

# **SERBIA–KOSOVO RELATIONS AND SECURITY IN SOUTH-EAST EUROPE**

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## **Abstract**

This paper shall present a comparison of the cases of Kosovo and the Republic of Srpska which provoke different opinions in the International Community. Attention is not only on the issues of internal situations in Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and other regional countries but much broader. Both geopolitical entities shall be analyzed in comparison to other entities in the Balkans, then we shall examine their relations with other stakeholders in the world politics including great powers. Further on, this paper shall tackle the situation from the point of international law which envelopes institutionalization and state building and also national self-identification which will dominantly influence inter-nation and inter-ethnic relations. Finally, there are issues of economy development including actual distance to EU membership, state of democracy development which should include a political culture of stakeholders.

Key words: nation, ethnicity, state-building, security, stakeholders

## **Introduction**

Kosovo as the security hot-spot should be observed as internal as well as within the frame of regional security relations. Firstly, security threats in Macedonia seem to be more dangerous than Albanian – Serb relations in Serbia and Kosovo. Although Macedonia looks more stable, it has unresolved questions with all neighbors: misunderstanding with Greece derives from the name issue, Macedonia argue about ethnicity and language issues with Bulgaria, open issues in communication with Serbia are recognition of separated Macedonian Church, rights and protection of Serb minority as well as border dispute. The biggest uncertainties when it comes to Albania – Macedonia relations is regarding Western Macedonia

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settled dominantly by ethnic Albanians and their intention to establish some sort of autonomy even to separate from the state of Macedonia. It is not an open request but there is a hidden idea or even agenda in terms of splitting the state and fulfilling one of the goals 'Great Albania' designed in the late XIX century. Beside Kosovo as the first point of the national project, Macedonia is the second important point. Others are municipalities in Serbia as part of Albanians' aspirations, north Greece and some areas in Montenegro. Neglecting the Albanians' national goals and looking at a singular separate point can lead to fallacy. Bulgaria and Macedonia have disputes on the issues of nationality as well as language issues. Serbia and Macedonia disagree on the issue of self-determination of Macedonian Orthodox Church, Serb national minority, recognition of Kosovo and some territorial issues.

Another important issue closely connected to Belgrade – Pristina relations is the possibility of proclaiming independency for Republika Srpska or unification of this entity with Serbia. We could observe that issue of self-determination of Republika Srpska is often linked to the final solution for Kosovo and usually mentioned as a possibility of territory trade through exchange. Any sort of such discussion usually revives nationalistic rhetoric in the RS and former ideas of independence, in particular in preelection campaigns. International position of RS is determined by the Dayton Peace Accord as the "semi-independent entity" which means extremely high level of autonomy. Both entities that constitute Bosnia and Herzegovina according to Annex IV, which is titled as the "Constitution of BiH", have a sort of position of *de facto state*. Serbs have majority over Bosnians and Croats in RS and Croats and Bosnians are far more numerous than Serbs in the Federation of BiH. Serbs feel much stronger identity with "their entity" taking it essentially as a state than Bosnians and Croats identify themselves with FBiH. At same time Serbs feel high level of national identity with "all Serbs in the region" – in Serbia and Montenegro where are they are constitutional nations, with Serbs in Croatia where they are politically significant national minority, but also with national minority groups in Slovenia and Macedonia.

The main common denominator for all three cases is that their existence and daily operational life is regulated by international agreements: Ohrid Agreement in Macedonia, UNSC Resolution 1244 and Brussels Agreement which is in the process of final realization for Kosovo and General Framework Agreement for Peace (Dayton Peace Accord)<sup>1</sup> in Bosnia and Herzegovina. While Macedonia and BiH including Serbs as the one of the Constituent people

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<sup>1</sup> General Framework for Peace in BiH is formally signed in Paris December 14 1995 but all of the eleven chapters negotiated and approved in Dayton (military base in Ohio, United states) November 21 1995, are known and used in political vocabulary as "Dayton peace accord"

still hold on internationally settled arrangements. Another common characteristic is that all three entities work on their independence as the supreme goal, and that Albanians would accept maximum autonomy at least. At the moment Kosovo institutions' formal policy is to reach full recognition as an independent country which should be realized through the UN membership. By now, around one hundred countries have bilaterally recognized Kosovo as an independent state but the UN chair for it is still far away. That means Kosovo is not fully recognized member of the international community and can not participate in international and multilateral initiatives in full capacity. The open question of Kosovo statehood is oppositely posed to Serbia's claim for territorial integrity which, holding to its constitution position, understands Kosovo as a compact territorial part of Serbia.

When referred to the solution of the Kosovo question, the Republic of Srpska's position is ambiguous. On the one hand politically, historically, culturally and in any other way as an unseparated part of the nation and national politics it supports Serbia and its interest to keep Kosovo. In the case of full separation of Kosovo, RS might intend to raise the same request for independence explaining it by similarities that led Kosovo to the idea of independence. It could also provoke other similar entities in the Region as well as worldwide to follow the suit.

### Possible solutions

Sources of security threats are relations to a parent (or metropolitan) state and tendency to declare independency, reactions from international community to possibility to avoid to implement international settlements and to violate relation with neighbors and to achieve unstable internal situation because of uncompleted political system, weakness and dis-functionality of institutions, lack of political will and political culture to uphold a tidy internal order, and achieve political and economy stability.

## Three scenarios

Taking into consideration that Kosovo has still not been recognized by Belgrade (Serbia) but also by some great powers (Russia, China, India, Brazil) and huge portion of UN members, three possible scenarios emerge as a possibility for near future.

### 1. Preserving status quo/postponing the solving of the problem

#### Strengths

- political elites should be less oriented towards conflict resolution for a while and more turned to real issues of their communities trying to improve them
- less attention of international community and providing a period for maturing and shaping ideas for solution
- solution might bring a certain period of avoiding open wide 'hard conflicts' which would enable directing powers and efforts to achieving a higher level of political, economic and institutional development in a time-gap of finding stable solution and maturing and shaping political ideas;

#### Weaknesses

- maintaining or even worsening of already disturbed inter-ethnic relations due to intentions political elites on both sides to strengthen and fix their position- maintaining nationalistic leaders and national politics in power; greater obstacles to reconciliation and strengthening inter-ethnic relations and multiculturalism
- worsening relations with international institutions and diminishing their will to work on solution
- international institutions would reduce engagement because of durability of no-solution exhausted by uncertainty and behavior of actors, lack of ideas to resolve problem because of rejecting and non-fulfilling Brussels agreement, changes of approach (United States), opposing Russia to western politics
- slowing institution building on both sides and further raising mistrust of population in their effectiveness
- uncertainty and political and security threats due to the lack of final solution in terms of impact to the regional order and security;
- economy development backlash and lagging because
- enabling and even forcing people to leave the area

### Opportunities

- providing testing period and launching new possibilities and preparing both sides for dialog, negotiations and final solution including creating awareness and will for finalization
- launching new ideas and shaping solutions in active cooperation with international community organizations and representatives (great powers, EU, neighbors)
- region will get time break to raise the level of security and stability and to work on shaping a final solution
- possibility to enhance Serbian presence in Kosovo
- strengthening national unification and identity in entire Serbian population as well as Albanians
- the Republic of Srpska will carefully follow Serbia's approach asserting everything that Serbia would accept.

### Threats

- mass replacing of population – Serbs from South Kosovo to North Kosovo and Albanians in opposite direction
- maintaining the lack of good diplomatic relations and non-cooperation either with Kosovo because of unrecognition with some regional countries, or opposite with Serbia, with those which recognized Kosovo independence
- sparking and renewing frozen conflict and permanent threat to regional security
- worsening interethnic relations and weakening the ground for an enhanced cooperation, disabling reconciliation process
- spreading of the conflict on other countries (Macedonia, BiH) - emerging new conflicts – BiH intentions to reach cantonal independence or revival of Croatian Republic of Herzeg-Bosnia in the form of a 'third entity' in BiH
- maintaining and even raising activities of organized criminal groups and
- Serbs leaving from Kosovo
- frozen conflict here to stay for a very uncertain period of time

## 2. **Serbia-Kosovo borders changes/swapping of territories**

### Strengths

- improvement of life of ordinary people
- raising regional security and establishing
- improvement of political system and raising institutions' effectiveness
- raising critical public opinion awareness and its impact on developing democracy

- political clarification and strengthening responsibility of local institutions for internal stability and development
- more efficient fight against organized crime and particularly corruption
- rising connectivity with Serbia by Kosovo Albanians community
- Serbia and Kosovo would not block each other on the way to EU

#### Weaknesses

- dissatisfaction of both sides population because of sense of unfinished solution and lost opportunity
- solution achieved by mediation and evenmore pressure of EU

#### Opportunities

- accelerating economic cooperation inside Kosovo as well as bilaterally with regional countries
- enhancing the role of both entities in regional and international relations achieved through a longer period of stability and absence of reasons for hard and open conflicts
- good ground for trust building, reconciliation and multiethnic approach based
- maintaining internal and external security and stability
- stabilizing development (economy, social, education...) and developing of harmonized economy space
- acceptance of a solution by neighbors, relaxing and developing relations in terms of movement of people,
- raising political stability
- avoiding additional explanation and recalling on Badentaire rule that borders of former YU republics are state border
- enhancing European path for both sides and faster accommodation process in order to faster close political entities to EU
- stabilizing and securing life of Serbs on Kosovo
- rising political stability which would be ground for reducing organized crime
- possible recognition by majority of countries and full UN membership

#### Threats

- potential legalization of sparkling new conflict – interethnic relations would be remained tension able

- provoking other unrecognized entities to force figuring out binding solutions based on this example
- internal attacks on political leaderships by opponents
- drawing new ethnic borders could have been an initiation for other ethnicities in the Balkans to openly talk about many borders in the Balkans
- remaining political ground for nationalistic hawks and other extreme and fundamentalist rhetoric
- frozen communication and integration (disappearing trust in Brussels process)
- example for RS and other sub-state entities in the Region that delimitation is feasible

### **3. Normalization of relations based on legally binding agreement to be reached the ongoing EU moderated Serbia – Kosovo negotiations**

#### Strengths

- stabilization of interethnic relations based on long term consistent relations
- full essential realization of freedom of movement, opening the economy, market and trade

#### Weaknesses

- no side would take the solution as finished process, all traditional tensions and instability would remain as a warning sign
- because of recent relations, lack of trust would be normal in interethnic relations
- multiethnicity would not bring multiculturalism
- uncertain duration of the settlement

#### Opportunities

- raising stability in Serbia as in northern Kosovo, and in Kosovo as a whole
- possibility for inter-ethnic cooperation and
- integration of Serbs from northern Kosovo into political system of Kosovo
- convincing RS and other sub-state entities in the Region that only possible changes and solution are internationally accepted ones

## Threats

- reviving conflicts in a case national and ethnic relations are harmed and violated, particularly if it might be explained as unilaterally initiated
- in the case of a lack of good will negotiated solutions would not be implemented
- solution could be presented as creating “Republic of Srpska on Northern Kosovo”

## Final considerations

No solution would be considered as an end of misunderstanding and finalization of a solution in a certain future. The question is how long the current situation would be maintained without sparking new conflicts or how sustainable and durable are the two last scenarios? Predictions for any solution are very uncertain.

Disturbed Serb-Albanian relations need a lot of time and national, political, spiritual, financial and other effort in order to get back now non-existent mutual trust, regardless which solution is implemented. For both nations, Serbs and Albanians, any solution for Kosovo is question of expressing national integration and identity as well as reaching national goals. A part of a satisfying national solution is developing appropriate political system and process of state building. Serbia and Kosovo are both in a process of multi-track post-socialist transition. Not only economy and politics are in a process of transformation that other former socialist countries have gone through, but there is a transition of territorial integrity and transition of sovereignty from former federal state to national state-shaped entities. The process usually opposes to necessities to be accepted in ‘international community’ as a resolution of standing point of self-determination – element that both sides declare as a cornerstone of their political ideas. Consideration on self-determination would have universal significance and importance which gives to Serbia-Kosovo relations a universal dimension. Many cases<sup>2</sup> are in a status of hibernation trying to pull out possibility to use the solution. From this standing point the Kosovo case must not be taken as an exception.

Kosovo case needs to be reconsidered by the Western part of international community which got stuck with some solutions for the Balkans (Bosnia and Herzegovina – position of the Republic of Srpska on BiH, intentions for centralization by Bosniaks, initiatives for establishing

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<sup>2</sup> Crimea, Catalonia, Abkhazia, South Osetia, Nagorno-Karabakh, Transnistria, Somaliland, Wester Sahara, Taiwan, Turkish Republic Norther Cyprus and many other *de facto states, states within states, unrecognized states, something 'as state', shadow-states* etc.

institutionally separate 'third entity' by Croats, position of Brčko District), problems with Serb minority in Croatia, Slovenia and Macedonia, final national solution for Montenegro (questions raised by Albanians and Serbs which are still not in full force. There are four 'great national' questions emerging: Serb national question and position of Serbs in all former Yugoslav countries, Albanian national integration and compacting territories in order to create "Greater Albania", Croatian national question affecting BiH where Croats are a constitutional people and recently emerging Bosniak national question launching from Sarajevo in relation dominantly to Bosniak national minority questions in Serbia (dominantly Raška Region or Sanjak Region) and Montenegro.

Kosovo example compared with the Republic of Srpska case refers to so called 'double standards'. While Kosovo institutions have been developing from the 'grass roots' level since founding after passing Resolution 1244 and furthermore developing in sense of effectiveness and functionality, the Republic of Srpska institutions have been deconstructing and 'removed to the common level'. A precise analyses would present the agenda defined as transcending from 'Dayton stage' to 'Brussels stage' is not welcome by majority in the RS and directly violates a right for self-determination. Both entities emerged after wars and based on ethnic principles. Both entities express a will of actors in International Community. The basic difference is that the Republic of Srpska has a limited international political and legal sovereignty and recognition as a 'semi-independent state' from IC based in DPA. On the other hand Kosovo has 'supervised independency', but random recognition posed on a number of bilateral recognitions, which is a point of arguments.