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# Kosovo Conflict and its Impact on European Security and Stability

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*Abstract*

*In the international context created after the end of the Cold War the inter-ethnic and inter-religious conflicts are one of the main threats to the European and international security and stability. The conflicts appeared in the ex-Yugoslav and ex-Soviet spaces. The constructivist theory shows that people actively construct or create their own subjective representations of the objective reality. Knowledge is based on personal experiences and hypotheses of the environment. The conflict appeared between the Orthodox Serbs and the Muslim Albanians in the province of Kosovo. In the course of time the Muslim Albanians became a majority in the province. The Orthodox Serbs consider that Kosovo is a historical province of Serbia because there is the place of the Kosovo Polje Battle (1389), important moment in Serbs history. Although the battle was a defeat for the Serbs, they wanted this moment to be celebrated as a national day thanks to the bravery that they showed during the fight. Also, Kosovo represents the core of the Serb feudal state. The Kosovo conflict (1999) has led to the appearance of a new state on the map of Europe, Kosovo. It was recognized only by a part of the international community. The Kosovo conflict represents a dangerous precedent. This fact has important consequences for the European stability and security because the European states comprise a large mosaic of ethnicities and religions. The paper aims to analyze the impact of the Kosovo conflict on the European security and stability environment. The study is based on the comparative analysis of the press articles and the literature from March 1989 which represents the moment of the revocation of Kosovo's autonomy until February 2017.*

**Keywords:** inter-ethnic and inter-religious conflict, security and stability, province.

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## 1. Introduction

The international system underwent fundamental changes during the XIX$^{th}$ and XX$^{th}$centuries. From a state of military multipolarity (1815-1945), the world progressed to one of bipolarity (1945-1989), and after that moment, to unipolarity and nowadays again toward multipolarity.

During the Cold War a bipolar world was installed by the two superpowers: the United States and the Soviet Union. The end of the Cold War represented the end of the bipolarity in Europe and all over the world. For almost a half of century the confrontation between the two blocs with different socio-economic systems dominated the international scene. The bipolarity brought stability to the international system. After the collapse of the Soviet Union the unipolar period begins. In this situation of unipolarity present in the first years after the end of the Cold War a vacuum of security was created in the Eastern and Central Europe after the disappearance of the Warsaw Pact and of the Soviet Union. In this context inter-ethnic and inter-religious conflicts appeared and were intensified, especially in the ex-Soviet and ex-Yugoslav spaces. These conflicts have existed for centuries and have been exacerbated when historical circumstances permitted. After the dismantling of the former USSR and of the former Yugoslavia, these conflicts broke out in the context of the dissolution process. The destruction of Yugoslavia had its roots even in the process of the state formation.[1 p35] Thus, it initially dismantled in independent states: the Federal republics of Yugoslavia. The disintegration process continued to manifest in the newly formed republics. In the Kosovo province, the Muslim Albanians became majoritarian and claimed the independence.

*Lato sensu*, an inter-ethnic and inter-religious conflict involves a clash of interests between two groups that have different languages, traditions, culture, history and religions. Conflicts between communities are often called „ethnic wars – wars in which belligerents define themselves, partly through cultural differentiations such as language, religion or something similar".[2 p143]

The paper aims to analyze the impact of the Kosovo conflict on the European security and stability environment. The problematic of the inter-ethnic and inter-religious conflicts in this area is essential because the ex-Yugoslav space is in an important geostrategic position in Europe.

Generally a conflict has an impact on the security and stability of the region and even at European level. The Kosovo conflict is not just a local conflict but it is affecting the whole region. It is the conflict of the whole region. The whole history of the Balkans was a history full of wars.

The Kosovo conflict has an impact on investments, on the prosperity, on the security and stability of the entire area. The Kosovo example was followed by Georgia separatist republics Abkhazia and South Ossetia and the Ukraine separatist republics Donetsk and Luhansk.

The study is based on the comparative analysis of the press articles (interpretation of political studies from the perspective of press articles) and the literature from March 1989 which represents the moment of the revocation of Kosovo's autonomy until February 2017. The sources used describe both the conflict and its implications. Most authors anticipate a latent conflict in the region in the medium term because Serbia did not recognize the Kosovo state. The constructivist sources served as support for the theoretical part.

## 2. Theoretical Background

The new realities of the European politics after the end of the Cold War cannot be fully explained by traditional theoretical approaches. Consequently, the constructivist approach can provide a more realistic explanation of these facts.

Referring to Kant's Copernican revolution, T. Rockmore considers that by his constructivism, E. Kant carries out the reversal of the representation of the world and the universe.[3]

The core of this approach is the concept of identity. It represents the main explanatory factor of political action. Identity is a socio-cultural construct, dependent on the cultural meta-text of the society, which defines the individual's personality. Ethnic identity represents the general framework of socializing for the individuals belonging to a given ethnic community. Identity and identity maintenance are significant elements for the protection of human rights. The absence of the right to cultural identity (and here we refer to any minority culture, not just to ethnic identity) is equivalent to subjecting the individual or the group of individuals to a stress of cultural uniformity, of separation from their own symbolic universe.[4 p11-12] A. Wendt envisages that identities are the base of interests.[5] He saw the national interest as a construction. In this construction the national identity is the main component. The national identity is perceived as a value to defend or to promote.

The constructivist theory shows that people actively construct or create their own subjective representations of the objective reality. Each person has a different interpretation and construction of the knowledge

process. Knowledge is based on personal experiences and hypotheses of the environment.

F. Tönnies describes several types of communities: spatial or geographic communities- based on the existence of a common habitat and the possession of neighboring properties; mind communities- spiritual communities, based on cooperation and coordinated actions to achieve common goals, unrelated to the geographic space; the third type of community is that of kinship, which encompasses all those who are blood relatives. The ethnic community is defined as a group of people who live in a given country or locality with ethnic origin, own religion, language and traditions and are united by this identity of ethnicity, language and traditions in a sense of solidarity, in order to preserve their own traditions, to maintain the form of worship, to ensure the education and the growth of children in accordance with the spirit and traditions of their ethnicity and mutual aid among their members.[4 p19] Another key aspect related to the ethnic community is the relation between the „majoritarian culture" and the „cultures of minorities".[4 p9]

Constructivism is formed by various currents, among which the most widespread is the mainstream constructivism. This approach, like the 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 of other state's place within the international system. From the constructivist point of view it is important to encompass the way in which the actors, states or individuals develop their interests in order to explain the international political phenomena.

S. Huntington considers that „in the post-Cold War world, major distinctions between peoples are not ideological, political or economic. They are cultural".[6 p29] In his vision the essence of politics is the conflict between civilizations. This represents the basis of global politics.

## 3. The historical and geo-strategic importance of the Kosovo province

The Kosovo province is situated in Southeastern Europe, in the center of Balkan Peninsula. It is on the East-West axis which links Russia, the Central European countries, Hungary, Austria and 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. It has a

strategic position in the Balkans, being an important connection between Central and South Europe, Western Asia and Northern Africa.
In Antiquity the area was inhabited by Illyrians and Thracians. It was named Dardania after the name of the Dardani who inhabited the region prior to the Roman conquests in the II$^{nd}$ and I$^{st}$ centuries BC. Afterwards, the territory was conquered by the Roman Empire. Dardania, with the neighbor provinces Macedonia and Illyria, became Roman provinces in 168 BC.[7 p173] After the dissolution of the Roman Empire, it became part of the Byzantine Empire. After the migration period, the territory was occupied by the Serbs. They renamed the region and called it Kosovo. In 1389 it took place the Battle of Kosovo Polje (the Blackbird Plain) between the army led by the Serbian Prince Lazar Hrebeljanović, and the invading army of the Ottoman Empire under the command of Sultan Murad Hüdavendigâr (Murad I). Although the battle was a defeat for the Serbs, they decided that this moment should be celebrated as a national day. The reason was the bravery that they showed during the fight. Also, Kosovo represents the nucleus around which the Serbian feudal state was formed. Since 1389 Kosovo became part of the Ottoman Empire. During the Ottoman occupation a big number of Muslim Albanians settled down on this territory and became majoritarian although they were a minority at the beginnings. The Ottoman occupation lasted until 1912. After the first Balkan war, the territory of Kosovo became again part of Serbia. At the end of World War I, Kosovo and Vojvodina were part of Serbia, in the framework of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (the Kingdom of Yugoslavia). In 1941 Italy annexed Kosovo to Albania under Italian sovereignty. Since 1945 Kosovo has continued to be a constitutive part of Serbia in the framework of Yugoslavia.

## 4. The history of the Kosovo conflict (1999)

During the communist regime, the Constitution of 1974 granted autonomy to the Kosovo province. In March 1989 the Serbian leader Slobodan Milosevic revoked the autonomy of Kosovo, bringing it under the direct control of Belgrade.

At the beginning, the Albanians manifested a passive opposition comparable to the opposition of the Hindus inspired by Mahatma Gandhi against the British. The policy of peaceful resistance of the Albanians was organized by the writer Ibrahim Rugova. The Democratic League of Kosovo was created to this purpose. Then the opposition was radicalized, leading to guerrilla fighting. The Albanians were grouped into a paramilitary

organization KLA (Kosovo Liberation Army) or UCK (Ushtria Çlirimtare e Kosovës). Their purpose was Kosovo's separation from Serbia and eventually its annexation to Albania. There have been many reports of abuses and war crimes committed by the KLA during the conflict, such as massacres of civilians, prison camps, burning of medieval orthodox churches and historical monuments and the sacrilege of holy relics.[8] The Serbian Orthodox Church asked the Serbian government for help. In these conditions the Serbian army intervened on March 20, 1999. Abuses have been committed also by the Serbs. During the conflict there were noticed serious violations of the human law, of the international humanitarian law and excesses were manifested such as ethnic cleansing.

The international community represented by NATO considered it important to intervene and stop the conflict. In this context the Rambouillet conference (France) took place in January-February 1999 to bring about peace in the region. Serbia did not agree with the treaty's provisions. Belgrade's rejection was based on the argument that it contained provisions for Kosovo's autonomy that went further than its government considered reasonable. After exhausting all diplomatic means, in order to force Belgrade to stop the conflict, NATO initiated the air campaign against Serbia (Belgrade and other important military targets). They had no approval of the United Nations Security Council. NATO bombing commenced on March 24, 1999 and ceased on June 10, 1999. Serbia gave up. Belgrade withdrew its troops from Kosovo. In the coming years Kosovo was under the protection of NATO forces. Their purpose was to stop the atrocities and spread the democracy in the area.[9 p84] However, progress in the democratization process has been weak. According to B.B. de Mesquita „the rate of democratization is rarely increased in states that have experienced intervention".[10 p227] The intervention was motivated by the fact that the Kosovo conflict represented a threat for the security and the stability of the Balkans and of the whole Europe. B.B. de Mesquita mentioned that „international relations is concerned with any aspect of politics that influences haw nations relate to one another".[10 p21]

## 5. Political and Juridical Aspects of Kosovo Independence

Kosovo has unilaterally declared its independence from Serbia on February 17, 2008. One can notice that the state's name remained Kosovo after the Serbian province's name: Kosovo (Blackbird). It is possible that the name will be changed in the future.

***From the political point of view***, Kosovo has not benefited from unanimous international recognition. The issue of the recognition of the new state has divided the international community. Until February 2017 the Republic of Kosovo has received 115 formal diplomatic recognitions. The Kosovo independence was recognized by the United States, England, Germany, France, Italy, Albania, Macedonia etc.

Serbia has refused to recognize its independence. Also Russia, the main ally of Serbia, a Slavic and Orthodox country, has not recognized the Kosovo independence. Other countries against Kosovo independence are: Spain, Romania, Cyprus, Greece, Slovakia, China, Indonesia etc. Indonesia is the largest Muslim country in terms of number of inhabitants. Bulgaria initially did not recognize the independence, and afterwards admitted it.

In addition to the question of recognizing a state, it is the problem of integrating it into the international community. Since the declaration of its independence Kosovo has been lobbying for formal recognition with international organizations. Kosovo could integrate into two international organizations: the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Serbia countered its political and diplomatic objectives for broader recognition. In this regard Kosovo's recent UNESCO membership bid failed due to Serbia's diplomatic efforts. The same situation was repeated concerning the admission in the UNO (United Nations Organization).

The fundamental issue is its integration into European and Euro-Atlantic structures. Because there are some states which do not agree with the independent Kosovo, it cannot be admitted in NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization), where unanimous consensus of members is required. Concerning the integration into the EU (European Union), this is under discussion because of the fact that there are lower stages of democracy and economy. But Kosovo is recognized as a potential candidate for membership by the EU.

A. Sandu considers that "the international organizations nowadays attach great importance to the treatment of minorities. The United Nations Charter and the subsequent documents, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (10.12.1948) establish the universal system of human rights protection. Within this system, the rights of ethnic minorities occupy an important place. (...). New hypotheses and concepts have been launched: the special statute (of the minority in relation to the majority); the specific treatment accorded to the minority in relation with the majority; the regulatory exemptions in favor of disadvantaged groups; finally, positive discrimination".[4 p20]

Due to the interethnic conflicts that have marked the European history, the problem of minorities is an integrant part of regional and

national security strategies in European states, including Eastern Europe.[4 p12]

***From the juridical point of view***, the question raised is the compliance with the principles of international law. The province's declaration of independence was made without the consent of the majority of the people of Serbia. This is a violation of the United Nations Charter. The act of unilateral proclamation of independence has not been declared null by the UN Security Council even if some of its permanent members have qualified it illegally (Russia, China).

*The principle of territorial integrity* is a main principle of international law, and it was guaranteed by international treaties (Helsinki I, Helsinki II). According to this principle, the state's borders are inviolable to preserve security and stability in Europe and all over the world. It has been considered that self-proclaiming Kosovo's independence is a violation of the principle of territorial integrity. The International Court of Hague has examined the issue of the status of Kosovo. This case was the first one concerning a unilateral declaration of independence that has been brought before this court. After lengthy debates, the court delivered its advisory opinion on 22 July 2010. It declared that Kosovo's independence is not in contradiction with the principles of the international law.[11] The International Court of Justice President, Hisashi Owada affirmed that the international law „contains no applicable prohibition" of Kosovo's declaration of independence.[12]

Another important principle of the international law is *the principle of self-determination of peoples* by the right of self-determination. This principle has received a widespread recognition after the end of the First World War. It was formulated by the United States president, Woodrow Wilson. It is recognized by the UN Charter and is the basis of peoples' relations.

In the Balkans there is a long tradition of cohabitation between different ethnicities and religions thus between Orthodox Serbs and Muslim Albanians. In time, the ratio of ethnic Albanians to Serbs fluctuated.

The decision concerning the independence of Kosovo province was based on the situation in 2008. The complex problem of this territory has not been taken into account.

## 6. Discussions

In Europe the states' majority has a complex mosaic of different ethnicities and religions. For this reason, conflicts that may arise in a certain

country may have repercussions on other countries, thus creating an impact on European security and stability.

According to the constructivists, the identity was the reason which motivated the separatist actions of Muslim Albanians in Kosovo. This led to the creation of a new state with its own identity.

Solving the Kosovo issue represents an unprecedented case in history. It is considered a unique case with specific features. Kosovo's case occurred in the conditions of global unipolarity.

The Security Council Resolution 1244 on 10 June 1999 defined the NATO's role in Kosovo after the end of the military conflict. This document drew attention to the fact that the situation in the region continues to constitute a threat to international peace and security.[13] Based on this resolution, the KFOR operation in Kosovo was maintained to resolve the grave humanitarian situation in province.

The conflict origins can be found in the history of the province. During 1974-1989 Kosovo (similar to Vojvodina) had autonomy in the framework of Yugoslavia. The abolition of the Kosovo autonomy was a mistake of Serbia. Serbia effectively lost Kosovo through its repression of the 1990s. Muslim Albanians took advantage of the favorable situation in which minorities are highly supported in world politics.

Kosovo has formed the heart of the state of Serbia since the medieval times. But in this moment 90% of the population is represented by the Muslim Albanians and should be allowed to decide their own fate. Kosovo independence is the logical work after the collapse of the Communist Yugoslavia. Kosovo caused a change in the perception of inviolability of the frontiers and the principles of international law.

It also influenced the relations between two major powers, Russia and the United States. Russia considered that the Kosovo independence infringes the sovereignty of the Republic of Serbia, the United Nations Charter, the UN Security Council Resolution 1244, the principles of the Helsinki Final Act, and other international agreements. Russia opts for reopening the talks and the process of political settlement of the Kosovo issue, in accordance with the Resolution 1244 of the Security Council.

Kosovo set a dangerous precedent for other similar situations. In March 2008, the president Putin said that the recognition of independence "undoubtedly fired up separatism and presents a very dangerous precedent".[14]

The Chechens launched a second war for independence in 1999 and declared the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria but the Russians intervened militarily and restored the control over the territory.

In august 2008 the Russian military intervention took place in Georgia using the Kosovo precedent. Consequently two republics declared their independence: Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

Also, in 2014 Crimea was annexed and occurred the conflict in Eastern Ukraine, which followed after the secession of the provinces Donetsk and Luhansk also after Kosovo model.

The Kosovo precedent also incited the minorities from other European countries to independence. For example, in Spain, the Catalans are trying to organize a second referendum on independence. Scotland after Brexit declared its intention to keep the EU membership. In these conditions can no longer be part of England.

## 7. Conclusions

The self-proclaiming of the Kosovo independence has led to the emergence of a new state on the map of Europe. The international community intervened to stop the inter-ethnic and inter-religious conflicts that had reached the ethnic cleansing phase. It was believed that if the conflict had continued, the number of victims in Kosovo would have been immeasurably higher. Bombing has been set off only after all the diplomatic means to stop the conflict have been exhausted.

9 years after the self-proclamation of independence, the economic situation of the new state is disastrous. Kosovo is facing a painful transition to a functioning capitalist democracy. In this moment, Kosovo has immense internal problems. There are a difficult economic situation, unemployment, emigration, significant social problems, a high crime rate, drug trafficking and organs trafficking etc. However, the security and stability in the region is guaranteed. But a dangerous precedent for European security has been created as showed the events in the nine years that have passed since the Kosovo's Unilateral Declaration of Independence. Conceived as a unique experiment at the beginning, Kosovo was followed by a series of military actions of Russia, as mentioned above. It also had an impact on minorities in Europe (the Catalans in Spain, the Scottish in the United Kingdom).

The Kosovo case confirms Huntington's theory of conflict between civilizations. One can notice that people belonging to different ethnicities and religions and living in a certain geographic space have not found the way to understanding, peace and democracy, and have chosen the conflict way.

The Kosovo case will remain open for a number of years due to its internal problems and due to the problems of international legality and legitimacy.

In the moment when the process of the creation of the European state will be fully achieved, the Kosovo case will remain history.

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