

Kosovo's independence policy: Historical background of Serbian–Albanian ethnical conflict

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As for the future of Kosovo the negotiations between Belgrade and Pristina – in spite of several attempts – have always failed so far. Searching for the ground for this inefficacy we obviously must not stick in the analysis to the actual political decisions; it is inevitable to present the historical background.

The historical past and the conflicts inherited from previous centuries are still of vital concern, they influence the judgement of certain problems.

Since the central issue is to understand the independence aspirations of Kosovo and to explore the development of the ethnic conflict between Serbs and Albanians, it is necessary to be acquainted with the historical antecedents and to grasp the importance of the cultural–religious identity. Considering this aspect not only the area's chronology is of importance but the transformation of the ethnic–religious space structure matters as well along with the related migrations and re-arrangements of power.

In this essay I drew a line in this historical retrospection at the end of WWII, which, on one hand, could be seen as the close of a long period; and, on the other hand, the two world wars with their alliance systems are strictly associated with some phases of the formation of the nation-states and with the growing implication of the ethnic affiliation.

Kosovo status talks

The negotiations in Vienna concerning the final status of the territory originally planned on 25th January have been delayed because of Ibrahim Rugova's death. The multiple-round talks started in February, then were proceeding in March, Washington took up the line, however, that they should be finished by the end of this year, said Frank Wisner, the U.S. special deputy in Kosovo on 14th April in Pristina. The American politician (who is a member of the U.N. commissioner Martti Ahtisaari's team) encountered Albanian and Serb leaders in Kosovo, and admitted: his task was to get a solution on the status of Kosovo and to learn the viewpoints of Belgrade and Pristina. According to Wisner the United States wants to clear up the status of Kosovo as soon as possible, a status that will be able to contribute to the stability of the area and to encourage its European integration.

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The experts of Belgrade and Pristina have already met three times in Vienna but they couldn't close the issues of the decentralization of power bodies and the municipal reforms, and the final status of the province wasn't even discussed. According to Ahtisaari the discussion on the question of status should be suspended until the discussion of practical matters (decentralization, minority rights, refugees, protection of religious heritage) are completed. In the meanwhile, as it came to light from Wisner's statement, intense diplomatic bargains have been running on in the background. Martii Ahtisaari (U.N. Secretary General's Commissioner in Kosovo) says talks relating to the future status of the region can take place in July at the earliest. Yet in spring of last year, politicians and diplomats met in Pristina and Belgrade. The main purpose of their negotiations was then Kosovo. These diplomatic meetings were obviously not unintentional for the status of constitutional law in Kosovo was not yet settled.

According to the opinion of the United Nations 2006 will be crucial to the Southern Serbian territory which is under the control of UNMIK.¹ Since the riots of March 2004 the impatience among the Albanians of Kosovo has been increasing to determine their constitutional status of the province.

The settlement of the Kosovo situation is supported by Macedonia as well because in Serbia there have been many times when the conflict between Albanians (23% of the population in Macedonia) and Macedonians, who are in the majority, caused distressful situations. The Albanian leaders of Pristina – both moderate and radical – thought that irrespectively of the result of the talks the negotiations about Kosovo's final status should be started. The one and only acceptable result for them is independence. Former Kosovo Prime Minister Ramus Haradinaj – whose politics are followed by the current cabinet – described an obvious progress plan for the year 2005 just before he gave himself up to the Hague International Court of Justice. It contained the following: in May the UN would look at all of the "technical" parts of the settlement plan, in midsummer they would go on with the political questions, in September negotiations could start about Kosovo's status, in December the decision could be made, and in the meantime the democratisation progress can continue in harmony with the norm system.

The provincial elections held on 23 October, 2004 brought victory to Ibrahim Rugova's party (Democratic Alliance of Kosovo). The low participation rate (53%) and the non-appearance of the Serbian minority living there indicated that the Serbians would not support the independence of the province. According to Belgrade's point there's no reason to argue about the status before the determination of the settlement plan. Nevertheless, it was known in Serbia that UN could switch to the principle of simultaneity summer.

A brand new idea has appeared which says there is more to give than autonomy but less than independence. According to Brussels Threefold Principle there will be no return to the state of 1999, and they will neither divide the province, nor join it to any other territories inhabited by Albanians. If we consider the expectations determined in the UN norm system with the conditions of Kosovo, there is a light-year of difference.

The international community strongly urged the negotiations between the political leaders in Belgrade and Pristina, and this was also a point in the UN norm system. The two Prime Ministers didn't manage to reach an agreement in either the time or the venue of the meeting. The presidential-level meeting was hampered by the fact that Kosovoian president Ibrahim Rugova would have only been ready to meet Serbian president Boris Tadic in the circumstances of an international conference. The rapprochement between Belgrade and Pristina was more difficult after the provincial parliament's committee dealing with international cases had decided that all high level political contact must be preceded by a debate in the provincial parliament. The Kosovo leader was not willing to participate in any further negotiations with Belgrade about Kosovo's future status without the parliament's acceptance.

It's no wonder that the Kosovo-conference held in Luzern, Switzerland, 3 July 2005 was unsuccessful. "Kosovo and its area prepares to changes" – that was the title of the two-day meeting arranged between the officials of the region, Switzerland and the United States. The aim of this meeting was the discussion of preparations, which would influence the decisions on the province's final status. The round-table meeting held in Luzern was notable because all neighbours of Kosovo were invited and given an opportunity to express their opinions about the processes taking place. Their opinions are not heard often because the decisions about Kosovo's status and the relating debates used to be dealt with by the UN Security Council and the Contact Team. The conference was organized by the Project on Ethnic Relations Foundation (PER). At the meeting were the representatives of Serbia–Montenegro, Kosovo, Albania, Bosnia–Herzegovina, Macedonia and Switzerland.

The spokesman for the Swiss Ministry of Foreign Affairs said that the opinions didn't get any closer around the table; because the parties weren't showing any flexibility. Between Belgrade and Pristina even the slightest rapprochement wasn't detectable. This failed meeting showed clearly and approved that long standing ethnic hostilities have been inherited from past centuries. These problems affect the situation directly even now, and threaten the stability of the Central and Eastern European area.

Nation states – multiethnic empires

The big bicentennial problem – the ethnic question – wasn't eliminated by the dissolution of the multiethnic empires but transformed in the age of nation-states. This is doubly true for the southern half of Central and Eastern Europe where there are still areas burdened with serious national-territorial conflicts. The existing conflicts must be cured and everything must be done for the sake of prevention, or more focal points will develop.

If we take into consideration that those ethnic conflicts now poison the life of certain areas then it's worth to think about what has caused these changes. It's a fact that at the beginning of the 19th century the 24 major and minor nations of Central and Eastern and South-Eastern Europe were under the control of three great political units: the Ottoman, the Habsburg and the Russian Empires, the primary determination for the main coherence force of these empires was dynastic loyalty and religion.

These two things determined the basic affiliation of major and minor ethnic groups. Ethnic affiliation gained significance only in the last third of the 19th century when dynastic politics were succeeded by the age of nation-states in Europe. Of course some of the independence movements that swept across European countries were motivated by ethnic affiliation. Due to these circumstances the newly united Italian state was born (1859), with the unification of Germany (1871) a new Great Power came to life, the Austrian-Hungarian pact was signed (1867), and the system of the 3rd republic in France was ratified.

The 1871–1914 stage of the competition between Great Powers concentrated on three main scenes: the German-French conflict, the Balkan question and the race for colonies. The German-French conflict determined new age history from the Sedan defeat to the end of WWII.

The Balkan states became the scene of the great game between the three European Great Powers (Russia, the Ottoman Empire and England): Russia hoped taking its power potential back by getting the straits, England wanted to keep its maritime superiority, and the Ottomans wanted to prevent the formation of a great Southern-Slavic state. These interests finally led to the breakout of the two Balkan wars, the development of the affiliations systems, and the breakout of WWI. At the beginning of the 20th century there were only two empires: the Catholic (Western Christian) Habsburg Empire and the Orthodox (Eastern Christian) Romanoff Empire. In place of the Balkan territories of the Islamic Ottoman Empire there were six new states at this time. The next stage of the formation of national states took place at the end of WWI when the Habsburg Empire was dissolved and Russian Empire became the Soviet Union losing its Western outskirt territories. Due to this in the area's Northern and

Central parts seven new states had been formed or revived. After WWII with the expansion of the Soviet Union the number of independent states decreased from 12 to 9, then in 1990/91 when Soviet Union dissolved it increased from 9 to 20 and the state-making nations' number increased from 12 to 18.²

Gaining independence is crucial for Kosovo Albanians

Almost exactly 5 years after the Kosovo bombings started in 1999 in the spring of 2004 28 people died and 900 were injured in 48 hours. These atrocities made it obvious, even years after the settlement, that the peace of the province is not stable. The extremely slow settlement conception preserved the tension that is present in the province. The stable, multiethnic, and democratic Kosovo outlined in the UN settlement plan remained a mere dream. The problem should not be considered closed for the elections held in autumn showed no harmony.

The question is: can we expect more conflicts like this? And, if yes, how can we prepare for them?

It's no doubt that the earlier reports on the security status of Kosovo gave a better view of the situation than reality in spite of that during the "settlement" of 1999 the prolonged problems were not solved, at best a little bit cured. The status of the Serbian entity in Kosovo remains unsolved to this day. The Albanian parties in Kosovo have assured the Serbians of their support in the topics of free language use and religion practice but the execution of these plans would need the help of Serbians living there because without them the negotiations on the province's status can't be started.

Of course they are reluctant to participate for by doing so they would acknowledge the province's separation from Serbia and Montenegro and because they don't want to live in an independent state led by Albanians whose formation they wouldn't support. With financial successes and the creation of general wealth the ethnical conflicts could be reduced but this seems impossible because of the unregulated conditions. Political instability stalls the economy; investors avoid the area so any privatisation processes can't be started. Economy is not able to function without foreign investment and there is a risk because of the political instability. Currently the organizations of UNMIK and KFOR seem to be the most successful enterprises in Kosovo.

These organizations give high-standard and secure living to many people through new jobs and leased real estate. If this didn't exist in Pristina and the surrounding areas there would be unemployment and lack of return on almost all businesses in the area. Politicians of Kosovo stick to the independence of the province tenaciously. The solution to this question is so important because it has big influence on the fate of the

entire region. For the fulfilment of the recurring desire for independence it is necessary to develop a democratic institutional system.

It's obviously not an easy task but it's worth thinking why after five years the international community can't make the region more democratic.

In addition to many other reasons one should consider without a doubt that institutional, swiftly functioning democracy is not the aim; we should be aware that the democratic model used in Western societies with prosperity can't be introduced into an area where there are no acceptable conditions and where the tradition and the historical-cultural background is totally different. Without consideration of local conditions and values this will not work in the future.

In our present case UNMIK has to get to know and understand the customs, ancient culture, way of thinking so that communication to Kosovo's inhabitants will appreciate its values. If this isn't realized then the ethnic conflicts that caused the riots can surface at any time. We also have to deal with the statement "cultural and religious conflicts and differences are harder to change and less capable of an agreement than political and financial ones". Religion can be the cause of even more aggressive and absolute discrimination than ethnical affiliation.

Conflicts appearing along cultural fracture-lines can be exclusively dangerous."³

"In international relations, we must be more and more aware of cultural factors, give the "civilized" character or radically different cultural readings of some great conflicts the evidence (Bay War, Kosovo, terror actions of 11.09.2001)."⁴

The cultural minister of Lebanon, Ghassan Salamé said in an interview: "... we are witnessing new phenomena worldwide: cultural questions come to focus of political debate. For a long time political debates were controlled by ideology. The main engine of the international system was of ideological nature. Since Cold War finished the nature of polemics has been changed as well. It seems that culture came to the foreground. I don't agree with the debatable theory born about cultural fracture-lines and clash of cultures and civilizations but it's a fact that nowadays culture is the very origin and determinative of most conflicts."⁵

It's no doubt that conversation between cultures leads to trust so in recognition of potential conflicts and decreasing of stress it may play a significant role. In a wider sense cultural foreign policy can serve the aims of security politics. Encouragement of conversation between cultures (intercultural communication) is a part of the strengthening of international security. Handing democratic institutions and achievements of conflict-culture down based on taking social properties into consideration could support the prevention of conflicts and crisis not unworthily.⁶

Changes of the ethnic–religious space-structure on the Balkan

Without knowing the historical past and cultural traditions it's difficult to understand the Serbian–Kosovo Albanian conflict, which still determines the present political decisions for both people. Serbians' compulsive adherence to the area of Kosovo inhabited by Albanians, the understanding of Kosovo Albanians' desire for independence is impossible without knowing the historical precedents. Histories, different cultural roots, traditions still have great influence. They control thinking, dealing with conflicts of ethnic origin, and political decisions, obviously not exclusively, but significantly enough for us to take a short glimpse on history until WWII.

We must pay attention not just to the chronological history of the area, but the changes in ethnic–religious space-structure and the related movements of people and power, for we mustn't forget that the Serbo-Croatian population taking up most of the Balkan area divides mostly on religious basis: to Serbian (Orthodox), Croatian (Roman Catholic) and Muslim (Islamic) ethnic groups. This thinking through is necessary because when we encounter the Serbian–Kosovo Albanian hostility problem we realize that Serbians back up their demands with referring to the past size of their state and they believe that this gives right to their current political decisions. At first it's maybe worth looking at the geographic area that is nowadays referred to as a phrase with negative meaning: "The Balkan." This name was always more than a mere geographical concept through time it became the symbol of backwardness, violence and barbarism. During its history it often became the sticking point of great powers, which had many reasons: the important geopolitical position of the peninsula, the closeness of the straits, the mixed ethnic ingredients of its population, and its trading ways, which connected Europe to the Near East.

The possession of Bosphorus and the Dardanelles became one with the great power ambitions of Russia since the 18th century. If Russia could maintain its Black Sea fleet's free passage through the straits and in to the Mediterranean Sea, then it could assure its power ambitions on the further seas and oceans.

Other Great Powers not accidentally tried to keep the Russian Empire away from the straits.

After the appearance of the abovementioned nation-states, Russia, referring to the pan-Slavic traditions and orthodox fraternity, supported Bulgaria's ambitions. The process from this point was connected to the crisis and dissolution of the Ottoman Empire and the loss of its Great Power status. It was interesting to all more significant power factors of the world of that age, that who got the control over areas becoming

free from the dissolving Eastern Great Power, how they redraw the borders, how the status quo changes.

This so-called "Eastern question", inside that the most complicated problem was present in the Balkan area and was produced by the mixed ethnic ingredients of the peninsula. "The history of the peninsula is organically connected to Byzantium's history. After the separation of the two halves of the Roman Empire and the downfall of the Western Roman Empire, the Eastern Roman Empire remained for a thousand more years. After the first centuries it decreased in territory, and only the Balkan peninsula and Asia Minor stayed under Byzantium's control."⁷

This moment is not accidental but is important for without this the naturalization of orthodox Christianity, what determined Serbian identity later, would be impossible. The Albanians are one of the most ancient peoples of the Balkan Peninsula; their ancestors were Illyrians (ancestors of the present Northern Albanians, the Gëgs) and the various Hellenic tribes. Their language is a modern version of the ancient Illyrian and Pelasgic languages. The name Albanian is first encountered in the 2nd century in the works of the geographer Alexandrian Ptolemy. (The "land of eagles" self-nomination used nowadays appeared first in the 16–17th centuries.)⁸

The gradual invasion of the Southern Slavic tribes to the Balkans became possible only in the 6–7th centuries AD, and it became a major event after the internal wars of the Eastern Roman Empire and the collapse of the Danube border-protection line (602 AD). The downfall of the ancient world significantly changed the ethnic composition of the peninsula. With the appearance of the Southern Slavic tribes the Illyrian population was pushed into the mountains and the Romanised (Neo-Latin) population was pushed into the cities of the tight sea-coastal zone.⁹ Clerical centres became the most important founders and expanders of the Slavic culture. The inclusion of orthodox Christianity was forced by not just lingual-cultural causes, but also from pressure of the near Byzantium presence. The Bulgarians tried to use the competition between Byzantium and Rome, to enter Latin Christianity, but their attempts were unsuccessful as long-term plans. Orthodoxy during the following centuries became a part of the self-awareness of the orthodox Southern Slavic peoples.¹⁰

In the 9th century the Croatian and Serbian tribes were partially united and Christianised. From the Southern Slavic peoples living between the Franc and Byzantine sphere of interest Croats first make an independent principality in 870 AD, which turned into a kingdom under I. Tomislav (925 AD). The Serbian tribes living in a geographically divided area under the control of other nations, such as the Byzantine, the Bulgarian, the Hungarian and Croatian, could be only partially unified

until the 12th century, by the Duklan Principality (now the area of Crna Gora) in 1042, kingdom from 1077.

The focus of the Serbian territorial control moved to the present area of Raska, Sandjak and Kosovo between 1180 and 1196. Bosnia gained independence in this era as well (1180–1204), and became the greatest supporter of the Bulgarian cult (Bogumils) in the 10–11th centuries. The present Bosnian territory became the scene of the permanent battle between the Catholic and Orthodox Churches since the schism in 1054. Among the population, tired of religious conflicts and violent religious conversions the Bogumils' doctrine became very popular, so the Bosnian (bogumil, patareus) church was founded, which became extinct only in 1459 by the violent efforts of the Hungarian kings and the prevailing Bailiff of Kalocsa forced by the Pope.¹¹ So the religious division of the Bosnian population goes back not just to the Turkish age but the 12–13th centuries.

Croatia, after the death of the last Croatian king, was taken under Hungarian occupation in 1091, and was unified with Hungary from 1102. Over the Dalmatian seashore the competition between Byzantium, Venice and Hungary was constant (until 1432 when it became a permanent Venetian dominion). The Serbian kingdom was founded in 1217, and in 1219 the Serbian Orthodox Church became independent. The Serbian state lived its golden ages under the legendary Dusan tsar (1331–1355). The state's political-cultural centre was the present Kosovo. Serbian politicians referred to this several times when they argued for the rightful keeping of the Kosovo province. It makes us think though that what does this glory of merely a quarter century justify at the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century. We know that remembering the glorious historical past was a determining reference during the rebirth of the nations, the development of national identity. From this point of view this may be understandable for in the chaotic times after the dissolution of Yugoslavia nationalism was repeatedly strengthened.

After the golden ages of the Serbian state the first Turkish invasion of European ground, this determined not just the fate of Serbians but of the whole continent. They conquered Thracia and Macedonia (1371), after the first Kosovo Polje battle Serbia became a Turkish vassal and after 1459 was a Turkish dominion for 400 years. This defeat was determined in times following, for being a vassal state or a Turkish dominion having lost independent statehood for centuries wasn't the same for either states. Think about just the 176-years Turkish presence in Hungary!

The defeat of the first Kosovo Polje battle and its aftermath meant a great loss for Serbians like the Mohács defeat in 1526 for us Hungarians or the Fehérhegy battle in 1620 for the Czech. In the mid-15th century on the territory of the former Yugoslavia

each ethnic group was separated except in a few transient zones. The territory of the Catholic or from bogumil re-Catholized Croatian population contained not just the present Croatia but a great part of Bosnia–Herzegovina as well. The seashore region belonging to the Venetian and the Raguzian Republic and the islands were inhabited by a mix of Croatian, Italians and their relatives the Dalmatians extinct since the 19th century.

The Northern flatland regions with developed agriculture belonged organically to the Hungarian Kingdom (Bácska, Bánát, Baranya, the northern half of the Szerémség) was inhabited by Hungarians almost exclusively. The majority of the orthodox Serbian folk, decimated strongly and forced to escape by the Turkish, lived east from the Drina and south from the Danube–Száva line. On the Southern territories of the historical Serbian state, e.g. in Kosovo, the formerly single Serbian ethnic structure became fragile because of the growing Serbian exodus and the Albanian shepherds' increasing immigration from the 13th century.¹²

The majority of the Romanised, shepherding Vlachs of Balkan left their Macedonian or Albanian origins and went to the Serbian Ore Mountains (Krajina) and the surroundings of the Lower Danube.

The above mentioned ethnic communities lived somewhat separately during the Middle Ages but the huge population movement before the unstoppable Turkish conquerors in the 15–16th century made the inhabitants escape in a mass had changed the ethnical map. During the 14–16th centuries these areas became one after one parts of the Turkish Empire: Macedonia 1371, Kosovo 1455, Serbia 1459, Bosnia 1463, Herzegovina 1482, Crna Gora 1499, Dalmatia 1513–1537, Eastern Croatia 1526–1592, Voivodina 1526–1551. Due to the repeated interchange of the population in Balkan areas under Turkish occupation and the forced migration influencing several hundred thousands of people the ethnic–religious space-structure transformed significantly. Conquerors pushed farther the inhabitants of the acquired territories in front of themselves.

The Catholic Croatian population wandered from the eastern and central region of its ethnic territory becoming a scene of war to the Croatian peripheries. (Surroundings of Zagreb, Istria, Dalmatia and Western Hungary.) The shrinkage of the Hungarian lingual area – due to the populations' escape to North – meant almost total disappearance of Hungarians. The place of the Hungarians and Croats was filled with Vlach, Serbian shepherds partially voluntarily, partially by forced resettlement. In case of Vlachs we don't think about Romanians, for these times the name Vlach meant not the ethnics, but the shepherding (cattle, sheep and goats), privileged because of martial services – mainly orthodox Serbian – population. The intensive Serbian–Vlach colonisation transformed mostly the depopulated border regions' ethnic picture (e.g. the

present Krajina in Bosnia and Croatia, Slavonia, South Hungary: Bácska, Bánát, Szerémség), and made it orthodox in religion and Serbian in ethnics.

The mentioned two Krajinas, so the central, core region deserted by the historical Croatian Kingdom and the Croatians, were re-colonised by the Serbians (Vlachs) coming from the Szendrő and Krusevac sandjaks. At the end of the 15th and the beginning of the 16th century Vlachs made up most of Bosnia's population.

In spite of this the Turks weren't eager to assimilate and Islamise the conquered people by force, the local Slavic, Albanian population, mainly the remaining noble class took up Islam to protect its wealth and local power and to become a full-right citizen of the Turkish Empire.

The introduction of Islam was strongest in the Bosnian vilayet, which contained the sandjak Novi Pazari as well, and which became the main headquarter of the wars against the Habsburg Empire and the Republic of Venice.

The rate of the Islam people in Bosnia–Herzegovina was increasing rapidly: 1468: 0,9%, 1520: 38,7%, 1710: 66%. In the capital, which in the Middle Ages was called Vrhlosra, then during the Turkish control Bosna-Seraj, Serajevo, Sarajevo, the Islamisation process was so fast that in 1600 the city's population was 96,5% Islamic followers.

The introduction of Islam was also successful among Albanians, who moved in increasing number to Kosovo (Metohija) and the Western part of the present Macedonia from 1690. In Kosovo, the Islamisation, Albanisation was more characteristic in the cities, villages kept their Serbian character until the end of the 17th century. Due to the Islamisation of the masses, 2/3 of the population, except the mountains regions, accepted the conquerors' religion. The Turkish domination lasting almost 600 years struck Albanians when their own state couldn't yet even appear. This had great influence on the Albanian identity. Long Turkish slavery never could develop such a great individualism in any other nation but Albanians. This showed mainly in their survival abilities, the unconditional success on foreign land. (Then in the 18th century with the collapse of the Ottoman Empire the Albanian separatists appeared, which didn't achieve autonomy, financial–political independence until 1912).

To the conquered territories, mainly Macedonia, Serbia and Bosnia, Turkish people came in great number. The energy of the Turkish conquest broke in the 15-year war (1593–1606), then the downfall of the European power of Ottomans with Hungary and Croatia becoming free began during the 1683–1699 Austrian–Turkish war. Due to the successes the abuse of the Bosnian Catholics became more and more frequent, which caused that the remaining Catholic Croatians escaped to Slavonia, Baranya and Bácska up to the end of the 17th century.

With the withdrawing Turkish forces approx. 130000 Muslims escaped from Hungary to Bosnia, which meant that they became the majority of the population. (1710: 66%) Catholics escaped in great number to Dalmatia freed by Venice, where Bosnian Turks could only reach the Adriatic Sea through two tight corridors between the hostile republics of Venice and Dubrovnik after 1669/70.¹³

The allied forces under Habsburg control, after taking back Hungary except the Bánát (1688), invaded even Sarajevo and Skopje. After the defeat and withdrawal of the Austrian forces, the Serbians rebelling against the Turks and slaying the Islam population left Serbia in a mass (30.000 families), being afraid of the revenge of the Turks. Due to this escape, the Serbian population of South Serbia and Kosovo became very rare.

The bigger movement of Serbians occurred again during the later Austrian–Turkish wars (after 1718, 1739, 1791). Turks put Islam, mainly the Albanian population in an organized way to the strategically important Istanbul–Skopje–Pristina–Novi Pazar–Sarajevo highway region, mainly to replace Serbians escaping from Kosovo and the Sandjak to maintain the political stability of the region. With this they separated Serbians, Crnogorians and Macedonians ethnically, avoiding a possible anti-Turkish alliance.

After the stabilization of the Venetian–Turkish and the Austrian–Hungarian–Turkish border (1718, 1739) the colonization politics began on either side: the politically–militarily trustable border guard inhabitants' colonization on the newly organized border region.

The Turkish Empire put extraordinary emphasis on the border protection of the most important, the most Islamized province, Bosnia. This time was when the Bosnian Krajina, the most destroyed area during the war, was re-colonized by Serbian and Islam population. The most trusted Islam population was settled in the Bihácsi sandjak's cities, which was deep inside the area of Croatia.

On the other side of the border, the border region which had depopulated during the war was re-populated by escaped or lured Serbians under Venezian, Habsburg or the Croatian ban's control as a plan to get privileged border guards who would become the main supporters of their patrons, either against outer or inner enemies. Of course there were border regions, which were populated by Croatians mostly. The colonization of the border regions organized this time had a great influence on the ethnic structure of the common border region of the present Croatia and Bosnia, mainly on the present expansion of the Serbian ethnic area.

After the defeat of the Rákóczi Freedom War and the liberation of Bánát (1718) the Hungarian inhabitants of the Middle Ages' South Hungary could only be found in traces. The Bácska, Bánát, Szerémség, East Slavonia regions were inhabited almost

only by Serbian outcasts, next to whom the Austrian government put Catholic Germans from South Germany within the frames of their colonization plan.

The Germans who could be trusted in any way were mostly placed near the Danube, in the most fertile areas. Unlike the Northern regions, in Crna Gora, the land of “Black Mountains”, the orthodox and Serbian ethnic character of the people living in permanent tribal conflicts, separately from others, in the mountains, wasn't changed during the Turkish occupation. This was partly because of the titular Turkish control next to the Venezians' outpost in Kotos. In spite of that the tribes held together by the Orthodox Church acquired their first successes on the way to independence in the beginning of the 18th century. They gained internationally accepted independence in 1859.

This time Crna Gora was the only independent Slavic state of Europe besides Russia. The separation from Serbia and the Serbian ethnics for almost 500 years, the spatial isolation, the gaining of independence greatly increased the regional self-consciousness of the Serbian population living there, and it led to the birth of a brand new nation internationally accepted after WWII.

The 500-year dominance of the Venetian Republic in Istria and Dalmatia ended with the French conquest of Venice in 1797. From that moment the area with a Croatian majority and a strong Italian minority was under control of Austria until 1918 (except between 1809–1814 when it was under French occupation). From the two rebellions of the Serbians living in the Belgrade pasalik in 1830, the sultan acknowledged the autonomy of the principality owning a 100 km stretch of land. In this half-independent state was born the first national program of Serbians by I. Garasannin in 1844.

Its aim was the liberation of all Serbian-inhabited regions and their unification in one state. Vuk Karadzic, who said that all Southern Slavic were Serbians, only different in religion, provided the lingual ideology to this. Willing to create the Serbian national unity Serbia and Crna Gora (Montenegro) attacked the Turkish Empire separating the two states in 1876.

The Berlin congress in 1878 ending the war won with Russian help acknowledged the independence of Serbia and Montenegro. But their original aim to annex Bosnia–Herzegovina and the Novi Pazari sandjak wasn't allowed. The 55% of Serbians and 45% of their ethnic region was acquired by Serbia and Montenegro, mainly northwards from the Danube–Száva line and westwards to the Drina (South Hungary, Croatia, Slavonia, Bosnia–Herzegovina) where the Serbian state was never expanded before 1918.

After the invasion in 1878 the number of Catholic Croats and Germans moving in was increasing. This ethnic transformation process to the Islam's disadvantage went on until the end of WWI.

Jovan Cvijic geographer gave the geopolitical, ethnographical and geographical reasons for the great Serbian attempts. According to him Serbian have the strongest self-knowledge on the Balkan and only they can unite the Southern Slavic folks in a state. On this behalf he doubted the existence of the Macedonian nation, the Croatians were simply Catholic, the Muslims were Islamised Serbians to him. The great Serbian ethnic-geographic theory was followed by practical actions in 1912.

Serbia and Montenegro in alliance with Greece and Bulgaria attacked the remaining dominions of the Turkish Empire. During the first Balkan war (1912) they conquered: Kosovo, Macedonia, the sandjak of Novi Pazar and North Albania, because Serbia needed an exit to the Adriatic Sea independent from Montenegro. The occupation of North Albania was justified by the Serbian possession of the territory between 1170 and 1355 (the Serbs gave it back only under the pressure of the Great Powers).

Most of the medieval Serbian state became Muslim, Albanian populated by this time. On the central areas taken back (Kosovo, Sandjak), Serbia – referring to historical reasons – started the ethnic cleansing which is in process with higher or lower intensity. As a result of the Balkan wars a contiguous, ethnically Serbian state territory came into existence with the common Serbian–Montenegrin border between Adria and the Lower Danube, like in the 12–14th centuries. The Eastern question and Balkan crisis deepening from the 1870s making the areas inhabited by Albanians permanent battlegrounds. Kosovo became the centre of the battles which broke out here. To support the Russian liberation propaganda the leaders of the Northern Albanian territories held a meeting in Prizren in May 1878, and on 10 June 1878 they established the Albanian League. They vowed not to pay any more tax to the Turks, nor to give any more recruits to the army. They mobilized the men between 17–20 years of age.

In autumn the Southern regions also joined the League, whose aim was to gain autonomy, which wasn't given by the Porta. In 1881 the movement of the Albanians was drowned in blood. The Young Turkish Revolution in 1909 also didn't bring change for Albanians.

In 1909 the Porta had rejected the Alban cultural, economical and political demands made by the movement called "Unity and Progress", so another riot broke out in Kosovo in the spring of 1910. They collected their demands in the Red Book published in Podgorica (Montenegro) on 23. June 1911. In 1912 the leaders of the riot asked the great powers if they could maintain autonomy for them in the framework of Turkey.

In the Balkan war, which then broke out, the Albanian territories were occupied in weeks and the Albanian leaders declared the independence of Albania in Vlora on 28 November, 1912.

On 20 December 1912 in the conference held in London a decision was made to accept an autonomic Alban state under great powers' supervision inside Turkey. But they couldn't agree where the border should be. Austria–Hungary would give the overwhelming majority of the Alban-inhabited territories to Albania generously. The Balkan allies though could imagine a much smaller Albania. On 29 July 1913 they acknowledged Albania's independent of the Great Powers.

Its borders were to be “finalized” in the Florence Protocol on 17 December, 1913 but in fact it triggered a struggle for border revisions and the Alban territories which is still present.¹⁴ Serbia attained its expansion goal in the South in the two Balkan wars (1912 and 1913), so its attention was oriented towards the Northwest where Southern Slavic people lived. Then in WWI the Austrian–Hungarian–Bulgarian forces annexed the whole territory of Serbia and Montenegro in 1916. At the end of the war the French–Serbian forces took back Serbia on the 1 November, 1918 breaking the Saloniki frontline, and then they started to occupy Bosnia–Herzegovina and Southern Hungary. With the joining of the Croats and the Slovenians on 1 December, 1918 the Serbian–Croatian–Slovenian Kingdom was formed. With the Serbian–Croatian–Slovenian Kingdom made with the help of the Entente, Serbia could unite the 98,5% of Serbians in one state.

During the unification made in three phases the territory of the Serbian state increased from the ethnic core area of 63.000 square kilometers to 249.000 square kilometers. This had a great price, for the rate of Serbian increased from 4.5% to 62.2%. Serbia, for the sake of the unification of Serbians, took up the challenge of the conflicts caused by the annexation of new, ethnically and religiously variegated territories different in culture and history. The kingdom created was a centralized, militaristic great-Serbian state, which ignored other nations and put great emphasis on the conversion to Serbian values. For the loosening of foreign ethnic territories thousands of Serbian were given fields within the 40 km area of the new borders.

In this time were Serbians were moved in the greatest number to the areas considered politically the most dangerous, such as Kosovo, Macedonia, Baranya, Bácska and Bánát. These migrations couldn't transform the ethnic structure of the 18th century. In crucially important cities the forced immigration of Serbians went on intensively. In 1929 the kingdom already renamed Yugoslavia was divided into 9 bandons, but borders were redrawn to make Serbians as minority in only 3 of them.

During WWII, at the Vienna conference (20–22 April 1941) the territory of the conquered Yugoslavia was divided. Italy got Montenegro together with the Sandjak under its control, and attached the West Macedonian and Kosovo areas with Alban majority to the occupied Albania. Due to this takeover mostly between the two World

Wars, Serbians, who were displaced, escaped back to Serbia which was reduced to nearly 60000 square kilometers. But from the territories under Italian occupation thousands of Serbians were deported to Italy. On the territory of the Independent Croatian State the Croatian Ustasha took a bloody revenge on nearly two million Serbians for the oppression of Croats between the two World Wars. They reorganized the new state in an ethnically manipulative way – just like Serbians did between 1922 and 1931. They drew out the border of the counties in order to the Serbian-populated territories were mixed with Croatian- and Muslim- (considered to be Islamised Croats)-inhabited ones.

Due to this more than a half of the 6 million inhabitants of the Ustasha Croatian state were Roman Catholic, one third of them were orthodox, and more than 10% were Muslim. This means that the minorities (non-Croats) made up more than 50% of the population. At the start, partly due to their persecution, Serbians began to show military resistance and partisan fighting. The territories liberated in the anti-Fascist battles until 1943 were mostly the difficult to reach mountain areas inhabited mostly by Serbians.

This partisan war later expanded to Croatian regions of course, due to the joining of Croatian and Muslim masses who had lost their faith in the Ustasha. These fights ended in May 1945; they claimed more than 1 million lives, including connected bloody ethnical reckonings.¹⁵

Summary

Over the last ten years we could keep our eyes on the endeavour on the part of several European nations to redraw their borders and redefine themselves on ethnic–linguistic–cultural grounds. So we can conclude that in our days the ethnic, linguistic, cultural, religious identity has an ever-growing importance in politics. The different European states assign an increasingly great importance to the identity. If we talk about identity in most cases we refer it to four fields: language, nation, culture, and religion. We can see the same thing in Kosovo. It is no accident that the exposition of the diverse historical–cultural backgrounds and the religious affiliation has an overriding role here; thus we may realize why the tension resulting from dissimilar traditions and habits could breed ethnic conflicts.

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10. P. KAPRONCZAY: *Op. Cit.*, p. 25.
11. The patarens and bogumil heretics (the movement of the pataria was at the beginning a society movement for the cleansing of the church, against simonia, etc.); bogumils' movement expanded from Little Asia to Bulgaria then the Northern regions of the Balkan peninsula in the 10–12th centuries, later in France, Germany, Italy and the German–Roman Empire as well. According to their dogmas the phenomena are a result of the battle between the two sons of God, good and evil. They thought the social order and institutions of the time are the products of the evil God, Satan. Bosnia was the centre of their teachings in the 13th century.
12. K. KOCSIS: *Op. Cit.*, p. 7.
13. K. KOCSIS: *Op. Cit.*, pp. 7–8.
14. P. KAPRONCZAY: *Op. Cit.*, p. 31.
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