

# The Relations between Macedonia and Kosovo

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## Abstract

One can hardly even talk about relations between Kosovo and Macedonia as relations between two independent states, because Kosovo is the youngest country in Europe that has been existing for only six years. But, although before Kosovo independence there were no direct relations and mutual foreign policy as between two independent states, the situation in Kosovo had influenced and preoccupied part of the Macedonian foreign policy in recent years. This should not be surprising because the issue of Kosovo was part of the agendas of the USA, EU, Russia, United Nations and so on.

*Key words:* Macedonia; Kosovo; International community; UN.

## 1. Introduction

In a short historical overview it can be found out that both Macedonia and Kosovo were part (although with different status) of the common federal Yugoslav state and that nearly half a century. With the breakup of Yugoslavia, Macedonia becomes independent republic, and not only does Kosovo remain in Yugoslavia but it loses its autonomous status in 1989. But as known, in Kosovo there were conflicts and after their ending, Kosovo became a UN protectorate. Later in 2008 it declared independence from Serbia. Between 1989 and 2008 numerous events occurred in Kosovo [1]. After this moment of declaration of independence, another period starts in 2008 and lasts until today, comes. The actual Macedonian - Kosovo relations have existed for only couple of years, because earlier Kosovo did not have status of an independent state. But the events in Kosovo were very important for Macedonia and the Macedonian foreign policy which had to deal with Kosovo. In fact, Kosovo was center of attention of many international actors, and Macedonia as its neighbor must not ignore the possible future scenarios and development of the events with the Kosovo crisis and the possible implications.

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The situation was being additionally complicated with the fact that there is a large Albanian minority in Macedonia, which closely followed the developments in Kosovo. What will be the future trajectory of relations between Kosovo and Macedonia depends on several factors that are treated in this paper.

## **2. Historical background**

In a short historical overview it can be found out that both Macedonia and Kosovo were part of the common federal Yugoslav state and that nearly half a century. Unlike Macedonia, which had status of Republic, Kosovo enjoyed an autonomous status within Serbia. With the Constitution of 1974 the province of Kosovo gains more autonomy and almost equates with the status of the other republics, but definitive status of republic within Yugoslavia gets never. Characteristic for both RM and Kosovo was that there were benefiteres of the federal funds for less developed parts of Yugoslavia. However, the most of the funds went to Kosovo because it was one of the less developed parts of Yugoslavia.

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Between 1989 and 2008 numerous events occurred in Kosovo. According to Trix [2] these events occurred in two major periods. We accept this division but we must also add one other - third period, namely the period after 2008, i.e. after the proclamation of the independence of Kosovo. According Trix [2] the first period includes the years between 1989 and 1999. This is the period after abolishing the Kosovo's autonomy and then the major clashes between the paramilitaries KLA (Kosovo Liberation Army) and Serb government troops, the NATO bombing, the refugee crisis and finally the signing of the Kumanovo agreement and the Resolution of the Security Council about Kosovo occurred. During the entire period, the overall power in Kosovo has Serbia or Milosevic who sets his own leading people in each institution in Kosovo. In response to the Serb "governing" in Kosovo, Albanians created their own parallel institutions. The second period is the period from 1998 till 2008, which has one key difference with the previous period. "The Serbian government" in Kosovo is definitely replaced and Kosovo becomes a kind of protectorate of the United Nations and is managed by UNMIK. It is a period in which the status of Kosovo is not clearly specified. In one hand, the Serbs had the resolution 1244 of the UN according to which Kosovo is part of Serbia, and the other hand, de facto, Kosovo was no longer part of Serbia. To calm the passions, the international community came up with the slogan "standards before status" that was supposed to imply concentration of Kosovars in creation of standards, i.e. building institutions and making reforms rather than focusing on the final status of Kosovo. However, such slogans did not be applied much in practice, but the talks about the status of Kosovo with Serbia were unsuccessful, because Serbia did not want to give up the territory which belonged to Serbia according the resolution of the UN, and the Kosovars did not want to give up the independence that they had de facto. In such situation, Martti Ahtisaari- UN Special Envoy formulated his plan for Kosovo. On 17 February Kosovo declares independence. After this moment of declaration of independence, a third period that starts in 2008 and lasts until today, comes.

The logical question here is why this periodization and these events around Kosovo are important for the Macedonian - Kosovo relations. The answer can be found in the fact that actual Macedonian - Kosovo relations have existed for only couple of years, because earlier Kosovo did not have status of an independent state. But the events in Kosovo were very important for Macedonia and the Macedonian foreign policy which had to deal with Kosovo. In fact, Kosovo was center of attention of many international actors, and Macedonia as its neighbor must not ignore the possible future scenarios and development of the events with the Kosovo crisis and the possible implications. The situation was being additionally complicated with the fact that there is a large Albanian minority in Macedonia, which closely followed the developments in Kosovo. Namely, since the proclamation of independent Macedonia, the situation in Kosovo must be taken into consideration, which could quite inevitably lead to military conflicts or unrests. At the same time, Kosovo was considered the "cradle" for Serbs and Albanians. Namely, Kosovo was place where the Serbs had the cult Kosovo battle against the Ottomans in 1389 and numerous Orthodox monasteries. That is why Kosovo in the consciousness of Serbs represents the cradle and the soul of Serbia. On the other hand, Kosovo Albanians founded their League of Prizren in 1878. So except that they had the overwhelming majority in Kosovo, Kosovo was for them Albanian cradle also. The situation was additionally complicated by the religious element. Namely, unlike Kosovo Albanians who are Muslims, Serbs are Orthodox.

### **3. Macedonian recognition to Kosovo**

The situation in Kosovo resembles the situation which describes Huntington [3] in its "Clash of Civilizations" about existence of cultures and conflicts between civilizations that can be most dangerous if they are according to the fault lines. Unfortunately, Kosovo was very close to country on the fault lines. All these factors combined with certain winds that blew from Kosovo, Albania and inside in Macedonia, and conspiring "completely" solving of the "Albanian question", in the entire Balkans, suggested that Macedonia as a country must not ignore this situation. This is why the Government had to build adequate attitudes and a kind of relationship towards Kosovo that was not state officially. Though, Macedonia's foreign policy, but also the Macedonian state did not prove to be very successful in managing the possible implications of the Kosovo situation against Macedonia. Objectively speaking, Macedonia was not a factor that could decide anything or to "smash" the Serbian - Albanian conflicts for which the USA, Albania, EU, NATO, Russia and even Turkey were interested also. Yet what Macedonia could and ought to do was to build adequate strategy in various scenarios in Kosovo as well as appropriate position that would be constant in relation to Kosovo. It seems that generally Macedonia was unsuccessful on this plan. Attitudes regarding the "Kosovo" question by various Macedonian official representatives were different across the time and there was no constant attitude. So through the Press could be witnessed that as the Macedonian official position changed from something like "Macedonia will accept any solution between Serbia and Kosovo" through "Macedonia will accept any solution of the international community and what will be agreed in the UN" [6] and "Macedonia will follow the positions of NATO and EU about Kosovo" to finally recognize the declaration of independence of Kosovo without agreement by Serbia, UN and some member states of EU and NATO. Another noticeable thing is that the views of certain politicians inside Macedonia varied depending on their ethnic origin. Thus, political representatives of Albanians in Macedonia had no doubt; Macedonia was clearly to stand behind Kosovo, which was directly opposite position from the position of the political representatives of Serbs in Macedonia, who thought that the Government

should stand behind Belgrade. There was a division over Kosovo also in the conditionally so-called "Macedonian" political block. While, for example, the former President Kiro Gligorov thought that the best for Macedonia would be if Kosovo remains within Serbia. *"In my opinion, for Macedonia would be best to have only four neighbors - Bulgaria Greece, Albania and SR Yugoslavia."* [4] (Translation by D.M.). He opposed the actions of the then Prime Minister Ljupco Georgievski, such as the receipt of Hashim Thaci, his visit to Pristina and his intentions for opening offices of the Macedonian mission in Kosovo. However, these views in the "Macedonian political block" were not constant and were not divided along purely party lines. So, the government led by Prime Minister Buckovski announced a proactive policy of Macedonia to Kosovo. This proactive policy of Macedonia was supposed to bring internal stability, as well as economic interest of Macedonia in Kosovo.

However, Macedonia dealt relatively successfully with the refugee crisis as co-product of the Kosovo crisis that resulted in over 350,000 Kosovo refugees in Macedonia [4, 5]. Just for illustration, we would note that according to estimates from the Macedonian authorities, Macedonia was ready to accept about 20,000 refugees and to provide appropriate conditions for them. But, the real figure of 350,000 was far above and directly disrupted the demographic structure in Macedonia. Again there were different views about the choice of dealing with the crisis, where Macedonia was virtually collateral damage. Thus, the idea of President Gligorov about a corridor through Macedonian territory was not accepted by the Macedonian government. But, although the Macedonian border was briefly closing on several occasions, Macedonia received the refugees and managed it successfully to prevent some adverse consequences [6]. Great role had the existence of good relations within the coalition government, in which the strongest Albanian party then - the DPA was involved. However, this was not enough to prevent spillover of the Kosovo crisis in Macedonia in 2001. Although one might deny that the crisis in 2001 was an internal crisis, it is indisputable that most of the conflict zones were near the Kosovo - Macedonian border.

However, Kosovo decided on a unilateral declaration of independence. Macedonia was faced with a situation where it will decide to recognize independent Kosovo and it would probably disrupt the relations with Serbia, or will not recognize Kosovo and it would inflame the anger of Macedonian Albanians towards the Macedonians [7]. The dilemma was not dilemma, indeed. As always, and then in the Macedonian government was an Albanian party that practically was a major lobbyist for recognition of independent of Kosovo. After the recognition of Kosovo by the United States, it was expected that Macedonia would simply follow the United States. The only thing Macedonia "demanded" was guaranteeing of the final demarcation of the 158km<sup>2</sup> borders with Kosovo, according to the Ahtisaari plan. Macedonia recognized Kosovo on 9 October 2008 together with Montenegro.

The move was expected because Macedonia did not have a choice, but we believe that the date on which the recognition of Kosovo occurred was wrongly chosen. Actually Macedonia recognized Kosovo's independence a day after Serbia had launched procedure in the UN General Assembly and asked the International Court of Justice to give its opinion regarding the legality of Kosovo's independence. Recognition of Kosovo just a day earlier would have been quite more normal and rational, because it turned out that the Republic of Macedonia

makes its decisions without taking into consideration the opinion of the Tribunal before which itself has launched disputes.

Nevertheless, since recognition of Kosovo, the Republic of Macedonia opened its embassy in Pristina in 2009 and Kosovo announced opening of its embassy in Skopje. According to the speculations that appeared in the media, Kosovo would address Macedonia as FYROM, but they appeared to be wrong and they probably aimed a kind of flattery of Kosovo towards Greece in the process of international recognition. However, the recognition of Kosovo by Greece is unlikely due to the good Serbian - Greek relations.

#### **4. Discussion**

What will be the future trajectory of relations between Kosovo and Macedonia depends on several factors. There are no open issues after closing the border issue between the two neighbors. However, Kosovo like it is now, internationally partly recognized, without membership in the UN, with constant tensions on its north inhabited by Serbs, poorly economic developed and with huge unemployment is a potential source of instability in the whole region, including Macedonia as its neighbor. In long turns, remaining of Serbia (because of possible non-existence of willingness to join it) and Macedonia (because of possible permanent blocking by Greece) to be out of NATO and perhaps out of the EU, with Kosovo between them, which is neither a UN member, can mean opening the possibility of future instability in this part of the Balkans as well as opportunity for creation of a gray zone in the Balkans. At the same time the opposite is true. If all of these neighbors are Euro-Atlantic integrated and Kosovo becomes member primarily of the UN and if the relations between Serbia and Kosovo become normalized, the future of Kosovo-Macedonian relations and in the wider region will be very favorable. In the meantime a one not really used opportunity by Macedonia for harder penetration in the Kosovo market remains in the air. Whatever the future development of the events over Kosovo, the Republic of Macedonia has nothing else to do but to develop its relations with Kosovo as the most reliable way for a peaceful and prosperous coexistence.

#### **5. Conclusion**

This paper is making an attempt to present the relations between Republic of Macedonia and Kosovo. We can conclude that Kosovo was in the center of the interests of many international actors. This situation influenced Macedonian- Kosovo relations. The future trajectory of the relations between two countries will depend from Euro-Atlantic integration of the region. If all of Kosovo neighbors are Euro-Atlantic integrated and Kosovo becomes member primarily of the UN and if the relations between Serbia and Kosovo become normalized, the future of Kosovo-Macedonian relations and in the wider region will be very favorable. How will the relations develop in the contrary situation it is still an issue that needs more research.

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