INTRODUCTION

Leandrit I. Mehmeti and Branislav Radeljić

The establishment of nation-states in the Balkans, a process made possible due to the decline of the Ottoman Empire, was nevertheless accompanied by various pretentions over territories inhabited by different ethnic communities. By trying to examine Serbian and Albanian pretensions over the territory of Kosovo, one is likely to be caught between two rather opposing historic narratives of truths, each aimed at defending one of the two party's entitlement to the ownership of Kosovo. In fact, Serbian and Albanian versions have often gone as far as to deny any possibility of a jointly inhabited space, meaning that Kosovo can belong to either Serbs or Albanians, but not to both.[1]

According to the Serbian narrative, Kosovo was liberated from the Ottomans in 1912—an understanding seriously challenged by the Albanian narrative, which has mostly maintained that its territory was actually occupied and annexed by the Serbs. After 1912, the territory of Kosovo was embodied first in the Kingdom of Serbia and then in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, in 1918. Later, during the Second World War, it was partitioned among Albania, Bulgaria, and Germany, with some Albanian groups cooperating with the Nazi regime against the Serbs. The 1946 Yugoslav constitution provided Kosovo with an autonomous status that was revalidated and, in fact, upgraded in 1974 with the adoption of a new constitution.[2] The general pessimism characterizing the 1980s, although mainly inspired by the possible problems emerging across Yugoslavia after the death of Josip Broz Tito, was also sustained by increasing tensions among Kosovo's dominant ethnicities.

In 1987, Slobodan Milošević visited the province and called for the "defense of the sacred rights of the Serbs."[3] Following the Serbian decision to take over

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Kosovo's institutions, the local Albanians formed a parallel state and proclaimed Kosovo a republic within the Yugoslav federation, in 1990, and then an independent state, in 1991. As expected, the province became exposed to frequent disputes and confrontations between the Serbian troops and the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA), a largely terrorist unit, as viewed by the Serbian authorities, or a guerrilla force fighting for freedom, as viewed by the Kosovo Albanians. The confrontations culminated in January 1999, when Serbian military forces committed a crime against humanity in the village of Račak, in central Kosovo.[4]

The consequent NATO bombing of the then Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was subject to numerous assessments, ranging from the ones directed to its legality, mostly due to the lack of a specific United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolution that would authorize the intervention, to those perceiving the external involvement as a legitimate instrument to stop the ethnic cleansing campaign of Belgrade authorities against the Kosovo Albanian population. More precisely, many commentators described the attack as aggression against a sovereign state that had not attacked another sovereign state, as, for example, Iraq did when it invaded Kuwait in 1990. In addition, many other countries around the world had been involved in or contributed to similar or even worse atrocities than Serbia was accused of, and in some nations such violations were still occurring, but most were largely, perhaps hypocritically, ignored when compared to the Kosovo crisis, although they also presented a strong case for humanitarian intervention.[5] With this in mind, NATO's intervention had nothing to do with humanitarian impulses and was all about defending the West's geopolitical interests in the region.[6] Other commentators went even further and perceived the aggression as a war of expansion by NATO, a war designed to push United States power right up to the borders of Russia.[7] Thus, the intervention was criticized as a colossal error, an example of a policy applied too late, in the wrong place, and even in ignorance of history. It was inconsistent and perceived as something that would create problems regardless of whether the outcome was a failure or a success.[8] By contrast, other commentators viewed the intervention as legitimate based on other UN documents and UN Security Council resolutions that had clearly recognized the violations of human rights, with the Council being warned of an impending humanitarian catastrophe in Kosovo.[9] However, regardless of the debates on the NATO intervention or the scope of the Yugoslav authorities' actions against the Albanian population in the sense of whether it constituted genocide or a lesser crime, the developments during the conflict in Kosovo, with more than a million displaced, "undoubtedly shocked the 'conscience of mankind,' and therefore provided a satisfactory

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ground for humanitarian intervention,"[10] so that a new chapter in the relations between the Serbs and Kosovo Albanians could begin.

After the intervention, the European Union understood that the region was in need of aid and managed to convince the international community to collaborate in the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe, which was adopted in Cologne in June 1999. At the same time, the UN Security Council Resolution 1244 established the UN Interim Administration Mission (UNMIK), exercising a full executive, legislative, and judicial role. The resolution declared the "establishment of an interim administration for Kosovo as a part of the international civil presence under which the people of Kosovo can enjoy substantial autonomy within the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, to be decided by the Security Council of the United Nations. The interim administration was to provide transitional administration while establishing and overseeing the development of provisional democratic self-governing institutions to ensure conditions for a peaceful and normal life for all inhabitants in Kosovo."[11] Back then, Javier Solana, the European Union's High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy, reminded Kosovo Albanians that independence was not on the agenda and that technically Kosovo was still part of Yugoslavia. He argued that the main task of an international presence was to establish standards first, and then discuss the final status.[12]

In Serbia, the dominant figures of the post-Milošević political scene did not share the same view about the status of Kosovo. As explained elsewhere, while for the new prime minister Zoran Djindjić there was no time to waste—in order to prove his commitment to rapid resolutions, apart from organizing the arrest and extradition of Milošević to the Hague tribunal in June 2001, he claimed that Kosovo was de facto independent and Serbia had to move on with the processes of democratization and Europeanization—the newly elected president Vojislav Koštunica, who was also welcomed by the European officials as a representative of new democratic elite, insisted that it was unacceptable to talk about Kosovo as independent.[13] In his view, Serbia had to find an alternative that would let it keep the province of Kosovo as its constituent part. What various analysts found problematic was that Koštunica easily linked the final status of Kosovo to a secession of Republika Srpska from Bosnia and Herzegovina: "Koštunica's Bosnia policy will result in continued Western frustration with implementation of the Dayton Peace Accords in Republika Srpska, as well as a strengthening of separatist Serb elements in Bosnia."[14]

However, in January 2003, Prime Minister Djindjić launched an initiative aimed at an appropriate and timely resolution of the Kosovo status question. As

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summarized elsewhere, "[t]aking a proactive, forward-looking approach that advocated a 'European, democratic, rational, and de-emotionalized' path towards resolution, he caught many stakeholders off-guard. Principally Djindjić realized that (a) too much complacency was leading dangerously towards uncontrollable developments; (b) all stakeholders, first of all Belgrade and Prishtina, but also including the UN, EU, United States, the Contact Group countries and all neighboring states, needed to work hand in hand towards a relatively speedy solution."[15] Soon after, during the EU-Balkans Thessaloniki summit, in June 2003, it became obvious that the European Union was slowly replacing Washington's leading role in the Balkans. For the Kosovo Albanians, this was not a positive sign, as they feared that a greater EU involvement could have supported Belgrade's position and eroded their own. Still, what the summit unselfishly stated was that "[t]he future of the Balkans is within the European Union," a path conditioned by a successful fulfillment of various prescribed criteria.[16]

The subsequent Vienna talks, aimed at bringing the Serbian and Kosovo Albanian parties together and trying to determine the future status of the province, did not generate any solution. The policy of standards before status, originally inaugurated by the third UNMIK chief, Michael Steiner of Germany, and covering a whole range of issues, ranging from the establishment of democratic institutions and rule of law to the development of market economy and dialogue with Belgrade authorities, was welcomed by the Serbian side and, in fact, often seen as the central pillar of the talks—an approach abandoned shortly after, following the Kai Aide report on the implementation of the UNMIK policy.[17]

What the Vienna sessions demonstrated was that the parties concerned were not ready to change their positions. Vojislav Koštunica, who became Serbia's prime minister soon after the assassination of Djindjić, argued that "the existence of Kosovo and Metohija as part of Serbia and the existence of the Serbian people in Kosovo are the key objectives of Serbia's involvement in the political talks for the future status of that region," and any decision on Kosovo "should be made within Serbia, in the framework of the large autonomy of Kosovo and Metohija within Serbia, while any other decisions, be it power decentralization or autonomy status, are just its specifications."[18] From the other side, Fatmir Sejdiu, president of the Kosovo Assembly, expressed hope that the Vienna negotiations would be terminated quickly, so that "this year [2006] can really become a year for determining Kosovo's status in conformity with the people's will, which is independence."[19]

In Kosovo, the externally provided and often poorly coordinated aid programs, focusing of the rebuilding of infrastructure and public institutions,

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turned the province into an aid-dependent territory, with a rather problematic political future. Moreover, neither UNMIK nor the NATO-led peacekeeping Kosovo Force (KFOR) was capable of preventing violations of human rights in the areas comprising the remaining Serbs and other non-Albanian population. Thus, in contrast to the initial situation, when international involvement was needed to protect the Kosovo Albanians from Serbian oppression, now the foreign presence was expected to protect the Serbs from the Kosovo Albanians. This was even more pressing given the Albanian position from the very beginning: they accepted nothing less than full independence. Aware of the complexity surrounding the future of Kosovo, the international community did not want to leave an impression that they would tolerate further acts of discrimination and violence.

When considering the procedure to determine the future status of Kosovo (in accordance with UNSC Resolution 1244), European officials tended to maintain that "any solution must be fully compatible with European values and norms, comply with international legal instruments and obligations and the UN Charter, and contribute to realizing the European prospects of Kosovo and the region."[20] Aware of the complexity of the whole process, the EU asked the parties "to show goodwill, so as to achieve a mutually acceptable solution" and especially "the authorities in Belgrade actively to encourage the Serbs of Kosovo to take their place in Kosovar institutions, to exercise their democratic rights there."[21] It is worth noting that by 2006 both Javier Solana and Olli Rehn, European Commissioner for Enlargement, had already expressed their support for Kosovo's independence by recommending three courses of action that would assist Kosovo to become a reliable partner with an EU perspective: first, to create a post holding a twofold mandate (to lead the international community's work in the region and to serve as the EU special representative to Kosovo); second, to launch a new EU mission, under the European Security and Defence Policy (to help reform and strengthen Kosovo's justice system); and third, to use financial instruments to help Kosovo prepare for the Stabilization and Association Agreement.[22]

In February 2008, the General Affairs and External Relations Council agreed to establish the EU Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX), including political and judicial personnel, both international and local, with the task of monitoring and advising. However, there was not much that the EULEX could have immediately done. As noted in the later official report, Kosovo was trying to make some progress, but without any significant success. For example, "the judicial system remain[ed] weak at all levels" and "[c]orruption was still wide-

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spread,"[23] there was "a lack of capacity to implement and upgrade human rights standards,"[24] money laundering and drug trafficking continued to be "a very serious problem," and so on.[25] The later reports noted some additional progress, but still not enough to give the impression that Kosovo would be able to secure EU candidate status any time soon. However, the European Commission reconfirmed the relevance of the previously adopted resolution on Kosovo by the European Parliament, encouraging "EU Member States to step up their common approach towards Kosovo" (meaning that all of them should recognize its independence) and underlining that "the prospect of accession to the EU is a powerful incentive for the necessary reforms in Kosovo."[26]

Needless to say, for the Serbs (in Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo) it has been difficult to accept that Kosovo might be lost forever. Such a feeling was further intensified when the International Court of Justice (ICJ) delivered its advisory opinion in July 2010, concluding that Kosovo's declaration of independence of the 17 February 2008 was in accordance with international law and did not violate UN Security Council Resolution 1244.[27] Still, the Serbian authorities have not given up on their southern province, hoping that some new disclosures, such as Dick Marty's December 2010 report about the involvement of members of the KLA in human organ trafficking, currently under investigation by EULEX,[28] might change the current state of affairs in favor of Serbia.

The EU-brokered April 2013 agreement between Serbia and Kosovo's prime ministers, Ivica Dačić and Hashim Thaçi, (along with the implementation plan agreed upon in May 2013) on the normalization of relations certainly opened another chapter with regard to the relations between the two states and their positions toward the EU.[29] Their ambitions to progress on their path to EU integration, combined with the EU integration process inertia pressures, are indeed some of the factors that enabled the EU to facilitate dialogue, already started between the two governments, on the highest political level.

The European Union officials have enthusiastically assessed the agreement as historic.[30] On the one hand, it is indeed historic because it is the first one to be reached and signed by both parties; on the other hand, though, it is not historic, as it does not address the core of the conflict between Serbia and Kosovo, which is political in nature.[31] It merely seeks to provide a power-sharing mechanism for the northern part of Kosovo, mainly inhabited by the Serb community, which would be acceptable to both Priština and Belgrade and be recognized by the international community, and thus capable of generating reconciliation and eventually the solution to the Albanian and Serbian concerns.[32] Still, what the 2013 agreement seems to have managed to achieve is to move the parties from

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their extreme positions, hoping that one party will have to end up as an absolute winner and the other as an absolute looser, and further stress the commitment of the EU to the integration of the Western Balkans in its structures, as originally promoted by the EU-Balkans Thessaloniki summit, in 2003. Currently, the process of normalization between Serbia and Kosovo is under way; with an even more obvious EU involvement in this process, there does not seem to be any return to previous positions. Of course, it is possible to argue that this process requires time and that it will face various difficulties due to local, regional, and global geopolitical circumstances.

The existing accounts of the Kosovo case have predominantly focused on the overall context,[33] the legality and possible consequences of the 1999 NATO involvement,[34] the postinterventionist local and international positions,[35] Kosovo's proclamation of independence and its recognition,[36] and, finally, Kosovo's capacity to pursue necessary reforms in order to become a viable state.[37] Aware of the available analyses and thus the uneasy relationship between the Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo, both being passionately supported by their respective neighboring communities, the originality of this volume lies in the point that it brings together a number of scholars of Serbian or Kosovo Albanian origin, interested in the dynamics closely associated with the position of Kosovo in Yugoslavia, its independent status and subsequent relationship between the Serbs and Kosovo Albanians.[38] In the context of the Kosovo question, these contributions examine Serbo-Albanian relations in historical, political, economic, and social perspectives. In this respect, this volume highlights, renews, and expands on the existing academic debates on Kosovo by providing new interpretations of the origins of the conflict and by exploring some neglected issues in the literature, especially in the context of political developments in Serbia and Kosovo after the proclamation of independence of Kosovo in 2008.

BOOK OUTLINE

Veljko Vujačić seeks to show that the Kosovo problem in the 1980s, while affecting both the Serbs and Albanians, was largely an unintended consequence of communist nationality policy. This policy, which promised self-determination to Yugoslavia's constituent nations and nationalities within the Titoist ideological framework (brotherhood and unity), was fraught with irresolvable contradictions. On the one hand, by holding out the promise of the equality of all nations and nationalities, and culturally promoting and institutionalizing ethnicity through a system of ethnoterritorial federalism, this policy raised the social and ethnic aspirations of peripheral groups, and

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turned ethnicity into a privileged category in the official ideological discourse. On the other hand, by treating legitimate social and ethnic grievances and civil rights issues as political crimes, the communist regime lacked the institutional mechanisms to regulate conflict. In contrast to the general tendency to reduce the Kosovo problem to the question of relations between "Serbs" and "Albanians," Chapter One disaggregates these collective concepts through a sociological analysis of the institutional causes and social underpinnings of ethnic conflict in Kosovo of the 1980s.

In Chapter Two, Arben Qirezi looks at the question of Kosovo's self-determination. While placing significant emphasis on the importance of historical perspective, he examines the strategies used to resolve the self-determination dispute between the Serbs and Kosovo Albanians. The chapter tackles conflict-regulating strategies that are capable of affecting the relations between the two parties, such as partition, transfer of population, attempted genocide, identity engineering, and complex power sharing, including shared sovereignty. However, as the author argues, none of these strategies have proven successful due to the historical context. With this in mind, Qirezi suggests that any decision to start the reconciliation talks between the Albanian and Serbian sides should take place within the Belgrade-Priština-Tirana triangle.

In addition to tracing European and Russian official rhetoric employed in the case of Kosovo, Branislav Radeljić points out how problematic some of the official statements have been, sending mixed signals and therefore questioning Kosovo's capacity to become and act as a viable state. In February 2008 the ethnic Albanian leadership declared unilateral independence of the province of Kosovo from Serbia, but without—as suggested by various primary sources—having managed to protect the position of the Serbian minority. By looking at three different periods (before 1999, 1999–2007, and post-2008), the discussion in Chapter Three shows that even after the proclamation of independence, Russia has continued to promote its originally adopted approach (supporting the territorial integrity of Serbia), whereas the European Union rhetoric has struggled to develop a common position due to a variety of official discrepancies and disagreements among member states. The incapacity of the Brussels administration to consolidate its policy with regard to the status of Kosovo has encouraged stagnation, but also frustration among the former conflicting parties.

Ilire Agimi discusses the governance matters and constraints presented by the country's limited statehood with regard to the relations between the Albanian and Serbian communities in postwar Kosovo. In Chapter Four, she explores how different elements such as the state's contested authority in the

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north, reliance on international stewardship, and deficient policies in addressing interethnic relations have had adverse repercussions in the understanding and implementation of any reconciliation process among Kosovo citizens and have stalled the normalization of interethnic relations. Agimi also looks at local governance and argues that the decentralization reforms, under the heading of an ethnic dimension, have entrenched divisions between the two communities at the municipal level, despite providing territorial reorganization and redistribution of power to local leaders from nonmajority communities. The contradicting political messages of the Serbian government in Serbia and the Kosovo Serb leadership exacerbate the Serbian community's struggle to survive in the changing sociopolitical environment.

In Chapter Five, Dušan Spasojević uses political cleavage theory to demonstrate ways in which Serbian political parties have discussed the Kosovo issue, which should be understood as a symbol and amplifier of divisions between modernist and traditionalist forces. This division reflects the postcommunist dilemma of other societies between a "return to ourselves" and a "return to Europe," but in the Serbian case it has been reinforced by other dominant lines of cleavages (socioeconomic and regional) and with the stateness issue leading to EU-centered and Kosovo-centered party blocks. Using cleavage theory as a framework, the author shows that parties have tended to employ different tactics, moving between vote-seeking and office-seeking models. Thus, its intention is to demonstrate the existence of a gradual rise in importance of the Kosovo issue for political parties from 2000 until 2008 and its subsequent decline. Such a switch has led to the marginalization of Kosovo-centered parties and to the creation of consensus on Serbia EU membership among other parties under the "both Europe and Kosovo" paradigm.

In Chapter Six, Mina Zirojević analyzes the mandate and performance of the EULEX mission in Kosovo, with an emphasis on the implementation of the mission's police and justice components in terms of its integration into the Kosovo police structures and the organization of the judiciary. The author shows that while the EULEX mission deserves recognition for many of its aspects (in particular, that related to implementation of its executive mandate), it has partly managed to shift away from the conceptualization of the European Union's Common Security and Defence Policy missions—a shift primarily linked to the specific international context and the legacy of the United Nations Mission in Kosovo. Yet the EULEX mission is not per se likely to consolidate the European Union as a powerful stability actor, not even in the neighboring territory that is seeing inclusion in its structures.

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Gent Cakaj and Gëzim Krasniqi discuss the issue of minorities and its impact on the relationship between Kosovo and Serbia. In Chapter Seven, in addition to providing a brief historical account of the relationship between Albanians and Serbs in Kosovo in the light of the "status reversal" argument, they focus on the dynamic interaction among minority, host-state, and external powers in the Kosovo-Serbia setting. The authors argue that in a situation when Kosovo and Serbia are contiguous and have each other's co-ethnics, the position of minorities lies at the heart of the Serbo-Albanian political configuration. However, notwithstanding the importance of minority status and position, territorial ambitions and pretensions seem to outweigh kin-states concerns about the well-being of their respective ethnic brethren. Thus, in such a constellation, the existence of the Albanian and Serb minority in Serbia and Kosovo respectively adds up to the Serbo-Albanian political quagmire rather than contributing to the process of reconciliation and higher political and social cooperation between the two countries and nations.

Chapter Eight deals with the question of minority returns to Kosovo. According to Tanja Pavlov, the returns of minorities primarily represent a political issue, conditioned by political and economic factors. However, the minority returns also represent complex migration flows; understanding them could lead to better institutional support for such flows and improved meeting of the interests of all involved parties. The chapter aims to determine (1) an understanding of return migration on the basis of which existing migration policies (returns and repatriation polices) and institutional mechanisms for their support have been developed, and (2) whether there is a possibility for their improvement with the involvement of transnational and translocal perspectives.

Gazmend Qorraj explores reasons that the West Balkan countries should intensify cooperation among themselves as well as with the European Union, so that they can overcome political challenges and become economically stable. In Chapter Nine, he examines regional cooperation and the relevance of neighborly relations, originally provided for within the Stability Pact framework, and the problems that followed. Accordingly, the author examines EU financial assistance, trade and economic issues, and the capacity of such mechanisms to contribute to the strengthening of economic cooperation among countries of the western Balkans, Serbia, and Kosovo, in particular.

In Chapter Ten, Leandrit Mehmeti examines the implications of the April 2013 agreement on the relations between Serbia and Kosovo and their integration in the European Union. In his view, the process of normalization of relations should lead to a political solution, based on the mutual recognition

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of sovereignty of Kosovo and Serbia, and with a clear EU integration and perspective of membership. The chapter concludes by arguing that the EU plays the main role in normalization of relations between the two sides, largely due to its enlargement policy for the West Balkan region, and by suggesting that the definition of the understanding of normalization should be open to modifications and adjustments, in order to ensure a smooth solution to a century-long political conflict.

This collection seeks to provide some new ideas about possible challenges and perspectives with regard to the relations between Serbia and Kosovo and, more importantly, the Serbs and Kosovo Albanians. While offering a range of primary findings and fresh arguments, the volume is also expected to be an important source for policy-makers assigned decisive roles in the handling of the situation in the present Kosovo and the Western Balkans more generally.

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