

IT ALL STARTED IN 1989: BREAK-UP OF YUGOSLAVIA AND KOSOVO'S STRUGGLE FOR NATIONHOOD

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Abstract: *The fall of the Berlin Wall, three decades ago, set in motion democratic changes and the fall of Communism from the Baltic Sea to the Adriatic Sea. While some countries affected by this wave of change went through transition to democracy and respect for human rights without violence, Yugoslavia was embroiled in internal military conflict fueled by conflicting aims of political elites of the time, aided by international political, diplomatic, and military support. The breakup of Yugoslavia started and finally ended in Kosovo (1989–1999), beginning with the suspension of Kosovo's political autonomy within Yugoslavia, followed by wars in Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, ending the decade of violence with NATO's military air campaign against military targets in Yugoslavia. Compared to the disintegration of the federalism of Czechoslovakia and the USSR, the disintegration of Yugoslavia happened along ethnonational lines because the one-party system in Yugoslavia allowed the political-administrative boundaries of the republics and provinces in the federal country to operate along ethnic national lines, making divisions and clashes inevitable. This paper aims to explain how a movement for human rights, equality, and democracy in Kosovo evolved into a movement for independence. It also aims to explain that the foundations for the idea of a free, independent, and sovereign state of Kosovo were set by events and processes in 1989–1991.*

Key words: *Yugoslavia, Kosovo, democracy, human rights, national mobilizations, US diplomacy*

Introduction

As the Berlin Wall fell, new walls were being erected in part of the Balkans. When Europe's differences were being overcome, the governing systems evolving from socialism or communism to democracy and liberal-capitalism, Yugoslavia's existing differences within one system, of a more liberal socialism, were swiftly brought to prominence. This led to the change of not only the governing system but indeed to the country being torn to pieces; new nations and new states emerged. At the end of 1980's a CIA assessment (NIE 1990: 15–90) report had correctly foreseen the dissolution of Yugoslavia and a civil war.

The reasons for such developments were said to be of various natures; political, economic, security system, national aspirations, historical, ethnic and religious differences. But, then, as well as in various future analyses, one main argument or reason was never highlighted as the driving force for Yugoslavia's swift collapse and dissolution immediately following the fall of communism and socialism in Eastern Europe.

In fact, the most effective way of tackling the developments that started in 1989–1991 in Yugoslavia is to examine various elements that contributed to the deterioration of the situation in Yugoslavia to such a condition where the outcome could not be a change of the internal governing system (Confederate States of Yugoslavia) or normal non-violent transformation (creation of national independent states). All those elements—domestic, cultural, economic, military, international—contributed equally. At the end of World War II communists of all nations that constituted Yugoslavia created this country but always failed to create and preserve the Yugoslav identity among all of the people of the country.

In the beginning of 1990s communists, political elites, in Yugoslavia failed to respond to internal crises. In search of self-preservation, political elites, aided by the top leadership of Yugoslav National Army, especially following the failed coup d'état in Soviet Union in August 1991, resorted to nationalism as the desire grew for more power and more decentralized governance in the Republics and Autonomous Provinces, that constituted Yugoslavia.

Political elites chose nationalism because the ideology of collective identity of socialism finds place in a similar ideology, nationalism. The emerging crisis was a crisis of legitimacy of a country that in essence was trying to find a new identity, beyond communism. Yugoslavia was a state in constant pursuit for its identity, and the fall of communism was the moment of truth for this project.

Just as political elites eagerly tried to find a legal basis for strengthening republic polycentric etatism in nationalism and hegemony, as was the case with Serbia, the Kosovo Albanians opted for mobilization to exercise their right to decide on their future in post-communist Yugoslavia.

Yugoslavia imposed the state of emergency in Kosovo twice in a space of 9 years (in 1981 and 1989), imposing de facto occupation by Yugoslav People's Army, Federal Police, Serbian State Police, and with brutal suppression, costing many lives, denying civil and political rights to Kosovo Albanians creating bitterness, frustration, and a desire for action. The idea for an independent Kosovo was forged as a reaction to lack of response from Belgrade to Kosovo's continuous pleas for more rights and freedoms that culminated with the fall of communism and crisis of Federal Yugoslavia's structures.

The role of the international community, the United States and European Union in the first place, in influencing changes in Yugoslavia was defining, although at the time both the US and the EU did not openly support the dissolution of Yugoslavia while openly supporting the aspirations of Slovenia and Croatia, as well as Kosovo Albanians, for more self-determination less control from Belgrade.

1. Reasons of the Collapse

1.1. Economic

The economic argument that is often cited as one of the main reasons for the break-up of Yugoslavia can be explained in two aspects: first, it is a matter of development, and second, it is a result of socio-economic inequality. The first aspect explains the dissolution of Yugoslavia ultimately as a result of a major economic crises that gripped the society there starting from late 1970's and culminated in late 1980's when Yugoslavia became one of the most indebted countries in Europe (Kosoric 1988). The second aspect acknowledges the importance of economy, or lack of economic development, but emphasizes more the socio-economic inequalities between the constitutive members of the Yugoslav Federation, most strikingly between Slovenia and Kosovo (Jovic 2001).

The model of socialist self-governance in 1960s and 1970s was popular because of its semi-liberal and seemingly economically successful model of socialism, a more open and capable model in seeking markets and adopting itself to market economy than any other form of socialism (Horvat 1983). However, the crises that followed put Yugoslavia in a position of debt, therefore rocking the internal stability and the country's independence in terms of international relations. Most prominent among foreign actors was the International Monetary Fund, the symbol of Western ideology and the driving force behind the potential expansion of liberal-democratic ideas in non-capitalist environments of the time. Some scholars believe that the IMF pressured the already unstable situation in the country following the death of Yugoslav leader Josip Broz Tito in 1981 (Woodward 1995) unintentionally, or simply not taking into account the complexity of the internal situation. Neo-Marxist scholars, some with strong beliefs (Chossudovski 1999), explain the role of the IMF as the main instrument of Western liberal institutions in breaking up Yugoslavia. In truth, the economic argument alone cannot explain the internal crises that had been going on for at least two decades. The years between 1975, following constitutional changes of 1974, up until late 1980's were a period of great stability but growing inequality among who actually benefits from the economy and who actually owns the means of production and market placement among the republics and provinces of Yugoslavia. Serbia was in constant rivalry with Slovenia and Croatia over budget allocations and expenditures. The weakest link in Yugoslav socialism, perhaps in all spheres, as well as in terms of economy and well-being, was Kosovo. In fact, the ratio between the most developed Slovenia and least developed Kosovo was 8:1 in 1989.

The economy cannot be seen as the defining factor for the dissolution also because of the reasons that, for instance, Slovenia and Kosovo chose to obtain for life after Yugoslavia or in a different Yugoslavia. Normally, a country that stands best within the Federation, like Slovenia did at the time, logically should try to keep the Federation and should not side with Kosovo Albanians, who stood worse and wanted change of Kosovo's status within the Federation in popular demonstrations in 1981, although they were inspired by leftist and Marxist ideologies (Maliqi 1998). Yet at the end of 1980's leaders of Slovenia and Kosovo had almost the same political discourse over the future

of Yugoslavia which could be summed up as—either the Federation changes and we have our place and equal share or we will seek a life outside of the Federation. Economy in Yugoslavia, or better the downfall at the end of 1980s, was not dealt with perhaps by introducing privatization of some parts of the industry or services, as was the case in Great Britain for instance. The state continued to drown in debt and the socialist economy—which was supposed to bring equality and justice—brought the opposite to the citizens: inequality and injustice. As the alternative solution to socialism could not be found, the idea of an egalitarian and just society was replaced with ideas of nationalism and separatism.

1.2. Institutional

The main idea behind the institutional argument for the collapse of Yugoslavia is the notion of a set of institutional arrangements in the country that prevented the functioning of a unified state. Two most often cited factors in support of this argument are, firstly, that the Constitution adopted in 1974 with its complicated and—from the standpoint of liberal-democratic analyses—completely irrational norms, was directly responsible for the break-up of Yugoslavia (Dimitrijevic 1996: 447–71). The new Constitution enabled the creation of “institutional vessels” (Bzezinski 1990) that were institutional bases for the creation of more autonomous territories, later to become new national states. The second key institutional factor were elections held in 1990. These elections are considered to be one of the main reasons for the break-up of Yugoslavia: the decision to hold elections in the republics that constituted the Federation while leaving federal ones for later or not to be held at all (Linz & Stephen 1996). Critics of the 1974 Constitution and the elections agenda, though, do not take into account that both political decisions, to create a more decentralized Constitution and allow multi-party elections, were decisions not made in conjunction with each other but those taken after compromises reached at the time of decisions.

The Constitution was the result of a compromise Tito and regional elites had made to various elements, while the decision to hold the elections was another compromise reached again by regional elites, without the supreme leader. The Communist League in the 1970s had become a decentralized confederation of the organizations of the republics and autonomous provinces (Remet 1992). Addressing reasons for the disintegration of Yugoslavia, some scholars believe they happened along ethnic national lines because the one-party system in Yugoslavia allowed the federal structure, the republics and provinces with their respective political-administrative boundaries, to operate along ethnic national lines, in the socialist context, thus creating proto-nations and proto-states making divisions and clashes possible and acceptable (Bruncce 1997: 354). When it was understood that one of the most important issues in Yugoslavia was the issue of the relations between nations in the country the whole concept of federalism was subdued to the concept of resolving national issues, hence the main elements of political and administrative arrangements lost their importance: the leading role of the Communist League of Yugoslavia, and the culture of tolerance between different nations as the legacy of the Second World War.

The break-up of Yugoslavia cannot be understood without comprehending the role and the significance of Yugoslav People's Army which was always dominated by Serbs. Communist regimes, of course, have always relied on the army as a pillar of power. The Communist Party's vanguard role in these societies, founded on the concept of democratic centralism and political control, imparts a special character to civilian-military relations. As in the case of the Soviet armed forces, the Yugoslav military was essentially an army of the party, not an army of the people (Biserko 2012:127–128). Vast amounts of the national budget were spent on the Army. By 1990, Yugoslavia earmarked 4.6 percent of its national income (2.5 bln USD) for the Army, which was the fourth largest force in Europe (Biserko 2012).

The Army was the safeguard of the Federation, but only in the late 1970s did the Army take upon itself to take action without political directives. In 1978, the Yugoslav Presidency adopted the "Special War against Yugoslavia" policy, which defined the tasks of social self-protection as a prerogative of the Territorial Defense Forces. In fact, the "Special War" was a war that the Counterintelligence Service (the Army's Intelligence wing) waged against domestic "enemies" (ethnic Albanian and Croat "nationalists," Slovene "dissidents," and so forth). It was an instrument through which the Army broadened the scope of its spying to include state and party officials in the "suspect" republics and provinces.

Although Socialism was collapsing in the USSR and Eastern Europe, prominent Army leaders openly accused those who participated in debates on the transformation of Yugoslavia, especially after the first multiparty elections in 1990, of being the "same forces that once brought about the collapse of Yugoslavia". The Army believed that communism was much stronger in Yugoslavia and that it would remain the norm regardless of the changes in Eastern Europe. A secret document from the Political Directorate of the Defense Ministry that was leaked to the media in March 1991 through Croatian and Slovenian officials stated that the process of disintegration in the USSR had slowed down and that the Soviet authorities had begun to act rationally by trying to preserve the federal state and institutions; decisive measures had been taken to halt separatist tendencies in some parts of the country; and even the Soviet Army had been engaged. Socialism had not been finished off. Nor had Yugoslavia been brought to its knees (Biserko 2012).

It is instructive to compare the attitudes within the Soviet and the Yugoslav armies around this time. Both armies believed firmly in preserving socialism and adamantly opposed the depoliticization of armed forces. Both were the most reactionary forces in the society and the biggest obstacles to the emergence of a multiparty democracy and a free market economy. Yet Mikhail Gorbachev and, later, Boris Yeltsin managed to control the Soviet/Russian army despite its conservatism and resistance to change. This was partly due to a pro-reform faction in the Army that helped Gorbachev dismantle the Soviet Union. In addition, the West played an important role (financially and logistically) in depoliticizing the Russian military, thus helping the military to play a constructive role in the political development of the country. The Yugoslav Army, though, decided to side with Milosevic under the auspices of the idea that they are fighting to preserve

Yugoslavia, but essentially they were striving to preserve their status in new conditions in disintegrated Yugoslavia.

1.3. Nationalism

Nationalism as a concept and doctrine in conjunction with statehood is known as prior to statehood or prior to party politics. To create or preserve a “national state” sense, or a feeling of belonging to nation, or state among individuals is necessary. Lately, terms “nationalism”, “ethnonationalism”, “religious nationalism” (Connor 1994) are used to highlight different nationalisms. Some scholars see nationalism in Western Europe as more political, while the one in Eastern and Central Europe is more of a cultural origin (Kohn 1994).

What is the difference between nationalism and ethnonationalism? It lies in the relations that an individual has with the “state” and the “nation”. Nationalism aims to restrict the powers of the state and ensure individual rights, freedom and autonomy, while ethnonationalism puts forth the nation before the individual and before the state itself.

Both nationalism and ethnonationalism were present in Yugoslavia. Nationalism was strong and state sponsored as communists were forging the idea “Yugoslav identity” by bringing together different ethnicities and different cultural backgrounds of its citizens. At the same time ethnonationalism was strong among Serbs, Croats, and Albanians that were the three largest ethnic groups in Yugoslavia that shared different distinguishing religious beliefs—Eastern Orthodox, Catholic, and Muslim. Therefore, nationalism in Yugoslavia had two features: one of togetherness and one of separatism. The first insisted in strengthening the “Yugoslav nation”, while the latter insisted on creating national states along national identities (Moore 1998).

The history of Yugoslavia is the history of conflict between these two nationalisms that eventually broke down the country (Wachtel 1998). Yugoslavia’s socialism was opposed to both types of nationalism as its goal was equality above all since it was based on communist ideology. Nationalism itself did not break down Yugoslavia but came as an acceptable alternative when the fall of socialism occurred, and the country was in a deep economic crisis.

However, different nations had different ideas at the time about their nationalism and national states: nationalist Serbs desired a Yugoslavia with Serbian domination, nationalist Croats wanted an independent Croatia, while nationalist Albanians did not want to be part of Yugoslavia but they had no clear option at the time (1989–1991) on whether to seek a country of their own or join Albania while breaking up Macedonia as well. The leaders of these nations were not nationalists at all in their beginnings: Slobodan Milosevic (Serb) was a communist bureaucrat, Franjo Tudjman (Croat) was a Yugoslav Army General, Ibrahim Rugova was nominally a member of the communist party, but not an active one; he was primarily a writer and literary scholar. What happened was the replacement of the idea of an overall “state of togetherness”, the ethics of “brotherhood and unity” being replaced by nationalist self-preservation ideas to which all three leaders adopted their policies.

The difference with the countries of Eastern and Central Europe and USSR is that they were to some extent “occupied” by Russian ideology. In seeking to be released from socialism these countries were looking to get away from Moscow. That is why the motives of Lech Valensa and Vaclav Havel were much different from the motives of the leaders of nations in Yugoslavia. Nations of Yugoslavia had no “enemy” from outside, so their nationalists needed something else as an alternative to preserving existing Yugoslavia, which clearly they did not want. So Zagreb (the Croats), Ljubjana (the Slovenes), and Prishtina (the Albanians) blamed Belgrade in order to forge a movement to break up or leave Yugoslavia. And Belgrade (the Serbs) decided that it is in their interest to preserve as much of Yugoslavia as they could (Jovic 2001). As Yugoslav socialism vanished, so did the idea of preservation of a Yugoslav nation and country, giving a chance to nationalism.

1.4. International factors

Many scholars share the view that Yugoslavia was created in 1918 and restored in 1945 with the aid of international factors and at least one global power. Yugoslavia had a foreign policy based on “non-alliance”, which meant being not aligned to NATO or Warsaw Pact, while it was believed that the West and the Soviet bloc were in agreement to allow this position for as long as the Cold War was going. By the end of Cold War Yugoslavia lost its importance (Zimmerman, 1996). It was then asserted by the US Foreign Policy decision makers that Yugoslavia and the Balkans would remain in the domain of interests for the US but also that Yugoslavia no longer possessed the geopolitical balancing role between NATO and the Warsaw Pact while choosing to “support the unity of the country, territorial integrity as well as advancing democracy within Yugoslavia”. For some, marginalizing Yugoslavia and its problems by the West was a gross miscalculation (Woodward 1995) and that Yugoslavia was, in some form, a victim of the fall of the Berlin Wall and the wave of non-violent changes of 1989–1991 in Eastern Europe and the USSR. The West believed that there was no need to support Yugoslavia during transition to democracy with tangible economic aid and that statements of support were sufficient (Woodward 1995: 22).

Although the international factor always had an important role in the politics in Yugoslavia it was far from the decisive factor in the break-up of Yugoslavia. Democratic changes in Eastern Europe and the USSR were not seen as a threat to Yugoslavia but rather more a proof that Yugoslavia was right when it decided to introduce a more liberal socialism and human rights even in the 1970s. Although all documents remain classified, it is safe to say that neither the West, nor the East wanted to see the break-up of Yugoslavia because no one in the region would benefit from a destabilized region (Tomlison 2001). Yugoslavia’s real enemies were not outside, but inside, within the borders, and that, finally, Yugoslavia and its idea as a state and a nation, was defeated within and not from outside (Perovic 1993).

2. It began in Kosovo

2.1. It was Milosevic all along

While the issue of what the main factors of the break-up of Yugoslavia were could be summed by stating that the break-up was a process rather than a one-off act or decision, the issue when the real break-up started has been an issue of debate for a long time. Some scholars believe that the timeline should start with the multiparty elections held in the republics of Yugoslav federation in 1990, others consider that first armed incidents in spring of 1991 mark the official beginning of the end of Yugoslavia. Almost all agree on the importance of one event, marking of the 600th anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo Polje in Kosovo (the Ottoman Army defeated the Serbian-led Balkan Christian coalition in 1389), the rally of half a million of Serb nationalists near Prishtina and the speech of Slobodan Milosevic, the Serbian leader, in which he underlined that the Serbs would do whatever it took (not excluding an armed struggle) to protect themselves and Yugoslavia (in their view Serbia). While all other national matters were somehow settled and perhaps mended in post-World War II Yugoslavia, the Kosovo Albanian issue was never really settled because the province of Kosovo was considered to be historical and cultural part of one side (the Serbs) while being populated for centuries by the majority of another side (the Albanians). In March of 1989 Serbia reduced the autonomous status that Kosovo province had under the Constitution of Yugoslavia making it an integral part of Serbia. Kosovo Albanians rejected this decision, revolted, organized themselves politically and militarily and ten years later Serbia was defeated by NATO military action following Kosovo crisis, ending Belgrade's rule over Kosovo. One man, communist leader Slobodan Milosevic, used the internal crises of Yugoslavia at the end of 1980s and the issue of Serbs in Yugoslavia, in particular in Kosovo, Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, to propel himself to the position of political leader of Serbia and protector of Serbs in Yugoslavia.

The Serbs liked Yugoslavia and regarded any attempt to refashion Yugoslavia as the loss of their state. (Biserko 2012). In June 1985, the Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences established a Committee to Prepare a Memorandum on Social Issues. Although the official version of the Memorandum was never released, a draft version appeared in the daily Belgrade newspaper "Večernje novosti", causing an immediate public uproar. In Serbia, the Memorandum divided the political leadership; in all the other republics, the Memorandum was considered an articulation of the Serbian nationalist program. Ivan Stambolić, the Serbian prime minister, commented that the Memorandum "is the juncture of our definite parting of the ways in Serbia and a prelude to a political showdown" (Stambolic 2002). The Memorandum consisted of two parts: "The Crisis of the Yugoslav Economy and Society" and "The Position of Serbia and the Serb People." The part of the Memorandum dealing with the position of Serbia and the Serbian people alleged that, in addition to the general problems common to all, the Serbs faced three additional ones: "the economic backwardness of Serbia, the unresolved legal status (of Serbia) vis-a-vis Yugoslavia and the provinces, and the genocide in Kosovo." It further claimed that Serbia was in an inferior position with regard to Croatia and Slovenia, because Serbia had subordinated its desires to Croatian and Slovene interests. The Memorandum stated that

the Serbian population in Kosovo was the “victim of physical, political, legal, and cultural genocide” and that the Serb in Croatia were “exposed to assimilation.”

Milosevic himself was a communist and Titoist, who came to power with the idea of invigorating Yugoslavia. He lauded “democratic Socialism as a rich and democratic society”, and strengthened his standing with the dogmatist circles in the party by accusing the reformers of “washing their hands of Socialism.” His advice to them was to “get out of the League of Communists and its forums” (Milosevic 1989). After his first visit to Kosovo in 1987 Milosevic stated that “appealing to Serbs of Kosovo for patience is hypocritical and that the state has an obligation to protect the integrity of its citizens” (Milosevic 1989: 154–56).

The Eighth Session of the Serbian Central Committee in September 1987 marked a turning point in efforts to resolve the Yugoslav crisis and brought about a rift within Serbia’s political establishment. Milosevic, supported by the Army, calling for greater centralization and especially for non-compromise with the Albanians in Kosovo, won the vote of the Central Committee of the Communist League of Serbia. Milosevic based his policy on populism and his personality. Serb nationalists and conservative elements within the Yugoslav Army found a common ground in reshaping Yugoslavia by strengthening the position of the Serbs in the country while the enemies were common Kosovo Albanian nationalists and Croatian and Slovenian secessionists.

This final stage of Yugoslavia’s disintegration had two phases: in the first, Milosevic used various forms of political violence, and in the second, he switched over to armed violence.

Political violence was first employed in October 1988, when Milosevic toppled the Vojvodina leadership in the bid to unite Serbia under the slogan “one people, one state, one court of law.” Montenegro was politically decapitated in January 1989 after the fall of the republic’s leadership. Under the pretext of a “replenishment of cadres,” Milosevic’s cronies were installed in federal posts, giving Serbia a controlling majority in the federal leadership. A wave of demonstrations against the sacking of Azem Vllasi and the installation of a pro-Serbian cadre, Rahman Morina, at the helm of the local Communist party organization swept across Kosovo. In 1988–89, Albanians working at the Trepca mine in Kosovo were summarily expelled from their jobs. They responded with protest marches and hunger strikes, to which the Serbian government in turn responded by arresting and imprisoning many of the protesting workers.

The Federal Assembly held an emergency session in which Yugoslav President Lazar Mojsov disclosed an “irredentist” “headquarters document” on creating a Kosovo Republic (reportedly a copy of Tanjug news agency’s internal service bulletin distributed to federal agencies and found in a Prishtina street; that document has never been seen by anyone) (Biserko 2012; Politika 1989). The Federal Assembly gave the federal leadership the green light to impose a state of emergency in Kosovo. In March 1989, amendments to the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia depriving the provinces of their right to veto the revision of the republic’s constitution were promulgated in Belgrade.

The decision provoked mass demonstrations in Kosovo; twenty-two demonstrators and two policemen were killed. Human Rights organizations like “Amnesty International” stated that up to 140 demonstrators were killed, hundreds wounded, over 900 arrested. (AI 1994). Paradoxically, while destroying the multiethnic autonomy in Vojvodina and Kosovo recognized by the federal constitution, Belgrade insisted on ethnic autonomy for the Serbs in Croatia although the federal constitution contained no provision for such autonomy. After the dissolution of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia at its Thirteenth Congress in January 1990, Milosevic announced that “Serbia has to prepare itself to live without Yugoslavia.” He also said,

“Our goal is to establish borders within which there will be no war. Outside those borders war cannot be avoided” (Jovic 1996: 131).

The first multiparty elections were held in 1990 in all the republics except Serbia. Milosevic paralyzed the federation because he commanded four votes in Yugoslavia’s collective Presidency, having managed to gain control of not only Vojvodina and Kosovo, but also of Montenegro. He refused to recognize the new legitimate government in Croatia and its representative Stipe Mesic (who was supposed to succeed Borisav Jovic as President of the Yugoslav Presidency). He also fully embraced the nationalist program and used mass rallies as a tool to achieve national objectives, especially following events in Novi Sad in 1998, an episode in the anti-bureaucratic revolution that led to the sacking of the provincial leadership of Vojvodina.

Mesic was installed in June 1990 as the new collective head of Yugoslav state, with a European Community troika present at the inaugural session. The adoption of the new Constitution of the Republic of Serbia in September 1990 marked the end of the first phase of preparations to destroy Yugoslavia. This constitution usurped two paramount federal functions: national defense and foreign relations. It deprived the autonomous provinces of their constitutional functions and excluded Serbia from the legal system of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia—Yugoslavia’s laws would no longer apply to Serbia.

This constitution was the first secessionist document. Its Article 135 stated that Serbia would enforce federal legislation only if it was not “in contravention to its interests.” Milosevic declared in a March 1991 speech on Radio Television of Serbia that “Yugoslavia does not exist anymore.”

Milosevic was always clear on what he thought about Kosovo Albanians. Milosevic never for any moment viewed Kosovo Albanians as equals. When the Western governments insisted on democratic elections as a precondition for a multiparty system, throughout Yugoslavia, this was problematic for the Serbian regime and Milosevic. So he decided to delay as much as he could elections in 1990 in Serbia, though in all probability the former Communists turned Socialists in the Socialist Party would have won easily. As his associate Borisav Jovic testified, Milosevic was skeptical about the idea of elections involving Kosovo Albanians because “in that case, an Albanian party would be formed.” Because there were nearly two million Albanians, Milosevic argued, “whatever name they might give that party of theirs, they would take over power in their environments and we would lose Kosovo” (Jovic 1996:). Milosevic himself wrote:

“It is a fact that the birth rate in Kosovo is among the highest in the world and that it is no longer a taboo but a matter of public debate. Albanian birth rate must be viewed in socio-political aspects. People who live beside or with Albanians turn to minorities or lose their living space” (Milosevic 1989:).

2.2. Kosovo Albanian mobilization

Just before the events of 1989, Kosovo Albanians were facing a huge dilemma. Yugoslav Communist League was being dismantled. The leadership of the Communist League in Kosovo was replaced by the end of 1988, following Milosevic's orders with more loyal Kosovo Albanians—mainly from the ranks of police services that were loyal to Belgrade and Milosevic. The task of the new leadership of Kosovo's Communist League was to see through the constitutional amendments brought before the Serbian Assembly on 25 November 1988, annulling Kosovo's autonomy.

On 20 February 1989, with the constitutional amendments due for final approval of the Serbian Assembly, the miners of Trepca mine in northern Kosovo went on strike. As Polish ship workers were aware when they founded Solidarnosc in Gdansk in 1981, it is harder for police to break up a strike when workers have shut themselves inside their workplace. So it was that a total of more than 7,000 workers shut themselves in Kosovo mines—1,300 in Stari Tërg in the Trepca complex. Some went on hunger strike. Their demands were to prevent the annulment of Kosovo's autonomy.

On 1 March 1989 Belgrade imposed a State of Emergency, and the arrests began, firstly 15 managers and miners from Trepca Mining Complex. The next major confrontation came on 23 March 1989, the day the Kosovo Assembly was to ratify the constitutional changes. With armored cars and tanks outside, helicopters overhead, and members of the security police and Serbian LCY officials inside, this has entered Kosovar lore as “the Constitution of the Tanks”.

Outside the Assembly, the protests had little nonviolent discipline. Riots erupted in Prishtina, Ferizaj, and some other towns. Stone-throwing was common, and some demonstrators made molotov cocktails, while in some towns both sides used firearms. For the next six days, spontaneous mass demonstrations met with brutal suppression, tear gas, water cannon and bullets. Official figures reported 24 people killed, including two police officers. Amnesty International noted estimates of 140 killed based on a coffin count, several hundreds wounded and “over 900 demonstrators, among them school pupils, were jailed or fined, sacked or disciplined for taking industrial action” (Clark 2000:). Kosovo Albanians lost their faith, if there was any, in the leadership of Yugoslavia's Communist League and were searching for new leaders.

The most influential center of Albanian opposition at the time was the Kosovo Writers Association in Kosovo, however, the people who the Writers Association defended, those who took part in activities in defense of Kosovo's autonomy, were invariably alleged “separatists” now facing “differentiation”(expulsion from their positions), which was Belgrade's policy. Previously in 1988, the Serbian members (27 out of a total of 150) resigned from the Kosovo Writers Association, intending to destroy it. Instead, they

opened the way for the Association to express Albanian aspirations, and in April 1988 it presented a draft Albanian program. Its president, Ibrahim Rugova, now became one of the main voices of Kosovo to the international and domestic press. Attacked both by his Serbian counterparts and by voices in Tirana critical of “decadent modernism” he was one of the first to call for the independence of Kosovo (Rugova 1994).

On 17 December 1989, the Council for the Defense of Human Rights and Freedoms (CDHRF) was founded in Prishtina. This became the main monitoring and collection center for details of human rights violations and police maltreatment. Theoretically open to Serbs, it was an Albanian organization. While its board was strictly above party politics for the first several years of its existence, its network in the municipalities depended on former political prisoners.

The dominant force in the Kosovo political for years to come was founded on 23 December 1989—the Democratic League of Kosovo (in Albanian, Lidhja Demokratike e Kosovës, LDK). This was one of the first anti-Communist political parties formed in Eastern Europe since World War II. Prior to creating and officially registering the LDK, Albanian representatives were in close contact with US diplomats in Belgrade that made two suggestions:

- To register the LDK at the Federal level (Buxhovi 2009) since LDK might be the leading force of all Albanians in Yugoslavia;
- To elect Ibrahim Rugova as the head of the party.

Recruitment to the LDK was spectacular, reportedly as many as 700,000 joined it in short time, with people queueing up to sign up.

In March 1990, some 7,000 children in 13 communities reported symptoms of neuro-intoxication. The authorities did not permit a proper investigation by Albanians but offered a diagnosis of mass hysteria. However, the then federal president (the Croatian Stipe Mesic) and a number of international observers believed that this might have been caused by an agent such as Sarin, used in chemical weapons and known to have been manufactured by the Yugoslav People’s Army. According to the Zagreb daily “Vjesnik”, at least 50 personal attacks on Kosovo Serbs took place within days of the alleged poisoning. This incident was described as the “trigger” case which generated massive emotional-political mobilization of the Albanians and got them ready for abandonment of institutions and norms of Serbia and Yugoslavia. It fitted the growing Albanian analysis that Serbia wanted to provoke an armed uprising for only a war could shift the demographic balance decisively in favor of Serbs.

On 2 July 1990—locked out of the Assembly building—114 out of the 123 Albanian Assembly members of the Kosovo Assembly met on the street, outside the Assembly building, to symbolically vote in a new status. This unilateral declaration, parallel to that enacted by Slovenia on the same day, was a sign of the resolve of the whole Albanian population of Kosovo to reclaim their self-determination right. Even if their signatures to the Declaration on Independence had not been “at all easy to collect”, the members of the province’s “most pro-Serbian” parliament now stood for independence.

Also on 2 July, while Kosovo and Slovenia were declaring sovereignty, a referendum in Serbia resoundingly endorsed imposing direct rule on Kosovo and Vojvodina. Three days later, the Serbian parliament voted to dissolve the Kosovo parliament and government, and on 26 July the Law on Labor Relations under Special Circumstances expanded powers to dismiss workers arbitrarily.

At the constitutional level of the conflict, the next round came three months later. On 7 September 1990, the Albanian delegates of the Kosovo Assembly gathered in Kaçanik, near the border with Macedonia, to proclaim the new Constitution—where Article 2 declared Kosovo “a sovereign and independent state”—and to nominate their own government. The meeting was clandestine, but Tirana TV cameras were there to broadcast the proceedings.

Three weeks later, the Assembly of Serbia passed its own new constitution, annulling the autonomy of Kosovo and Vojvodina, yet claiming their votes on the federal presidency so that, combined with Montenegro, Serbia now had a bloc of half the votes on the federal presidency.

Serbia’s reaction was swift. Within a year, more than 45% of Albanians in employment would lose their jobs and ultimately nearly 90% (a total of 146,025 out of the 164,210 Albanians in employment in 1990 were out of work. (Clark 2000). Already, the first Albanian police had been suspended: eventually 3,709 were dismissed, and replaced by many more Serbs and Montenegrins, many brought in from outside.

Henceforth Albanians were systematically removed from positions of influence. In the media, Albanian workers for Radio and TV Prishtina and the now-banned “Rilindja” daily were dismissed.

Medical personnel were a particular target. Their response to the alleged poisoning episode was just the latest irritation from a body seen as colluding with demonstrators and refusing to control the growth of the Albanian population. First, teams of medics from Serbia arrived to “offer their professional help”, that is, to supervise. Then, in August, “emergency management” was installed, and Albanian directors were replaced by Serbs, and the sackings began. By June 1991, over 1,211 medical workers had been fired because they refused to accept these measures.

1991 was the year of contesting the legitimacy of Serbian rule and demonstrating the aspirations of the overwhelming majority of the people of Kosovo. In this, the central idea was to prepare a referendum on the future of Kosovo. On 22 September 1991, Albanian delegates to the “dissolved” Assembly met again, this time to call a referendum. The proposal was to proclaim Kosovo a sovereign and independent state with the right to take part in any eventual association of sovereign states within Yugoslavia. The referendum, organized by the Coordinating Council of Political Parties, took place a few days later, between 26 and 30 September at a cost of more than 40 organizers imprisoned for up to 60 days.³² Its predictable result was that, of the 914,802 votes counted (87% of the electorate), 99.87% favored independence. Without Slovenia and Croatia, Kosovo Albanians did not want to be part of Yugoslavia.

On 19 October, the members of the former provincial Assembly duly amended the Kaçanik constitution and declared Kosovo's independence. Now the Coordinating Council of Political Parties appointed one of the LDK's founders, its General Secretary Bujar Bukoshi, as prime minister, tasked with establishing a government in-exile. Rugova as LDK president would stay in Prishtina to carry out his responsibilities openly. Therefore, it was essential to have a legitimate voice operating from the safety of the diaspora.

The newly formed Government of Kosovo set up the income tax system "3% Fund" to finance activities and services in Kosovo. In the education sector operations of 20.000 teachers and professors, 317.000 pupils and 12.000 students were fully funded. Kosovo's "parallel system" was supported and partially financed by US who at the time tasked two diplomats from US Embassy in Belgrade to oversee the process (Buxhovi 2009).

This mobilization and organization of Kosovo Albanians from dissolving Yugoslav Communist League in Kosovo, creating democratic political anti-communist parties, setting up a parallel system of governance and services, was the basis for the new administration of post-war and post-free Kosovo that would come in 1999. By doing so with non-violent means, Kosovo Albanians made three major gains:

- By refusing to be provoked and drawn into an all-out conflict with Belgrade's brutal force the Albanians won the moral war in the eyes of international public opinion.
- By creating its own institutions of self-governance Albanians demonstrated self-sustained capacities independent from outside help.
- By cohesion and consistence in their demands Kosovo Albanians were able to ensure international support, US support firstly, so that their matter would not be treated as an internal issue of Serbia or Yugoslavia but as a democratic will of the people of Kosovo for self-determination and self-governance (Clark 2000:128–129).

Following the initial armed incidents in Croatia in the spring of 1991 and with the imminence of violent break-up of Yugoslavia, the Coordinating Council of Albanian Political Parties in Yugoslavia, on 11 October adopted a political declaration with three options to resolving the "Albanian Issue" in Yugoslavia:

- If outer boundaries of Yugoslavia are not changed then the Republic of Kosovo must be proclaimed and it will be on equal rank with other Republics.
- If outer boundaries of Yugoslavia are not changed but internal borders between the Republics are, then an Albanian Republic must be proclaimed on the basis of ethnic principle as valid for Serbs, Croats and others.
- If outer boundaries of Yugoslavia are changed then the Albanian people in Yugoslavia will use their democratic right to unify all territories and an integral Albanian state in the Balkans will be created along ethnic lines (Kosovo Presidency 2007).

3. US, Kosovo, and the beginning of the end of Yugoslavia

The fall of the Berlin Wall and the ensuing dissolution of USSR ushered in a period of global domination of United States of America. President George W. Bush at the time faced series of events and revolutionary developments that defined post-Cold War stability, security, and the world order it proclaimed (Brzezinski 2009). For the US, 1989 was a victory without winning. US “containment” policy toward USSR, that lasted for forty years, gave results—Western Europe had progressed. However, victory in the Cold War was not without risks since the main task of the US was not to stop but to control the fragmentation of the communist world. The future of USSR became a dominant security issue for the US, mainly the nuclear arsenal (est 30.000 warheads) the USSR possessed, and the US decided to aid Moscow (Nunn-Lugar Cooperative Threat Report) (Bush & Scowcroft 1998).

Yugoslavia was another matter. Since November 1948, following the CIA report, that assessed that “Tito’s resolve announced the first cracks in Soviet Empire”, George Kennan, tasked to define US policy toward Yugoslavia, noticed that

“[A] new movement had appeared in the global communist order that proves that satellites can successfully oppose Kremlin advising US government to support Yugoslavia” (Kennan 1948).

US was to support “independent, economically sustainable, stable and militarily capable Yugoslavia” because it served Western and US interests. As such, during the Cold War, Yugoslavia was “the protected and spoiled child of US and western diplomacy” (Zimmerman 1996).

Following new circumstances of post-Cold War order and transformation of institutions, the Bush administration was pressured to define its policy toward looming crises in Yugoslavia. However, this administration was reluctant to be engaged more and chose to act following the same Reagan directive from 1986 (NSDD 54) toward other communist countries, one of “course correction not a new turn” (Zimmerman 1996).

At this point US diplomacy decided not to be bothered by Milosevic’s nationalist rhetoric for as long as he favored changes without using violent means. This lasted until June 1989 and following Milosevic’s speech at the Kosovo rally where he threatened the use of military armed force when diplomatic correspondence was sent to Washington from US Embassy in Belgrade stating that “Milosevic has gone too far and America has nothing more to expect from him” (Simic 2008).

At the same time US began to focus on the issue of Kosovo, which was treated as a matter of national minorities whose human and democratic rights were being violated. The US House of Representatives actively involved in the situation of Kosovo, and demanded more engagement from the Bush administration. Following a congressional delegation visit to Yugoslavia and Kosovo, in August 1990, Senator Bob Dole’s report noted that

“the Serbian government is applying tactics of police state with the approval of Yugoslav Federal government and that the US can stand aside but have the moral

duty to defend individual right of the Albanians, urging direct actions from Washington (Congressional Record 1990:).

In November 1990 the US Congress adopted a bill calling for halting aid to Yugoslavia if democratic elections were not held in all the republics and if Serbia continues to violate human rights of Albanians. In February 1990 Deputy Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger visited Belgrade to convey the message of support for political pluralism in Yugoslavia and concern over violation of human rights in Kosovo. Milosevic reportedly told American representatives that in Kosovo Serbia was facing Islamic fundamentalism and narco-mafia elements (Zimmerman 1996). Eagleburger and National Security advisor Ben Scowcroft, back at the White House, believed that the crises in Yugoslavia must be internationalized. In October 1990 US intelligence agencies compiled a report that outlined findings different from the Administration in regard to events in Yugoslavia. The document, named “Yugoslavia Transformed NIE 15-90”, highlighted four main assessments:

1. Yugoslavia will cease to exist as a federal country in one year and in two it will break-up. Economic reforms cannot delay the dissolution.
2. Serbia will block any attempts from Slovenia and Croatia to create any form of confederacy in Yugoslavia.
3. A long-term Albanian uprising will begin. Inter republic large scale war is not likely but the violence will be bitter and unresolved.
4. There is little to nothing that the US and European allies could do to stop the break-up of Yugoslavia.

Weeks before NIE 15-90 report was made public, the US Ambassador to Belgrade Warren Zimmermann sent to Washington his analysis on the future of Yugoslavia emphasizing that

“Kosovo could be the ridge that will sink Yugoslavia. It is hard to believe that the country can be rearranged in a matter suitable for Serbs, Albanians, Croats, and Slovenes. Serbs are ready to pay any price in order to preserve Kosovo, although there are less than 10% of Serbs living there. Albanians seem equally determined not to remain in any kind of union with Serbia. Slovenes and Croats have no interest in Yugoslavia that condones oppression that Serbia uses to imply its will on Kosovo Albanians” (Shreeve 2006).

CIA's October 1990 analysis proves to be almost entirely accurate apart from the fact that conflict did not start in Kosovo, and that it took less than two years for Yugoslavia to break up. The Bush administration at the time did not ignore this report, that was even leaked to the press causing further tensions between US and Yugoslavia, but basically, it did not like the content and also the Administration had different interests, mainly in Kuwait. An additional problem was that the CIA estimate did not provide any alternatives. For the US administration it was an unsolved dilemma: we might not be for the break-up, but we cannot ensure the unity.

Official US strategy on Yugoslavia, including Serb and Kosovo issues, was created in 1990. Senator Bob Dole, at the time second most important leader of the Republican Party, held separate meetings with Dobrica Cosic, prominent Serb intellectual and two

years later, in 1992, the President of Yugoslavia, and Ibrahim Rugova, prominent Kosovo Albanian intellectual and two years later the President of the Republic of Kosovo. (Buxhovi 2009). In the meetings Senator Dole conveyed two messages: if the Serbs continue to behave with the greater-Serbia logic, then Yugoslavia would have ceased to exist; while if the Albanians continue to preserve the peaceful course of demands for equality and democracy, then their aspirations for the future would have been accepted and satisfied.

Conclusions

The process of break-up of Yugoslavia was a result of several factors of different socio-economic natures, but mainly a product of political elites of the time, their beliefs and actions. Now, three decades since the beginning of the process of dissolution of Yugoslavia, and after a careful study of the reasons and the outcome of the process, several certain observations can be made. What seems irrational and impossible now, like imposing one nation's will on other equal nations in the joint federation, the attempt of Serbs to dominate Yugoslavia, seemed rational and possible to the degree that it became Serbian policy at the time. What seems impossible now, namely, to organize, mobilize and with international support achieve self-government and eventually statehood, the efforts of Kosovo Albanians to break free from Serbia and Yugoslavia, seemed sufficiently attainable at the time. The nations of Yugoslavia chose their own fate rather than preserving the Federation in any shape or form.

However, between aims and results there is a process of action and reaction. In the case of Yugoslavia, because of an aggressive Serbian approach and Yugoslav military siding with policies from Belgrade, a non-violent dissolution was difficult to be achieved, and, in the case of Kosovo, impossible. Also, Yugoslavia is a clear case that one nationalism will always be met with another nationalism, and that it is impossible to achieve anything in the long term with one-sided violence.

Yugoslavia case has proven that even when all the conditions are set, it still takes an irrational ideology to initiate the breakup. In Yugoslavia this was Slobodan Milosevic and his aggressive and erratic approach toward other nations and their demands to rearrange the Federation. Milosevic did not create the rising tide of nationalism in Serbia, but he did decide to ride it, and to convert it into the force capable of sweeping aside the dams of ideology erected by Tito and communists. The foundation of Yugoslav "brotherhood and unity" was thrashed by previously suppressed claims of "blood and soil".

Kosovo has been the issue used by the main actors and stakeholders in the Yugoslav Federation (Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia) to push forward for their own national agendas. It made possible the use of military (YPA) and police (Federal and State) force to oppress a nation aiming to preserve the Federation. Use of force and expulsion forced Kosovo Albanians to mobilize, organize themselves and seek international partners in the West to promote the idea, that in the case of dissolution of Yugoslavia, then the universal democratic right of self-determination must be respected in the case of Kosovo Albanians.

Because this right was refused initially, what began as a quest for human rights and democracy, quickly turned to demand for self-governance and self-determination.

Process of the break-up of Yugoslavia, although happening at the same time with the change in Eastern and Central Europe and USSR, must be seen as a separate and different case, as a dissolution process driven from within. This process was not aided by international factors (US or USSR), but also it was not prevented by these powers.

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