

# Kosovo- A Unique Experiment in Europe- in the International Context at the End of the Cold War?

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**Abstract**—The question of interethnic and interreligious conflicts in ex-Yugoslavia receives much attention within the framework of the international context created after 1991 because of the impact of these conflicts on the security and the stability of the region of Balkans and of Europe.

This paper focuses on the rationales leading to the declaration of independence by Kosovo according to ethnic and religious criteria and analyzes why these same rationales were not applied in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The approach undertaken aims at comparatively examining the cases of Kosovo, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. At the same time, it aims at understanding the political decision making of the international community in the case of Kosovo. Specifically, was this a good political decision for the security and the stability of the region of Balkans, of Europe, or even for global security and stability?

This research starts with an overview on the European security framework post 1991, paying particular attention to Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina. It then presents the theoretical and methodological framework and compares the representative cases. Using the constructivism issue and the comparative methodology, it arrives at the results of the study. An important issue of the paper is the thesis that this event modifies the principles of international law and creates dangerous precedents for regional stability in the Balkans.

**Keywords**—Interethnic and interreligious conflict, security and stability, superpower.

## I. INTRODUCTION

WITHIN the framework of the permanent development of the human society, along the history, the past of Europe knew restless or quiet periods, plausible or non plausible, contradictory or non contradictory, minor or major conflicts, latent antagonisms or wars, even world wars. “Only the interactions during the history among peoples, cultures,

“Never stop the plans of mechanical and egoist retracing of the borders of Europe that each one wants to have as one likes, without realizing that this means first of all to deny, and then to destroy forever the nations, by destroying, in prisons, even their soul”. (N. Iorga)

“It is necessary that the force of the right have precedence and not the right of the force”. (N. Titulescu)

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classes and states created a various and contradictory European unity” [1]. (author translation)

The diversity and the contradictions have persisted until today, especially in the Balkans, and determined the Euro-Atlantic Community to sustain the creation of a state in unprecedented conditions in history: Kosovo.

The end of the Cold War represented the end of the confrontation of the two antagonist blocks- conducted by the United States and by the Soviet Union, respectively- confrontation which could produce a third global war with devastating effects for Europe and for the entire world. In the period that began after the end of the Cold War, the European and international security environment knew profound changes. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the United States remained the unique superpower to dominate global politics. According to the definition of R. Keohane, a super power “is a State of whose leaders consider that it can, by itself, exert a significant impact, even decisive, on the international system” [2].

The fall of Communism led to the dissolution of the Pact of Warsaw; in this manner, NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) remained the unique military block capable to administrate the crises at the global level.

A security vacuum developed in the Central and Eastern Europe following the disappearance of the Warsaw Pact and of the Soviet Union [3]. One of the consequences of this vacuum of security is represented by the outbreak of the interethnic and interreligious conflicts in the South-East and in the East of Europe.

The space of ex-Yugoslavia represented during history a space where periodically appeared conflicts according to the historical conditions. These conflicts were characteristic of this area in the last seven hundred years having moments of exacerbation and latent moments of “cold conflict”. The cause is generally represented by the great ethnic and religious diversity generated by the historical circumstances of the Balkans<sup>1</sup>. F. Guida shows this ex-Yugoslav diversity in “Dayton dieci anni dopo. Guerra e pace nella ex Jugoslavia” [4].

From the etymological point of view the word “Yugoslav” means the “South’s Slavs”. Although in conformity with the etymology, this meaning is inaccurate [5]. The political reality

<sup>1</sup> Balkan countries include: Greece, Bulgaria, Romania, Turkey, Albania and ex-Yugoslav space formed by: Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Macedonia and Serbia.

of this area shows a great ethnic and religious diversity, potential source of conflicts. The word “Yugoslav” designates all the citizens of ex-Yugoslavia: Slavs or other groups of populations.

The question of the interethnic and interreligious conflicts in this area is important under the conditions where the ex-Yugoslav space is in an essential geostrategic position in Europe. It is on the East-West axis which starts in Russia, passes through the Central European countries, Hungary, Austria, and passes through Germany. This space is also on the North-South axis which binds the Central Europe with the Mediterranean zone, located at the proximity of the Middle-East.

In the new international context created after the fall of communism, the “Yugoslav Federative Socialist Republic” knew a disintegration process between December 1990 – February 1992 following the interethnic and interreligious conflicts. Four of its component republics: Slovenia, Croatia, Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina proclaimed their independence; in this direction, three of them, Slovenia, Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, chose the military option while the fourth one, Macedonia, chose the diplomatic solution. Following the referendum of 2006, Montenegro peacefully separated from Serbia and becomes two sovereign countries: Serbia and Montenegro. After the process of secession of Montenegro from Serbia Yugoslavia as a distinct political entity, did not exist anymore.

The disintegration process of Serbia, the Successor State of ex-Yugoslavia, continued with the secession of the province of Kosovo by the declaration of independence on 17 February 2008. Kosovo was one of the two autonomous provinces of Serbia, the second one being Voivodina, situated in the North-West of Serbia. Kosovo province includes the plains Kosovo Polje and Metohia and a mountainous region. From this reason it is often called Kosovo- Metohia or “Kosmet”.

The general aim of this paper is to identify the reasons of the unilateral declaration of the independence of Kosovo and of the maintenance of the unity of Bosnia and Herzegovina. At the same time, it proposes to examine the attitude of the international community concerning the conflicts and the impact on regional and European security and stability;

The paper is structured as follows. Section II develops the theoretical and methodological framework. Here, the parameters of the research are identified. Section III presents the results and the discussion. Section IV concludes, by revealing the position of international community concerning Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina and the impact of Kosovo’s unilateral declaration of independence on the regional and European security and stability.

## II. THEORY AND METHODOLOGY

### A. Theoretical Background

#### 1. Perspectives on Interethnic and Interreligious Conflicts

A conflict represents a “meeting of elements, of contrary feelings, which are opposed” [6]. The interethnic conflicts “develop in areas where live together, sometimes for centuries, people often very close from the geographical point

of view but separated by one or several elements perceived by them as insurmountable divisions” [7]. (author translation)

The paradigm of conflict between civilisations was developed by S. Huntington [8] in order to explain the new international relations post Cold War. Huntington considers that the basic elements of any culture or civilization are the language and the religion [9]. The civilization is defined at the same time both by objective elements, like the language, the history, the religion, the habits, the institutions, and by subjective elements of self identification [10].

Among these elements, for thousands of years, the history has proved that the religion constitutes the deepest difference among peoples [11]. E. Mortimer notices the fact that the religion penetrates more and more in the international businesses [12].

#### 2. The Constructivist Approach: Accent on the “Identity”

The traditional theoretical approaches do not offer a complete framework for the analysis of the post cold war evolutions. For this reason, the constructivist approach can be chosen. Thanks to the instruments and to the concepts that it provides, this approach will allow explaining the aspects of the international reality after 1991 which interest this research. The constructivists are the first theorists who saw in “identity” the explanatory factor of political action, in the security system created after the end of Communism.

It is necessary to mention that constructivism does not constitute a coherent theoretical approach; there are various currents, among which the mainstream constructivism [13] starts to be most widespread. The mainstream constructivism, like classic realism, tends to view the state as the main actor of the international system. Thus, the interests of the states have their root in the identity of the states, in the representation which the states have of themselves and of the others, of their place and other state’s place within the international system.

A. Wendt specified that the identities are the base of the interests [14]. He considers the national interest as a construction, in which the national identity is the essential component. At the same time, the national identity is perceived like a value to defend or to promote. From the constructivist point of view it is important to include the way in which the actors (States or individuals) develop their interests in order to explaining the international political phenomena.

#### B. The Research Method

The study was conducted in two territorial entities which belonged to the ex-Yugoslavia and manifested the wish to become independent. The cases: Kosovo, and Bosnia and Herzegovina are representative. The first concerns the interethnic and interreligious conflicts in an ex autonomous province, Kosovo, which belonged to Serbia. The second refers to the interethnic and interreligious conflicts in one of the ex-Yugoslav Republics which formed the Yugoslav Federation and which was separated from this in 1992 following a civil war, Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The cases present resemblances and differences, which determined to submit them to a comparative examination.

C. Ragin considers that the comparative analysis “provides the key to comprehension, explanation and interpretation”. [15]

At the question: “how to compare?” G. Sartori answers in the following way: “we compare in order to control” [16]. (author translation) The reason of the comparison consists in the obligation to control and check. To compare means to assimilate and, at the same time, to differentiate from a point of view; to report, permanently, resemblances and differences between two or several units.

The two cases will be compared according to the following parameters: number of ethnic groups, number of religions, territorial distribution of the ethnic and religions groups, historical factor, geostrategic position, numerical preponderance, Constitution, intervention of international community.

### III. DISCUSSION AND RESULTS

Table I presents comparatively the two analyzed cases: Kosovo, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. In the province of Kosovo there are, mainly, two different ethnic groups and two religions: Moslem Albanians and Orthodox Serbs.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina there are three great different ethnic groups and three different religions: Orthodox Serbs, Catholic Croatians and Moslem Bosnians.

These ethnic groups have been for seven hundred years in a state of latent conflict which exacerbated from time to time during the history, according to the various geopolitical circumstances. The different religions increase the intensity of the conflict.

There are two religions in Kosovo, while in Bosnia and Herzegovina there are three religions, so, the situation should be more instable in Bosnia and Herzegovina than in Kosovo. It should be noticed a paradoxical situation: in Kosovo there are two ethnic groups, and they did not arrive at a peaceful solution while in Bosnia and Herzegovina there are three ethnic groups, which arrived to a democratic solution: the Constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina considers the three ethnic and religious groups as “constituent peoples” and guarantees the rights of these groups.

The paradox continues when we refer to the territorial distribution of ethnic and religious groups: while in Kosovo the distribution is compact and distinct between the two parts, in Bosnia and Herzegovina the distribution is not compact and not distinct, increasing, in this way, the length of the zones between the ethnic and religious groups, presenting bigger risks for conflict. Here the ethnic and religious groups are dispersed, and for this reason their disposition was compared with a “leopard skin”. During the civil war (1992-1995), in Bosnia and Herzegovina the three ethnics groups fought each one against the others or realized short time alliances of two ethnic groups against the third, the partners being formed according to local affinities. Because of this territorial disposition the conflict was more violent here. In Kosovo were only two antagonist camps.

Concerning the historical factor, Kosovo formed the core of the Serbian medieval state; here the battle of Kossovo Polje (translated as the Plain of the Balckbird) took place on 28 June 1389. Even if defeated, the battle represented a very

important moment in the Serbian history because of the courage shown during the fights, confirmed by the Serbian historical annals. For this reason, the Serbs chose this day as their national day; the example is unique in history. Because of these facts, the emotional attitude of the Serbs concerning this province can be understood.

During the Ottoman occupation (1389-1913<sup>2</sup>) the territory was colonized massively with Muslim Albanians. Because of their religion they were privileged in rights compared to the Orthodox Serbs. In this situation, the Muslim Albanians had favourable conditions to determine the Orthodox Serbs to leave the province. Now, the Muslim Albanians form the majority of the population in this territory. According to CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) in Kosovo, in this moment, the great majority of the population is represented by Moslem Albanians in percentage of 88%; the Orthodox Serbs represent 8%, and other ethnic groups 4% [17]. Moslem Albanians invoked the argument of numerical preponderance in the region. This was obtained in historical conditions non favourable to the Orthodox Serbs. It should be noticed that the Muslim Albanians of Kosovo are concentrated in a compact area near the frontier with Albania. At the same time, the Orthodox Serbs from Bosnia and Herzegovina are disposed in an area near the frontier with Serbia. This is a common element, but in Bosnia and Herzegovina case, this did not lead to the declaration of independence or to the Serbia annexation.

In comparison with Kosovo, for Bosnia and Herzegovina the problem of numerical preponderance does not exist, the three ethnic and religions groups lived together on the same territory and are relatively numerically balanced. From the point of view of the geostrategic position, on the map it can be remarked that Kosovo is in a better geostrategic position than Bosnia and Herzegovina, compared to the Middle-East and to the South flank of the North Atlantic Alliance.

<sup>2</sup> The Treaty of London (May 1913) recognized the affiliation of the province of Kosovo to Serbia and the affiliation of Metohia to Montenegro.

TABLE I  
 COMPARATIVE ASPECTS OF KOSOVO AND BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

| Cases                     | Independent variable           |                            |  |   |   |   |   | Dependent variable                             |
|---------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------------|--|---|---|---|---|--|
|                           | 1. The number of ethnic groups | 2. The number of religions | 3. The territorial distribution of the ethnic and religions groups   | 4. The historical factor                                | 5. The geostrategic position  | 6. The numerical preponderance              | 7. The Constitution   | 8. The intervention of international community |
| 1. Kosovo                 | 2                              | 2                          | Compact and distinct distribution                                    | Historical region of Serbia                             | Proximity respecting the Middle East and the NATO South flank - better position than Bosnia and Herzegovina | Clearly in favour of Moslem Albanian        | Non democratic concerning the Albanian especially after the death of Tito | KFOR<br>ONU                                    |
| 2. Bosnia and Herzegovina | 3                              | 3                          | Ethnicities and religious incompact and indistinct (skin of leopard) | Permanence of the three ethnic groups on this territory | Proximity respecting the Middle East and the NATO South flank.  | Equilibrium between the three ethnic groups | Democratic it guarantees the statute of "constituent people"              | IFOR<br>ONU                                    |

Concerning the Constitution, it can be noticed that in the Bosnia and Herzegovina's Constitution the three main<sup>3</sup> ethnic and religious groups enjoy of the statute of "constituent peoples". They benefit from a democratic Constitution which brought the stability in the country. In comparison with Bosnia and Herzegovina, in Serbia the situation was different. The Serb Constitution did not consider the Serbs and the Albanians as "constituent peoples". The principal reason is that the Moslem Albanians arrived later in Kosovo. An important element is this: the conflict in Kosovo at the end of the Cold War began when the authoritarian regime of Milosevic suppressed the autonomy of the province (28 March 1989), therefore in the conditions of a lack of democracy. So, while in Bosnia and Herzegovina a solution existed and the country rested united, in Kosovo only the secession solution (17 February 2008) was found.

Concerning the intervention of the international community in the conflicts, when the phenomenon of "ethnic purification" and the serious violation of the human rights were noticed, it sent troupes. This phenomenon was produced in both cases: in Kosovo and, also, in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In these situations, the international community used the armed force to stop the conflict and maintain the peace. The armed interventions named KFOR in Kosovo and IFOR in Bosnia and Herzegovina were NATO interventions; in both cases the United States had the preponderance.

<sup>3</sup> In Bosnia-Herzegovina there are three principal ethnic and religious groups and other ethnicities, for example: Montenegrins, Turkish, Gorans (Muslim Bulgarians) and Gypsies.

The NATO military intervention in Kosovo was under the terms of the Kumanove Treaty (10 June 1999) and of the Resolution 1244/1999 of the Security Council of the United Nations which recognized that the province of Kosovo is a part of the Serbian territory. The KFOR mandate envisaged: 1. the prevention of interethnic tensions; 2. the establishment of a security climate in the province; 3. the demilitarization of the KLA (Kosovo Liberation Army).

The XX<sup>th</sup> century brought a benefic innovation: the intervention of the democratic community when conflicts appear and can degenerate in wars at regional, continental or global level.

The National Security Strategies [18-20] of the United States in the post Cold War are underlying the importance of the security and stability of Eastern Europe; this is seen as a key to the security and stability of the entire Europe and of the whole world.

In fact, not only the United States, but the international community as well has the interest to preserve security and stability in the Balkans region.

The Balkan conflicts were exacerbated again at the beginning of the XX<sup>th</sup> century leading to two Balkan wars (1912; 1913), releasing the first World War (the Great War) and strongly influencing the events of the second world conflagration.

This is why, in the international context at the end of the Cold War, the international community intervened to prevent the expansion of the Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina conflicts. The military intervention of the international community is a common element in the both cases.

On 17 February 2008, the province of Kosovo selfproclaimed its independence. The unilateral declaration of independence of a province is a fact that does not have precedence in history.

It can be noticed that the United States are the first state to recognize the independence of the province. Also, Albania recognized the state of Kosovo. Some other states of the European Union (Great Britain, France, Germany, Italy etc.) recognized, too, the independence of Kosovo.

The creation of Kosovo state divided the European states. Russia, Serbia, Romania, Spain, Greece etc. do not recognize the independence of Kosovo. They consider that the recognition of the independence can create threats to the regional security because the majority of the European states present different ethnic and religious groups. Kosovo constitutes a dangerous precedent for the security and stability of the region and of Europe. F. Guida emphasizes the dangerous implications of the declaration of Kosovo independence; in 2007, before the selfproclamation of the independence of the province, the author anticipated the implications of this politico-historical phenomenon [21].

Transforming a province into a state according to the criterion of numerical preponderance, of the "identity", represents a new experience in the state history. It can be considered that the factor which determined the action of Muslim Albanians of Kosovo was the expression of the "identity".

Conceived as a unique experiment at the beginning, Kosovo experiment was followed by Georgia events (South Osetia and Abkhazia). These provinces declared, too, the independence. More, South Osetia recently manifested the wish to become part of Russia. By studying the evolution of the very recent events, it can be noticed that the Kosovo experiment does not remain a unique event.

These evolutions are in contradiction with the Helsinki principles (1975). The principles of international law established at Helsinki (the Decalogue) constituted the legal framework that has regulated the relations among states from that moment until the end of the Cold War. Following the events of Kosovo, many of these principles among which the principle of inviolability of borders became shaky.

Other paradox appears here: on one side, the Euro-Atlantic Community was concerned with the European security and stability and acted to preserve it, and, on the other side, through the actions undertaken, the European security environment presents instability. In these conditions, the question which appears is: Was the creation of Kosovo state a good political decision for the security and stability of the region of the Balkans and of Europe?

The United States and the western states supported the creation of Kosovo state because, at that moment, there was not another solution to stop the antagonisms between the Orthodox Serbs in minority and the Muslim Albanians in majority in Kosovo. Today, there are still peace keeping missions in Kosovo and in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In these conditions, other question appears: Are the actions of the international community, initiated by the United States, the responsible fact for the separation of Kosovo from Serbia and

for the non division of Bosnia and Herzegovina during the conflicts (1992-1995)?

#### IV. CONCLUSION

A unique event took place in Europe: the self proclamation of independence from a province, in contradictions with the Helsinki principles. The numerical preponderance constitutes the main argument that conducted to the selfproclamation of Kosovo independence.

This was done to put an end to the interethnic and interreligious conflict exacerbated in the conditions created after the fall of communism. In opposition with Kosovo, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the democratic framework and the balanced situation of the habitants were decisive for the non division of the state.

A part of the European states recognized Kosovo state, but there are some other European states that did not recognize the Kosovo independence. They underlined the impact of this experiment on the regional and European security and stability, even on the global security.

Conceived as a unique experiment, the Kosovo experiment was followed by two other cases: Abkhazia and South Osetia. For Europe, at this moment this unique experiment is debatable.

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