



Kosovo Conflict: General Overview

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1 History

Considered the cradle of Serbian culture, the Southern province of Kosovo had been the cause of turmoil during much of the Middle Ages and the last few decades. The region borrows its name from the 'blackbird field', where the Serbs under King Lazar were defeated in 1389 by the Ottoman army. The Battle of Kosovo was followed by a centuries-lasting occupation where every attempt for restoring an independent Serbia was brutally crushed by the reigning Ottoman and later Austro-Hungarian occupiers. It was not until World War I where under the diplomatic support of France and Russia and at a heavy human cost Serbia - which at that time included Kosovo - sought independence. Shortly afterwards, Serbia was to join the fellow Slovenes and Croats to establish the nation of the South Slavs - soon to be known as Yugoslavia. With the subsequent proclamation of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia under the iron hand of Marshall Josip Broz Tito, the ethnic minorities started enjoying substantial rights under the blanket term of 'brotherhood and unity'. Nonetheless, any attempt from the six constituent republics of the federation for seeking independence was met with armed resistance from the capital Belgrade. During Tito's regime the eye of the storm moved to the province of Kosovo. The region had been witnessing a rise in refugees from neighbouring Albania. In turn, properties of the wealthy Serbian landowners - which have been constituting the biggest minority group in Kosovo - had been confiscated and given to Albanians. The Serbs feared for their future in Kosovo. Together with the declining Yugoslav economy towards the end of the 1980s, the people's despair paved the road for nationalists such as Slobodan Milošević. The Serbian politician began to recognise his political potential in the Kosovo cause. After holding a series of rallies and ousting his political rivals, Milošević started to consolidate his power as President of Serbia - the greatest of the six republics, which still contained the autonomous region of Kosovo. Soon, the latter lost its status as autonomous province and with it the right to use Albanian language as an official language. In retaliation, a group of armed Kosovar Albanians responded by establishing the paramilitary KLA, the Kosovo Liberation Army. Their goal was clear and unambiguous: to liberate Kosovar territory from Serbian troops and, at a later stage, to seek independence. By applying guerrilla warfare and attacking Serbian police and civilians, the KLA attracted worldwide attention. Belgrade responded by deploying the regular army and heavy artillery to crush the Kosovar resistance. Milošević's armed intervention came under fire from the international community and prompted NATO to launch a 78-days long military campaign in Spring 1999 to assist the Kosovar rebels. As a consequence, the Serbian army retreated and the UN resolution 1244 was negotiated in the Kumanovo Agreement between Milošević, his Finnish counterpart Martti Ahtisaari and the Russian Foreign Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin. The binding agreement defines Kosovo as an integral part of Serbia, but subjects the region to the NATO-backed KFOR control. Inter-ethnic conflicts between Serbs and Albanians continue in Kosovo and culminated in 2004 in the March Pogrom, where dozens of Serbian monasteries and cemeteries were desecrated and thousands of Serbian civilians had to seek refuge elsewhere. Finally, in 2008, the Kosovar parliament declared unilateral independence from Serbia and sought to consolidate its international status.

2 Status quo

Since the unilateral establishment of the Republic of Kosovo in 2008, 50% of UN member states recognise its independence. Under the incumbent president Aleksandar Vučić, Serbia is set to join the European Union within the decade. However, as the Union does not accept new member states with open border question, the EU and the USA are involved in intensive peace talks in order to settle a long-lasting compromise between both Serbia and Kosovo. In 2019, territorial exchange between Serbia and Kosovo stood for discussion, where Kosovo would secede several Northern municipalities to Serbia which are mostly inhabited by ethnic Serbs. In turn, Kosovo would adopt from Serbia the Preševo valley with an Albanian-dominant population. The plan was dropped on the grounds of lacking will for changing established borders and for fear of creating a precedent for redrawing the borders of neighbouring Bosnia and Herzegovina. Instead, Vučić and the newly elected Kosovar PM Avdullah Hoti signed in September 2020 two separate agreements of economic cooperation with US President Donald Trump, while the Serbian Foreign Ministry under Ivica Dačić succeeded in lobbying several UN member states, including Ghana, to withdraw their recognition of Kosovo.



Fig. 1: The proposed land swap for resolving the Kosovo Conflict

3 References

- 1 Kosovo Conflict: 'The ethnic partition which could bring war back to the Balkans'
<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/the-ethnic-partition-which-could-bring-war-back-to-the-balkans-0xdzzy6b>