

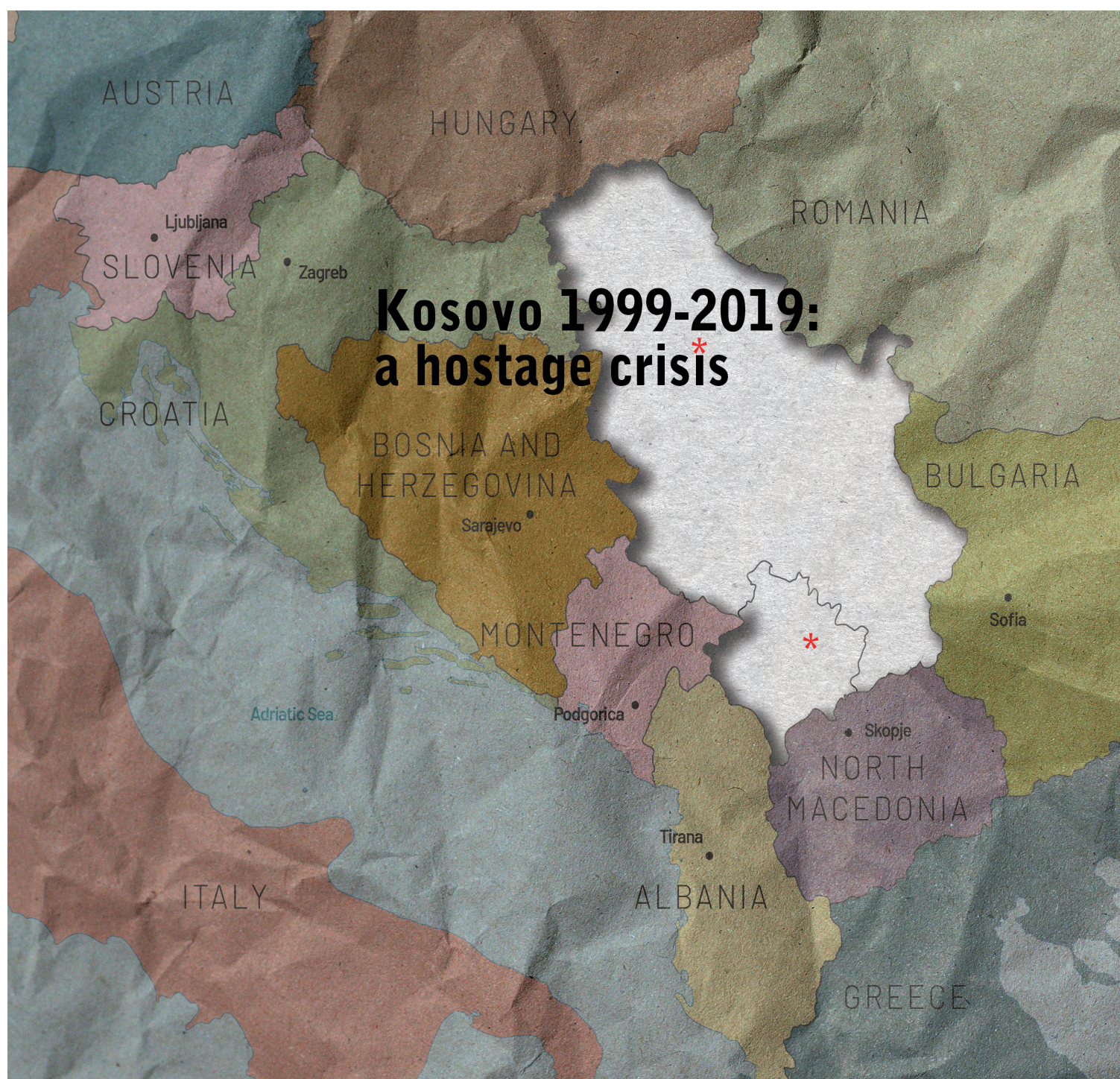
# perspectives

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POLITICAL ANALYSES AND COMMENTARY

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## Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung

Fostering democracy and upholding human rights, taking action to prevent the destruction of the global ecosystem, advancing equality between women and men, securing peace through conflict prevention in crisis zones, and defending the freedom of individuals against excessive state and economic power – these are the objectives that drive the ideas and actions of the Heinrich Böll Foundation. We maintain close ties to the German Green Party (Alliance 90/The Greens) and as a think tank for green visions and projects, we are part of an international network encompassing well over 100 partner projects in approximately 60 countries.

The Heinrich Böll Foundation works independently and nurtures a spirit of intellectual openness. We maintain a worldwide network with currently 30 international offices. Our work in Serbia, Montenegro and Kosovo concentrates on the democratisation process, political education, and environmental protection and sustainable development. We support and open public fora about topical and marginalised socio-political issues and we enable networking among local and international actors whose work aligns with Green values.

# Kosovo: A Hostage Crisis

By Natalija Miletić

Twenty years on from the Kosovo War, the collective memory of both parties in the conflict remains burdened by myths and incontestable truths about what actually took place. Nationalist and ethnocentric narratives about the war in the former Yugoslav autonomous province continue to dominate public discourse of both Kosovo and Serbia.

The process of reconciliation and building longstanding peace is being undermined, primarily, by political elites in both countries, whose populist policies amplify the prejudices between Kosovar Albanians and Serbs. The political establishment in both countries –composed of, *inter alia*, war-mongers, former combatants, convicted and non-convicted war criminals– face pressure from the international community to finally, and without hesitation, resolve the question of the former province of the ex-Yugoslav Republic of Serbia and normalize relations between Kosovo and Serbia.

The current problems concerning relations between the two countries are partly the result of the normalization negotiations, which have been going on for more than a decade under the patronage of the international community. Kosovo's status negotiations, which have taken place in the aftermath of a conflict that claimed the lives of thousands of civilians, destroyed tens of thousands of homes and displaced more than a million people, led to thousands of women being raped, and which only ceased following the intervention of NATO, are be-

ing conducted by the very politicians who were on opposing sides during the war in 1998-99. The fact that the negotiations are in a state of stalemate, and have been for a long time, should come as no surprise.

The hostage crisis known as Kosovo, in which the populations of both Kosovo and Serbia are held as ideological hostages by their own political elites, has already been going on for twenty years. The lack of progress in the official negotiations between Belgrade and Pristina is an obstacle to peacebuilding and the normal coexistence of the two Kosovar communities. However, bad policies made by local and international stakeholders, mainly affect the lives of ordinary citizens, rather than the politicians and policy makers that are involved. This issue of Perspectives on the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Kosovo War and the NATO bombing of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, is dedicated to ordinary citizens. These are the people who, to this day, live with the consequences of war, even if they took no part in it; the youth raised to hate; anti-war activists who are considered enemies of the state; minorities that are used as pawns in political maneuvering; victims of war crimes and victims of the NATO military campaign. In this issue of Perspectives we aim to highlight the fact that Kosovo is not just a toponym, but a country burdened by its recent violent history, where common people are struggling to rebuild the broken societies that the conflict has left behind. ■■■

# Introduction

By Marijana Toma

In the early 1980s, after the death of Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) President Josip Broz Tito, demonstrations took place in Kosovo as Kosovo Albanians sought for Kosovo to be recognized as a Republic within SFRY. At the same time, increasing numbers of prominent individuals and institutions in Serbia began to request that Kosovo's autonomy be reduced, claiming that the Kosovo Albanian's protests were "organised counter-revolutionary activities". Additionally, the emigration of Serbs and Montenegrins from Kosovo intensified in this period, accompanied by increasingly vocal demands from the Serbian public to halt this trend. During the mid-1980s, the division between Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo was evident and deep: Albanians continued to request that Kosovo be granted the status of a Republic, as well as for greater liberalization, and expressed concerns about Kosovo's underdevelopment within SFRY, while Serbs were concerned about discrimination against them by the Kosovo Albanian-led provincial government. After the Central Committee of the League of Communists of Serbia elected Slobodan Milošević as the new Chairman of the Presidency of the Central Committee, he managed to marginalize his political opponents in the Party and established full control over the Serbian branch of the League of Communists, allowing him to crucially influence political events in Yugoslavia.

At the beginning of 1989, amendments to the Constitution of Serbia were adopted by the National Assembly. These constitutional changes revoked Kosovo's autonomy: most of the Provinces' autonomous powers were annulled, including control over economic and educational policy,

choice of official language, control of the police, as well as veto powers over any further changes to the Constitution of Serbia. A wave of demonstrations were organized across Kosovo, involving students and teachers, intellectuals, and miners, which led the Presidency of SFRY to impose 'special measures', with federal authorities assuming responsibility for security within the province. In that period, thousands of Kosovo Albanians employed in the public sector- doctors, teachers, university professors, workers, judges, police and civil servants- were dismissed from their positions and replaced by non-Albanians. At the same time, police violence against Kosovo Albanians increased.

## A decade of non-violent resistance and the formation of the Kosovo Liberation Army

In September 1991, after the war in Slovenia already ended, and war in Croatia was on its way, Kosovo Albanian political leaders gathered together within the Democratic League of Kosovo, led by Ibrahim Rugova, a prominent writer and intellectual, and embraced a policy of non-violent civil resistance, establishing a system of unofficial, parallel institutions in the health care and education sectors. Kosovo Albanians held an unofficial referendum in which they voted overwhelmingly for independence from Serbia and Yugoslavia. Between 1992 and 1995, the situation in Kosovo remained tense, but did not erupt in violence, despite the strong-handed rule of the Serbian regime. After almost a decade of non-violent resistance by Kosovo Albanians, the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA), an armed resis-



tance organization, was formed by late 1997 and began attacking Serbian police and civilians in Kosovo. In late 1996 and 1997, the KLA claimed responsibility for armed attacks on members of the military in Kosovo, as well as against civilians. The beginning of armed conflict between the Yugoslav Army and Serbian police with the KLA is commonly connected to the attack by Serbian police special forces on the family compound of Adem Jashari in the village of Donje Prekaze in March 1998, in which Jashari, one of the founders of the KLA, along with an estimated 50 others members of his family and associates, including several women and children, were killed. During the spring of 1998, the KLA gradually increased the intensity of attacks in Kosovo, including against police patrols. The Army of Yugoslavia and Serbian police responded by shelling Albanian villages. In July 1998, the KLA began an offensive in the Municipality of Orahovac, in an attempt to take control of the area, which resulted in the killing of many civilians, both Albanian and Serb, by both the Serbian security forces and KLA. Following the KLA's operations in the Orahovac region, the Serbian army and police coordinated action against KLA forces, and by early September 1998 the KLA had lost much of the territory it had previously held.

### Diplomatic efforts to stop the war

Following a massacre in mid-January in the village Račak, in central Kosovo, the Contact Group called for a peace conference to be held in France at the beginning of February 1999. Despite efforts by the Contact Group, the negotiations failed due to substantial differences between the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia/Serbian authorities and the international community on the issue of implementation and an international military presence in Kosovo. According to the ICTY, the diversity of the Kosovo Albanian delegation caused indecision and numerous changes in their position; the approach of the Troika (Austrian Ambassador Wolfgang Petritsch, acting as the European Union's Special Envoy for Kosovo, Russian envoy Ambassador Boris Mayorski, and U.S. Ambassador Christopher Hill) did not encourage confidence in the process; and the involvement of the U.S. Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright, introduced confusion and uncertainty into the position of the international negotiators.

After additional attempts by international mediators to persuade Slobodan Milošević to accept the agreement, US Ambassador Richard Holbrooke announced the failure of negotiations on March 23<sup>rd</sup> 1999, after which NATO Secretary General Solana directed Wesley Clark to commence air strikes, which began on the March 24<sup>th</sup> and continued until June 10<sup>th</sup> 1999.

### Operation Allied Force - NATO military intervention against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia

Between March 24<sup>th</sup> and June 9<sup>th</sup> 1999, large areas of Serbia, including Kosovo, Belgrade and Novi Sad, were targeted by NATO bombing. While Montenegro was not targeted often, Podgorica was bombed at the end of April 1999. According to the Army of Yugoslavia, the Belgrade region was most intensively targeted by NATO's firepower. Although NATO and allied governments and military officials stressed their intent to limit civilian casualties and other harm to the civilian population, from the outset of operation Allied Force, civilian casualties occurred.

Human Rights Watch, which conducted an investigation in NATO's intervention, reported ninety separate incidents involving civilian deaths during the bombing campaign. During the NATO air campaign, the international community continued with diplomatic efforts to persuade the Yugoslav leadership, primarily Milošević, to accept an international military presence in Kosovo. Based on the Chernomyrdin-Ahtisaari plan, a Military Technical Agreement between the International Security Force (KFOR) and the Governments of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and Serbia was signed on June 9<sup>th</sup>, 1999 in Kumanovo, then Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. The agreement encompassed the withdrawal of Serbian-Yugoslav forces from Kosovo, deployment of KFOR in Kosovo following the adoption of a UN Security Council resolution, and allowing KFOR to operate without interference. On June 10<sup>th</sup> 1999 the Security Council adopted Resolution 1244, authorizing the creation of an international civil presence, the purpose of which was to provide an interim administration for Kosovo, demilitarization of the KLA, and safe return of refugees and internally displaced persons. Following the withdrawal of the Serbian police and Yugo-

slav Army, according to the records of the Government of Serbia, more than 187,000 Serbs and other non-Albanians left Kosovo and moved to Serbia. Those who stayed in Kosovo were targeted by Albanians in reprisals. In this post-conflict violence, between June 12<sup>th</sup> 1999 and December 31<sup>st</sup> 2000, 932 non-Albanians were killed, abducted or went missing, mostly Serbs.

Post-conflict relations between Serbs and Albanians have developed slowly. Violence did not end in 1999, erupting again in March 2004 when ethnic tensions led to unrest and riots in what is now known in Serbia as the “March Pogrom”, in which 15 Albanians and 12 Serbs were killed, 170 Serbs were seriously injured, around 800 Serb houses were destroyed or seriously damaged, as well as 90 Ashkalia and two Albanian houses, and 36 Serbian Orthodox Churches and other religious places were completely or partially destroyed. In recent years, the security situation in Kosovo has improved and although the return of Serbs is slow, relations between Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo are slowly normalizing.

### War crimes in Kosovo

During the entire period of the NATO bombing, the Army of Yugoslavia and police forces of the Republic of Serbia continued to specifically target Kosovo Albanian civilians, committing killings, including executions, and forcing civilians to leave Kosovo for Albania and Macedonia. Atrocities began almost immediately after the beginning of NATO bombing. One of the first major crimes was committed by members of Serbian police in Suva Reka, on March 26<sup>th</sup> 1999, when 45 members of Berisha family were killed. Among them were many women and children, whose bodies were discovered and exhumed from a mass grave at the police compound in Batajnica, a Belgrade suburb. One area targeted by the Army and Police was the municipality of Đakovica, where Serbian police began killing Kosovo Albanians and burning houses in March and April 1999 in order to create an atmosphere of fear among those civilians who refused to leave their homes and flee to Albania. During the Reka Valley operation, launched in part as a response to the killing of five policemen on April 22<sup>nd</sup> 1999, the Army and Police acted in conjunction, expelling Kosovo Albanian civilians from their villages and sending many of them to Albania. On April 27<sup>th</sup> 1999, in villages Meja and

Korenica, and other villages in the Reka Valley, Serbian forces killed at least 287 Kosovo Albanian men and forcibly expelled a number of Kosovo Albanian civilians and forced them to leave for Albania. A significant number of bodies of these men were later discovered in a mass grave in Batajnica, during the exhumations conducted in 2001-2002. In Izbica, on March 28<sup>th</sup> 1999, over 100 mostly older men were separated from women and children, gathered in a field, divided into two groups and shot. In Podujevo, on March 28<sup>th</sup> 1999, the Serbian Scorpions police unit committed a massacre, killing 19 Albanian women and children from the Duriqi and Bogujevci families.

### Victims of victimhood

Since the end of the armed conflict, Serbia and Kosovo have been in dispute over almost every issue related to the conflict, from the causes of the conflict, its chronology, and nature, to the atrocities that were committed, and the number of people who lost their lives during and after the conflict. Since mid-2000s, the Humanitarian Law Center in Serbia (HLC) and Humanitarian Law Center Kosovo (HLC Kosovo), two human rights organizations and documentation centers, have conducted extensive research on human losses in connection with the Kosovo conflict. According to the Kosovo Memory Book Database, a total of 13,535 persons were killed or disappeared during and in the context of the armed conflict in Kosovo, 10,812 of which were Kosovo Albanians, 2,197 were Serbs, and 526 were Roma, Bosniaks, Montenegrins, and other non-Albanians. HLC and HLC Kosovo have analyzed more than 31,600 documents from numerous sources, including a large number of statements given by victims or witnesses of war crimes. According to the HLC and HLC Kosovo database, during the conflict in Kosovo in 1998, 2,046 persons were killed or went missing, of which 1,705 Albanians, 280 Serbs, and 61 were other non-Albanians; 1,018 were Kosovo Albanian civilians, 129 were Serb civilians, and 44 other non-Albanian civilians; 682 were Kosovo Albanian members of the KLA, one Kosovo Albanian who was a member of the Army of Yugoslavia/Serbian police, 151 Serb members of Army/Police, and 16 persons of other ethnicities who were members of the Army of Yugoslavia/Serbian police. It was impossible to determine the status of



four Albanians and one non-Albanian as combatant or civilian.

Between March 20<sup>th</sup> and June 14<sup>th</sup> 1999, Serbian forces killed or destroyed the bodies of 6,901 Albanian civilians. In the same period, the KLA was responsible for the killing or disappearance of 328 Serbian civilians and 136 Roma persons and other non-Albanian civilians. Combat between the Army of Yugoslavia/Serbian police and KLA resulted in the killing or disappearance of 1,204 members of the KLA and 559 members of the Army of Yugoslavia and Serbian Police. During the NATO bombing, HLC and HLC Kosovo documented 758 persons who lost their lives as a result of NATO attacks, of which 205 Serbian civilians, 220 Kosovo-Albanian civilians, 28 Roma civilians and civilians of other ethnicities, 30 members of the KLA, and 275 members of the Army of Yugoslavia and Serbian police. NATO bombs killed 260 people in the territory of Serbia, 10 in Montenegro, and 488 in Kosovo. The two most deadly NATO attacks were in Korisa, where 77 Albanian civilians were killed, and Bistražin, where 64 Albanian civilians were killed, whereas on the territory of Serbia, the most deadly attacks were the

ones on Surdulica, where 29 people were killed, Niš, where 19 civilians were killed, and on the Radio-Television of Serbia studio in Belgrade, where 17 civilians were killed.

## Reconciliation

While some progress has been made in the area of dealing with the past and transitional justice, the process of reconciliation still lies in the distant future in the region of the post-Yugoslav states, and in Serbia-Kosovo particularly. It is therefore necessary that Serbia and Kosovo, as well as other countries in the region, accept the already established facts about war crimes committed in the Yugoslav wars during the 1990s, demonstrate additional willingness to address these issues through the establishment of regional truth experiments, repair the damage inflicted upon victims, and establish accountability for past atrocities, through war crimes prosecutions and halting the promotion of war criminals. These steps present the only solid ground for the long awaited reconciliation between Serbs and Kosovo Albanians, as well with other neighbors in the region. ■■■

# Winfried Nachtwei: NATO bombing – the lesser of two evils

By Simon Ilse and Milan Bogdanović

In early 1999, German Tornado jets took part in airstrikes against targets in Serbia, thus opening a new chapter in the history of Germany. The decision to participate in the NATO intervention in the Kosovo war, taken by the newly formed red-green government in Germany, headed by Gerhard Schroeder, caused major internal strains, primarily in the ranks of the Greens. The focal point of criticism was the “Green” Minister of Foreign Affairs, Joschka Fischer, whose support for military intervention clashed with the Green Movement’s anti-war policies. Winfried Nachtwei, former member of the German Bundestag and the Alliance 90/Greens, interviewed for this edition of Perspectives, speaks about the controversial dilemma of protecting human rights through the use of military force and the policy of non-violence, as well as about the lessons learned from the war and the process of peacebuilding in Kosovo.

## **In regard to the NATO intervention in 1999 – did the Greens do the wrong thing for the right reasons?**

That thought came to me a few weeks after the beginning of the NATO intervention, because the intention to avert an imminent humanitarian threat within a short period of time was not achieved. The intention was right, I still believe that, but the result is questionable. The thought came up: “Was one being naive about the effectiveness of this kind of military action?”

## **Was the decision to participate in operation Allied Force, from a German point of view, and in conditions that were not easy, the right one?**

From the very start it was mainly about the dilemma of preventing another Bosnia in the European political sphere of interest and, in that sense, it was very much the right and necessary thing to do. A major problem was that the United Nations Security Council was unable to legitimize military action, i.e. the use of force, because of the veto announced by Russia and probably also China. The threat of military strikes, air strikes, was justified, given the real situation in Kosovo, but it was not

legitimized under international law. In this respect, it was clear to us that we supported one evil to prevent another intolerable evil.

## **Could you describe this dilemma?**

The Green Party, including the peace movement, have argued for years about how adequately Western European states could have reacted to the wars in the Balkans. It was agreed that humanitarian aid should be supported, aid should be given to refugees, refugees should be admitted and sanctions should be imposed on the main aggressors. Whether military action should be taken was the subject of huge debate, and it was postponed by the Greens, in the autumn of 1996, when a delegation from our parliamentary group and our party visited Bosnia and Herzegovina. There, in Sarajevo, we really understood what had happened to the defenseless population in besieged Sarajevo, and how Europe had done nothing effective against it. This was precisely where we, most of whom were pacifists, came to realize there are situations in which the use of military force can be necessary, legitimate and justifiable, in order to prevent mass violence.



In 1998 the violence had escalated considerably. In September 1998 the UN Security Council stated how the development in Kosovo posed a threat to security and peace in the region. The issue was addressed to both parties in the conflict, including the KLA [Kosovo Liberation Army, Albanian *Ushtria Çlirimtare e Kosovës* - Ed.], but the armed Serbian forces were marked as the main driver and as the side responsible for the violence. That was the main reason for the final approval.

**And the dilemma in the German public discourse – what was it like from your perspective?**

The support of Germany for the NATO intervention meant that democratic Germany participated in a war for the first time. In the case of the Greens, it was aggravated by the fact that in our party programme – even in 1998 – we rejected United Nations combat missions. We only voted for the weakest form of blue helmets. When we agreed to the NATO intervention, we simply broke with the essential pillars of our peace policy. That brought a storm of indignation from substantial parts of our own membership and voters, because those who were involved in the government were considered traitors to our previous principles. However, the problem was that those who condemned the intervention could not provide any suggestions as to what else was possible and necessary to do in Kosovo.

In summary, we had a dilemma between the protection of human rights, on the one hand, against mass violence, and on the other hand the obligation to non-violence – non-violence as a fundamental value for the Greens.

**Shortly before the intervention the famous Green Party conference of Bielefeld took place. Joschka Fischer's speech and the paint bag attack<sup>1</sup> left a strong historical impression. What was the most important thing about that party conference?**

I was at the party conference in May 1999. The NATO intervention had already been going on for a few weeks and it hadn't shown the effect we had hoped for. The conference was essential, because there was a discussion about whether the Greens would continue to support the course of the Federal Government and support its Foreign Minister or would they withdraw

their support. Had the majority of them withdrawn their support of their own Foreign Minister, Joschka Fischer, it would have led to the Green Party leaving the coalition and the German Government, and Fischer would not have been Foreign Minister any more. Fischer had already made good progress agitating for a political solution to the conflict, with the five points of the so-called Fischer Plan. It tried to include Russia and the Western states were behind it.

Fischer was the main proponent of a diplomatic solution to the Kosovo war, and thus the party conference of Bielefeld was essential for the further development – for the political development, in Europe – regarding the war in Kosovo.

**Was the Fischer Plan, with its famous 5 points, the crucial step towards the resolution of the conflict?**

It would be an overestimation to say it was the crucial point. There are different factors that came together, but it did set the diplomatic stone rolling. If, however, the US and Moscow had dismissed it, the initiative would have gone up in smoke.

There was a will to find a resolution. That was especially obvious on June 2<sup>nd</sup> when two envoys of the Troika – Chernomyrdin and the Finnish President Ahtisaari – were in Belgrade. There was another urge from Russian President Yeltsin: "You have to reach an agreement!" Milošević sensed then that he didn't have Russian support anymore, which is why he gave in.

To summarize, there were several people seeking solutions and the stubborn Milošević had to give in.

**How do you see the role of Joschka Fischer, the then main politician of the Greens, today? How much is his public image influenced by 1999?**

Joschka Fischer did indeed play a very essential role in this. As a political realist he was aware even before October 1998, before the red-green coalition was formed, what the participation of the Greens in the Government of Germany would mean. The rest of us, me included, were not completely aware of that in advance.

If you are part of the Government, it isn't enough to just criticize what has been done and say what should be done better. You have to practice politics in the given circumstances – with strong principles and with the ability to form an alliance. He was

very dedicated to the principle that Germany must not act alone, but always together with partners. He had a strong opinion about that and pursued it with the best powers of persuasion, leadership and rhetoric. In this stormy political sea he was, I believe this strongly, the best and strongest navigator. I am very sceptical whether there was anyone else in the Green Party that could provide such strong leadership, who would be able to do what he did.

If the Bielefeld party conference had developed in another direction, it would have led to the break-up of the government. It would, most probably, not have changed the fact that Germany was participating in it [NATO intervention - Ed.] – it would have just participated under another government.

For the Greens this would possibly, or even probably, have led to a split and thus to a considerable decline. The Greens are today the second strongest and sometimes even the strongest party in Germany - this success might not have happened in that case.

**As a member of the Bundestag's Defense Committee, you have been to Kosovo several times since 1999. What was your experience of the 2004 riots, the 2008 declaration of independence and other inter-ethnic tensions?**

As members of the Defense Committee, we were mainly involved in KFOR. I had contact with UNMIK police and we also met representatives from Kosovo, including civil society actors, on a regular basis. As far as KFOR is concerned, I always had the impression that on the whole they acted appropriately and predominantly wisely.

In the first few years, stabilization and preventing major outbursts of violence was the priority. All of a sudden the March riots happened, I was there and I saw how it exploded, so to say. I noticed a few things: First of all, the so-called community of states had, in the meantime, lost interest in Kosovo, partly due to other crises, especially in Afghanistan after September 11<sup>th</sup>. There was a certain Kosovo-fatigue in the Parliament as well as the urge to reduce the number of KFOR soldiers more quickly.

The so-called frozen conflict, which had previously been neglected at the international level, exploded again in March 2004.

KFOR did not show determination in many areas. There were organized demonstrations, with around 50,000 people attending in Kosovo, which is very small. Some of the protesters were armed and behaved like a mob. KFOR soldiers mostly did not intervene and during the days of the March riots many Kosovo Serbs were forced from their homes. Ten Serbian Orthodox sacred buildings were destroyed in the Prizren area alone at that time.

That was an extremely disturbing setback. However, we had the impression that lessons were learned relatively quickly at an operational level. It got a little tricky again in North Mitrovica, in the areas predominantly inhabited by Serbs, in connection with the unilateral independence, then again in 2011, in relation to the customs issues, when a KFOR soldier was shot.

These crises flared up over and over again. What was not achieved was to reduce the considerable influence of organized crime within the top political circles. It was also not possible to effectively reduce unemployment and the lack of prospects, especially for younger people.

However, it must be said that KFOR cannot do this. These things have to be supported by UNMIK. I do not dare to say from a defense policy perspective why this was so unsuccessful.

**To what extent do you think the decision to intervene in Kosovo influenced later discussions about military interventions worldwide?**

Kosovo taught us decisive and fundamental lessons related to stabilization operations in post-conflict environments, with considerable potential for violence. The experience was used in Afghanistan by Bundeswehr soldiers and our NATO partners.

Each crisis operation is different, because all countries in crisis are different, and the significantly different framework conditions in Afghanistan were not considered sufficiently. It was a totally different war, with a different balance of powers, where a wave of wars over decades meant the Mujahedin, the Taliban, were very experienced in the affairs of war. In other words, the experience from Kosovo was transferred too simply to the next mission.

**That sounded a little like the grand topic of "Lessons Learned". Did the Green Party or Germany learn from Kosovo? Are there certain strategies or new ways of**



### **approaching conflicts as a consequence of the experience in Kosovo?**

The experiences of the OSCE and KFOR mission in Kosovo from autumn 1998 until March 1999 were the starting point. There was a huge observer mission with a conflict dampening function, but there were not enough sufficiently educated and capable people. It is something that has been corrected.

The creation of the Civil Peace Service, with advisors working against social hostility and the Center for International Peace Operations in Berlin, which is internationally highly recognized – they were one lesson.

Another lesson was the Stability Pact – transnational, comprehensive support for the Western Balkans, which was supposed to bring together different ethnicities and regions through practical work. Many lessons were learned from the crisis in the Presevo Valley in 2000 and in Macedonia in 2001. There was a danger of a new internal war, which was prevented for the first time through coordinated crisis management by the international community.

Still, in my opinion, the German Government did not do any systematic and public evaluation of the Kosovo war, of its own participation in it and of the whole mission – and this also applies to many other countries. There hasn't been an overall "lessons learned" process at the political and strategic level and for the current political generation the experiences from Kosovo are not relevant.

### **How do you explain the fact that the West has suffered a severe defeat regarding the justification and interpretation of this war and that to this day it continues to be a great hurdle with regard to normalizing relations between Kosovo and Serbia?**

I have also observed this loss of interpretive sovereignty or legitimacy of one's own actions, which was already apparent in the immediate years following this intervention.

These are narratives that are still widespread among the population today, that the population was lied to, that there were other interests at play. The point of view has been adopted that the war in Kosovo and the violence started with NATO bombings and there was no history behind it.

At the time, that was hugely underestimated by the German Government. We now need to draw a line and evaluate what went wrong, what should be done better in the future in order to promote an empirical narrative that is as realistic and factual as possible. At the time, Foreign Minister Fischer also said: "We must look to the future".

It was not understood by the ruling parties that they must not only stay politically active in relation to such conflicts, but that there is also a continuing struggle for legitimization and acceptance.

### **After the intervention in 1999 you mentioned there was fatigue regarding Kosovo in Germany. What is the situation now, 20 years later? Is Kosovo still of interest in Germany in 2019?**

The "Kosovo fatigue" – lower interest among the public about Kosovo – is still present. It is a fatigue towards countries in conflict with which European countries, or now the European Union, and the Federal Republic of Germany, had special dealings in the past; for some years now, since 2014 at least, it applies very clearly to Afghanistan. There are only reports in the media when something huge happens. The problem is that there is an enormous crisis competition today. The most actual crises, in which our own soldiers are involved, get the most attention.

International efforts of stabilization and of peace building are much more complicated and have a more long-term character than it was imagined at the end of the 1990s and at the beginning of the 2000s.

There is now the possibility, twenty years after the war in Kosovo, twenty years since the beginning of KFOR and UNMIK, to draw attention again. Many women and men, who were familiar with the initial phase of intervention are now saying that KFOR and its troops, who had the task to ensure peace and to prevent new violence, were successful. ■■■

Translated by Sanja Katarić

<sup>1</sup> The conference was marked by heated anti-war protests, both in and outside the venue. At one point, Mr. Fischer was hit by a bag of red paint, causing damage to his ear drum - Ed.

# The Kosovo Myth in Modern Serbia: Its functions, problems, and critiques

By Ivan Čolović

The myth of the Battle of Kosovo Field on June 28<sup>th</sup> 1389, in which the armies of the Ottoman Sultan Murat I and Serbian Prince Lazar clashed, has, since the early 19<sup>th</sup> century to this day, served the purpose of legitimizing various political and military projects: From the breakup of communist Yugoslavia and the policies of Slobodan Milošević, through the “Kosovo is Serbia” motto, as part of the Serbian “European agenda”, to the dialogue –both internal and with Brussels– led by Aleksandar Vučić. The “Kosovo Covenant” in modern Serbian history is used to accommodate various political ideas and actions.

The colloquial use of the word *myth* is widespread today, to denote a story without basis in reality, one which is not true. Contrary to this, I understand myth in an anthropological sense, as a story with the status of paramount truth in a particular society, a truth which is not debated, one which an individual is not obliged to believe in, but must not disturb, must not publicly question. This is why myths are sometimes referred to as “divine stories”. The political function of myth is based on this divinity and unquestionable nature, because it can serve those in power, or those seeking power, as a tool to legitimize their policies. They do this by placing themselves and their political and military projects and actions under the protection of the sanctity of myth, constructing a tailor-made version of mythical narration, so that they themselves may become mythical heroes, or at least their devotees and followers, thus “inscribing” themselves into the myth.

The same is true of the Kosovo myth, the myth of the Battle of Kosovo Field on June 28<sup>th</sup> 1389, in which the armies of the Ottoman Sultan Murat I and Serbian Prince Lazar clashed. It is important to note that not all of the diverse evocations of this battle in folklore, historiography, literature, and church literature are myth. Mythical are only those offered up as paramount, “sacred”, in order to place some political idea or action, as well as its actors, under the

auspices of “sacred Kosovo” or the “Kosovo covenant” – as the mythical narrative about the Battle of Kosovo is most widely referred to today. This function –that of political myth– was already present in the memory of this battle in the cult writings about Prince Lazar written a few years after the battle. However, the mature Kosovo myth, with all of the episodes we know today, was only formed in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and has served to legitimize various political and military projects ever since.

During that time, the solemn, sacred story of the Battle of Kosovo has not only served to legitimize the policies of Serbian politicians and the Serbian authorities. It wasn’t always solely a Serbian myth. It also served to legitimize political and military projects undertaken in the name of other peoples, so that there are Croatian, Bosniak, Montenegrin, Albanian, and Yugoslav versions of the Kosovo myth, in addition to the Serbian one. However, after the Kingdom of Yugoslavia was dissolved in 1941 –a country where *Vidovdan* (St. Vitus Day, the day of the Battle of Kosovo, June 28<sup>th</sup>) was a national holiday, a holiday shared by all Yugoslav peoples, when the famous Battle of Kosovo Field was emphasized as being a shared political and cultural heritage– the Kosovo myth has been exploited most often, if not exclusively, as a Serbian national myth. It was revived in that capacity by the Quisling government led by Milan Nedić



during the German occupation of Serbia (1941-1944). Nazi sympathizers close to Nedić proposed that the authentic Serbian myth of Kosovo should be revived, as it was alienated from the “Serbian soul” in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, highlighting its similarity to the German racial myth that had been revived in Nazi Germany. After the Second World War, communist Yugoslavia did not restore the Kosovo myth as part of a common Yugoslav heritage, because that role was reserved for the solemn narrative about the People’s Liberation War, the Partisans, and their leader Tito. Instead, the Kosovo myth was assigned the role of keeping the memory of the important contribution of the Serbian people’s heroic ancestors in the fight for freedom, a freedom which would be fully realized, with similar contributions from other Yugoslav peoples, only with the victory of Communism. This was also the role of the Monument to the Heroes of Kosovo, erected in 1953 by Serbian communists in Gazimestan.

In the time of crisis, wars, and the dissolution of communist Yugoslavia (1985-1995), the Kosovo myth served to legitimize the main policy goals of the Serbian regime, headed by Slobodan Milošević. The main portion of the 600<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration of the Battle of Kosovo (July 28<sup>th</sup> 1989) – a grand rally organized in front of the Gazimestan Monument – was used by Milošević to portray himself as the new Serbian leader, a worthy successor to those who led the Serbs into battle against the Turks 600 years before, and to promise that he would lead the Serbian people into new battles. During the wars in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbian soldiers were also called to follow the example of famous Kosovo heroes. This sort of motivation for battle was used most by Bosnian Serb leaders, portraying Bosniaks as descendants of the Turks, and the war against them as a continuation of the Battle of Kosovo and an opportunity for the Serbs to take revenge on the Turks for their defeat in Kosovo in 1389. This is exactly how General Mladić hailed the capture of Srebrenica and the slaughter of its Bosniak residents, which was ruled to have been genocide by the International Court of Justice in 2007: Revenge against the Turks<sup>1</sup>.

In more recent times, in the context of reviving Albanian nationalism in Kosovo, the war of 1998-1999, and the creation of an independent state of Kosovo, Albanian

versions of the Kosovo myth have also developed, emphasizing the participation of Albanian warriors in the Battle of Kosovo Field. It goes without saying that they did battle on the side of the Christians, which is to prove that Albanians are also an old European and Christian people, who have always stood at the vanguard of Europe. In corroboration, a national poem is offered about the Albanian hero Miloš Kobilić<sup>2</sup> and his feat – the killing of Sultan Murat I, written in the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century<sup>3</sup>. Writer Ismail Kadare greatly contributed to the popularization of the Albanian version of the Kosovo myth. Since 2011, two plays about the Battle of Kosovo have been part of the repertoires of two Parisian theaters, one of which was written based on the poems of the “Kosovo Cycle” from the collection by Vuk Karadžić, and the other is a theater adaptation of Kadare’s book, *Three Elegies for Kosovo*<sup>4</sup>.

### “Kosovo is Serbia” – A New Kosovo Covenant

After the wars in Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo in the 1990s, the Serbian politicians who took over governing the country found themselves tasked with adapting the Kosovo myth – which was still an important political resource for them – to fit the new situation. It was to be separated and saved from being compromised as a result of what some would say was its abuse by Milošević and other Serbian leaders during the wars, and adapted to the new goals of Serbian policy, among which was the “European agenda” of moving toward the EU. This is why, when the Battle of Kosovo was evoked in public events, it was emphasized that the bravery of the Kosovo heroes could still serve as inspiration to 21<sup>st</sup> century Serbs, but that it can also manifest itself as political and diplomatic struggle to keep Kosovo as part of Serbia, instead of waging a new war – as Milošević did, to the detriment of the Serbian people.

After 2008, when Kosovo Albanians declared Kosovo’s independence, the *Vidovdan* celebrations at Gazimestan became a frustration, because Serbian politicians and religious leaders could only go there with KFOR’s permission, as well as the police force of independent Kosovo. This is why the most important *Vidovdan* celebrations were moved to Kruševac in Serbia and Višegrad in Republika Srpska. On the other hand, Kosovo’s declaration of

independence served to revive warmongering versions of the Kosovo myth, even leading to attempts to rehabilitate Milošević and his Kosovo policy, elevating him to be a new Kosovo martyr. The culmination and failure of this new mobilization for battle with the Kosovo Albanians in the name of the “Kosovo covenant” was the grand rally in Belgrade organized on February 21<sup>st</sup> 2008 by the Serbian government, headed by Vojislav Koštunica, to protest Kosovo’s declaration of independence. Following a series of incendiary speeches, and chants of “Kosovo is Serbia”, some protestors caused mayhem in the city, including an attack on the U.S. embassy. A few months after this rally, on May 11<sup>th</sup> 2008, Koštunica’s party, the Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS), lost the parliamentary elections.

### Holy Serbia and Profane Kosovo

Aleksandar Vučić, leader of the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS), which has occupied the most important positions of power since 2012, is considered to be the politician whose word on all matters of Serbian policy is final, notwithstanding the constitutional powers he actually possessed as Deputy Prime Minister (2012-2014), Prime Minister (2014-2017), or now as President. This is why his influence on Serbia’s Kosovo policy has been decisive, as well as the use of the Kosovo myth to further that policy, which is ambivalent, to say the least – simultaneously renouncing and fully affirming the myth.

Vučić himself publicly professes doubts about what he calls the “mythical approach” to the Kosovo problem. At his inauguration as President of Serbia, Vučić announced a new approach to this problem, finding a solution through dialogue, without prejudice, and without myths: “That is why I want to open up an internal dialogue on the matter of Kosovo and Metohija, with all our differences, without prejudice, upholding our country’s Constitution. We have to be open, to renounce the mythical approach, but without simply giving away that which we have every right to. Our internal dialogue is perhaps even more important than the one we should be having with the Albanians.”<sup>5</sup> However, this renunciation of the Kosovo myth by Vučić applies only to one essentially benign aspect of it – the versions referring to a so-called “celestial Serbia”. “Our job”, explained Vučić in a statement a few days

after announcing the internal dialogue, “is to worry about earthly life, and let someone else worry about the afterlife.”<sup>6</sup>

The version of the Kosovo myth in Serbia dominant today originated in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when concern for the afterlife was abandoned and the story of Prince Lazar choosing the Kingdom of Heaven over the Kingdom of Earth – which was included in Serbian church writings as early as the 14<sup>th</sup> century, as well as in folk songs recorded by Vuk Karadžić – was revised. At the time when Serbs and other South Slavs were fighting for liberation from Turkish, and then Austro-Hungarian rule, evoking the famous Battle of Kosovo served to raise the morale of these warriors for the Kingdom of Earth, and so Lazar was asked to give up on the Kingdom of Heaven or step back and allow Miloš Obilić, who had slayed Murat, to take the lead role. Having renounced the Kosovo myth as a concern with the afterlife, Vučić has actually reasserted his belief in the Kosovo myth as heroic death for earthly life, the main version of this myth from the 19<sup>th</sup> century until today.

It is important to note that the people using the Kosovo myth to strengthen their political positions today never mention it under that name, rather using the terms “Kosovo covenant” or “*Vidovdan* covenant”, suggesting that they are talking about something supposedly more true and valuable than what the colloquial use of the term “myth”, defined as a story without basis, would imply. That is why there is actually no difference between calls by Vučić for Kosovo to be discussed without using the “mythical approach” and the frequent statements and warnings to Serbs by his closest advisors that the “Kosovo covenant” must be kept. The head of the Government’s Office for Kosovo and Metohija, Marko Đurić, is also aware that he is not contradicting Vučić by saying that “*Vidovdan* is the Serbian covenant, the covenant of all Serbs, wherever they may live and work”<sup>7</sup>. The decision by the authors of the Strategy for the Cultural Development of Serbia from 2017 to 2027 to give the “Kosovo covenant” a prominent role in the document is also based on the premise that the mythical approach to Kosovo is not the same as the covenant. The covenant is mentioned as the “heroic dimension of Serbian culture”, with a very important function – to ensure the “self-preservation of society in the face of existential challenges

and challenges to identity". Other aspects of Serbian culture are also set out – the "Enlightenment-European" and "democratic" dimensions – but there is no doubt that these are only secondary, because they do not provide what is most important, the existence and identity of the nation, a task entrusted to the "heroic" dimension of Serbian culture, that is to say the "Kosovo covenant", or the Kosovo myth under another name.

## Critical Analysis of the Kosovo Myth

There are a few things to keep in mind regarding the critical analysis of the Kosovo myth in modern Serbia. Firstly, it is important to note that this analysis cannot be reduced to differentiating between the few historically accurate pieces of information about the Battle of Kosovo and the historically unsubstantiated stories about that event, which serve as the basis for the Kosovo myth, including its modern versions. As noted by historian Sima Ćirković, all the materials about Kosovo, the entirety of the "Kosovo tradition", as he would say, deserves the attention of historians and other researchers. Therefore, to interpret the Kosovo myth critically, it is not enough to determine whether there is historical truth to it, but we must also determine the purpose served by stories about the Battle of Kosovo, who told them and with what purpose, what their political and ideological messages were, and how they changed over time. The same can be said for researching and interpreting the role of the Kosovo myth in Serbian society and politics today.

It is also important to determine where we encounter this myth today, and how to identify it, as it appears in various types of text – from newspaper articles to scientific studies, and from political speeches to religious sermons. Rarely is it a well-developed narrative, as in Zdravko Šotra's film *The Battle of Kosovo* (*Boj na Kosovu*, 1989). Statements are most often put under the protection of the Kosovo myth by using quotes from certain passages of canonical texts about the Battle of Kosovo (from Vuk Karadžić's "Kosovo Cycle" or Njegoš's *Mountain Wreath*), or even more simply, by claiming that the statement or action is in line with the "Kosovo covenant". For example, one political organization in Serbia,

founded in 2012, chose the name "Zavetnici"<sup>8</sup> for itself, explaining that it was done "in accordance with the Kosovo Covenant, the spiritual and historical path of the Serbian people through the centuries, followed by our greatest rulers and minds<sup>1</sup>."

Furthermore, any critique of the Kosovo myth – if undertaken to protect values such as enlightenment, democracy or human rights – will be ineffective if it limits itself to questioning the contents of the messages conveyed under the auspices of this myth, because these messages are not necessarily unacceptable from the point of view of the critic. It is important to identify and differentiate them, but it is even more important to point out that all of them, no matter the differences in content, have one common characteristic which separates them from the values of enlightenment and democracy. Namely, all messages relying on the myth, messages which inscribe themselves into it, including those "conveyed" by the Kosovo myth today, are to be accepted without thought or discussion. The myth empowers them to impose themselves on certain political collectives, while making them unacceptable to collectives fostering humanist and democratic values. ■■■

Translated by Nemanja Georgijević

<sup>1</sup> An overview of the creation and evolution of the Kosovo myth, and the main literature on the topic is available in Miodrag Popović's study *Vidovdan i časni krst* (St. Vitus day and the Holy Cross), *Ogled o književnoj arheologiji* (4<sup>th</sup> Edition, *Biblioteka XX vek*), as well as in my book *Smrt na Kosovu Polju. Istorija kosovskog mita* (Death on Kosovo Field, a History of the Kosovo Myth) (2nd Edition, *Biblioteka XX vek*).

<sup>2</sup> Miloš Obilić is said to have been the Serbian knight who assassinated the Ottoman Sultan Murad I in the Battle of Kosovo during the Ottoman invasion of Serbia – Ed. note

<sup>3</sup> An analysis of the written versions of this poem and the explanation of its role in modern Kosovo's identity politics can be found in Anna di Lellio's book *The Battle of Kosovo 1389. An Albanian Epic*, I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., London, 2009.

<sup>4</sup> *La Bataille de Kosovo 1389*, translated from the Serbian and directed by: Nathalie Hamel, *Theatre du Nord Ouest*, Paris. – "La vieille guerre. La Bataille du Kosovo", directed by Simon Pitaqaj, based on "Trois chants funebres de Kosovo" I. Kadare, *Théâtre de l'Oprimé*, Paris.

<sup>5</sup> Serbian President's address to Parliament, TANJUG, May 31<sup>st</sup> 2017

<sup>6</sup> Vučić: It's time to talk about the Constitution and Kosovo", TANJUG, June 2nd 2017

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.rts.rs/page/stories/sr/story/9/politika/2781371/djuric-nikada-necemo-odustati-od-kosova-i-metohije.html>

<sup>8</sup> Translator's note: this can roughly be translated as "Defenders of the Covenant"

<sup>9</sup> Zavetnici  
website [https://web.archive.org/web/20180207002002/http://zavetnici.rs/?page\\_id=7542](https://web.archive.org/web/20180207002002/http://zavetnici.rs/?page_id=7542)



# A Lesson in History

By Jelena Krstić

The prewar political history of the former Yugoslav autonomous province of Kosovo was shaped by its educational system. Both Albanians and Serbs have omitted the other community's language and history from their curricula. Today, twenty years after the armed conflict, Albanian and Serbian students are using textbooks with different versions of history. Some of the controversial phrases from Kosovar textbooks describing actions by Serbs include: "violence and chauvinist terror", "terror and genocide", and "horrific barbaric scenes of bloody squadrons". Serbian textbooks use phrases such as "attacks by Albanian gangs" and "Albanian terror over the Serbs". Such language in school textbooks amplifies prejudice, inter-ethnic intolerance, and nationalist ideas.

*"I am deeply sorry for all the victims in Kosovo, and for their families' suffering. Yes, I knew crimes were committed... Yes, I was involved in moving bodies to Batajnica... I didn't oppose the concealment of crimes. I took no action to find and process the perpetrators, as I should have done."*

Vlastimir Đorđević

*Sentenced to 18 years' imprisonment for crimes against humanity*

Early one morning, the S. family had to leave their village in Kosovo. The mother had dressed the children well, so that they wouldn't be cold, and prepared some food for the journey. A group of armed men stopped them in a nearby settlement and separated them, detaining the father and two sons and ordering the rest to keep going. They did keep going and spent some time far away from their home, school, friends, and relatives. Only after the war had ended did they return to their home. It was a few years later that they found out that all three of the men had been killed and their bodies hidden in a mass grave. The mother and two sons from the S. family are currently living in their home village again, in difficult conditions, lacking employment or regular income. What happened to the S. family?

## The Crisis between 1980 and 1998

The 1974 Constitution of the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia grants the Autonomous Province of Kosovo greater autonomy. A section of the Serbian public object,

claiming that the new constitution gives the province too much power. At the beginning of the 1980s, Albanians ask for Kosovo to be recognized as a constituent Republic of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY), while Serbs intensify their calls for the province's autonomy to be reduced. In March 1989, amendments to the Constitution of Serbia strip the province of its autonomy. The situation in Kosovo deteriorates.

In June 1990, the Serbian Assembly declares that special circumstances have arisen in Kosovo aimed at upending the constitutional order. A few days later, Kosovo Albanian MPs declare Kosovo to be an independent Republic. The Serbian Assembly then dissolves the Kosovo Assembly. This officially dissolved Assembly compiles a Draft Constitution, which is then accepted by a majority of Albanians in a local referendum. In September 1990, the new Constitution of Serbia diminishes Kosovo's autonomy even further.

A period of discrimination and repression against the Albanian population in Kosovo ensues. Albanian language radio and television are limited, and newspapers are



Joint Chiefs of Staff Headquarters in Belgrade, in ruins since the 1999 NATO military campaign, pictured in 2019.  
Photo by Nemanja Subotić CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

closed down. Albanian employees in public enterprises are laid off *en masse*, including school teachers. Students are unable to attend classes taught in the Albanian language. A number of professors at the University of Pristina are dismissed. An informal school system then develops in Kosovo, and classes are held in private homes. Kosovo Albanians boycott the elections for the National Assembly of Serbia in 1992, instead holding their own. Thus, a “parallel system” is created, with a shadow government that provides services to Kosovo Albanians. A declaration on the rights of national minorities adopted by the Serbian Assembly in 1992 lays the blame for the human rights situation on the Albanians.

As the crisis develops, steps are taken to resolve it. In September 1996, an agreement on the normalization of the education system and the return of Albanian teachers and students to schools is signed. In March 1998, an agreement to reopen schools and universities is signed, allowing both Serbian and Albanian students to use the premises. These agreements are not enforced.

### Armed Conflict 1998-1999

The crisis in Kosovo escalates into an armed conflict between the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY), as it was called at the time, and Serbia on one side, and the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) on the other. The conflict lasts from 1998 until the end of the NATO intervention in June 1999. The two sides hold differing views on the

resolution of the crisis: the FRY/Serbian authorities insist that any solution for Kosovo must respect territorial integrity, sovereignty, and FRY/Serbia’s internationally recognized borders. The Kosovo Albanian representatives want a referendum held, which would ultimately lead to Kosovo’s independence.

During 1998 and early 1999, diplomatic efforts are made to solve the armed conflict by peaceful means. The Contact Group, consisting of representatives from the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Italy, the United States, and Russia, take part in the negotiations. The Contact Group rejects the idea of an independent Kosovo, and insists that the province is given greater autonomy. The best chance to solve the crisis comes in the form of the agreements of October 1998, which entail deploying a civilian mission, a reduction in military and police personnel in Kosovo, and their disarmament. However, these agreements are not binding for the KLA, as it is not a signatory, so the number of incidents continues to rise. The situation deteriorates, and FRY/Serbia once again employs disproportionate force.

In February 1999, the Rambouillet negotiations commence. The two sides stick to their positions on a possible solution: maintaining territorial integrity vs. independence. The failure of diplomatic efforts to solve the Kosovo conflict is the consequence of a combination of reasons – not least the intractability of both sides, and the way the negotiations were led.

## NATO Intervention

The threat of NATO intervention is present throughout 1998. After negotiations collapse, on March 24<sup>th</sup> 1999, air strikes commence, lasting until June 10<sup>th</sup> 1999. The stated aim of the intervention is to prevent a humanitarian catastrophe in Kosovo. NATO aircraft strike targets across FRY, causing damage and destruction to a large number of targets. In addition to military facilities, civilian facilities are also hit.

Diplomatic efforts to end the crisis continue, with the key interlocutors being representatives from Finland and Russia. In early June 1999, FRY/Serbian officials accept a peace proposal. The Military Technical Agreement between the International Security Force (KFOR) and FRY/Serbia is signed on June 9<sup>th</sup> 1999. The Agreement calls for the deployment of international security forces in Kosovo and a gradual withdrawal of FRY/Serbian troops.

On June 10<sup>th</sup> 1999, the United Nations Security Council adopts Resolution 1244, which provides for the withdrawal of armed forces, the demilitarization of the KLA, and the creation of a safe environment for the return of refugees and displaced persons. The Resolution authorizes the formation of an international civilian mission with the purpose of establishing a temporary administration for Kosovo.

Along with FRY/Serbia's military and police personnel, two hundred thousand Serbs and other non-Albanians leave Kosovo<sup>2</sup>.

## Epilogue

During the armed conflict in Kosovo in 1998 and 1999, 13,535 people were killed: 10,812 Albanians, 2,197 Serbs, and 526 members of other ethnic communities. Civilians were the biggest casualties, with 10,111 killed or disappeared; in the period between March 20<sup>th</sup> and June 14<sup>th</sup> 1999 alone, 7,431 civilians were killed.

As a result of NATO air strikes, 754 people lost their lives: 454 civilians, (219 Albanians, 207 Serbs and Montenegrins, 14 Roma, and 14 members of other ethnic communities) and 300 members of the armed forces (274 members of the FRY/Serbian armed forces, and 26 KLA members)<sup>3</sup>.

The International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) has ruled that units of the Yugoslav Army and police committed war crimes, crimes against humanity, and violated the laws and customs

of war during the internal conflict in Kosovo. The Tribunal has ruled beyond reasonable doubt that persons in the highest echelons of politics, the military and police took part in a *joint criminal enterprise* with the goal of changing the ethnic balance in Kosovo and ensuring Serbian control. This state criminal plan was carried out by means of murder, deportation, forced resettlement, and banishment<sup>4</sup>.

The ICTY has also ruled that certain members of the KLA were responsible for violating the laws and customs of war, by subjecting imprisoned civilians in camps at Lapušnik and Babušnica to cruel treatment, leading to the deaths of two people, and by killing nine people. It was also determined that KLA members interrogated and molested two Serbs in April 1998, that a KLA soldier raped a woman in the KLA headquarters in Rznić in the summer of 1998, and that KLA members murdered seven people whose remains were found in the vicinity of the Radonjić Lake<sup>5</sup>. In processing KLA crimes, the ICTY faced imprecise evidence, an inability to verify evidence, and marked difficulties in obtaining statements from a large number of witnesses. Many witnesses refused to testify before the Tribunal out of fear. The Tribunal stated that there was an impression that the trial had taken place in an atmosphere in which witnesses did not feel safe.

## Towards an Objective Curriculum

The overview of the events in Kosovo described above is one of the possible ways in which the armed conflict from 1998 to 1999 could be taught. It is simultaneously short and comprehensive. The situation faced by Kosovo and Serbia today is the result of multiple, complex, interdependent, and asynchronous influences and causes, which is why such an overview is only a framework that cannot be understood outside of a wider social, political, and historical context. As such, it is by its nature scant and incomplete, and unable to fully explain everything. However, it is also perhaps the only possible overview in a post-conflict situation where there is a frozen conflict characterized by opposing narratives about the past, and a huge interethnic divide between communities, such as the one between Serbian and Albanian communities. Such an approach has the potential to open up space for dialogue and mutual understanding, as it approaches an extremely complex



problem from the viewpoint of pure facts, free from appraisal and explanations. It is precisely the fact that it is incomplete that allows for questions to be asked, independent research to be conducted, and conversations to be started, which is the essence of *historie* as knowledge gained through listening and inquiring.

At the same time, this overview of the events in Kosovo is more comprehensive than the history being taught in both countries' schools, which deviates from the facts and approaches the topic superficially and with political motives. In this regard, there are more similarities than differences between them.

## The Instrumentalization of Youth

The key similarity between the two education programmes is the way they instrumentalize young people: The teaching of history is used to propagate and ingrain a desirable narrative about past events and their effects on the present. For young people in Kosovo, history is supposed to show the genesis, evolution, and success of the struggle for independence, and all events are perceived exclusively from that point of view, even when they had little or nothing to do with it<sup>6</sup>.

Thus, the 1974 Constitution is not mentioned in light of the autonomy it offered, but as the result of protests in the late 1960s, which called for, among other things, Kosovo to be granted the status of a Republic. Likewise, the demonstrations of the early 1980s are placed in the context of the struggle for independence rather than the struggle for social justice and political equality.

The political aspirations of the time are also misrepresented, omitting the fact that the future of Kosovo was previously seen by Kosovar politicians within a Yugoslav framework, and that the idea of living together in a wider state was only given up in late 1991, when it became clear that this framework no longer formally existed.

On the other hand, Serbian textbooks' aim to show how the dissolution of Yugoslavia and the loss of Kosovo were historically determined by events beyond Serbia's control, and in which it had no allies to rely on. The 1974 Constitution allowed Kosovo more independence than was justified and "undermined Yugoslavia"<sup>8</sup>. This was already evident a few years later, when Albanians put their "nationalist and separatist

ambitions"<sup>9</sup> in public view at the 1981 demonstrations. Serbia's quixotic efforts to preserve the common state were insufficient to stand up to internal and external enemies. In spite of this, however, Serbia defied ultimatums and obstinately awaited international military intervention.

Both curricula neglect to mention efforts on both sides to resolve the crisis peacefully, as well as the agreements concluded as part of those efforts. Compromises accepted during those talks, which sometimes necessitated that political positions were changed, are a special taboo.

The most obvious similarity, however, lies in the way victims of the war are portrayed, where both curricula choose to only list their own victims, while exaggerating their suffering, and failing to cite sources. Textbooks from Kosovo do not recognize KLA victims, nor the criminal proceedings before the ICTY; Serbian textbooks do not contain a single sentence about mass crimes, deportations, or hiding the bodies of Kosovo Albanians in secret mass graves, and, unexpectedly, fail to mention crimes against Serbs and other non-Albanians committed by the KLA.

The most surprising decision by the Serbian authorities is to have textbooks completely omit the armed conflict from 1998 to 1999, as well as the period of crisis, discrimination, and repression against Albanians that preceded and led to the armed conflict. Young people in Serbia learn that Albanians in Kosovo strove toward separatism, and in the end, with the help of the international community and by means of bombing that caused enormous human losses and destruction, finally got their way.

On the other hand, textbooks from Kosovo contain an apotheosis of the military struggle for independence, ignoring the position that was dominant before the war - that of non-violent opposition to repression. The military conflict is accordingly very prominent, and used as an opportunity to legitimize the KLA as a party to the conflict that led to the final outcome, and not as a party whose demilitarization was a component of post-war agreements.

## History as a National Programme

There are several long-term consequences of this approach to teaching history, which are difficult to rectify. The most obvious is the inability of the communities involved to reach out to one another due to these

conflicting teachings about the past. A self-victimizing narrative that refuses to recognize the suffering of others will fail to see the importance of dialogue with them, and will base its arguments on the culpability and crimes of the other side. Furthermore, perceiving events as having been imposed from outside serves to maintain the conviction that the current solution is unnatural and temporary, and that, if the political conditions should change, it too can be overturned. This makes it impossible for a political solution to a conflict to become a societal solution, thereby freezing the potential for conflict.

Insisting on militarism fails to uphold dialogue and negotiations as methods of conflict resolution, which makes it more likely that future participants in public and political life in both countries will reach for violent solutions, instead of dialogue and compromise.

A less obvious consequence is that treating young people as a formless mass to be molded as desired and necessary, in addition to being ethically wrong, could be counterproductive. Young people do not live in isolation (anymore); they have contact with members of other communities, and the freedom and desire to seek out information, which is ever more available, on their own.

By teaching history as a national programme rather than learning about past events based on reliable evidence could deepen mistrust in the education system among young people, given that they are witnessing one reality while being taught another at school. And while some young people will inevitably accept the imposed narrative and continue down the path of simplification and stereotyping, many others may take an opportunistic approach and treat education as just one of the necessary steps in growing up, and not as one that is supposed to equip them with knowledge and skills, develop their critical thinking, and empower them to become active in the protection of human rights, democracy, and the rule of law<sup>10</sup>.

A different history lesson on the armed conflict in Kosovo from 1998 to 1999 is one based on alternative ways of teaching young people about the recent past that continues to shape their present. A fact-based approach to teaching is the foundation of history as an academic discipline, so this could be an opportunity for history teaching to regain its original direction in

both countries. This is especially true because Serbia and Kosovo are fortunate enough to have an abundance of resources to rely on when preparing history curricula: Over 3,000 pages of ICTY verdicts, which have been determined to be accurate beyond reasonable doubt, provide a reliable and credible source of information; evidence presented to the court provides a direct insight into documents relevant for expanding lessons and deepening knowledge, especially as these documents would otherwise be unavailable to researchers. Victim testimonies help put a human face on certain historical facts and events that took place a long time ago, greatly increasing a society's capacity for solidarity, understanding, and acceptance.

In this way, we could start expecting even more from our education – to teach us to respect diversity and equality, making us more accessible to one another, and making dialogue with other communities commonplace, and not just a formal demand as part of international processes that the countries are involved in, or toward which they strive. ■■■

Translated by Nemanja Georgijević

<sup>1</sup> ICTY, 2013. Case *Vlastimir Đorđević*, IT-05-087A: Đorđević (Appeal), Public Transcript of Hearing, May 2013

<sup>2</sup> Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2000. *The Global Report 1999*

<sup>3</sup> Data on the number of casualties: Humanitarian Law Center

<sup>4</sup> ICTY, Case *Šainović et al.* (IT-05-87-T), first instance ruling from 2009, and the Appeals Council verdict from 2014, available at: <http://www.icty.org/en/case/milutinovic/4>; Case *Đorđević* (IT-05-87/1), first instance ruling from 2011, and Appeals Council verdict from 2014, available at: <http://www.icty.org/en/case/djordjevic/4>

<sup>5</sup> ICTY, Case *Haradinaj et al.* (IT-04-84), first instance ruling from 2008, and Appeals Council ruling from 2012, available at: <http://www.icty.org/case/haradinaj/4>; Case *Limaj et al.* (IT-03-66), first instance ruling from 2005, and Appeals Council Verdict from 2007, available at: <http://www.icty.org/case/limaj/4>.

<sup>6</sup> All claims about the contents of history teaching in Kosovo rely on the paper: "Kosova 1912-2000 in the History Textbooks of Kosova and Serbia", 2012 Gashi

<sup>7</sup> Two history textbooks for primary school were used, selected according to the number of students using them.

<sup>8</sup> Đorđe Đurić, Momčilo Pavlović, 2010. *Istorija - udžbenik za osmi razred osnovne škole* ("History - A textbook for the Eighth Grade of Primary School"), JP Zavod za udžbenike

<sup>9</sup> Predrag M. Vajagić, Nenad Stošić, 2010. "Istorija", *udžbenik za osmi razred osnovne škole*, ("History" - a textbook for the eighth grade of primary school), Klett

<sup>10</sup> Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers to Member States on the Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education, CM/Rec(2010)7, Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 11 May 2010 at the 120th Session, available at [https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result\\_details.aspx?Objec-tID=09000016805cf01f](https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result_details.aspx?Objec-tID=09000016805cf01f)

# War Criminals Be Quiet, Victims Speak Up!

By Marigona Shabiu and Ivan Đurić

The Regional Network of the Youth Initiative for Human Rights (YIHR) gathers together a young generation of peace activists, who are too young to remember, yet determined never to forget, the atrocities, crimes and victims of the wars in the Balkans. They are the 2019 laureates of the Vaclav Havel Human Rights Prize for their work on peacebuilding and reconciliation in the region. YIHR activists face continuous threats of physical violence and have been prosecuted for their activism. In this curated interview for “Perspectives”, Marigona from Pristina and Ivan from Belgrade, two colleagues from YIHR, talk about their motivation to join the organisation and the challenges they face in their struggle against national mono-ethnic narratives twenty years after the war in still the deeply divided societies of both Kosovo and Serbia.

Although they were only kids during the wars in Yugoslavia, Marigona and Ivan have not hesitated to stand up to war criminals and say: “War criminals be quiet, in order for victims to speak up”. One of their signature activities is to show up with a banner with this message whenever convicted war criminals from Serbia or Kosovo make public appearances. The perpetrators of the war on both sides are still present in the countries’ political and social arenas.

These and similar activities put them at top of the list of “foreign mercenaries” and “domestic traitors” [terms often used to label those who dare to speak about war crimes committed by their own governments - Ed.], marking them as targets for threats and physical attacks. Despite this, Marigona and Ivan say they don’t have the luxury of giving up these courageous acts. They spoke about their motivation to be part of the YIHR regional network and the fight that they are not willing to give up, despite rising nationalistic narratives in all the countries in the region.

**When did you join the Initiative and what was your motivation to do so?**

**MARIGONA:** My motivation to become an activist came from my interest and

genuine belief in the importance of being vocal about important issues that concern our societies at the local as well as regional level. YIHR is one of the very few NGOs that connects these two perspectives and provides young people with the opportunity to debunk and challenge national, mono-ethnic narratives.

I started my activism at YIHR in 2008, when I was only 14 years old. I had attended a Human Rights School, where we had the opportunity to discuss very important topics, such as human rights, LGBTIQ\* rights, gender equality, transitional justice, and so on. That was the first time I learned about transitional justice and I was amazed by the work of activists, not only in Kosovo, but also in the region, who were brave enough to challenge their social and political systems to deal with the past, even putting their lives at risk sometimes, due to the very sensitive nature of this topic.

The roots of YIHR’s work were established precisely through the courage and enthusiasm of young people willing to fight for human rights. For more than 15 years, we have been strongly and proudly encouraging and supporting our group of activists by enabling them to communicate and cooperate with their peers in the Western Balkans and beyond, while also engaging

**Marigona Shabiu**, Youth Initiative for Human Rights, Kosovo  
**Ivan Đurić**, Youth Initiative for Human Rights, Serbia



the broader public in matters that concern us all.

**IVAN:** My path to YIHR was a bit unusual, as I joined the Initiative after being a political party activist for some years – it usually goes the other way around. What brought me to YIHR was the liberty to vocally and openly talk about uncomfortable topics regardless of the current political situation in Serbia. There is an enormous value and benefit to having counterparts in other countries in the region with whom we share values and, together, fight this battle. Obviously, working regionally brings great value to our messages and activities, but on a personal level it brings another kind of satisfaction, self-confidence and determination, which makes YIHR exceptional.

At the beginning of my years of activism, in 2006-2007, the issue of war crimes and war criminals was one of the main political questions, but the context was completely different than today. Serbia was extraditing or on the way to extraditing individuals wanted for war crimes; the question of arresting Mladić and Karadžić was imminent and it seemed like a turning point for Serbian society.

It seemed as if we were breaking connections with the Milošević regime and the past and entering an era of decisive and fast European integration and democratisation. But that was obviously a false picture. I still believe, more and more every day, that our stance, as a society, towards war criminals and the wartime period, and Serbian actions in that period, is determining our present, and above all our future. Like many others, I completely misjudged the situation fifteen years ago. Nationalism in our society goes far deeper than party politics, and support for Milošević's policies and actions, and for the ideology of Serbian nationalism, transcends all spheres of society. It is not just the political elites that are currently in power, it is also the political elites in the opposition. Nationalism is in our academia, education system, and cultural scene – both high class culture and kitsch culture and sports – and not only football hooligans, but also the national football federation, and so on. The voices of peace activists are not as strong as they were and we are currently on the losing side.

However, being unpopular doesn't make us wrong: I feel it is completely the opposite.

### **What is it like to talk about war crimes and victims in societies that are very far from reconciliation and where peace-building attempts face numerous challenges?**

**MARIGONA:** It is still a taboo, especially if you do so in an inclusive and unbiased manner. In Kosovo, the Albanian community is reluctant to accept that there were Serbian civilian victims, as well. For the majority of people, all Serbs are bad. The same goes for Serbs' feelings about Kosovar Albanians.

The past conflict has produced different forms of prejudice and intolerance. A common aftereffect of the conflict is the lack of opportunities for people from both sides, in particular for youth. Young people face numerous obstacles, often created as a consequence of administrative barriers and mental barriers caused by a lack of trust and information, and existing prejudices. Young people from both communities lack opportunities to interact and communicate with each other. As a result, xenophobia and the growing sense of alienation among young people is very concerning.

Politicians in both countries are further perpetuating this situation with messages serving the sole purpose of scoring political points, without actually trying to have an impact on the broader reconciliation between the two societies. It caused much concern when former Prime Minister of Kosovo Ramush Haradinaj appointed Mr. Sylejman Selimi as his political adviser, given the fact that the latter has been convicted for war crimes by the courts in Kosovo. The fact that Haradinaj, as Prime Minister, was previously tried by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former-Yugoslavia (ICTY) is not reassuring for the victims of war crimes who still live in Kosovo. Instead of unifying figures that cross ethnic lines, we have leaders with controversial pasts, who create distrust among people from other communities both in Kosovo and Serbia.

Another crucially important factor is the education system in Kosovo, which is perpetuating various nationalist narratives, particularly through history books. This has been found by an analysis of textbooks conducted by YIHR Kosovo in 2017. On the other hand, Serbian youth living in Northern Kosovo learn from history books influenced by the Serbian government, which barely mention the Kosovo war and portray the

Serbian people as the main victims of it. Such hatred and xenophobic language has created isolation, prejudice, distrust and insecurity in both communities.

Collective memory in both Kosovo and Serbia is dominated by national mono-ethnic narratives, which are filled with myths and glorify heroes. Victims are usually left in the margins, while the tendency to portray one group as the main victim and the other only as the perpetrator is the central element of official, state narratives in both Kosovo and Serbia. Every other experience, especially those of ordinary people and peaceful resistance by various groups, is not acknowledged. Researching and documenting the past in an unbiased manner helps in building up collective memory and acknowledge the life stories of every individual.

For more than 15 years, YIHR has worked to challenge such narratives and empower citizens to raise their voices so as to acknowledge the suffering of all victims and respect their dignity. We strive to create an environment where all victims from all communities are recognized, while aiming to gain justice for them and their families.

In Kosovo, to mark the International Day of Enforced Disappearances – August 30<sup>th</sup> – YIHR activists organize street actions dedicated to the more than 1,600 missing people from all ethnic groups in Kosovo. Furthermore, we have launched a virtual museum, where we provide an open space for ordinary people to share their personal stories about their experiences as refugees during the war in Kosovo.

Given the lack of cooperation and communication between the two societies, due to the violence in the recent past and existing political pressure and ethno-nationalist agendas, we are focusing our efforts on establishing a network of youth from both communities who are capable of and empowered to bring forward reconciliation processes, so as to create a prosperous and peaceful region. We believe that young people from Kosovo and Serbia should be capable of understanding and promoting cross-border communication and cooperation as a foundation for sustainable peace between the two countries.

Through increased dialogue we can create better ways of dealing with the past, challenging nationalist propaganda and increasing social resilience, so that past conflicts are never repeated. We believe that it



Prizren, summer 2019. Photo by hbs Belgrade.  
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is very important to increase critical thinking among young people in order to tackle the existing ethno-nationalist narratives about the recent past in Kosovo, as well as in the region, which are nurtured within the ethnic and national groups, and thereby hinder effective dealing with the past and deepen the divisions between the communities.

Kosovo and Serbia need to intensify their efforts to reconcile the past conflict by approaching past mistakes and the causes of violence in an open and transparent manner. Both countries need to continue the dialogue process, towards reaching a legally binding agreement that will ultimately bring peace and further contribute to the reconciliation process.

**IVAN:** They say that time heals everything, but in this case it is completely the opposite. Now, 20 years later, the question of who is responsible for the actions that led to war, and the war crimes that were committed, interests no one. Memories of the victims and survivors of the war are fading away.

The general public –even the people affected by the war– don't want to talk about it anymore. They don't want to hear about it. Everyone feels that we have been talking about it for 20 years. But no one takes into account the lack of conclusions. Yes, it's true, we have been talking about this for 20 years, but not in the proper way.

And in Serbia we're not sure why the war started. Our version of events does not correlate with anyone else's. How the war ended is also questionable. What were the

goals of the policy that had led us to war? If we did not fulfil these goals, do we plan to revisit them?

Serious questions about the causes of the war, the actions of the Serbian police and army during the war, and the consequences of the war are taboos in our society. Our elites are intentionally keeping all of these topics under the carpet: You will hear no one associate themselves with the Milošević regime, but almost no one completely distance themselves from it. The only thing to penetrate the wall of silence is the voices of support for people convicted by the ICTY. The government supports them. Their memoirs are being published. Government jets bring them home from prison after serving their sentences.

In order to convey our message, the first obstacle to overcome is the wall of silence. We are speaking out about things you are not supposed to talk about. That feels unnatural to people and automatically creates a distance between us and them. For this we are labelled as weirdoes. A huge problem is that we are questioning the official nationalistic

narrative – or even completely disputing it. For this we are labelled as traitors. Because we are not present in mainstream media and public discussions, most of our messages are sent through public actions where we face threats of physical violence. At the same time, we poke this nationalist paradigm of national unity and single mindedness in the eye. For this we are labelled as foreign mercenaries.

It feels unnatural that we, as young people born during or after the war, are dealing with the issue of the legacy of the conflicts during the 1990s - I often hear that remark. But this was not our choice. Previous generations left this toxic issue unresolved. It still shapes our political reality. Our motto is “too young to remember, determined never to forget”. I strongly believe it is socially responsible to devote your time and your career, and –why not say it– to risk a lot trying to defeat this nationalistic monster, which has been destroying our countries and societies. Many people –and not just individuals, but entire generations– have avoided tackling this. We do not have that luxury. ■■■



# Born, Raised and Deported: Kosovo Roma children surviving in Serbia

By Anđela Milivojević

During the NATO operation Allied Force against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in June 1999, ethnic Albanians violently expelled approximately 96,000 of Kosovo's 120,000 pre-1999 Romani population. According to international administrators in Kosovo, not a single person has been brought to justice for anti-Gypsy crimes occurring since 1999 as part of the on-going ethnic cleansing campaign. Most of the families fled to Western Europe, primarily to Germany. Although these families came from Kosovo, due to the EU Readmission Agreement with Serbia, over 22,000 people have been deported to Serbia since 2007. Some of the children spoke only Albanian, Romani or German.

"Mirsad, I don't understand why are you camping in front of the school? The bell rang five minutes ago!" shouts principal Nenad Ćirić through the window of his office at the boy he spotted in the schoolyard through a video camera. The class has already started, but the elementary school pupil Mirsad is playing with a ball outside the classroom with some other kids.

Nenad Ćirić is the young and energetic principal of the "Branko Pešić" elementary school in Zemun, on the outskirts of Belgrade. The school has worked with children and young adults aged from 10 to 16 that have not entered primary school or did not finish it on schedule, since the 1970s.

Another peculiarity of this school is that over 80% of their pupils are of Roma nationality. "I mostly worry about their safety," explained Nenad as he closed the window that looks out onto the yard where the children were playing.

Mirsad was abandoned by his mother when he was seven and his father is a convicted drug addict. "His grandparents are his guardians today and they are doing the best they can to take care of the boy," says the principal. But Mirsad is disobedient. He often misses class and doesn't arrive on time. On the other hand, he is not violent and he doesn't get into fights like other children. Mirsad is one of dozens of children from Ashkaelia, Egyptian and other families regarded

as Gypsies, who fled from Kosovo to Western Europe during the war in Kosovo in 1998-99. The European Roma Rights Centre estimates that during "NATO action against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in June 1999 and the subsequent return of predominantly ethnic Albanians from abroad, ethnic Albanians violently expelled approximately four-fifths of Kosovo's pre-1999 Romani population – estimated to have been around 120,000 – from their homes". Fleeing from the Kosovo war, Roma families tried to seek asylum in countries such as Ger-



Pupils with their teachers at a school event. Photo by Anđela Milivojević, all rights reserved.



School area in Zemun, Belgrade. Photo by Anđela Milivojević, all rights reserved.

many, France and Austria. However, many of them have returned to Serbia since then. Over 22,000 people have been transported back to Serbia since 2007 in accordance with the EU Readmission Agreement, according to data from the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration of the Republic of Serbia. Some were deported and some decided to return on a so-called “voluntary” basis. Roma families with children make up the largest proportion of the returnees, having spent from several months to several years in European countries, most commonly in Germany.

“The majority of our children, their parents were from Kosovo, and all of them went, at some point, to Western Europe to seek asylum,” explains Nenad, who has been working for the school for over twenty years.



A classroom at the “Branko Pešić” school. Photo by Anđela Milivojević, all rights reserved.

He says the biggest problem is motivating the kids to come to school regularly.

Many of the children who have returned from counties in Western Europe did not attend school in those countries. And if they did, they didn’t certify their diplomas, nor do they know how to, says Nenad.

### Survival before education

Another problem might be a more serious one – parents’ understanding of the importance of education.

Over 90% of the parents of these children either did not attend or have only finished elementary school, explains Nenad, who says that parents do not perceive school as important.

“Motivating these kids is the biggest problem, because they have no support from home,” he explains.

The causes of the poor educational outcomes and high drop-out rates from school are numerous: poverty, poor knowledge of the Serbian language, discrimination, lack of motivation and support, failing to keep up with the curriculum, inadequate housing conditions, and long distances of Roma communities from schools.

“These people are taking care of their children, but school is simply not the most important thing for them, so the question of their children graduating is just not important. We have a lot of children who start helping their parents at some point - babysitting younger siblings, girls cleaning around the house and boys collecting secondary [recyclable] materials with their parents” says Nenad and concludes “Between the idea of going to school or surviving, they will choose the latter.”

A new way to survive is to go Western Europe. Families that go to Germany and seek asylum are given social assistance for several months while their asylum request is processed. The chance to actually receive asylum is small.

At the beginning of 2016, German Parliamentary State Secretary Hans Joachim Fuchtel, on a visit to Belgrade, said that “Serbia is a safe country of origin where people can live freely. It means that those who seek asylum and who will be granted asylum if they come from Serbia will be zero, and they will be returned to their country of origin”.

Although Roma families know that asylum applications will almost certainly be rejected, they still decide to take this step, pushed by poverty to find a better life for at least a few months.



According to the school principal, Nenad Ćirić, many of the families aim to spend some time in Western Europe because social assistance is important to them.

“You have kids who don’t know math but know what paperwork they need for social assistance. That is survival. Children are children and we can’t blame them for anything. Every single thing that happens in their lives –adults are the ones to blame, no matter whether it is the state, the educational system or the non-governmental sector– there are people everywhere who have failed them,” explained Nenad.

### School as a safe haven

It was May 13<sup>th</sup> 2019 when live music, children singing and a long round of applause were heard from the small attic at the “Branko Pešić” elementary school.

At the end of a successfully completed school year, the pupils and teachers of the school prepared an event that they called “Music and Geography Around the World”. Roma children, along with their peers, including many refugees fleeing war who also attend this school, sang and played tunes from different continents - African, Asian and Latin American.

The music teacher was playing a guitar and the sports teacher was helping on the drums. Along with the Serbian National Anthem, the children sang famous rock songs as well as traditional ethno-songs. After the performance the pupils were happy, laughing and hugging their teachers. The applause lasted for several minutes.

Despite all the misfortunes that Roma children who originate from Kosovo face, a certain number of them manage to successfully complete the studies at this school – all thanks to their dedicated teachers. Over 30 teachers of various subjects work in the school. However, their job is not just to teach.

Not far from the school is the Roma settlement of “Zemun polje”, where many Roma children live. The living conditions in this settlement are dire, and the settlement is often referred to as an unsafe ghetto.

However, teachers from the Branko Pešić elementary school are always welcome in

the settlement. From time to time, teachers visit the neighborhood in order to talk to parents or provide help in the form of clothes, shoes or give New Year’s gifts.

“Parents are very aware that we are the only ones taking care of these children, trying to get them to finish school and helping them,” says the school principal.

Due to all the problems that pupils face on a daily basis, the school uses a modified teaching model with a reduced curriculum that is adapted for children with limited prior knowledge, poor knowledge of the Serbian language and very difficult living condi-



School hallway decorated for the School Day celebration. Photo by Anđela Milivojević, all rights reserved.

tions. The model aims to enable children to acquire a minimum of knowledge during a short period of time, so that they are then able to attend a regular primary school.

Teachers are particularly sensitive to working with children who come from difficult backgrounds, but the school’s principal, Nenad, admits it is often emotionally exhausting.

“Sometimes it seems like it would be easier for me to carry cement all day compared to what I experience and hear from the kids in only one day here at the school,” he says. ■■■

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.errc.org/press-releases/five-years-of-ethnic-cleansing-of-gypsies-from-kosovo>

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.kirs.gov.rs/wb-page.php?kat\\_id=44](http://www.kirs.gov.rs/wb-page.php?kat_id=44)

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.rts.rs/page/stories/sr/story/9/politika/2179434/fuhtel-srbija-sigurna-zemlja.html>

# Rape as a Weapon in War

By Thomas Roser

Only time doesn't heal wounds: Women abused during the war continue to be stigmatized and silenced. In Kosovo, the number of women who were raped during the war, and who are often severely traumatized, is estimated at around twenty thousand. Only a fraction of them seek professional help. And only a few dare to talk openly about their experiences to their families.

PRISTINA. The war is still not over for the dark-haired woman. At the Kosovo Rehabilitation Centre for Torture Victims (KRCT) in Pristina, 50-year-old Adelina (name changed) tells us that she had always been "a very strong person": "Whether poverty or violence, I had many problems to solve in my life. But when it came to this, I wasn't up to the task. Even with my family, I still can't talk about it".

In the wrong place at the wrong time: Adelina talks about the fateful day in April 1999, which changed her life, with her hands clasped together. The day before, Serbian militia had massacred more than 20 men in her village. "After the shootings even the animals did not seem to come to rest anymore. The dogs barked, the cows moored, the chickens cackled". The fear that her missing brother might also be among the dead made it difficult for her to grasp a clear thought: "I just couldn't understand how humans can do this to other humans."

Without her husband, who was working abroad at the time, Adelina and her five children sought refuge in her parents' house. It was her concern for her hungry children that prompted her to return the next day to her own farm for milk and eggs. "Mama, are you coming back?" her three-year-old son asked her, crying as she went.

When Adelina opened the gate for the hungry calf, so that it could get to the cow on the pasture, she noticed the two soldiers by the henhouse too late. "They

raped me", she says in a hesitant voice. "I told them that I had five children, and I asked them to let me go. They laughed and said that they would make me more children. And they called for other soldiers to take me with them".

At that moment she thought only of the promise she had made to return to her son, Adelina says: "I broke loose, ran away. As I looked around, I saw one of the soldiers pointing his pistol at me. The other one fell into his arm - and prevented the shot".

The war raged in Kosovo from February 1998 to June 1999. Twenty years later, the consequences of the war still cause many problems for the inhabitants of the Balkan state, which has been independent since 2008. The number of rape victims alone is estimated at twenty thousand women. According to KRCT therapist Selvi Izeti, rape is a "weapon of war" that is still effective decades later. In Kosovo, the victims were between eight and sixty years old. Children, elderly and disabled women were also raped: "It was not a question of whether the women were attractive or not. It was about hurting society".

Adelina never talked to her family about what she had experienced. Only one of her sisters knew about it, Adelina says. She has not talked about it to her husband because she is afraid of his reaction: "He often drinks a lot, sometimes he is violent. I don't know how he would react". Once she asked him what he thought of raped women: "He said that he believed such women were



immoral". Her children have grown up, but she has not been able to tell them about the rape either: "I would have difficulty explaining to them why I had kept this from them for so long".

A thorny rose on an open hand adorns a picture painted by one of the victims during therapy at the KCRT. According to therapist, Izeti, only around a thousand of the traumatized women have so far asked for help - and mostly without the knowledge of their families. The stigma attached to rape victims makes it difficult for them to open up to their relatives: "Because they were never able to talk about what they experienced, the war is still fresh for them, but their trauma is chronic. And these cases are always the most difficult to treat".

It is the shame and fear of the reactions of relatives and the social environment that still keeps many victims of sexual violence in patriarchal Kosovo from talking about their suffering. Only last October, for the first time, a rape victim dared to speak publicly on Kosovar television about the crime they had suffered. Vasfije Krasniqi Goodman, who now lives in the USA, reported in a tearful voice how at the age of 16 she was deported by a Serbian policeman to a neighboring village, where she was raped by him and another man. She had begged her tormentor several times to shoot her, said the mother of two: "But he told me that I would suffer more if he let me live".

The report by that courageous woman was "an important step" to "break" the social stigmatization of rape victims, Izeti said. The number of women seeking advice and help in the KCRT did not increase significantly, contrary to expectations. But many patients finally dared to open up to their families and talk about their experiences: "Vasfije had the support of her family. And this was to become a model for other families - which is what is happening now."

For a long time, the attention of the State to the needs of traumatized rape victims in Kosovo was insufficient. The care of affected women has so far been largely left to independent organisations such as the KCRT. Until recently, rape victims were not entitled to any state aid. Only since February 2018 have women who can credibly prove that they were raped during the war been able to apply for a small pension of 230 euros per month.

However, Izeti explains that the conditions for receiving the war victims' pension can-

not be fulfilled by many of the women affected. As a result, a relatively small number of only one hundred women have been recognized so far as entitled to receive the pension. For example, a relative must testify to the rape: "But if the women have never told their families about it, they can hardly have the rape confirmed by a relative". Some women are unable to provide the very detailed description of the circumstances and the course of the crime that is required: "20 years have passed. And many can hardly remember every detail. That is why sometimes the authorities don't believe them".

Anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder are common problems among victims of sexual violence during wars. While the initially very high number of former prisoners of war and veterans who sought help in the KRCT has declined over the years, the number of rape victims willing to undergo therapy increases: "The suffering of former prisoners of war is accepted. They have no problems to talk about it". Rape victims, on the other hand, often never felt able to talk about it: "Their problems usually increase with the years".

Izeti reports that women often deliberately do not speak about their rape at the beginning of their therapy: "Often they first ask whether there are cameras and recorders, whether the conversation is being recorded or whether someone is listening to them". Only when they are sure that no one else can learn about their experiences do they feel free enough to speak. Fearing that other people might find out about their rape, the women that visit the KRCT often tell their families that they are going to a gynecologist or another doctor, Izeti said, speaking of a "double problem" that their patients face: "They feel compelled to lie to their family even if they want treatment".

Those women who dared to contact KRCT, which operates in several cities, needed "urgent help", according to Izeti's experience: "But they can also drastically change their situation for the better. Their lives change when they begin to talk about what they have experienced and their problems. Even women who relapse two or three years after their therapy are much easier to treat".

She cannot forget the rape and will never be able to forget it "until the end of my life", Adelina says. But since she came into contact with the KRCT in 2016 and could talk about her experiences, she feels "70 per-

cent better”: “If I have the feeling that I can’t cope with it alone, I call - or I come by” Adelina says. Talking to other rape victims is particularly helpful for her: “It’s simply a good feeling to talk about our shared experiences with women who have similar experiences”. “Step by step” it is be-

coming better, she says when she says goodbye, “I hope that my problems will eventually be a thing of the past - and that I will finally be able to put them behind me”. ■■■

Translated by Sanja Katarić

# The Kosovo Pressure Cooker: Kosovo Serbs between Belgrade and Pristina

By Tatjana Lazarević

Kosovska Mitrovica, along with the neighboring municipalities of Zvečan, Zubin Potok and Leposavić, constitutes a compact Kosovo community primarily populated by Serbs. At the same time, this is a part of Kosovo where the Serbian state still leads a parallel life. Kosovar Albanians and the Western partners are using this administrative condominium to highlight accusations of disorganization and a lack of law and order, with an increasing number of voices warning about Northern Kosovo being on the verge of new a confrontation. Albin Kurti, the newly elected Prime Minister of Kosovo, of the Vetëvendosje party, has announced changes both with regard to Kosovo's official policy towards the Serbian minority in the north of the country, as well as concerning the dialogue on the status of Kosovo. As part of the political power play between Belgrade and Pristina, it has been the "bad guys" from the north who have thus far always been most affected.

In 1999, my daughter Marija was six years old. We were still living in my parents' house at the time. As you enter Kosovska Mitrovica from Zvečan, a great building towers over the main street. As a habit, the first thing I do in the morning is look through the window. On that, what was it, June 17<sup>th</sup> maybe, I did the same and froze my gaze. Right across the street stood a tall black soldier with a helmet on, holding a strange automatic rifle at the ready, wearing an unknown uniform. My next thought was of Marija, probably because of what I call *cognitive self-defense*. Exhausted by a three-month-long bombing campaign, I constantly feared for her life, focused on protecting her, and despaired at the knowledge that nothing actually depended on me.

The image of that French soldier in Kosovska Mitrovica marked the official break with my previous life.

Serbs in Northern Kosovo got used to French, Danish, and Belgian uniforms, and the UNMIK police, in spite of negative emotions. Citizens who stayed in the four municipalities north of the River Ibar had previously said tearful goodbyes to dusty military and police uniforms of the former federal state - some exhausted from waging war, and others, usually paramilitaries,

satiated, as it would later turn out, by robbing and murdering; and columns of refugees. Distaught, they waited for the big unknown to roll in from the south.

And they kept waiting. Kosovska Mitrovica is the only town in Kosovo where, at least in one part - north of the Ibar - Serbs remained. Kosovska Mitrovica, along with the neighbouring municipalities of Zvečan, Zubin Potok, and Leposavić, still make up a compact Serb-majority area.

This accustomedness to foreign uniforms then spread to the Kosovo police. Before getting accustomed to each of them, there was a period of violence, bitterness, and a refusal to accept them. Now, it's the Kosovo Army's turn.

Also in June of 1999, I watched as the former head of the County of Kosovska Mitrovica turned his official car away from people who had assembled on the street, waiting to hear what they could expect. Without telephone lines, with disassembled institutions and refugees, they gathered in the streets waiting for officials to talk to them.

## Parallel Reality

Since the original UN mission, through temporary institutions of self-government in Kosovo - first under international ad-

ministration, and then, after the unilateral declaration of independence in 2008, under mere supervision, and up to the end of supervised independence in 2012, the Serbian state has led its own parallel life in Kosovo.

The consolidation of state institutions in the North, as well as in Serb-majority communities south of the Ibar, was already visible in 2001 - from municipal public services, through civilian police services, the payment system, the courts, and finally the return, or relocation, of what is now called *The University of Pristina Temporarily Settled in Kosovska Mitrovica*. With the exception of the University, which returned with the agreement of UNMIK, other institutions operated in secret, in secluded locations, without official insignia. Both the Kosovo and international authorities were aware of their existence. The services were provided with difficulties, and were often just a stepping stone to the places where citizens' needs would ultimately be fulfilled - in relocated administrations in Raška, Niš, Kraljevo or Vranje [cities in southern Serbia close to the border with Kosovo - Ed.] - needs such as obtaining personal and travel documents. Post offices, primary schools and high schools, doctors' offices and hospitals never stopped operating. A political slogan often heard in the North is that *the University and the hospital are the pillars of Serbs' survival in the North* (the post offices are omitted).

Contrary to these guerrilla efforts to preserve the presence of the Serbian state, Kosovo Albanians and Western partners used this administrative condominium to highlight accusations of disorganization and the absence of order and law. Although the systems intertwined in the south as well, accusations and criticism were directed mostly at the North.

### Comprehensive Abnormalization

Since the day Serbs first put up a fight at the River Ibar, the negative narrative about Serbs merely shifted from previous war zones in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, through Milošević's Serbia, to the North of Kosovo, and has cemented itself there to this day.

Two decades since the war, it seems as though Serbs had a more difficult time adjusting to the dismantling of the former Yugoslav system of administration than to the fact that, after 100 years, with the Brus-

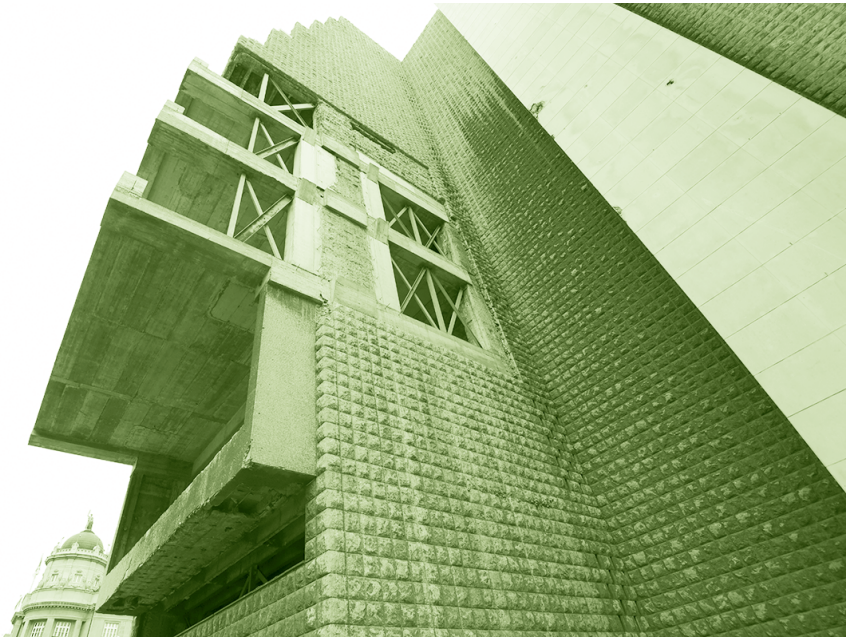
sels Agreement in 2013, the Serbian state itself completely abolished its executive and judicial authority in Kosovo.

The abolition of these institutions began in December 2014, with the dissolution of the Ministry of the Interior, i.e. the civilian police service, and the integration of several hundred police officers and civil servants into the Kosovo system, and finished with the dissolution of the courts in 2017.

The normalization of relations between the two peoples as the ultimate political agenda arrived in the North of Kosovo straight from Brussels. Its *alter ego* was precisely the abolition of Serbian state services, focusing above all on the North. Communities south of the Ibar were not paid much attention.

When the new document on Kosovo, *The Agreement on Comprehensive Normalization of Relations*, was signed in April 2013, a new phase began. In addition to the final abolition of Serbian state authority, it was also characterized by a severe lack of transparency about the talks and agreements between Belgrade and Pristina, mediated by the EU. For the media, obtaining accurate information about *what the negotiations were about, how the negotiations were proceeding, what was on the table*, and how the agreements would be implemented with regard to citizens, seemed like mission impossible. The only exceptions were the inane statements of the European team, which never revealed anything, and the populist and ever more polarizing sound bites from the Serbian and Kosovar leaders - polarized not only in relation to one another, but in relation to reality itself. Over the course of 6 years, over 30 technical agreements have been signed, and scores of high-level political and technical talks held. Hundreds of accompanying civic initiatives were started to support the respective leaderships in their stated intentions of achieving lasting peace and stability in the region. Contrary to all that, the sixth anniversary of the Brussels Agreement was met with the entire process having been forgotten, and with both societies deeply destabilized. The talks have reached a dead end - at least those on the official agenda. The sudden revival of the idea of a land swap, wherein the North, or a small piece of it, would remain part of Serbia, ensued, following what seemed to the publics on both sides to have been a *fait accompli* secret deal between the two Presidents [Serbian and Kosovo presidents Aleksandar Vučić





Joint Chiefs of Staff Headquarters in Belgrade, in ruins since the 1999 NATO military campaign, pictured in 2019.  
Photo by Nemanja Subotić CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

and Hashim Thaçi - Ed.), with the consent or passive agreement of certain international mediators.

For citizens, all of this amounts to an abnormalization. Both Serbs and Albanians hold abiding feelings of the transience and ambiguity of their everyday lives, and of permanent tensions bordering on latent conflict, while their respective leaderships have remained constant for over three decades. It seems as though the process of both nations waking up to the fact that one side is led by wartime leaders, and the other by warmongers and stranglers of civic and media freedoms, has only recently started to enter a more mature phase. Ever more heralds are warning that we are once again edging toward a new conflict. Europe, which has crowned these leaders as the Balkans' stabilocracies, has only recently started to note other winds blowing from the region, above all thanks to a newly alert Germany.

## Democratorship

It stands to reason that, in a battle of elephants, it is the grass that suffers the most - in a battle between Belgrade and Pristina, Kosovo Serbs are the grass. Those in the south and in Metohija suffered the most, above all as targets of ethnically motivated physical assaults, and later as targets of *administrative asphyxiation*, in spite of solid legislative and constitutional provisions. In preparation for the signing of the Brussels Agreement, the North's political blood count was changed almost overnight. The

hardline nationalist DSS [Democratic Party of Serbia - Ed.] leaderships were removed by abolishing municipal assemblies in 2013, and a bit earlier in the south. A U-turn had previously taken place in late 2011 and early 2012 on the policy of supporting roadblocks in the North. This policy started in 2011, when Kosovo special police units tried to take control of two administrative crossings in the North. The last barricade in the North remained in the Bosniak Mahala until 2016.

In the autumn of 2013, the first Kosovo local elections were held throughout the North, formally kicking off the Brussels Process in the field. With it began what citizens learned to recognize as institutional terror and the abolition of civil liberties, including freedom of speech.

In the first round of these elections, just before polling stations were closed, a group wearing ski masks burst into the central polling place and smashed the ballot boxes. During the day, there was a rumour circulating that this incident was being prepared if the electoral result didn't favour the candidate supported by Belgrade, and general Bratislav Dikić [retired Serbian Gendarmerie general Bratislav Dikić was sentenced to 8 years in prison before the Higher Court in Podgorica for an attempted coup d'état on the day of the parliamentary election in Montenegro in October 2016 - Ed.], a Gendarmerie general at the time, now a prisoner in Spuz, took a stroll through the city with a group of young men. After the second round, the newly elected mayor, close to the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS)

[party of Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić - Ed.], Krstimir Pantić, resigned after just a few days, and in the election campaign for the third round, on January 16<sup>th</sup> 2014, mayoral candidate Dimitrije Janićijević, who was running against the Serbian List [political party close to Aleksandar Vučić's SNS - Ed], was murdered. Ten days later, on January 27<sup>th</sup>, another candidate, Oliver Ivanović, was arrested. Finally, in the fourth round, in the spring of 2014, there were no incidents; the ballot boxes remained empty throughout the day and only filled with votes in the evening. These were counted in the neighbouring Serbian town of Raška, instead of Kosovo Polje, as the regulations stipulated.

International representatives, led by the OSCE and the EU called it *a great victory for democracy and free and fair elections* in chorus, applauding Pristina and Belgrade. All other incidents were just one-time agency news items.

Oliver Ivanović spent three years in prison. Less than a year after he was released, he was executed on the same day Janićijević was murdered, on January 16<sup>th</sup> 2018. He had spent his freedom as a candidate in the new local elections in Kosovo, demonized by the media and political machinery controlled by the Serbian List, with his car set on fire once again in the summer of 2017. During his political engagement, since 1999, the greatest leader of the Kosovo Serbs had a bomb planted under his car in 2005, his party offices set on fire in 2013, and an unknown person entering his

apartment in 2014, breaking a window and striking his wife.

## The Last of the Mohicans

I am writing this text on the day of the third (snap) Kosovo mayoral elections in the North [held on May 19<sup>th</sup> 2019 - Ed.]. The Serbian List has just declared victory. It had no challengers in the Kosovo Serb community. It entered the elections after four of its mayors had resigned six months ago, saying that Kosovo municipalities had ceased to exist in the North. Their return to the system, which, according to their pay checks, they had never really left, was conditional on the removal of the 100% tax on Serbian goods imposed by Kosovo authorities, and on the release of Serbs arrested on suspicion of involvement in the murder of Oliver Ivanović. None of these conditions have been met thus far. The same mayors who had resigned have now won again, except for one, whose brother ran instead.

The oxymoron that has struck this community, and apparently the entirety of Serbian society as well, has made zombies out of them. In this Kosovo pressure cooker, which has been boiling under pressure for 20 years, Kosovo Serbs are slowly boiled frogs. If and when it explodes, they will not remove the lid, but they, especially those from the North, will most likely continue playing the role of the *bad guys* in the narrative. ■■■

Translated by Nemanja Georgijević

# Depleted Uranium: Between sensationalism and health hazard

By Elion Gerguri

Twenty years after the bombing, many questions relating to the use of depleted uranium and its consequences for human health and the environment remain unanswered. NATO and some Western governments argue that depleted uranium does not have any harmful effects, while doctors and other experts point out the increased number of malignant tumors, genetic mutations, birth defects and other serious conditions, including leukemia, caused by radiation. Kosovo and Serbia have approached the issue of depleted uranium based on their own – very different – political agendas.

The availability of information, data and surveys about the use of depleted uranium is very limited and there is a lack of public awareness or public debate about this issue in both Kosovo and Serbia. There were isolated debates and rumours about an increase in the mortality rate after the war, with many people linking this situation to the use of depleted uranium, especially people living close to targets that were bombed by NATO.

For the last twenty years both governments have politicised and misused the issue of depleted uranium and questions related to it. This has led to increasing demands for experts to investigate the issue and discover the truth about the consequences of depleted uranium use during the bombing of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

## Background

According to available information, depleted uranium ammunition was used in at least 112 cases across Kosovo, mostly in the southwestern regions of Gjakova, Prizren and around Ferizaj. Additionally, depleted uranium was also used less intensively in attacks by U.S. bombers in the areas of Vranje, Preševo, and Bujanovac, as well as in a locality in Montenegro<sup>1</sup>. Although some estimates are much larger, information available from NATO confirms that 10 tons of depleted uranium am-



Figure 1. Sites identified as being targeted by ordnance containing depleted uranium

munition was used in Kosovo during NATO's three-month-long intervention. Kosovo was bombarded by depleted uranium shells (bullets) during April 1999. Around thirty thousand depleted uranium rounds (projectiles) were fired and about 10 tons of the depleted uranium debris was scattered across Kosovo.

In reviewing the data on environmental measurements for depleted uranium col-

lected by field missions in the Kosovo area in November 2000, a year and a half after the end of the conflict in June 1999, evidence of concentrated depleted uranium contamination was only found in soil samples at localized points of concentrated contamination. There were no signs of depleted uranium in waters.

It is important to note that hits on non-armoured ('soft') targets do not generate significant contamination because the depleted uranium penetrators do not generate significant amounts of aerosols on impact.<sup>2</sup>

### What is depleted uranium and how is it used?

According to the European Commission's Scientific Committee on Health and Environmental Risks (SCHER), depleted uranium is a dense metal produced as a by-product of enrichment of natural uranium for nuclear fuel. It is still radioactive, but at a much lower level than the starting material. It is used in armour-piercing shells and bombs, to give them more penetrating power. Such munitions were used in both Gulf Wars and in Serbia and Kosovo. Their use has raised concerns about health threats from exposure to the distributed uranium. Many studies have reported a lack of evidence of hazard, but their results remain controversial. The European Parliament in 2008 asked for more information about the science of depleted uranium and on where it can be found.<sup>3</sup>

The potential health and environmental effects of depleted uranium (DU) have been a concern for many years. In particular, its use in munitions has led to claims that it is involved in various problems in affected areas, both among combatants and civilians. A number of independent studies have reviewed the data and no conclusive evidence of damage has been found. These findings are still being disputed by others, however. The International Coalition to Ban Uranium Weapons questions the radiation exposure and dose calculation models used, claiming that DU weapons are a new source of contamination that needs more scientific analysis.

SCHER agrees with the conclusion of the UN Environment Programme, the International Atomic Energy Agency and others that environmental and human health risks are not expected due to the potential

widespread distribution of DU. Compared to background exposures to natural uranium, exposure to DU is very limited. According to SCHER, higher exposures to DU dust may occur shortly after the hit when entering vehicles hit by DU bullets, and in battle when near a tank hit by DU ammunition. Vehicles hit by DU should be made inaccessible and properly disposed of by civilians. Used DU ammunition should also be stored and disposed of properly.

The United Nations environmental investigators' analysis of 355 samples of soil, water and plants in Kosovo showed "no cause for alarm" over the radiation risks from depleted uranium ammunition. But the report from the United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP) called for precautionary measures, including cleaning up all 112 sites hit by NATO air strikes and monitoring drinking water. UNEP officials admitted that the report left open questions about potential long-term adverse effects from exposure to radiation and chemicals on human health and the environment.<sup>4</sup>

### Sensationalism or health hazard

Stories of depleted uranium were popular immediately after the war. However, to avoid minimizing the great Kosovar victory after the NATO intervention, it became a taboo topic. There are numerous scientific articles about the dangers of depleted uranium – many of which describe it as extremely dangerous. On the other hand, state authorities claim that the dangers of depleted uranium use in Kosovo are minimal.

In 2015, Arif Krasniqi, Chairman of the Ecological Party of Kosovo (a non-parliamentary party) invited all of the political factions in Pristina to approach this issue seriously and, if necessary, seek help from the international community to carry out decontamination of sites that were proven to be contaminated. "Our interest is to know the truth. No one has the right to turn a blind eye to this issue. These are living people - ecology knows no peoples and borders. This issue has not been discussed enough, no one is talking about it, and that is not good"<sup>5</sup>. Nenad Rašić, a former member of the Kosovo Assembly, also believes that cooperation in the region is indispensable, but he assesses that the political decision-makers are currently not ready to tackle these issues seriously. "At the moment I see neither the political potential, nor the will, in this govern-



ment to initiate such cooperation. If there is no pressure, I don't think anyone will deal with it. We need expert, technical and financial help. I am sure that EU institutions could do this well, but we could also ask the U.S. to investigate this fairly, and in line with the measures to be taken, the risk to the population would decrease"<sup>6</sup>.

Although the Kosovo government does not plan to reopen the issue of depleted uranium and the potential danger to public health, Ferid Agani, former Kosovar Minister of Environment and Spatial Planning, does not rule out the possibility that it will be put on the agenda if the facts prove the existence of danger. "But at the moment there are no such facts," said Agani, highlighting that the questions are legitimate but that he is convinced that this case has been sensationalized and that there is no real danger to public health.

## Depleted uranium - A Serbian scapegoat

While depleted uranium ammunition was used in at least 112 cases all over Kosovo, depleted uranium ammunition was used on a smaller scale in Serbia in the areas of Vranje, Preševo, and Bujanovac, as well as in a locality in Montenegro. Available media articles in Serbian mostly ignore the fact that depleted uranium ammunition was used almost entirely in Kosovo, and to a lesser extent in Southern Serbia.

Serbian Parliament recently established a commission to examine the alleged effects on public health of NATO's use of depleted uranium ammunition. No details are available about the work of the committee or what data it is using. However, the committee is intended to submit its' first report in 2020.

The President of the Serbian Society for the Fight Against Cancer, Professor Slobodan Čikarić, published an article in 2015 in which he claimed that the harmful effect of depleted uranium has resulted in a drastic increase in the number of cases and deaths from leukemia and lymphoma. His findings are based on an analysis of the annual reports of the Institute of Public Health of Serbia. However, no serious debate has taken place at an official level about these findings.

Professor Čikarić claims that depleted uranium used in NATO airstrikes on Serbia in 1999 is responsible for high mortality rates. Studies have shown that depleted uranium is a carcinogen: When ingested, it interrupts normal cell growth and can lead to

malignant tumours<sup>7</sup>. In response to this allegation, NATO<sup>7</sup> referenced a UN Environment Programme report, released in 2001, which states that the health risks from uranium are negligible<sup>8</sup>.

Professor Danica Grujičić of the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Belgrade is involved in forming a group of independent experts that aims to prove the public health consequences of the 1999 bombing. "Why is it that no administration in Serbia since 1999 has formed a group of experts in agriculture, chemists, doctors, and physicists, which would prove exactly what they did to us? Let the experts do their job. It is a shame that the State shows no interest in the health consequences for the population when it is known that NATO bombers used depleted uranium ammunition and also attacked chemical-industrial complexes".

At the same time Jelena Milić, the Director of the Center for Euro-Atlantic Studies, has continually pushed for a fact-based discussion on depleted uranium in Serbia. Milić identifies the media as the largest propagator in the formation of the narrative on the harmfulness of depleted uranium. "They have begun 'accusing' the ammunition for every potential health problem, and are utilising 'fake news' in order to form public opinion"<sup>9</sup>.

## Depleted NATO

The Economist magazine has recalled that the use of depleted uranium ammunition in the first Persian Gulf War in Iraq, in 1991, when at least 300-350 tons of depleted uranium were used, has raised concerns among some NATO member states, as hundreds of cases of malignant diseases have since been diagnosed among NATO soldiers, as well as a very high number of cases among the Iraqi people. A particularly large number of patients were recorded in southern Iraq, where, according to The Economist, depleted uranium ammunition was "used to a great extent". The most prominent critics of the use of depleted uranium ammunition at the time of the first Persian Gulf War were Italy and Germany, as well as some other countries whose soldiers became ill with malignant tumours. There was a risk that these countries would directly demand the end of the use of depleted uranium for military purposes – something NATO wanted to avoid at all costs<sup>10</sup>.

During the Kosovo conflict in 1999, about 30,000 depleted uranium rounds were fired at targets on the ground. Fact-finding

missions by the United Nations Environment Programme and the World Health Organisation looked into the environmental and health impacts<sup>11</sup>. Although the missions found no convincing evidence to indicate any health impact on people in Kosovo, it was noted that people could come into contact with depleted uranium by picking up objects from the ground or ingesting contaminated soil<sup>12</sup>.

### Common ground

Since the war, media reports in Kosovo and Serbia have suggested that there are higher rates of leukemia in areas where depleted uranium was used. A representative from Kosovo's Institute of Public Health told *Deutsche Welle* that the country's health authorities have not studied the issue because there is no reliable data. Kosovo only established a national cancer database in 2012<sup>13</sup>. To date, Kosovo's Institute of Public Health has released publications, neither of which are related to depleted uranium. On the other hand, the Institute of Public Health of Serbia is highly active, with numerous reports and analyses, including data on the number of cancer patients and deaths in the periods before and after the bombing.

All of the questions about depleted uranium, the risk of exposure to it and its impact on health, are legitimate. Kosovo and Serbia should focus their attention on environmental protection at the regional level, as ecological problems know no borders and regional cooperation is desperately needed. The ultimate question regarding depleted uranium in Serbia and Kosovo is who will give us answers – politicians or experts? Both countries should work together on reducing antagonism, promoting professional exchange and setting aside their differences for a common cause. Only by

having information that is accurate, comparable, fact-checked, professionally researched, and publicly available, will the citizens of both countries be able to accurately inform themselves about the issue of depleted uranium and its impact. ■■■

- <sup>1</sup> Aerial photography of targets in both Kosovo and Serbia: [https://mega.nz/?fbclid=IwAR08rns0cfk0PgUxQQCqfG-CVKvhVNa-9Ktes2CQ9rkcg3rS8GjcIEGskU1g#F!vMtD3QIB!a0xIGdNuqDDtrmpO\\_CgYHq](https://mega.nz/?fbclid=IwAR08rns0cfk0PgUxQQCqfG-CVKvhVNa-9Ktes2CQ9rkcg3rS8GjcIEGskU1g#F!vMtD3QIB!a0xIGdNuqDDtrmpO_CgYHq)
- <sup>2</sup> United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) (2001). Depleted Uranium in Kosovo: <https://postconflict.unep.ch/publications/uranium.pdf>
- <sup>3</sup> Scientific Committee on Health and Environmental Risks (SCHER) (2010). Depleted Uranium: [https://ec.europa.eu/health/scientific\\_committees/opinions\\_layman/depleted-uranium/en/index.htm](https://ec.europa.eu/health/scientific_committees/opinions_layman/depleted-uranium/en/index.htm)
- <sup>4</sup> CBS News (2001). Report: Kosovo Not Contaminated: <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/report-kosovo-not-contaminated/>
- <sup>5</sup> Kosovalive.org (2015). Uraniumi i varfëruar: gjurmëve të së vërtetës (in Albanian): <http://kosovalive.org/uraniumi-i-varferuar-gjurmëve-te-se-vertetes-2/>
- <sup>6</sup> Independent Journalists' Association of Serbia (NUNS) (2015). Osiromašeni uranijum: u potrazi za istinom (in Serbian): <http://www.nuns.rs/info/activities/25502/osiromaseni-uranijum-u-potrazi-za-istinom.html>
- <sup>7</sup> International Coalition to Ban Uranium Weapons (2014). Malignant Effects: depleted uranium as a genotoxin and carcinogen: <http://www.bandedpleteduranium.org/en/docs/216.pdf>
- <sup>8</sup> The Borgen Project (2017). 5 Facts About Cancer in Serbia: <https://borgenproject.org/5-facts-about-cancer-in-serbia/>
- <sup>9</sup> European Western Balkans (2018). Milić: Towards a fact-based discussion on depleted uranium: <https://www.ceas-serbia.org/en/external/5434-all-this-would-not-have-happened-had-the-serbs-listened-to-jele-na-milic>
- <sup>10</sup> The Economist (2001). Depleted NATO: <https://www.economist.com/leaders/2001/01/11/depleted-nato>
- <sup>11</sup> World Health Organization (WHO) (2001). Report of the World Health Organization Depleted Uranium Mission to Kosovo: <https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/108666/E71919.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>
- <sup>12</sup> World Health Organization (WHO). Environmental Threats to Children: [https://www.who.int/water\\_sanitation\\_health/hygiene/settings/ChildrenNM4.pdf](https://www.who.int/water_sanitation_health/hygiene/settings/ChildrenNM4.pdf)
- <sup>13</sup> Deutsche Welle (2012). Uranium risks haunt Kosovo survivors: <https://www.dw.com/en/uranium-risks-haunt-kosovo-survivors/a-16366645-0>

# The First Collateral Damage Was Democracy

By Elisa Satjukow

On Easter Sunday, April 11<sup>th</sup> 1999, the Belgrade journalist and editor Slavko Ćuruvija was shot on his doorstep. NATO's military intervention in the Kosovo war had begun three weeks prior. With slogans like "Ćuruvija is welcoming the bombs", the Serbian State media had publicly branded him as a "traitor".<sup>1</sup> Although Ćuruvija had previously received warnings that his life was in danger, he decided not to leave Belgrade.<sup>2</sup> Ćuruvija was shot in the back seventeen times in broad daylight, which sent a "very strong message by the regime"<sup>3</sup> recalls a friend, who, like many other Serbian intellectuals and critics of the regime, shared the opinion that Ćuruvija's murder was a contract killing.

"We were suddenly all afraid that Milošević will take the chance offered by the bombing to finish off the whole opposition"<sup>4</sup>, my informant describes the situation faced by the so-called 'Other Serbia' after the assassination of Ćuruvija. The term 'Other Serbia' emerged with the Belgrade Circle<sup>5</sup> and has been used since the 1990s to denote intellectuals and political activists who stood up for a democratic and pluralist Serbia in the Milošević era.<sup>6</sup> At the time of Ćuruvija's death, Veran Matić, the founder of the independent radio station B92, was repeatedly asked by his friends from the 'West' why there was no rebellion against the bombing in Serbia: "Where are the people who poured onto the streets every day for three months in 1996 to demand democracy and human rights?"<sup>7</sup> recalls Matić. Back in 1996, hundreds of thousands of people had demanded a democratic and European Serbia. Only one year later, a period began that the journalist and writer Velimir Ćurguz Kazi-mir describes as a reign of "terror"<sup>8</sup>.

The universities were successively depoliticized with the University Act<sup>9</sup> in the spring of 1998 and independent media were hit hard by a new Media Law<sup>10</sup>, which contained strict censorship regulations and was followed by repression of critical reporting. With the beginning of the war in Kosovo, the country was again under sanc-

tions and Milošević ruled in and through a state of emergency. Once again, it was the democratic activists who became, as Veran Matić states, "the first collateral damage of the war"<sup>11</sup>.

While ethnic cleansing in Kosovo intensified at the beginning of the bombing, the Serbian government pursued what Eric Gordy calls the "destruction of alternatives"<sup>12</sup> in order to stabilize its own power. "How do you talk about human rights and building democracy when the world's leading democracies are bombing you? The simple answer, pro-democracy activists say, is that you don't"<sup>13</sup>, states journalist Kevin Cullen. Does this really hold true?

In the following article, I will analyse the reaction of the independent media, NGOs and intellectuals to the NATO bombing and discuss their attempts –despite the combined dangers of "NATO planes in the sky, Milošević on the ground"<sup>14</sup>– to keep alive the dissident and anti-nationalist voices of the country. Last but not least, I will show that the question of whether Serbia 'deserves' to be collectively held accountable for the crimes in Kosovo, in the end, led to an irreversible rupture in the ranks of the 'Other Serbia'.

## Facing a Double Threat

With the beginning of the NATO air raids, the Yugoslav government immediately de-

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clared a state of war and mobilized for the “defence of the country”.<sup>15</sup> Isolated from the outside world and governed under martial law, the ‘Other Serbia’ in particular was in a doubly dangerous situation. Not only were they confronted by daily NATO air raids and their immediate consequences, they also experienced a renewed radical nationalization encroaching on their everyday lives. The powers of the police and judiciary were extended by emergency laws so that house searches could be conducted without a warrant and suspects detained for up to 30 days without judicial convictions or the right to a defence.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, the “Decree on the assembly of citizens during the state of war” from the 31<sup>st</sup> of March 1999 sanctioned any public meeting without pri-



Joint Chiefs of Staff Headquarters in Belgrade, in ruins since the 1999 NATO military campaign, pictured in 2019. Photo by Nemanja Subotić CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

or permission from the state with a heavy fine or imprisonment.<sup>17</sup>

If the first “collateral damage”<sup>18</sup> of the bombing was democracy, then democracy’s best-known symbol was the radio and TV station B92. Founded in 1989, B92 was the most important source of alternative information during almost the entire period of Milošević’s rule. B92 was closed by the Government at the outset of the bombing and shortly afterwards taken over and rebranded as a patriotic youth station, which transformed the “usually lively alternative culture and politics station into a standard government-run organ”.<sup>19</sup>

On the same day that B92 was closed by the Government, Veran Matić was arrested on his way to the B92 studio and held in custody for several hours. In a press release from the 13<sup>th</sup> of April 1999, the “staff of the real B92”<sup>20</sup> informed their listeners about the events that had taken place and their deci-

sion not to continue reporting on the radio for as long as the war lasted. Instead, Project FreeB92 was launched by supporters of the radio station in the form of a website, “to keep alive a flicker of the Other Serbia”.<sup>21</sup> B92 wanted to maintain the spark of the ‘Other Serbia’ not only on the web but also at concerts and events organized at the Belgrade club *Industrija*, where every day between 12am and 9pm an alternative public came together “to provide a vague mood that unites us. A feeling of young people opposing Milošević and the bombing”.<sup>22</sup> Goff and Trionfi see the takeover of the station and the temporary arrest of Veran Matić, who had been denounced shortly before by Vojislav Šešelj as a ‘NATO General’, as a “test case of the regime”<sup>23</sup> and a warning to the remaining independent media.

In a statement in April 1999 the *Association of Independent Electronic Media* (ANEM) recommended that, due to the tense situation, journalists either remain passive or cooperate with the regime: “...objective reporting, or even reporting which would not be welcomed by the authorities, entails disproportionately high risks”.<sup>24</sup> Most of the independent media followed this recommendation and during the period of the bombing either complied with censorship guidelines or, like Slavko Ćuruvija, stopped publishing altogether. Thus, with the beginning of the bombing, Serbia became what cultural activist Borka Pavičević called an “information black hole”.<sup>25</sup> Because of the censorship many people felt like cartoonist Aleksandar Zograf, who wrote in an e-mail to his friends: “It’s hard to say what is happening because we are so badly informed”.<sup>26</sup> Like Zograf, many others who had a modem at the time, used the internet as the main method of gaining information, communication and intervention. Homepages like CNN, Sky News and Beograd.com were popular for gathering information; mailing lists, chatrooms and emails were used to exchange experiences.<sup>27</sup>

For the ‘Other Serbia’ in particular, the internet became the most important mouthpiece. For example, writer and women’s rights activist Jasmina Tešanović e-mailed her war diary to a friend in Sweden, who then published it anonymously online. Within a week Tešanović’s diary had been translated into seven languages and shared on over 50 websites. After the war, Tešanović published the diary as a book<sup>28</sup> and many others followed her example.<sup>29</sup> Political appeals were also primarily shared



via the internet, such as the “Statement of concerned citizens”<sup>30</sup> of 16<sup>th</sup> April 1999, which under the title “Let civility prevail” condemned both the NATO bombings and violence against the Kosovar Albanian people by Serbian forces. The 27 signatories, among them many well-known regime critics, demanded an immediate end to violence and all military activities. In another appeal, titled “Letter to the Albanian friends”<sup>31</sup>, Serbian NGOs pleaded for a common peaceful solution – “to renew normal life and activities and find a solution to the status of Kosovo”.<sup>32</sup>

The student activists and programmers of the Internet magazine *FREE SERBIA*, which was founded in reaction to the war, also used the Web for alternative reporting: “We wanted to break the media blockade, which was imposed from both sides. Our slogan was ‘anti-NATO, anti-Milošević’”<sup>33</sup>, Janja Bobić describes the magazine’s approach. Readers were therefore shocked when a rumour circulated that the Yugoslav Internet connection was about to be shut down at the end of April 1999. Twenty Serbian NGOs urgently appealed to U.S. President Bill Clinton that access to the Internet was vital for their survival: “For NATO it appears important to cut off all dissenting people and groups from Yugoslavia in order to maintain the image of Yugoslav society as if it is totally controlled by the Milošević regime and made only of extreme nationalists who deserve punishment by bombs”.<sup>34</sup> What is apparent here is not only the dependence on the World Wide Web as the only free means of information, but also frustration about the one-sided representation of Yugoslav society in the Western media. “The [Western journalists] could have accomplished this by not forgetting the ‘Other Serbia.’”<sup>35</sup>, says Nafsika Papanikolatos, from Human Rights Watch, criticising the marginalisation of the Serbian opposition in reporting by NATO countries.

### The Question of Responsibility

The state of war opened up opportunities for Milošević to suppress his political opponents and strengthen his power. The regime knew well how to make use of the patriotic mood among the people and transformed the initial gatherings in public places into ‘anti-war events’, showing ‘TARGET’-signs as a symbol of defiance.<sup>36</sup> For the ‘Other Serbia’, the patriotic support of the regime was a double setback: Not

only did Milošević use the state of emergency to suppress his critics but he also managed to reassemble a majority of the people behind him.

In these days opposition to the NATO bombing was common ground among people in Serbia – but for very different reasons. At the heart of the conflict was the question of whether Serbia deserved to be collectively held accountable for the crimes in Kosovo, or whether this should be seen as a reaction to a decade of Serbian war crimes committed under the rule of Milošević. This was the moment, as one of my interviewees described, when many people who were against the wars in Yugoslavia until 1999 “somehow flipped” and now said to themselves: “Well, no, I’m against this bombing. This is too much. The Serbian side is not the only one responsible”.<sup>37</sup>

The remaining circle of dissidents was severely intimidated, not least by the murder of Slavko Ćuruvija. The murder was seen as a moment that instigated the reorganization of cooperation among Yugoslav NGOs. Out of fear of “politically disappearing”<sup>38</sup>, the Yugoslav NGO Action network was founded by some fifty-five non-state groups.

But even for those who were still politically active during the war, the question of Serbian responsibility for what happened in Kosovo quickly became a crossroads that divided the ranks of civil society. Obrad Savić, a member of the Belgrade Circle, later distanced himself from the political attitude propagated at the time – which he described as naive – towards Serbian crimes in Kosovo: “I am ashamed that in our public statement we caused both sides to be held responsible for the expulsion of the Kosovo Albanians and to legitimize our criticism of NATO with the experiences of the Kosovo Albanians”.<sup>39</sup> It only became clear to him following the end of the war, following discussions with his Albanian colleagues, that the Serbian side in particular was responsible for the mass expulsion and killings during the war.

Nataša Kandić, director of the Humanitarian Law Center, also sees the reluctance of Serbian NGOs to accept the role played by Serbia in expelling the Albanian population in Kosovo as a fracture in civil society that continues to this day: “Perhaps everything would have been different if people in Belgrade had decided to show their concern about what happened to the Albanians be-

tween March and June 1999 and to demonstrate their attention and political solidarity".<sup>40</sup> Kandić herself set off for Pristina shortly after the bombing started and visited Kosovo and refugee camps in Macedonia throughout the war and afterwards. In letters<sup>41</sup> and interviews she reported in detail on the human rights violation and crimes committed against Kosovo Albanians: "I know from conversations with Albanians that they expected people to come from Belgrade and show that they care about what is going on in Kosovo. Perhaps even a hundred Belgrade intellectuals could have changed the Albanian-Serbian relationship".<sup>42</sup> Kandić describes the heart of the dilemma in which the 'Other Serbia' found itself at the beginning of the bombing.

At the same time, any criticism of NATO's military intervention seemed to trivialise Serbian war crimes in Kosovo – a "propaganda trick of both sides", diagnoses sociologist Božidar Jakšić, condemning both NATO's and Milošević's politics at the same time: "I consider the dilemma 'either NATO or Slobodan Milošević' to be a false one, a mere propaganda trick of the two sides. If I oppose NATO aggression against my country that does not mean I support Milošević's policy. If I am an opponent of Slobodan Milošević's policy that does not mean I support NATO military actions against my country. (...) I reject both policies".<sup>43</sup>

The right to a third –and neutral– way, the "*pravo na treće mišljenje*"<sup>44</sup>, as Ljubiša Rajčić called for in relation to the NATO bombing, was then also the focus of a public debate in the critical newspaper *Vreme*,<sup>45</sup> triggered by Milošević's trial in The Hague in the summer of 2002. For the first time, the question of the responsibility of the 'Other Serbia' for the crimes committed under the rule of Milošević was publicly debated between many well-known Serbian intellectuals and activists. The behaviour during the war in Kosovo was at the core of the controversy, which shows that the NATO bombing was one of the crucial moments, as political scientist Jasna Dragović-Soso states, that manifested the rift within the 'Other Serbia' that continues until today.<sup>46</sup> ■■■

<sup>1</sup> N.N., Deset godina od ubistva Čuruvije, *RTS*, April 11, 2009, available at: <http://www.rts.rs/page/stories/sr/story/135/Hronika/54911/Deset+godina+od+ubistva+%C4%86uruvije.html?email=yes>, 03.02.2017.

<sup>2</sup> Attacks on the Press in 1999 – Yugoslavia, *Committee to Protect Journalists*, February 2000, available at: <http://cpj.org/2000/03/attacks-on-the-press-1999-yugoslavia.php>, 08.03.2019.

<sup>3</sup> Interview with the author on March 20, 2013, in Belgrade.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> The Belgrade Circle ("Beogradski krug") was an association of independent intellectuals who critically discussed the ethno-nationalist politics of the Milošević regime following the outbreak of the Bosnian War in 1992. Their declared aim was to "promote ideas, deeds and activities that affirm the values of a democratic, civil and plural society". From the extensive material of their meetings, the anthologies "Druga Srbija" (1992) and "Intelektualci i rat" (2002), edited by Ivan Čolović and Aljoša Mimica, emerged.

<sup>6</sup> Ana Russell-Omaljev, *Divided We Stand: Discourses on Identity in 'First' and 'Other' Serbia Social Construction of the Self and the Other*. Stuttgart 2016, p. 2.

<sup>7</sup> Veran Matić, Bombing the Baby with the Bathwater, March 30, 1999, available at: <http://www.hartford-hwp.com/archives/62/336.html>, 08.05.2019.

<sup>8</sup> Ćurguz Kazimir, *The last decade*, p. 9.

<sup>9</sup> The University Law of the 26<sup>th</sup> of May 1998 practically abolished the autonomy of universities and meant the end of their self-government. It stipulated that rectors and faculty chairmen should be appointed by the government. It also stipulated that all employees had to sign new contracts based on these new regulations and, last but not least, that the government was empowered to close a university if it did not meet their expectations. See: The University Act of 1998, *Human Rights Watch*, available at: <https://www.hrw.org/reports/1999/serbia/Serbia99-03.htm>, 09.01.2017.

<sup>10</sup> The Information Law passed by the government on the 20<sup>th</sup> of October 1998 allowed the government to use fines and prison sentences or even completely withdraw the work permits of media that spread "fear, panic and defeatism". See: The Serbian Public Information Law, *Committee to Protect Journalists*, August 29, 2000, available at: <https://cpj.org/reports/2000/08/serb-info-law.php#61>, 24.04.2016.

<sup>11</sup> Matthew Collin, *This is Serbia calling: rock 'n' roll radio and Belgrade's underground resistance*. London 2004, p. 147.

<sup>12</sup> Eric D. Gordy, *The Culture of Power in Serbia, Nationalism and the Destruction of Alternatives*. Pennsylvania 1999.

<sup>13</sup> Kevin Cullen, Democracy Activism: A War Casualty. Milosevic Foes Say Bombs Stifle Them, *Boston Globe*, May 26, 1999.

<sup>14</sup> Božidar Jakšić, From a Balkan Perspective, *Greek Helsinki Monitor*, July 19, 1999, available at: <http://www.bndlg.de/~wplarre/back277.htm>, 20.6.2016.

<sup>15</sup> N.N., Sinoć u 20 časova NATO započeo zlikovačku agresiju protiv naše zemlje. Savezna vlada proglasila ratno stanje, *Politika*, 25.03.1999, p. 1.

<sup>16</sup> Peter Goff; Barbara Trionfi, *The Kosovo news and propaganda war*. Wien 1999, p. 315.

<sup>17</sup> The Decree on the Assemblies of citizens during the state of war, *The Official Gazette of The Republic of Serbia*, No. 17, available at: <https://freeserb.home.xs4all.nl/facts/1999/e-07041999a.html>, 09.01.2017.

<sup>18</sup> "Collateral damage" is a technical military term that refers to incidental killing or wounding of non-combatants or damage to non-combatant property during an attack on a legitimate military target. It is widely criticized for its euphemistic connotation. For the NATO mission against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, NATO's final report referred to the fact that it was the "most precise and lowest-collateral damage air campaign in history." For analysis and criticism of the NATO mission see: Amnesty International, *NATO/Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. "Collateral Damage" or unlawful killings? Violations of the Laws of War by NATO during Operation Allied Force*, June 5, 2000, available at: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/EUR70/018/2000/en/>, 03.02.2017.

<sup>19</sup> Marina Blagojević, A victory for the media?, *Central Europe Review* 1 (1999), No. 13, September 20, 1999,

available at: <http://www.ce-review.org/99/13/blagojevic13.html>, 13.01.2017.

- <sup>20</sup> From the Staff of the real B92, *nettime.org*, April 13, 1999, available at: <https://nettime.org/Lists-Archives/nettime-l-9904/msg00236.html>, 09.01.2017.
- <sup>21</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>22</sup> Quoted originally in German, translated by the author. See: Katja Diefenbach; Katja Eydel, *Belgrad Interviews: Jugoslawien nach NATO-Angriff und 15 Jahren nationalistischem Populismus*. Berlin 2000, p. 36.
- <sup>23</sup> Goff; Trionfi, *The Kosovo news and propaganda war*, p. 316.
- <sup>24</sup> Ibid, p. 315.
- <sup>25</sup> Collin, *This is Serbia calling*, p. 150.
- <sup>26</sup> Aleksandar Zograf, *Bulletins from Serbia: [e-mails & cartoon strips from behind the front line]*. Hove 1999, p. 17.
- <sup>27</sup> Smiljana Antonijević, *Sleepless in Belgrade: A virtual community during War*, *First Monday* 7 (2002), No. 1, 7.1.2002, available at: <http://firstmonday.org/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/920/842>, 23.04.2016.
- <sup>28</sup> Jasmina Tešanović, *The Diary of a Political Idiot*. San Francisco 2000.
- <sup>29</sup> Just to name a few: Dušan Veličković, *Amor mundi. Amor mundi: dani ratnog stanja u Beogradu: istinite priče, Beograd 1999*; Vladimir Arsenijević, *Meksico. Ratni dnevnik, Beograd 2000*; Ljubiša Rajić, *Dnevnik iz Beograda, Oslo 2000*; Stojan Kaličanin: *Ratni dnevnik. Dnevnik zločina i užasa (sedamdeset i osam dana Nato agresije na SRJ), Kraljevo 1999*; Dragomir Antić, *Bombardovanje se nastavlja...*, Belgrade 1999, Aleksandar Zograf, *Bulletins from Serbia* etc.
- <sup>30</sup> Let Civility prevail. A statement of concerned Serbian citizens, April 16, 1999, available at: <http://www.sarantakos.com/kosovo/ks13civil.html>, 03.02.2017.
- <sup>31</sup> Letter to Albanian Friends from Nongovernment Organizations, *War Resister's International*, April 30, 1999,

available at: <https://www.wri-irg.org/en/archive/xyu/en/albfrien.htm>, 17.01.2017.

- <sup>32</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>33</sup> Matthew Collin, *This is Serbia calling*, p. 168.
- <sup>34</sup> Goran Gorić, *Symbolic Warfare: NATO versus the Serbian Media*, in: Phil HAMMOND / Edward S. HERMAN, *Degraded capability: the media and the Kosovo crisis*. London 2000, p. 88 - 110, p. 91.
- <sup>35</sup> Nafsika Papanikolatos, *Western Media and the "other Serbia"*, *Human Rights Review* 1 (2000), No. 2, p. 114.
- <sup>36</sup> See Srđan Atanasovski, 'The Song Has Kept Us': Soundscape of Belgrade during the NATO Bombing, *Südosteuropa* 64(2016)4, p.
- <sup>37</sup> Interview with the author, March 20, 2013.
- <sup>38</sup> Diefenbach, *Belgrad Interviews*, p. 74.
- <sup>39</sup> Originally in German, translation by the author. Ibid, p. 74.
- <sup>40</sup> Ibid, p. 118.
- <sup>41</sup> Natasa Kandić, *Letters, Humanitarian Law Center*, available at: <http://www.hlc-rdc.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/Natasa-Kandic-Letters-1999.pdf> (09.05.2019).
- <sup>42</sup> Diefenbach, p. 118.
- <sup>43</sup> Jakšić, *From a Balkan Perspective*.
- <sup>44</sup> Ljubiša Rajić, *Pravo na treće mišljenje, Vreme*, No. 608, August 29, 2000, available at: <https://www.vreme.com/cms/view.php?id=320922>, 08.05.2019.
- <sup>45</sup> The debate is accessible online at the Vreme archive under Vreme, Arhiva 2002, available at: <https://www.vreme.com/arhiva.php?year=2002>, 08.05.2019. See also Latin-ka Perović, *Tačka razlaza. Povodom polemike vođene na stranicama lista "Vreme" od 1. Avgusta do 21. Novembra 2002*. Belgrade 2004.
- <sup>46</sup> Jasna Dragović-Soso, *The Parting of Ways. Public Reckoning with the Recent Past in Post-Milošević-Serbia*, in: Timothy Waters (Ed.), *The Milošević trial. An Autopsy*. Oxford 2012, p. 390-408, p. 405f.

# Media Wars

By Dejan Kožul



Though 20 years have passed, it seems as though it happened only yesterday -- not just because the events are relatively recent, but also because the rhetoric in both Serbia and Kosovo has not changed throughout this period. Perhaps this is due to the fact that the same political actors are still active and in decision-making positions. Still, even when actors from other, “democratic” parties were in charge during the past 20 years, the narrative about victims of “NATO aggression” was the same.

If we go by media coverage on both sides, Serbia’s media emphasized the beginning of the bombing campaign, i.e. its anniversary, whereas Kosovo’s media focused on celebrating the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of the conflict. That is understandable, since former U.S. President Bill Clinton graced this year’s celebrations with his presence, as did the former NATO Supreme Allied Commander Wesley Clark, and former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright. Perhaps an unimportant but still illustrative detail is that streets and monuments in Pristina have been dedicated to Bill Clinton and Madeleine Albright, as the architects of Kosovo’s independence.

On the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the start of the bombing campaign of FR Yugoslavia, a central commemoration ceremony was held in Belgrade, with all the most illustrious representatives of the Serbian people in attendance – those from Serbia and from abroad: the President, Prime Minister, Serbian Government Ministers, as well as Milorad Dodik, member of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Željka Cvijanović, President of Republika Srpska, Irinej, Patriarch of the Serbian Orthodox Church, Russian and Chinese Ambassadors, etc. They were all in attendance when the President of Serbia, Aleksandar Vučić said that the deaths of 2,500 civilians during the “NATO aggression”, and especially the deaths of 79 children “will always be a crime to us, and to them, even when they admit it, it is merely

a mistake.” “We will never agree with that – our people are not a mistake,” said Vučić.

The media acted in accordance, especially outlets close to the ruling party. This is evidenced by a selection of titles which read as follows: “NATO Monsters!”, “All Serbs Were The Target”, “NATO Aggression Was A Crime”, “I Regret Bombing Serbian Children”, etc.

Since statistics are often arbitrary in this part of the world, they are prone to adjustment and inflation. Suffice it to say that the exact number of casualties was unknown for quite some time, and only in 2014 did the Humanitarian Law Center publish a list of casualties of the NATO bombing of FR Yugoslavia by name.

According to this list, a total of 754 people lost their lives in the NATO strikes, 454 of whom were civilians, and 300 members of the armed forces. Among the civilians, 207 were Serbs and Montenegrins, 219 Albanians, 14 Roma, and 14 civilians of other nationalities. A total of 274 members of the Yugoslav Army or Police were killed, in addition to 26 members of the Kosovo Liberation Army. All in all, three times fewer people than the President claimed.

Some of the titles refer to the fact that the bombs dropped on the FRY were filled with depleted uranium, but here too, they merely repeated what had been said.

Slobodan Milošević’s party, the Socialist Party of Serbia, put out a statement on the matter, in which they point out that Operation Merciful Angel (“Milosrdni anđeo” in





Selected newspaper headlines from Serbian dailies on the 20th anniversary of the NATO military campaign: "Heroic Defense of Serbia", "Moscow Will Defend Your Right to Kosovo and Metohija", "I Regret Dropping Bombs on Serbian Children", "The Entire Serbian People Was The Target", "NATO Used Weather Warfare To Kill Us", etc.

Serbian, the name the NATO action is incorrectly referred to in Serbia), left behind 15 tonnes of depleted Uranium, leading to 300 children per year being diagnosed with cancer, and raising the cancer mortality rate by 36% compared to 1998.

Even *Politika*, the longest-running daily newspaper in the Balkans, ran an article titled "NATO Should Treat Our Citizens Diagnosed With Cancer, Civic Initiative Suggests", and the *Večernje Novosti* even went a step further down the path of conspiracy theories with the title "NATO Used Climate Weapons to Murder Us."

This has all served to foster mistrust of NATO. The Institute for European Affairs conducted a survey on public support for NATO integration, to coincide with the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the bombing, which found that as many as 79% of Serbian citizens oppose NATO accession, and 64% would refuse to accept an apology from NATO for the bombing.

While media outlets in Serbia were trying to find individuals from NATO who would open up and express their remorse, NATO representatives mostly spoke to Kosovar media, in general and terse statements, without a hint of remorse -- quite the opposite.

Kosovo's public broadcaster carried a quote from the U.S. Ambassador to Kosovo, Philip Kosnett, who said that the U.S. supported strikes against the FRY 20 years ago, so as to put an end to the ethnic cleansing carried out by Slobodan Milošević, after all diplomatic efforts had failed.

The best illustration of the polarized views the two sides have of this anniversary is the example of the sacking of Kosovo Deputy

Justice Minister Vesna Mikić, who called the NATO intervention "a genocide". Ramush Haradinaj, Kosovo's Prime Minister at the time, commented on this event on his Facebook page, and was quoted by Kosovar media:

"There is no room in the Government of Kosovo and its institutions for individuals, whatever their ethnic background may be, who seek to disrupt our common Euro-Atlantic values."

For the Serbian side, this decision was another case in point that Ramush Haradinaj needed Serbs who would be loyal to him. The signing of the Kumanovo Agreement, which marked an end to the conflict, as well as the bombing, holds a special significance for the Kosovo side, then as well as 20 years later, when former U.S President Bill Clinton, former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, and the former Supreme Allied Commander Wesley Clark attended the commemoration. In Kosovo's media, the whole affair was presented as the 20th anniversary of Kosovo's liberation from Serbia, and the aforementioned guests were hailed as heroes.

Thus, the *Koha Ditore* quotes Bill Clinton as saying: "I am in love with Kosovo. It is the time I am most proud of."

This event received lackluster coverage in the Serbian media, and even when they did comment on it, they merely quoted Marko Đurić, Director of the Government's Kosovo Office, who characterized the event as being an "ugly and cynical vampire ball." ■■■

Translated by Nemanja Georgijević

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.hlc-rdc.org/?p=34890>

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