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Eastern Europe After the Fall of the Berlin Wall: Escalation of Conflicts and Geopolitical Situation in Kosovo During the 1990s

Introduction

Following the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, Eastern Europe experienced significant geopolitical changes. This period marked the end of the Cold War division and the downfall of communist regimes in countries such as East Germany, Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and later in other countries in the region. These circumstances ushered in a period of transition where many nations began constructing new political and economic systems. While some of them drew closer to Western structures and integrated into NATO and the European Union, others faced various challenges and periods of instability. The new geopolitical situation in Eastern Europe after the fall of the Berlin Wall had a direct impact on the geopolitical situation in Kosovo,

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making this topic essential for understanding the developments in the region. The geopolitical situation in Kosovo and the former Yugoslavia was highly sensitive in the late 1980s and early 1990s, given recent events in Eastern and Southeastern Europe, which had a geopolitical impact on Kosovo and the region. While other Eastern European nations toppled communist regimes and embraced Western democratic systems, the Albanians in Kosovo faced a high risk of violence due to the Serbian regime. Slobodan Milošević, the recently elected Serbian dictator, revived plans for the creation of Greater Serbia. The Albanians were most vulnerable to the Belgrade regime's war preparations, and almost all former Yugoslav member states opposed these plans. The autonomous status that Kosovo gained during Tito's rule in 1974 never provided the Kosovo Albanians with the potential to engage with Serbia, which was governed by a regime that systematically promoted violence against other nations. The rule of Slobodan Milošević in Serbia, driven by Serbian nationalism and with the support of the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Serbian Academy of Sciences, once again directed violence against the Albanians, but this time in institutional form. As a result, peaceful resistance was initiated, led by Kosovo's historical president, Dr. Ibrahim Rugova, who implemented an unprecedented parallel system to counter Milosevic's regime's policies. Following the Dayton Conference in 1995, the situation on the ground escalated, creating all the prerequisites for an escalation of the geopolitical and security situation in Kosovo. Consequently, these events led to further homogenization and radicalization of the Albanians, strengthening until the beginning of the armed conflict in the late 1990s.

Constitutional changes and the abolition of the autonomy of Kosovo

Slobodan Milošević's rise to power in Serbia, playing on the card of Serbian nationalism, with the support of the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Serbian Academy of Sciences, renewed violence against Albanians in a new, now institutionalized form. Milošević delivered a "historic" speech on June 28, 1989, in the town of Fushë Kosovë (Kosovo Polje), on the anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo, emphasizing that Serbs were still facing challenges and that other battles were not excluded, alluding to future conflicts throughout Yugoslavia, including Kosovo Albanians (Bilandžić 1999: 765). Albanian officials had expressed support for two other pro-Serbian representatives, Husamedin Azemi or Ali Shukrija. Milošević deemed it best to entrust Kosovo to the chief of police. On February 22, 1989, the constitutional committee in the Serbian parliament unanimously approved amendments to the constitution of Serbia. The "approval" of the Kosovo province was no longer needed

after the change in “personnel” in Pristina. Two days later, the unanimous adoption of the constitution followed in a plenary session of the Serbian parliament. “Kosovo delegates raised no objections, especially when rumors began circulating in Pristina about the existence of blacklists with names of ‘separatists’ and hostile Albanian elements”. The most significant aspect of everything that happened was the sudden addition of a clause abolishing the provinces’ veto rights regarding future changes to the constitution in Serbia. The inclusion of this clause surprised the rest of Yugoslavia. This constitutional clause, formally adopted in a covert manner, meant nothing less than the *de jure* liquidation of the autonomy of the provinces. Obtaining the veto for the provinces was something other republics, including Croatia, did not agree to (Meier 2007: 132–133).

Protests in 1989 in defense of the 1974 constitution

Trepča soon became a symbol of resistance for Kosovo Albanians. Western scientists and analysts who closely monitored the recent events in Yugoslavia in the 1980s, leading up to the process of the country’s disintegration, noted that Trepča played a crucial role in those developments. Renowned British human rights scientist and activist Robert Myers began his description with the history of the Trepča mines from antiquity to the early 1930s, when a British company, Stan Trg, resumed mining. He wrote: “When I first visited Mitrovica in 1996, I was confronted with a sense of sadness. All Albanian miners were laid off after protests in 1989 and 1990”. Denisa Kosotovica, a British scientist of Balkan origin, in her study “Parallel Worlds: The Response of Kosovo Albanians to Gaining Autonomy from Serbia, 1989–1996”, in the first chapter titled “Miners”, wrote: I will emphasize: In November 1988, about 2,000 miners from Trepča undertook a peaceful march over 50 km to the capital of Kosovo, Pristina, to protect Kosovo communist leaders who opposed constitutional changes in Serbia.

The five-day peaceful protest by miners, supported by another 100,000 Albanians across Kosovo, was ignored, and the mentioned officials were replaced by loyal Albanians. This high act of self-sacrifice by miners was supported by strong solidarity from workers and students in Kosovo and beyond. Thousands of miners from other mines closed themselves in their galleries in a sign of solidarity with Trepča miners. In those dramatic moments, Trepča and Mitrovica became symbols of resistance and patriotic self-sacrifice (Gashi 2012: 63).



Figure 1. Trepča mine miners' strike in 1988, in defense of the 1974 constitution

Source: *Kosovo Miners Remember the Bravery and Betrayal of the Underground Strike*, Balkan Insight, <https://balkaninsight.com/2023/02/20/kosovo-miners-remember-bravery-and-betrayal-of-underground-strike/> [accessed 1 August 2024].

The miners' main demands were that the fundamental principles of the 1974 constitution not be changed. In this regard, Denisa Kostovicova in the mentioned study will note: "Extreme Serbian nationalism with Milošević forced them (the miners) to react not only as workers but also as Albanians". "The miners only ended their struggle after three pro-Serbian officials resigned, but they were deceived by the Yugoslav negotiator of Croatian origin, Stipe Šuvar, the Yugoslav prime minister, who claimed that the miners' demands would be taken seriously. The strike of Trepča miners exposed the fragility of the so-called Yugoslav federation" (Gashi 2012: 63). Intellectuals also took action: On February 22, a petition signed by 215 intellectuals called on the Serbian parliament not to abolish the autonomy of Kosovo. The miners did not seek a withdrawal from the basic principles of the 1974 constitution and the resignation of officials. They showed distrust towards the leadership of the provincial party, demanding that it be elected in the future from the base in Kosovo, not from the bureaucracies of other republics. Since 1981, firstly, Kosovo Albanians had been imprisoned, discriminated against, maltreated, and oppressed by Yugoslav authorities, and now it became common to hear the protest and distrust of miners; the strike continued. They persisted in self-sacrifice until their demands were met, and if not fulfilled, a national rebellion was threatened (Vickers 1998: 263). Here, one can rightfully speak of a constitutional coup. Unlike the miners from Trepča, the Albanian party

cadre proved incapable of resisting Serbian pressure, perhaps due to the totalitarian Titoist system. Therefore, it took only a short time for Serbian party cadres in Kosovo, with the help of Belgrade, to take over power. The submission of party cadres while Milošević fought for power radicalized Albanian resistance and strengthened opposition not only to the Slovenian party leadership but also, from the beginning of 1989, the Croatian one. While Bosnia and Herzegovina, with its numerically significant Serbian population, stood aside, the Republic of Macedonia supported Serbia. Regarding the issue of Kosovo, Macedonians and Albanians from Macedonia acted from Serbian and Albanian positions, respectively (Schmitt 2008: 243). Of course, for economically developed republics like Croatia and Slovenia, it was evident that the strengthening of centralism undermined their economic independence, which Belgrade sought to control. Since the international factor, especially the European one, which was crucial for Belgrade, more than the U.S. factor, would be inferior to what would happen on March 23, 1989, in Kosovo, and some countries would even send their representatives who welcomed the adoption of the “unity constitution” in Belgrade, although the day before in Pristina and other parts of Kosovo the blood of Albanian protesters was spilled, instigated by the violent voting in the Kosovo Assembly called for by Kosovo Serbs, it was a clear signal for Serbia that Europeans considered the stability of Yugoslavia through the “unity” imposed by Serbia more important than equality based on federalism (Buxhovi 2009: 383-384). The most horrifying aspect of the events in Kosovo at that time was related to the news about the treatment of Albanians who were held in isolation cells. This issue took on political dimensions not only due to the inhuman cruelty towards the “isolated” individuals but also because of the highly questionable legal basis for these measures and the fact that they were not reported to federal authorities (Udovički & Ridgeway 2000: 103). On June 28, 1989, a celebration was held that sparked extensive debate on the occasion of the 600th anniversary of the defeat in the Battle of Kosovo Polje, which, paradoxically, despite leading to the downfall of the medieval Serbian empire, was celebrated as a victory. During the festivities, the excitement among Serbs over recent successes surpassed all limits. Serbs proclaimed that they had already “forever returned to Kosovo”. Milošević delivered a speech that sent shockwaves across Yugoslavia with the following two sentences: “Today, 600 years later, we Serbs are still fighting”. “Our war is not armed, but not even that possibility is excluded”. This speech on the 600th anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo Polje finally shattered the hopes of those who expected that the “victory” in Kosovo would once and for all satisfy Serbian appetites. For Albanians who did not participate in this gathering, this was a very clear message, but Slovenes and Croats took this warning seriously as well (Schmitt 2008: 244). In the context of these events, in his capacity as the President of

the Kosovo Writers' Association, in an interview with *Der Spiegel* on June 26, 1989, Dr. Ibrahim Rugova, regarding the manifestations of Kosovo Serbs at Gazimestan, stated: This is a completely Serbian and chauvinistic celebration. We have plenty of historical evidence showing that Hungarians, Croats, Bosniaks, and, of course, Albanians participated in this battle. Otherwise, you must bear in mind homes all over Kosovo. There will be senseless drinks and conversations. One wrong word can serve as a spark in a powder keg. (Robelli 2015: 34). Meanwhile, in response to the final question from *Der Spiegel* asking Dr. Rugova if the disagreement between Serbs and Albanians can be resolved peacefully, he answered: "If Serbia continues to try to suppress our national identity, then there will be a rebellion. I can only warn the Serbs: they are also a small nation. In the past, when a nation or someone tried to act as a hegemon in the Balkans, it always ended in tragedy for that nation", concludes Rugova, among other statements (Robelli 2015: 34).



Figure 2. Dr. Ibrahim Rugova, President of the Kosovo Association of Writers (1988)

Source: Rok 1988: The Last Beginning of Yugoslavia and the Appearance of Ibrahim Rugova on the Political Scene of Kosovo, Telegrafi, <https://telegrafi.com/en/1988%2C-the-beginning-of-the-end-of-Yugoslavia-and-the-appearance-of-Ibrahim-Rugova-in-the-political-scene-of-Kosovo/>, accessed 1 August 2024.

Establishment of the first non-communist (democratic) party – Democratic League of Kosovo

During the collapse of the one-party system and the rise of multi-party politics in Yugoslavia, the registration of various political parties began in

the western republics of the former Yugoslavia. While several political associations were formed in other parts of the former Yugoslavia, in Kosovo, in September and October 1989, a group of writers and intellectuals initiated efforts to unite Albanian political forces (Judah 2008: 69). The initiative to establish a party in this system was launched by writers Jusuf Buxhovi, Ali Aliu, Ibrahim Berisha, Mehmet Kraja, Milazim Krasniqi, and Xhemail Mustafa. After many discussions, they selected Jusuf Buxhovi as the coordinator of the initiation council, who took on the task of contacting other intellectuals, drafting the party's program, and developing its statutes. This initiative was supported and encouraged by intellectuals of that time, such as Ibrahim Rugova, Ajri Begu, Basri Çapriqi, and Ramiz Kelmendi, who confirmed their membership in the Initiating Council for the establishment of the party with their signatures. This initiating council occasionally convened to discuss the future outlines of the party. Despite the initial difficulties and challenges over time, it was decided that other intellectuals, courageous enough to act amid the dissolution of Yugoslavia, would also join the initiative (Vickers 1998: 245). Other intellectuals who were willing to operate in the circumstances of the dissolution of Yugoslavia would be involved in further work on the establishment of the party. The Founding Assembly of the Democratic League of Kosovo, which began at 10:05, concluded at 11:10 on December 23, 1989. The meeting was attended by correspondents and journalists from publications such as Rilindja, Tanjug, Radio-Television of Pristina, Oslobođenje, Vjesnik, and Radio-Ljubljana. Precise details show that information about the establishment of the Democratic League of Kosovo was provided by Rilindja (with poorly mutilated news), Tanjug, and Radio Ljubljana. Two days later, Belgrade's RTV Vjesnik reported on the establishment of the LDK, along with foreign agencies: AFT, AP, and DPA. TV Pristina briefly aired the news on the New Year's night news, albeit with a week's delay. The program of the Democratic League of Kosovo, from Monday, December 25, 1989, was sent, according to the law, to provincial police authorities and the court (to be registered in the registry of independent associations, although they were not yet legalized in the country at that time; there was a federal law on political parties), then to the U.S. Embassy in Belgrade, the British Embassy in Belgrade, the German Embassy in Belgrade, and the French Embassy in Belgrade. Translated into English, the program of the Democratic League was sent on that day to all major world agencies, also to Tanjug (Kostovicova 2005: 60). On December 23, 1989, Ibrahim Rugova was elected as the president of the Democratic League of Kosovo. The Democratic League of Kosovo itself was established as the first opposition party in the former Yugoslavia. The founding act and legal recognition of the political party by the then Yugoslav federation brought the LDK to the forefront as an opposition political party, part of a pluralistic system, with political and national programs opposite to

those of the communist party. Its program differed not only from a social and economic perspective but also in its attitude toward the former communist society. The LDK program stood out from all other opposition party programs in the former Yugoslav republics. It had similarities only with the political programs of opposition parties in Slovenia and Croatia and with modern Western parties (Bytyqi 2011: 48-49).

Anëtarët e Këshillit inicues për themelimin e "Lidhjes demokratike të Kosovës"	
1. <u>Jusuf Buxhovë</u>	Jusuf Buxhovi
2. <u>Zekeria Gena</u>	Dr. Zekeria Gena
3. <u>Milezim Krasniqi</u>	Milezim Krasniqi
4. <u>Ajri Begu</u>	Ajri Begu
5. <u>Ibrahim Rugova</u>	Ibrahim Rugova
6. <u>Bujar Bukoshi</u>	Dr. Bujar Bukoshi
7. <u>Rehim Agapi</u>	Dr. Rehim Agapi
8. <u>Ibrahim Berisha</u>	Ibrahim Berisha
9. <u>Mehmet Kraja</u>	Mehmet Kraja
10. <u>Ali Aliu</u>	Dr. Ali Aliu
11. <u>Zenel Kelmendi</u>	Dr. Zenel Kelmendi
12. <u>Ramiz Kelmendi</u>	Ramiz Kelmendi
13. <u>Idriz Ajeti</u>	Akademik Idriz Ajeti
14. <u>Dervish Rozhaja</u>	Akademik Dervish Rozhaja
15. <u>M. Krasniqi</u>	Akademik Mark Krasniqi
16. <u>Anton Getta</u>	Anton Getta
17. <u>Zenun Qelaj</u>	Zenun Qelaj
18. <u>Mustafa Radoniqi</u>	Mustafa Radoniqi
19. <u>Besri Çapniqi</u>	Besri Çapniqi
20. <u>Jusuf Bajraktari</u>	Dr. Jusuf Bajraktari
21. <u>Ilhami Jusufi</u>	
22. <u>Jusuf Matoshi</u>	
23. <u>Mësjet Nusitë</u>	
23. dhjetor 1989 Prishtinë	

Figure 3. List of 23 members of the Initiative Council for the establishment of the Democratic League of Kosovo (Facsimile, December 23, 1989, Archives of Kosovo)
Source: State Agency of Archives of Kosovo



Figure 4. View from the foundation of the LDK, December 23, 1989

Source: Photo archive of the Kosovo Information Center.

Thousands of members would soon join the Democratic League of Kosovo during 1990. Immediately, at the beginning of the year, the formation of its branches throughout Kosovo began. Its name became known even beyond the state borders. Congratulations for Rugova came from all four sides. However, local communist politicians, especially the Serbian press, continued the most brutal attacks on Rugova, stigmatizing him, while the LDK was described as an organization of Albanian “separatists and nationalists”. The state of emergency was still in effect. Protests erupted in January and February, first in Pristina and then in other cities, again with dozens killed, just like the previous year (1989). But now the number of victims is twice as high. The media was still controlled by the repressive and occupying Serbian-Yugoslav government. Rugova continued to communicate only with foreign and northern Yugoslav media (Croatia and Slovenia). He stated that the Serbian repressive policy brought to the surface “territories, volunteers, and weapons”, and that “satraps cannot become democrats”. About 150,000 people joined the LDK in a month. Asked in February 1990 by the well-known Italian newspaper *Corrieredella Sera*, what would be the solution for Yugoslavia, Rugova said: “a modern confederation, based on communication and respect for diversity”. The Yugoslav Communist Congress failed in Belgrade, as representatives from Slovenia and Croatia left. In Kosovo, Albanians massively left the Communist League, while members of the Socialist League joined the LDK. But

in March, another evil befell the Albanians: Serbian secret services and the army poisoned students in schools, even in kindergartens. Statistical data confirm the poisoning of around 7,000 students (Koliqi 2011: 39).



Figure 5. Dr. Ibrahim Rugova addressed the US Congress in 1990

Source: National Museum of Kosovo (photo archive).

In April 1990, Ibrahim Rugova, along with a group representing the Kosovo alternative, traveled to the United States. The group included Secretary Jusuf Buxhovi, Women's Forum representative Luljeta Pula-Beqiri, academic leaders Idriz Ajeti and Zekeria Cana on behalf of the Council for the Protection of Human Rights and Freedoms in Pristina, Veton Surroi from UJDI, Hivzi Islami from the Peasants' Party, Muhamedin Kullashi from the Social Democratic Party, as well as Hajrullah Gorani from the Independent Trade Unions of Kosovo. Also present were Tomë Berisha, the president of the LDK in Croatia, Halil Matoshi from the Parliamentary Party, Shkëlzen Malqi, and Isuf Berisha from the Association of Kosovo Philosophers, among others (Buxhovi 2009: 255). The delegation led by President Rugova visited the United States to testify before the American Congress, where they presented facts about the violence against Albanians in Kosovo. They highlighted incidents such as imprisonments, murders, isolation, dismissals, politically motivated trials, brutal attacks on Albanian culture and history, etc. During their testimony in Congress, Serbian representatives (including Dobrica Ćosić and some priests) accused Albanians of burning monasteries, claiming that a religious war was allegedly taking place in Kosovo, with Serbs purportedly defending Christianity while Albanians were associated with Islam (Carlen, Duchene, & Ehrhart 1999: 79–80). In the context of raising awareness about the situation of Kosovo Albanians, the visit of the delegation

from Kosovo led by President Rugova to the United States had an impact on the internationalization of the Kosovo and Albanian issue within Yugoslavia. Soon after Lawrence Eagleburger's visit to Belgrade on April 26, 1990, the first draft resolution was distributed in the Senate. This was the draft of Senate Resolution 124. Proposing this resolution, human rights violations in Kosovo were framed in the context of the need for U.S. involvement in promoting democracy and human rights throughout the entire process in Eastern Europe. It reminded that Albanian human rights were violated not only in Kosovo but also in Macedonia, along with the removal of Kosovo's autonomy in Serbia. The protests and general activities of Kosovo Albanians were first described as a "democratic movement", while the actions of Yugoslav and Serbian authorities were characterized as the use of force and disruption of the democratic process (Malnar 2013: 110).

Approval of political-legal acts and the creation of a parallel state

Upon witnessing the significant deterioration of Kosovo's political status, political and state entities sought to take what was deemed necessary and appropriate action. On June 15, 1990, the Kosovo Academy of Sciences and Arts addressed the Assembly of Kosovo, the Assembly of the SFRY (Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia), and the Assembly of the RS Serbia with a statement. The statement, among other things, contained the following: "In the new Constitution, Serbia aims to humiliate the essence and constitutional position of the Kosovo Academy of Sciences and Arts, which is a degradation contrary to the basic principles of the Federation's Constitution (Articles 2 and 4). With its proposals regarding autonomous provinces, Serbia also violates its constitution because: in point 2 of Amendment 47, it is specified that by amending the Constitution of Serbia, it cannot change the status, rights, and duties of an autonomous province defined by the constitution of the SFRY". The Academy of Sciences also called on the Assembly of Kosovo to annul the decision of March 23, 1989, approving Amendments and Supplements to the Constitution of Serbia, and to declare a Constitutional Declaration on the new constitutional position of Kosovo within the Yugoslav Federation/Confederation (Gjeloshi 1997: 129). The delegates of the Assembly of Kosovo also made requests to numerous municipal assembly sessions to annul the decision of March 23, 1989, and enact laws to improve Kosovo's status. During sessions held from June 20 to 22, 1990, Albanian delegates attempted to make decisions of political and historical interest, but their Serbian counterparts disrupted them at the podium, cut off their power supply, and ultimately, they were forced to leave the Assembly building in the early

morning hours through darkness (Gjeloshi 1997: 130). In response to these events, on June 27, 1990, the Assembly of Serbia decided, without the votes of Albanian members, to install an extraordinary administrative regime in Kosovo, appointing an “extraordinary and plenipotentiary commissioner” at the level of deputy prime minister. In Belgrade newspapers, this figure was titled “governor” (Meier 2007: 149). Tensions and discontent among people in political parties, associations, and other Albanian organizations were growing stronger. The youth, especially students, were active and vigilant in every community. The entire population was awaiting new developments: Did the Albanian delegates have the determination to proclaim an act on Kosovo’s new constitutional position? What actions could Serbia and Yugoslavia take with the military and police stationed in Kosovo? How much support would decisions from delegates of other entities within the Yugoslav Federation receive? What would be the reactions from the international community (Clark 2000: 72)? Due to the tumultuous events, Kosovo was extensively covered by electronic media in many Western countries. The interest of the international community in this hotspot was significant. In this most explosive focal point in the Balkans, an imminent armed explosion was anticipated (Gjeloshi 1997: 132). On July 2, 1990, Albanian delegates in the Assembly of Kosovo declared a constitutional declaration. The announcement was made in front of the Kosovo Assembly building - on the entrance steps, as the Serbian police were not allowed to enter the Assembly building. The Assembly building, besides being surrounded by a large police force, and the entire city of Pristina, was “covered” by large crowds of Albanian residents of all age groups to support the delegates in declaring Kosovo’s declaration as an “equal subject with the other units of the SFRY” (Gjeloshi 1997: 132–133).

Based on the sovereign rights of the people of Kosovo, including the right to self-determination, the Assembly of the Socialist Autonomous Province of Kosovo, in a joint session of its three houses held on July 2, 1990, approved and declared the following statement: Taking into account the will strongly expressed throughout Kosovo by the majority of the population of Kosovo, as summarized in the Declaration of the Academy of Sciences and Arts of Kosovo, and considering the role and position of the Assembly of the SAP Kosovo as the highest representative body and the constitution-giving authority for power and self-government in Kosovo, the Assembly of Kosovo solemnly declares: *The Constitutional Declaration of Kosovo as an independent and equal unit in the federation (confederation) of Yugoslavia and as an equal subject with other federal units in the federation (confederation)*. (Buxhovi 2009: 431).



Figure 6. Proclamation of the Constitutional Declaration by 114 delegates on July 2, 1990.

Source: Taken from the video recording of Radio Television of Prishtina, which was closed by the Serbian regime on July 5, 1990, 4 days after this event.

The Serbian reaction was immediate. Serbian authorities announced the dissolution of the Kosovar parliament on July 5th. This act represents the de facto elimination of Kosovo's autonomy guaranteed by the Yugoslav constitution of 1974. Faced with the Serbian threat, 114 Albanian representatives had to go underground or flee to Croatia, Slovenia, and Europe (Meier 1995: 92–93). The Serbian team, led by Belgrade, assumes all political, economic, and cultural decision-making mechanisms, which cannot promote the creation of a deeply antagonistic parallel Albanian society (Lory 2007: 249).

In order to familiarize themselves with the situation, exert pressure on Serbia, and confirm the Kosovo issue, a group of U.S. senators, led by Robert Dole and Alfonse D'Amato, visited Belgrade and Kosovo in August 1990. Milosevic refused to meet with Dole and unsuccessfully tried to prevent his visit to Kosovo. The senators met with Ibrahim Rugova and became acquainted with the situation on the ground. The CIA reported that Serbian police used force to disperse Albanians in Pristina who had gathered to welcome the American delegation. The report assessed that continued arrests in Kosovo would further radicalize the Albanian community and increase the risk of clashes between Serbian police and Albanians. The outbreak of violence in Kosovo could have far-reaching consequences and accelerate Slovenian resistance, with Croats refraining from sending recruits to the JNA at the time. The JNA was then considered the foundation of the multi-ethnic factor and

integrative force in the SFRY. The stability of the Balkans would be jeopardized because a weakened Yugoslavia would be an attractive target for potential irredentist aspirations of neighboring countries. It was estimated that Kosovo Albanians could use such a military intervention as a signal to rebel against Serbia and seek reunification with Albania. It was also added that Bulgaria could revive its historical claims to Macedonia, while Hungary might seek Hungarian parts of Vojvodina. However, for the U.S. Congress, democracy and self-determination in Yugoslavia were more important than its unity. Senator Dole and others believed that Kosovo should be independent (Malnar 2013: 111–112). Soon after, in 1992, a draft resolution on Kosovo was introduced to the U.S. House of Representatives, known as Resolution 21, sponsored by Congressman Tom Lantos. The demand of this Resolution was the “Recognition of the Republic of Kosovo by the President of the United States”. The demand for the “recognition of the Republic of Kosovo” was justified by the fact that Kosovo was defined as sovereign at the First National Liberation Conference held on January 1, 1944, as well as in the constitutions of the SFRY from 1946 and 1974, as one of the constituent elements of the Yugoslav federation. Serbia destroyed autonomy on March 23, 1989, without the consent of the people of Kosovo, while the Kosovo Assembly declared the Republic of Kosovo on July 2, 1990, and approved the Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo on September 7, 1990, based on the principles of self-determination, equality, and sovereignty. This resolution called for the guarantee of human rights and freedoms in accordance with international standards and was based on the principle that all peoples have the right to freely determine their internal and external political status (Reka 1995: 97). *The Constitutional Declaration of July 2nd and the Constitution of September 7th, 1990, are considered crucial documents in the historical course of the national movement for the liberation of Kosovo. They represent brave acts and efforts to prevent Kosovo from sinking into the historical abyss, into the oblivion of the world and mercilessness. Both acts were a direct response to the aggression committed by Serbia against Kosovo in 1989. I believe that the Albanian delegates of that time did what the time and historical moment demanded, responding to the call of the people for freedom and independence.* After the efforts of the Albanian political entity to internationalize the Kosovo issue and seek support from Europe, contacts were established in several countries. As a result of these contacts (in January 1991), a delegation from the European Union led by Secretary-General Andreas Kohl from Austria visited Kosovo. Kohl was briefed by Albanian political actors on the situation in Kosovo, the progress of constitutional changes in March 1989, and the goals of the Albanian political factor for resolving the Kosovo issue. Meanwhile, the Vatican, as one of the three largest diplomatic centers in the world, supported the resolution of our issue according to the will of the people. In July 1991, the Kosovo delegation (led by Ibrahim Rugova, President of the Democratic League of Kosovo; Nik

Gjeloshi, Vice President of the Christian Democratic Party; Lush Gjergji, priest; Mark Krasniqi, President of the Academy of Sciences and Arts of Kosovo) was offered diplomatic assistance in recognizing the Kosovo issue worldwide (Gjeloshi 1997: 140). Meanwhile, Slovenia and Croatia, on July 25, 1991, made decisions in their parliaments regarding political-legal and factual secession from the Yugoslav community. On the same day, the Federal Executive Council, led by Ante Marković, declared the decisions of the Croatian and Slovenian parliaments "illegal, illegitimate, and worthless" regarding secession and took measures "to preserve the territorial integrity of Yugoslavia". The European troika: Hans van den Broek, Jacques Poos, and João Pinheiro, attempted in vain to reverse the decisions of these two republics and their previous constitutional status. Slovenia and Croatia responded to the open military aggression of the Yugoslav army with popular liberation resistance (Vickers 1998: 250). As the war began in Croatia, the new school year of 1990–1991 did not commence as it should have in Kosovo. It was marked by the imposition of division in primary and secondary schools in Kosovo and at the university. By the fall of 1991, the state education system in Kosovo was under the control of Serbia. The introduction of Serbian legislation in education had a strong impact at all levels of education in Kosovo. Due to their refusal to submit to Serbian education laws, Albanians lost access to schools and university buildings. The process unfolded simultaneously in primary and secondary schools as well as at the university. The exact procedure of punishment, excluding inadequate Albanian staff, somewhat differed at the pre-university and university levels. However, the principle remained the same. From the establishment of spatial division and the closure of parts in Albanian language, the transformation of the University of Pristina from bilingual to fully Serbian institution continued, starting at the Medical Faculty in 1990–1991. The agreement on the university in Serbia was initiated by the implementation of the new University Law. The refusal of Albanian teaching staff to implement this law was punished by their dismissal from the newly established Serbian administration. Decisions divided among Albanian lecturers were a punishment not only for non-compliance with Serbian laws but also for open opposition. Albanian staff of the Medical Faculty and related hospitals or clinics received special attention in Serbia. The faculty and its clinics were portrayed in the Serbian press as an example of Albanian "multiplication", as out of 342 lecturers and associates, only 91 were non-Albanians. In March 1991, the Serbian government adopted a decision to suspend the funding of the teaching process in primary and secondary schools in Kosovo, where the curriculum approved by the Serbian Educational Council was not implemented. Albanian teachers in the first and fifth grades of primary school and the first year of high school, as well as school principals and administrative staff who ignored Serbia's laws in Kosovo, ceased to receive salaries. The decision was

retroactively applied from January 1, 1991 (Kostovicova 2005: 82). On the other hand, in Kosovo, on September 22, 1991, the Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo in exile, in accordance with Article 97, paragraph 1, point 8 of the Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo, after approving the decision to hold a referendum in Kosovo for that day, the next day determined the question that should be marked “yes” or “no” by the citizens of Kosovo at the referendum. The text of the question was defined as follows: Based on your free statement, please answer (by circling the word “yes” or “no”) whether you accept as the decision of your political will the resolution of the Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo that the Republic of Kosovo is a sovereign and independent state, with the right of constitutive participation in the community of sovereign state-republics in the Yugoslav federation / confederation, based on the full equality of republics states in their community.

The referendum of the citizens of Kosovo for the Republic of Kosovo, a sovereign and independent state, was held from September 26 to 30, 1991 (Caplan 2005). Out of the total number of eligible voters (1,051,353), 87.01% voted. From this percentage, 99.87% voted for the Republic of Kosovo as a sovereign and independent state, with 164 votes against, while 933 ballots were invalid. The referendum was successful because more than 2/3 of the total number of eligible voters participated, and from that number, 99.87% voted for the Republic of Kosovo as a sovereign and independent state (Report of the Referendum Commission, Pristina, October 7, 1991) (Vickers 1998: 251). On May 24, 1992, the Coordinating Council organized parliamentary and presidential elections in Kosovo. Once again, people turned out with an overwhelming majority – 766,069 voters within Kosovo, and 105,300 in the diaspora. Twenty-four parties and associations participated. The results highlighted the dominance of the LDK, which was more of a national movement than a political party. The LDK won 96 out of 100 seats with 76% of the votes, with the remaining seats going to the Slavic Muslim and parliamentary party (PPK – successor to the Youth Parliament). Some expressed doubts about the defeat of two candidates in the electoral unit, the leader of the Social Democratic Party Shkelzen Maliqi and the mining manager Burhan Kavaja, who were recently tried as alleged organizers of the strike in Trepča. Dr. Ibrahim Rugova, as the only candidate for president, received 99.5% of the votes. However, there was police interference in these elections, and there were unforeseen plans: for example, organizers were prepared to have “decorated” ballot boxes already filled with ballots to trick the police into seizing them. Additionally, individual polling stations had to be relocated occasionally for security reasons. Journalists from Tirana were not allowed, and the team from Croatia was expelled. The elections on May 24, 1992, were a good attempt to internationalize the issue of Kosovo in the international arena (Judah 2008: 71).

The Dayton Conference and its influence on the geopolitical aspect in Kosovo

On November 1, 1995, negotiations began to end the conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base near Dayton, Ohio. After three weeks of intensive talks, the conflicts between Croatia and Serbia and the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina were resolved, and tensions between Greece and Macedonia were reduced. At the end of the negotiations, the external borders of Bosnia and Herzegovina were preserved, while its territory was divided into the Republika Srpska (49% of the territory) and the Bosniak-Croat Federation (51% of the territory). The European Union took over the construction of democratic institutions and the conduct of free elections under the supervision of the OSCE, while NATO ensured security and the implementation of the Dayton Peace Agreement through Operation IFOR. However, the issue of Kosovo in 1995 was not a priority in American foreign policy compared to the situation in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. The US State Department characterized the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina not only as the most devastating conflict in Europe since World War II but also as a direct threat to the entire continent after the end of the Cold War. Bosnian Serbs attempted to exterminate the Bosnian population through genocidal actions, while Croatian Serbs, supported by the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, occupied 30% of Croatian territory, resulting in thousands of refugees seeking asylum in Western European countries (Chollet 2005: 253). Meanwhile, the Kosovo Albanian Movement was a struggle for survival against assimilation or expulsion and for self-determination. Initially, it was also part of a movement for change in Kosovo – the cessation of communism and conservative customs in favor of democracy and pluralism. As the regime displayed the degree of repression it would consistently employ, defense became more important than the transformative aspects of the movement (Clark 2000: 122). The commitment of the Clinton administration to the crisis caused by the breakup of the former Yugoslavia was largely reflected in the strengthening efforts to stop the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. These efforts culminated in the Dayton Peace Negotiations at the end of 1995, resulting in the signing of the Agreement that ended the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The United States affirmed its leading role in resolving the crisis through negotiations and the Dayton Agreement, also solidifying its position in the European security architecture. Initially, America aimed to fully resolve the crisis caused by the breakup of Yugoslavia, including addressing unresolved issues related to Kosovo. In this regard, in the spring of 1995, Bob Fraser, responsible for the Balkans at the State Department, developed possible solutions for Kosovo. The basic idea was to reintroduce a long-term OSCE mission to Kosovo and ensure the implementation of the Education

Agreement. However, Milošević clearly stated that he considered Kosovo an internal issue of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and did not accept any international discussion on the matter (Malnar 2012: 146). The Dayton Agreement also ended sanctions against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY), with an “outer wall” that would remain in place until progress was made in resolving the Kosovo issue. Naturally, most Kosovo Albanians expected international attention to finally return to Kosovo. The announcement by the United States that it would open an Information Office in Kosovo in January was seen as a significant step. There were also rumors of a secret agreement in Dayton regarding the opening of the American office in Pristina. At the same time, the European Union (EU), especially Germany, began to act as if the situation had already been resolved by the EU, granting diplomatic recognition to the FRY. Germany also decided to “repatriate” refugees from the former Yugoslavia, including 130,000 Kosovo Albanians. From Belgrade, a concession arrived in March: the abolition of visas for entry into Albania (Clark 2000: 123).

The end of the war in Bosnia did not bring an end to the crisis in Kosovo. This fact was a blow to Rugova’s prestige. In fact, for four years, he had been convincing his people that they must be patient until the international community imposes a final solution for the former Yugoslavia, one that also respects their interests. However, the solution presented by the Americans in Dayton left the Kosovo Albanians where they were. The only support in favor of Kosovo was the UN Security Council agreement that the “outer wall” of sanctions against Serbia (including the denial of participation in the International Monetary Fund) would remain until Belgrade improved the human rights situation in Kosovo. Otherwise, the Dayton Agreement generally strengthened Milošević’s rule in Serbia. Western diplomats openly stated that they were grateful to him for his efforts to “establish peace” and considered him a constructive force in the region, whose departure could lead to “destabilization” (Malcolm 2011: 440–441). On the other hand, the United States still had unresolved issues regarding Milošević and his regime, which was reflected in the U.S. non-recognition of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) and the establishment of diplomatic relations at the embassy level. The U.S. continued its policy of small steps, which affirmed its interest in Kosovo. After maintaining the “outer wall of sanctions” and non-recognition of the FRY, an indicator of interest in the Kosovo issue was the opening of the USIA office in Pristina on June 5, 1996. The office was a clear political message that the U.S. was present in Kosovo and interested in the processes there (Malnar 2012: 148). Criticism of Rugova, which grew within Kosovo’s political circles, emerged in two forms. Some believed that his absolute refusal to engage in talks with Belgrade (except under the condition of the presence of an international factor) was unrealistic. They believed that Kosovo could

only escape its current difficult situation by entering into a long process of emancipation, where the first step would be becoming a federal unit in a new type of federation with Serbia, Montenegro, Vojvodina, and perhaps with the “Republika Srpska” in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Others criticized him for not being fully committed to rejecting Belgrade’s policies, and thus demanded a more active protest policy (Malcolm 2011: 442).



Figure 7. Signing of the Dayton Agreement, November 1995

Source: CNA.al, online news portal.

President Rugova's policy of nonviolence saved the lives of many people, and unlike Serbs from Krajina, he kept the population of Kosovo Albanians (likely around 1.7 million) under control in their homes. During the early 1990s, Rugova was under intense international diplomatic pressure not to engage in any form of hostility and not to provoke any potential conflict with Serbia in any way. Just as the international community had on paper, if not in reality, insisted that Bosnia and Herzegovina was a unified country, diplomats continued to repeat that the borders of Serbia, or at least the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, were immutable. Before the war, there was also an element in the Kosovo equation that was considered unique. While Bosnian Serbs and Croats had strong supporters in Serbia and Croatia, respectively, Kosovo did not have such support in Albania. Albanian history greatly differs from Serbian history, except under the Ottoman Empire, which is not comparable, and except briefly during World War II, Albanians did not live together in a state with Albania (Judah 2008: 319). A series of studies suggest that the Dayton Agreement influenced the radicalization of Kosovo's politics

and showed Kosovo Albanians that their policy of peaceful internationalization needed to be reconsidered. Indeed, circumstances were created that in the near future led to conflict in Kosovo, as well as in Slovenia, Croatia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, as the only possible response to the expansionist policy of the Belgrade regime led by Slobodan Milošević (Koinova 2013: 114).

Conclusions

The geopolitical situation in Eastern and Southeastern Europe during the 1990s, along with the democratic movements in those countries, significantly influenced the area of the former Yugoslavia, with a particular emphasis on Kosovo. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, new circumstances arose in the countries of the former communist bloc, where Kosovo Albanians also demonstrated coherence in international and Yugoslav events. As new political circumstances emerged in political pluralism, Albanians were determined not to politically identify with the Yugoslav Communist Party anymore. They distanced themselves from its ideology, and Albanian intellectuals showed determination and made the decision to establish the first democratic party – the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) on December 23, 1989. Ibrahim Rugova was elected as the leader of the LDK. Until then, he had been the president of the Association of Kosovo Writers, which was known for its reactions in many articles condemning the discriminatory policy towards Albanians by the Serbian regime in Kosovo. It became clear that Kosovo could not offer armed resistance to Yugoslavia, and for as long as possible, a multidimensional peaceful movement was led by Ibrahim Rugova. Preparing Kosovo as an independent state, political and legal acts were adopted – on July 2, 1990, which was the first step towards building an independent state of Kosovo. Two months later, on September 7, 1990, in Kačanik, the Constitution of Kosovo was adopted, which envisioned Kosovo as an equal state with other Yugoslav republics in a confederation or federation. After the adoption of the Constitution in Kačanik, it was considered necessary for Kosovo, like other Yugoslav republics, to take important steps towards its independence, such as the referendum organized from September 26 to 30, 1991. From the very beginning, major challenges emerged in Kosovo in the education, health, security, social status sectors, as well as the issue of Kosovo in the international environment. In 1992, Kosovo held its first presidential and parliamentary elections in a very tense atmosphere. After that, legitimate democratic institutions were sanctioned, such as the institution of the president, parliament, and government in exile. Kosovo, with its president, attempted to engage on two levels: diplomatic – meetings, memoranda, plans, interviews with international media; and internally – organizing the education system (home

schooling), health system, which were key links in maintaining a parallel system in Kosovo. After Milošević's devastating wars in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, an international conference was held in Dayton to discuss modalities for resolving the issue of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Kosovo was not equally represented; it managed to participate only as an observer, contrary to the expectations of the leadership and the Albanian people in Kosovo. The United States was aware that the Dayton Agreement would not solve the Kosovo problem as it was exclusively intended to address the issue of Bosnia and Herzegovina. However, due to the Kosovo issue, the U.S. maintained an external wall of sanctions. This was the maximum that Kosovo could withstand in those circumstances until 1995.

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Abstract

Following the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, Eastern Europe experienced significant geopolitical changes. This period marked the end of the Cold War division and the downfall of communist regimes in countries such as East Germany, Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and later in other countries in the region. These circumstances ushered in a period of transition where many nations began constructing new political and economic systems. While some of them drew closer to Western structures and integrated into NATO and the European Union, others faced various challenges and periods of instability. The new geopolitical situation in Eastern Europe after the fall of the Berlin Wall had a direct impact on the geopolitical situation in Kosovo, making this topic essential for understanding the developments in the region. The geopolitical situation in Kosovo and the former Yugoslavia was highly sensitive in the late 1980s and early 1990s, given recent events in Eastern and South-eastern Europe, which had a geopolitical impact on Kosovo and the region. While other Eastern European nations toppled communist regimes and embraced Western democratic systems, the Albanians in Kosovo faced a high risk of violence due to the Serbian regime. Slobodan Milošević, the recently elected Serbian dictator, revived plans for the creation of Greater Serbia. The Albanians were most vulnerable to the Belgrade regime's war preparations, and almost all former Yugoslav member states opposed these plans. The autonomous status that Kosovo gained during Tito's rule in 1974 never provided the Kosovo Albanians with the potential to engage with Serbia, which was governed by a regime that systematically promoted violence against other nations. The rule of Slobodan Milošević in Serbia, driven by Serbian nationalism and with the support of the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Serbian Academy of Sciences, once again directed violence against the Albanians, but this time in institutional form. As a result, peaceful resistance was initiated, led by Kosovo's historical president, Dr. Ibrahim Rugova, who implemented an unprecedented parallel system to counter Milosevic's regime's policies. Following the Dayton Conference in 1995, the situation on the ground escalated, creating all the prerequisites for an escalation of

the geopolitical and security situation in Kosovo. Consequently, these events led to further homogenization and radicalization of the Albanians, strengthening until the beginning of armed conflict in the late 1990s.

Europa Wschodnia po upadku muru berlińskiego: eskalacja konfliktów i sytuacja geopolityczna w Kosowie w latach 90. XX wieku

Streszczenie

Po upadku Muru Berlińskiego w 1989 roku Europa Wschodnia doświadczyła znaczących zmian geopolitycznych. Okres ten oznaczał koniec zimnowojennego podziału i upadek reżimów komunistycznych w takich krajach jak Niemcy Wschodnie, Polska, Węgry, Czechy, Słowacja, a później w innych krajach regionu. Okoliczności te zapoczątkowały okres transformacji, w którym wiele państw rozpoczęło budowę nowych systemów politycznych i gospodarczych. Podczas gdy niektóre z nich zbliżyły się do struktur zachodnich i zintegrowały się z NATO i Unią Europejską, inne stanęły w obliczu różnorodnych wyzwań i okresów niestabilności. Nowa sytuacja geopolityczna w Europie Wschodniej po upadku Muru Berlińskiego miała bezpośredni wpływ na sytuację geopolityczną w Kosowie, co sprawiło, że temat ten stał się kluczowy dla zrozumienia rozwoju sytuacji w regionie. Sytuacja geopolityczna w Kosowie i byłej Jugosławii była niezwykle wrażliwa pod koniec lat 80. i na początku lat 90. XX wieku, biorąc pod uwagę ostatnie wydarzenia w Europie Wschodniej i Południowo-Wschodniej, które miały geopolityczny wpływ na Kosowo i region. Podczas gdy inne kraje Europy Wschodniej obaliły reżimy komunistyczne i przyjęły zachodnie systemy demokratyczne, Albańczycy w Kosowie byli narażeni na wysokie ryzyko przemocy ze strony reżimu serbskiego. Slobodan Milošević, niedawno wybrany dyktator Serbii, ożywił plany utworzenia Wielkiej Serbii. Albańczycy byli najbardziej narażeni na przygotowania wojenne reżimu w Belgradzie, a prawie wszystkie byłe państwa byłej Jugosławii sprzeciwiały się tym planom. Status autonomiczny, jaki Kosowo uzyskało za rządów Tity w 1974 roku, nigdy nie dał kosowskim Albańczykom możliwości zaangażowania się w sprawy Serbii, rzadzonej przez reżim systematycznie promujący przemoc wobec innych narodów. Rządy Slobodana Miloševicia w Serbii, napędzane serbskim nacjonalizmem i wspierane przez Serbską Cerkiew Prawosławną oraz Serbską Akademię Nauk, ponownie skierowały przemoc przeciwko Albańczykom, tym razem w formie instytucjonalnej. W rezultacie zainicjowano pokojowy opór, na czele którego stanął historyczny prezydent Kosowa, dr Ibrahim Rugova, który wdrożył bezprecedensowy system równoległy, aby przeciwdziałać polityce reżimu Miloševicia. Po konferencji w Dayton w 1995 roku sytuacja na miejscu uległa eskalacji, tworząc wszelkie przesłanki do eskalacji sytuacji geopolitycznej i bezpieczeństwa w Kosowie. Co prawda, wydarzenia te doprowadziły do dalszej homogenizacji i radykalizacji Albańczyków, nasilając się aż do wybuchu konfliktu zbrojnego pod koniec lat 90.

Keywords: Kosovo, geopolitics, autonomy, Milošević, dictatorship, Europe

Słowa kluczowe: Kosowo, geopolityka, autonomia, Milošević, dyktatura, Europa

