although unjustified in most of the cases).⁹ Also, Serbia is very often represented like the “dangerous instability factor in the Western Balkans”, although the truth is quite the opposite. And this is one of the main “proofs” that are commonly used for new pressure and demonization of the Serbs although just one look at the geographic map will clearly show that Serbia looks like an island – surrounded by NATO countries – and it’s simply impossible that Serbia could be any kind of threat for their neighbors. Furthermore, Serbia is constantly promoting initiatives for cooperation and improving of good neighborhood relations (e.g. “Open Balkan”).

⁹ Even today, well known narrative is present – stating that the late President Slobodan Milošević was the only one to blame for the dissolution of former Yugoslavia (although he has never said or ordered anything incriminating). In the same time, there were clear instructions of former (and also late) Croatian President Franjo Tuđman how to violently “solve the Serbian issue” in Croatia. Also, former President of the Presidency of the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia (and later Croatian President Stjepan Mesić) publicly said “I think I have completed my task, Yugoslavia no longer exists” (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9w2PMEWh6EM>).

It is also well known that Serbia is condemning the invasion of Ukraine while supporting the full respect of international law. In the same time, clear Serbian position is that sanctions are not an adequate tool for solving of any kind of international dispute.¹⁰ Because of the described balanced and neutral policy Serbia is under the great pressure from the West. Since the Republic of Serbia is the candidate to become the member of the European Union there is the obligation of the Serbian side (before the formal act of accession to the European Union) of fully adoption European Union Common Security and Defense Policy. Practically, it means that the European Union (and the United States of America, too) are expecting that Serbia should impose sanctions to the Russian Federation. In the same time, enlargement of the European Union is currently not seriously considered while “Berlin Process” in EU is not an issue for quite a while (despite politically correct statements in numerous announcements of EU officials). Hence, motivation for further European integrations has the steadily negative trend.

Current Situation

Efforts from international community to solve existing open issues between Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo and Metohija currently are instructed by the European Union, but those efforts – especially in the latest period – are united with significant support from the United States of America. Miroslav Lajčak is European Union Special Representative for the Dialogue between Belgrade and Priština and other Western Balkan regional issues for more than three years. He is closely monitoring the situation concerning the said dialogue as the key operative mediator for European Union High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy – Josep Borell. Besides two of them, Gabriel Escobar is also engaged in the Dialogue between Belgrade and Priština as the United States Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs responsible for the South Central Europe.

However, and despite various efforts of the international community, situation in Kosovo and Metohija hasn't become better in last few decades. Historically not so long ago – from the year 1999 until today – Albanians from Kosovo and Metohija were backed by NATO and most of the

¹⁰ Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was the subject of international sanctions (1992–1996, 1998–2000). Those periods of recent contemporary history have not remained in the best collective memory of Serbian people. Drastic sanctions made serious and almost tragic consequences on the lives of common people, but also included unprecedented inflation and devastation of the economy.

powerful Western countries in their efforts to achieve the unilaterally proclaimed “independence”. The result was (and is) the state-like shaped non-functional creature that is suffering from the lack of legitimacy and legality despite the enormous help and support from the West – primarily from the United States of America¹¹. For years now – the whole world is witnessing that temporary self-governance institutions in Priština have neither interest in normalization of the relations nor in achieving the comprehensive and sustained solution for all painful issues that were opened in the past.

It is more than obvious that there is no political will in the provisional institutions of self-governance in Priština to form the Association of Serbian Municipalities, which still is their obligation from the Brussels Agreement that was reached ten years ago. During this period of time all obligations of the Serbian side were fulfilled. Furthermore, official Belgrade was more than cooperative in efforts to stabilize the situation in Kosovo and Metohija but the West kept on “inviting both sides” to find the solution and de-escalate the tensions, without the sense about equal treatment of both sides. Consequently, the only possible result was nothing else but the continuation of provocative – and very often dangerous – behavior of the provisional institutions of self-governance in Priština.

Accordingly, and in lack of the will to bring to reason the Albanian side, it was decided to launch another EU initiative – without proper closing of the previous one. Hence – new Franco-German dialogue framework between Belgrade and Priština has been set up (that was adopted as an EU initiative in December 2022). Deficiency of the official consensus between the EU member states was compensated with the urge need to show uniform unity at all costs – most probably having on mind the ongoing war in Ukraine. Therefore, the result after the last meeting at the highest level¹² was extremely questionable.

¹¹ It is well known that European Union (EU) does not have an unified position on this issue because five EU member states did not recognize the unilaterally proclaimed “independence” of so called “Kosovo”.

¹² Meeting was held following the initiative of EU, in Ohrid (Northern Macedonia) on March 18th 2023 and with the participation of President of the Republic of Serbia - Aleksandar Vučić, Prime Minister of the provisional institutions of self-governance in Priština - Albin Kurti, High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy - Josep Borell, EU Special Representative for the Belgrade-Priština Dialogue - Miroslav Lajčak. Specifically, US Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs responsible for the South Central Europe - Gabriel Escobar (as observer) showed his undisguised pleasure, noting that both sides „should immediately start implementing the agreement towards the normalization of relations“.

To be more concrete – reached arrangement was something between written and oral agreement (without signing of documents). Hence, after the “agreement” all included sides had their own versions, explanations and remarks what really happened and how to move on.

Elections in the northern part of Kosovo and Metohija (in April 2023) were nothing else but the charade. Serbs boycotted the elections since still there is no Association of Serbian Municipalities. Therefore, only 3,47% of the registered voters went out to vote and the Albanians won the majority (with no legitimacy). Finally, they misused the opportunity to aggressively enter the offices in the northern Kosovo and Metohija – under the protection of Police armored vehicles and heavily armed special policemen – what induced riots and revolt of the Serbian population. Unfortunately, in those riots several KFOR soldiers were injured.

Under the above mentioned circumstances it is no surprise that the situation on the field has almost slipped out of control. Silently, and with the implicit and/or tacit consent of international organizations in Kosovo and Metohija nothing has been done to form the Association of Serbian Municipalities. In the same time, conflict potential rose dangerously – day by day – because of constant threats, arrests, violence and systematic oppression by the Albanian provisional institutions of self-governance. Police bases with Albanian policemen “popped up” in the northern part of Kosovo and Metohija – before the eyes of KFOR – so it seems that the “frog is still being boiled” ...

Simultaneously, and after winning again the election in his country – it seems that new/old Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan would like to take (another) initiative in pursuance of raising Turkiye from regional to global power. After his several diplomatic achievements¹³, it seems that Turkiye would like to regain back significant influence in the Balkans. Namely, last announcements are indicating that the next KFOR commander will be Turkish general (for the first time) and the said duty take over is allegedly planned for the fall this year. This could be a symbolic gesture of the great Turkish return to the Western Balkan – although this step should be strictly professional and impartial.

¹³ Helping Ukraine and maintaining contact with Russia from the beginning of the war, proactive role in facilitating the “Black Sea Grain Deal”, meetings with USA President Joseph Biden and Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis during recent NATO Summit in Vilnius, important (almost decisive) Turkish role in approving NATO membership for Finland and Sweden.

It should not be forgotten that NATO has been leading a peace support operation to build peace and stability in Kosovo and Metohija, under the authority of the United Nations (UN Security Council Resolution 1244).¹⁴ Having this on mind, there simply can be no convincing explanation to justify latest procurement of a new batch of Turkish-made *Bayraktar TB2* drones¹⁵ (after five drones have already been delivered to Priština in the beginning of May 2023) because this action is simply not consistent with KFOR's mission.

Indicatively – and similar as it usually was before¹⁶ – EU and the West mostly remained silent. Furthermore – and instead of clear condemnation – we could hear unfounded accusations and allegations that “weapons from Serbia were being smuggled into Kosovo using ambulance emergency vehicles and stockpiled in Serbian Orthodox Church facilities.”¹⁷ After the said allegations KFOR was forced to publish this statement: “*Alleged illegal presence of weapons was reported to the KFOR headquarters, but after further investigation to find confirmation of the reported incident, no evidence of what was reported emerged. There is no evidence of alleged smuggling conducted through the administrative border between Kosovo and Serbia into Orthodox churches using ambulance vehicles*”.

After everything that happened, President of the Republic of Serbia Aleksandar Vučić had to ask for a meeting with NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg. During the said meeting President Vučić expressed his concern about the situation in whole Kosovo and Metohija (not only in the northern part) and asked Secretary General Stoltenberg to provide safety and security for the Serbian people, pointing out that at least six Serbs were shot by the Albanian members of security forces in last six months. President Vučić also objected because of unfounded and arbitrary arrests that Albanian policemen are executing in Kosovo and Metohija what is clearly leading to the persecution of Serbian people. On his behalf – and among other things – Secretary General Stoltenberg said that “*It is important that tensions are reduced so we call on all parties to reduce tensions and to refrain from escalatory actions and rhetoric*”.

¹⁴ KFOR's mission is to: (1) contribute to a safe and secure environment, (2) support and coordinate the international humanitarian effort and civil presence, (3) support the development of a stable, democratic, multi-ethnic and peaceful “Kosovo”, (4) support the development of the “Kosovo Security Force”.

¹⁵ https://twitter.com/search?q=albin%20kurti%20bayraktar&src=typed_query&f=top

¹⁶ Türkiye have already delivered modern armored personnel carriers, mortars and howitzers to Priština.

¹⁷ Member of Parliament and Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the British Parliament – Alicia Kearns – caused a lot of controversy launching these allegations.

Therefore, the question is: why EU, USA and NATO don't (want to) see all of this and why they constantly avoid to sanction provocative and unacceptable behavior of Albin Kurti ?

Finally, now – when wild fires bursts almost every day and endurance is tested in the peak of this extremely hot weather – the administrative summer break will be imposed and the situation in Kosovo and Metohija most probably will be put aside for a while.

But this for sure doesn't mean that the burning issues will cool and that “normalization of relations” will occur. At least – not for Serbian population that is trying to survive on their own soil, in their own homeland – in Kosovo and Metohija.

How to Achieve a Righteous and Sustainable Solution

For durable, impartial and sincerely interested readers – who made it reading to this point – it is necessary to understand the depth of the problem of relations between Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo and Metohija. As it was explained – the problem of complex and sensitive relations goes on back into the past... waiting to be solved in the future to come. And exactly because of that – Serbs and Albanians have to do more than their best to overcome all mistrust and hostilities that were cumulating for centuries. It is still possible – although it is not going to be easy! Also, it should be noted that world will not stop until the righteous and comprehensive solution is found. On the contrary, there are (and there will be) plenty of issues that are waiting for solutions: Ukraine and Russia, NATO and Russia, Kurds and Turkiye, divided Cyprus, Greece and Turkiye, Armenia and Azerbaijan, Africa, Syria, Iran, Palestine, China, new alliances in the Pacific region etc.

Impartial and thorough reader will definitely notice that the determining factor in all of the confrontations and historical challenges between Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo and Metohija were the third sides¹⁸. To be more general – and more precise in the same time – great efforts were made to direct the relationships between the Balkan peoples according to the “third side interests” and without any regard whatsoever for the interests of those peoples involved.

¹⁸ Ottoman Empire, Austro-Hungarian Empire, Germany, Great Britain, USA, Russia etc.

Following this conclusion it is convenient to cite few paragraphs from the newspaper interview (*“New World Disorder”* – Newsweek – May 31st 1999) of the former United States Secretary of State – Mr. Henry Kissinger:

“No issue is more in need of rethinking than the concept of humanitarian intervention put forward as the administration's contribution to a new approach to foreign policy. The air war in Kosovo is justified as establishing the principle that the international community – or at least NATO – will henceforth punish the transgressions of governments against their own people. But we did not do so in Algeria, Sudan, Sierra Leone, Croatia, Rwanda, the Caucasus, the Kurdish areas and many other regions. And what will be our attitude to emerging ethnic conflicts in Asia, for example in Indonesia and the Philippines? The answer often given is that we act where we are able to without undue risk, not elsewhere. But what are the criteria for this distinction? And what kind of humanism expresses its reluctance to suffer military casualties by devastating the civilian economy of its adversary for decades to come?”

In the same interview Mr. Henry Kissinger added that: *“At every stage of the Kosovo tragedy, other mixes of diplomacy and force were available, though it is not clear they were ever seriously considered. A strategy that vindicates its moral convictions only from altitudes above 15,000 feet – and in the process devastates Serbia and makes Kosovo unlivable – has already produced more refugees and casualties than any conceivable alternative mix of force and diplomacy would have. It deserves to be questioned on both political and moral grounds.”*

Finally, somewhere further in the said interview he noted that: *“We must not repeat in Asia the emotional and unthought-out policies that brought us such grief in the Balkans. The law of unintended consequences still operates.”*

Without any kind of ambition for explanation or/and interpretation of the above cited words of one of the world's greatest diplomats and geopolitical theorist, it is absolutely necessary to stress that today Henry Kissinger is almost the only eminent person in the world who still advocates the standpoint of political pragmatism and is fully aware of the necessity to discuss about the

problems with the equal respect to the vital interests of all involved parties.¹⁹ Even today, his words from the “Newsweek” interview are still deafeningly loud, like some kind of prophecy – especially having on mind ongoing efforts of the West to restrain Russia and China.

Accordingly, it can be concluded that the only way to achieve a righteous and sustainable solution in Kosovo and Metohija is to respect the international law and rights of both peoples, without any kind of imposed “one-time-case” solutions (like it has been done in the case of Kosovo and Metohija).

Only because of the said lack of consistency there is no Serb who will accept unilaterally proclaimed independence of so called “Kosovo” (and this represents a serious threat for creation of another “frozen conflict” in Europe). Also, no one has the right to forget that Kosovo and Metohija is the spiritual cradle of the Serbian state and Serbian Orthodox Church. There are too many proves about it and this simply can not and must not be neglected.

Finally, and instead of conclusion, it should be stated that balanced approach and equal respect of the interests of both sides are absolutely necessary – because truth is never black or white and it’s rather one of the countless shades of gray. If this is neglected – there will be no righteous and sustainable solution or any solution at all! And the fuse from the powder barrel of Balkans will be even shorter!

This is exactly the reason why Serbian side doesn’t have the luxury to miss a single opportunity to represent the truth – proudly, clear and loud, everywhere and always – in order to support the legitimate efforts for the implementation of the international law and survival of Serbian people in Kosovo and Metohija.

¹⁹ Henry Kissinger didn’t hesitate to talk about his stances for the solution of the war in Ukraine (also speaking openly about the Russian security concerns). Recently, he also paid the visit to China – where he met with the Chinese President Xi – trying to find the path of conciliation and dialogue between USA and China.