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The Beginning of the Breakup of Yugoslavia – Kosovo as starting point

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This paper contains a chronological summary and analyzes the process of beginning of the Breakup of Yugoslavia in relation to the events in Kosovo during the period 1981-1989. Its aim is to present through an objective approach the main causes that led to the beginning of the Breakup of Yugoslavia, with Kosovo as starting point. The methodology of this paper includes the reflection of the main events in form of a comparative analysis, by comparing the attitudes of a considerable number of international and local authors (Albanian, Croatian, Serbian) including here historians, diplomats, politicians, journalists, and so forth, with some of them having been direct followers of this period. Sources: a selection of special literature has been made, such as: scientific articles, monograph publications, documentaries, and so forth.

Keywords: Yugoslavia, Kosovo, Autonomy, Conflict, Serbian Nationalism, Milošević regime.

1. Introduction

The Breakup of Yugoslavia did not occur overnight. In fact, at the time of its establishment on 1st December 1918, it contained many dilemmas. From the very beginning this process was followed with major problems, starting with the fact that it was seen more as a political program rather than a reality that would be implemented into practice.

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First, although the three respective initiating nations were of Slavic origin and had some common elements, the distinctions between them were not insignificant. Croatians and Slovenians had always showed sympathy for a self-governing system, they were catholic, and their past was linked to the western world because for a long time they have been under the Austro-Hungarian rule. On the other side there were the Serbs who were Orthodox and with clear dominant ambitions. Their mentality was related more to the eastern world, a fact that was influenced by the centuries-old rule of Ottomans.

The second problematic issue was the exclusion of other nationalities that were not small in terms of population, such as: Albanians, Bosnians, Hungarians, Macedonians, Germans, Italians, and so forth. Thus, being denied, the majority of these populations had lived under the shadow of the nationalism in their national states.

If we analyze this issue from the Kosovo-Albanian perspective, the problem appears quite clear. Kosovo Albanians had become part of this combination unwillingly being unjustly separated from the Albanian state (28 November 1912), although it was globally known that Kosovo had nothing in common with other populations of the Federate, and were differentiated clearly by language, culture, traditions, religions, and so forth. In such context, the separation had left significant marks in Kosovo-Albanians during the Serbian-Yugoslavic rule. Several historical sources speak of the violence, persecution, murder, continuous imprisonment and not only: schools in Albanian were not allowed; Albanian language, books and writing was strictly prohibited! This policy contained in itself assimilation and colonization through two main instruments: first, placement of Slavs in Kosovo and the expulsion of Albanians.² Within this ongoing policy, Albanians, being called second-hand citizens, faced a ferocious campaign of denationalization and mass expulsion from their native lands. Despite the restrictions imposed upon them, Albanians never surrendered. They had consistently rejected the Yugoslavian state. As a result of these continuous objections there arose a new opportunity: The Constitution of 1974, wherefore for Kosovo-Albanians the period 1968-1981 marks a cultural renaissance followed by a social, political and national emancipation, followed by the opening the main cultural and national institutions such the University, Academy, etc., contributing to the establishment of an intellectual Albanian elite which in the forthcoming decades would enable the expression of the ethnic identity of Albanians, thus becoming the cornerstone of the state of

2 For more details see *Nacertainije and Nacionalism* by Ilija Garšanin and *The Expulsion of the Albanians* by Vaso Čubrilović, Memorandum of SANU.

Kosovo. However, this achievement was not the goal itself, the expectation of Kosovo-Albanians. Their main demand was equality with other people of the republics for as long as the Federate would function or at best reunion with Albania.

The objective of this study is the issue of Kosovo-Albanians in the process of Yugoslavian break-up. The issues addressed are: The rise of nationalism and the 1981 protests; Debatable Migrations, Memorandum of SANU in service of increasing Serbian nationalism; Slobodan Milošević rise to power; abolition of Kosovo's Autonomy; Gazimestan the place of battles and myths. All these issues that contributed in the disintegration of Yugoslavia.

2. The Rise of Nationalisms – The Protests of 1981

In the late 1970s, economic problems within the federation grew everyday more. The death of Yugoslavian leader Josip Broz Tito on May 4, 1980 further complicated matters, leaving a huge political vacuum. Dissatisfaction was evident, thus increasing inter-ethnic tension, marking the moments of Yugoslavia's decline. In this context, in the mid-1980s, the card of nationalism had already been lit up and, unfortunately, it spread almost throughout the whole federation. The picture seemed clear. It was used to incite political, economic and cultural problems, phenomena that the Yugoslav society was experiencing and demanding as necessary changes. The challenge faced by the peoples of the Federation was the use of "involvement" with the "national cause" for which divergences were so great that the media propaganda managed to promote it, increasing the mythological basis of a community through the production of metaphors for populist use, which had long been silenced by the 35 year rule of Tito.

Judging from the Serbian viewpoint, the instigation of nationalism had begun with Kosovo. More precisely, in March 1981, less than a year after Tito's death, protests burst out in Kosovo. These protest came as a surprise for the political leadership and the public in general. Later, party and federal authorities blamed the Albanian leadership for not being strict enough in the fight against Albanian nationalism. (Pavlović, 2019) On the other hand, Dušan T. Batakovic, (2006) sees the Albanian uprising as carefully prepared and orchestrated in March and April 1981. Initially, it was like a genuine student revolt, evolving within few weeks into a broad nationalist movement demanding the status of seventh federal state of Kosovo within Yugoslavia. The requested status included the right to self-determination and the constitutional provisions reserved for all other respective republics within the Federation. This request was made in 1981, one year after Tito's

death, and as such, the Albanian request disturbed the fragile balance of power in the federal leadership and challenged the stability of the entire system established in 1974.

On the other hand, Albanians had continuously expressed their dissatisfaction related to the disregard that they were experiencing in terms of economic development and their sublime request for the Republic of Kosovo. However it is a fact that Yugoslavia was facing a major economic decline at the end of the 70s and the beginning of the 80s. For Kosovo as the poorest state of the Federation, this was a signal of collapse thus further complicating the situation. In fact, Kosovo was experiencing severe political and economic problems. The region inhabited by Albanians was characterized by a backwardness in all aspects, whether resulting from its historical past; whether from the negative political treatment and negligence; inequality in terms of education; poor standard of living, and so forth, thus being categorized as second-hand citizens. In these circumstances, Albanians had no other choice but to express their dissatisfaction about the disregard that they were experiencing in terms of economic development. According to Noel Malcolm, (1998) there existed a significant ethnic inequality: Serbs and Montenegrins who made up only 15% of the population, had 30% of jobs. Another fact that is emphasized by Austrian authors W. Petritsch and R. Pichler, (2002) is that Albanian students after graduating had almost no prospect of being employed. Therefore, this dissatisfaction took an economic and social character, political liberalization, and their main demand—equal status with other Yugoslav nationalities. This issue has been at its best articulated through the great historical turn of protests starting on spring of 1981 by the students of the University of Prishtina, whose main cause was the poor meal being served to them in the student refectory. This event had its impact in the community wherefore within a short period of time the protest was joined by citizens, workers, pupils, and so forth, thus expanding all through Kosovo. Undoubtedly, this fact greatly disturbed the Serbo-Yugoslavian government, which took immediate action, mobilizing special police force and security units from various parts of Yugoslavia.

The response of the Yugoslav government was tendentious as usual, without analyzing the real causes of the protests, prejudicing and striving to put Kosovo Albanians in a position against all the other peoples of the Federation. Their conclusion was that the basic Albanian request for a Republic was an attempt to "destroy the constitutional system of socialist Yugoslavia" (Lalaj, 2000).

Although the protests were violently suppressed by Yugoslavian military police forces, the event had already left its marks. Thus, as a response, since

the beginning of the 80s and onwards, Serbs had begun to express their concern about the supposed discrimination and intimidation that according to them each day more elements of hostility were being expressed from the majority of Albanian population towards the minority of Serbs and Montenegrins. This approach had begun to appear in various Belgrade media. About such views, in June of 1982 the Serbian theologian Atanasije Jevtić published an article with the content: "today one, tomorrow seven, the day after tomorrow each of us", this was the uncompromised slogan of Albanian "irredentists" for Kosovo Serbs published in press, whose aim was to proclaim the end of Serbs in Kosovo. He further states that "Albanian Nazis have made such threats for decades that were often associated with drastic acts, physical and psychological violence and even public crimes against the innocent Serbian population" (Radić, 1999). Such writings begun to contribute to the continuous deterioration of the situation, such as the burial of Serbian radical Ranković in 1983 which turned into a nationalist event due to the fact that according to them he was the greatest defender of serbisation in Kosovo. To further nationalize the issue this case served as a *casus belli* to express their dissatisfaction and manifest public protests. The issue in question had its own impact, managing to be one of the main media-journalistic topics in Belgrade.

3. Debatable Migrations

At the end of 80s, the card of nationalism was the main topic among serbs, a phenomenon that was especially noticed among Serbs that lived outside of Serbia. They (serbs) were feeling more and more isolated and threatened from the nationalism arising in places where they were living such as Croatia, Bosnia and Kosovo. Undoubtedly the most active in this issue were the Kosovo Serbs. In this context, for a long time they had been instrumentalised by Belgrade with the complaint that they were being oppressed and maltreated every day more by Albanians and they were being forced to leave Kosovo. Such was the case of Jorge Martinović, a 56 year old farmer from Gjilan who had declared that he had been attacked by two Albanians who had put a bottle in his anus. For Serbs, this incident came to be the main national event, coming to the final conclusion that Albanians were allegedly mistreating, raping, and evicting the Serbian population. This case was confirmed as a manipulated one by a Serbian doctor and a judge, but nevertheless the Belgrade media had not stopped the propaganda. However, this event had already made its effects, since the international authors, relying mostly in Serbian sources, came to the conclusion that a considerable number of Serbian population, having no

other choice, had to leave their homes.³ However, when we talk about the migration process, we can argue that it was a global phenomenon continuously faced by many countries. Being quite a complex phenomenon, it is difficult to control or even prevent it entirely. Victor Meyer, a close follower of the events in former Yugoslavia, states: "It cannot be denied that the 'Albanian Renaissance' in Kosovo was accompanied by a continuous departure of Serbs and Montenegrins." (Meyer, 1999) According to Hivzi Islami, (1990) a number of Serbs and Montenegrins began to migrate from Kosovo due to the insecurity coming from the history of maltreatment and injustice that the Albanians had experienced in the times of deformations "especially those of Ranković's state apparatus", and due to the loss of privileges they had before 1966, but above all, the Serbs and Montenegrins could not tolerate being equal to Albanians. In this regard, there is no evidence grounded in facts that Albanians as a majority have discriminated Serbs and Montenegrins. On the contrary, statistical data speak of favorization of Serbians and Montenegrins in all public institutions.

Table no.1 shows the percentage of employees in public institutions based on ethnicity in Kosovo during 1971-1981.

In this regard, it seems paradoxical to speak unilaterally about the migration of Serbs and Montenegrins without mentioning the migration of Albanians and its causes. For Albanians involved in politics, the period after the protests started to get very difficult as they were being consistently persecuted and many were being imprisoned for political reasons by the Yugoslavian authorities led by the UDB (Yugoslavian Secret Service). Amnesty International Report (1988) had reported on the political imprisonment of Albanians in its annual reports of 1982-1989 where it emphasized the difficult situation of Albanians in Yugoslavia. According to official statistics, between January 1981 and September 1988, 1.750 ethnical Albanians were sentenced by political crime courts. In addition, it is estimated that 7.000 Albanians were imprisoned for minor political activities. Most of the defendants were accused for being involved in activities in support of

3 For more details on this issue see: Malcolm, Noel (1998). *Kosovo A short History*. Prishtinë: Koha, pp. 352-362.; Clark, Howard (2000.) *Civil Resistance in Kosovo*. London: Pluto Press, pp. 16-18.; Judah, Tim (2002). *Kosovo war and Revenge*. Prishtinë: Koha, pp. 67-71.; Vickers, Miranda (2004). *Midis Serbëve dhe Shqiptarëve një Histori e Kosovës*. Tirana: Toena, pp. 261-276.; Glenny, Misha (2007). *Histori e Ballkanit 1804-1999, Nacionalizmi, Luftërat dhe Fuqitë e Mëdha*. Tirana: Toena, pp. 625-626.; Schmit, Oliver Jens (2012). *Kosova – Histori e shkurtër e një treve qendrore ballkanike*. Prishtinë: Koha, pp. 234-242.

the demand for Kosovo to become a republic within Yugoslavia or for its eventual union with Albania.⁴

Such a situation resulted in a number of Albanians being forced to leave for Western Europe (1981-1999) as a result of severe economic difficulties or because of the continuous political persecution and imprisonment for political motives. In relation to this, the data show that economical migrations of Albanians were unorganized and illegal. Although after 1964 the predominant feature of economic and political emigration was legalization with temporary work. In this aspect, migrant workers grew in proportion to the increasing difficulties of the life within the province. According to "Rilindja" newspaper, in 1979, it was estimated that there were about 65.000 Kosovo-Albanian emigrants working in Western Europe with tens of thousands others in USA, Australia and Canada. (Lalaj, 2000) Until the end of the 20th century, these figures had increased tremendously, and it was estimated that between 120.000 and 200.000 Kosovo Albanians lived in Switzerland alone, while 250.000 up to 400.000 others were settled in Germany. (Schmit, 2012) Regarding these discussions about the process of migration, Marina Blagojević (1999), criticizing the politics of the Serbian regime, ascertains: The public and international politics have never taken seriously the problem of Serbian and Montenegrin migration. In fact, Serbian historiography has managed to take advantage of its "scientific" preponderance giving its own perspective on this matter. Based on our research, it turns out that there are no authors who have written even a short article about Kosovo and have not written about the process of so-called "forced mass migration of Kosovo Serbs". The truth is that the vast majority of these articles have expressed their dilemmas about the real reason for migration or maltreatment as in the case of Martinović. Furthermore, Blagojević emphasizes that the Serbian side, represented politically by the regime, never articulated an adequate and acceptable explanation for foreigners. The Serbian issue of Kosovo in the 70s, as a human rights issue, it was instead sent forward as a purely ethnic conflict embedded in history. On the contrary, this was to strengthen the Albanian argument along the same lines. The result was that Kosovo was not being treated as an issue of human rights and of underdevelopment, therefore the interpretations provided by each party led to radicalism and conflict. Moreover, Serbs brought the problem to the attention of international community too late, when the international community had already molded an opinion of who was the victim and who was to be blamed. Subsequent

4 Amnesty International Report January – December, (1989). Easton Street. London WC1 X 8D, United Kingdom, p. 243.

events in the 90s and especially the genocide acts of Serbian regime made the Albanian claims a self-fulfilling prophecy. One issue that sparked debate was the high birth rate of Albanians, for which Serbian circles concluded that it was a deliberate and planned process! It is a fact that Albanians have had the highest birth rate in Europe. Miranda Vickers (1998) provides a statistic that the years 1961-1981 in Kosovo were followed by major demographic changes. From 2/3 of the population in 1961, Albanians doubled while Serbs and Montenegrins from 1/4 of its population lowered to 1/6 of it. Vickers furthers her argument, on the basis of the 1971 census which estimated that Albanians comprised 73.6% of the population in Kosovo. As it is shown in the graphical table below, through these years, the natural rate of population growth in Yugoslavia per 1.000 inhabitants was quite different compared to Kosovo.

Table No.2 shows a statistics of 1961-1981 on population growth.

Furthermore, there were interpretations that such a decision for rapid reproduction was a deliberate decision by Albanians in order to change the demographic image of Kosovo (Pavlović, 2013). Such a political mindset led to the conclusion that Kosovo women were called "washing machines" while the children born and even those yet unborn were called nationalists and Albanian separatists - a clear racist approach. On the other hand, Ekrem Avdić (2013) provides a detailed explanation about the economic reasons for the migration of the non-Albanian population. According to him, during these times there were Albanian families that had up to 200 members. Facing such a situation, there had been a great demand for land, thus the price of real estate increased enormously. These facts encouraged the non-Albanian population to migrate, because for a modest house and land in Kosovo you could buy a villa in Serbia sparing a modest sum of money. In this context the rules are clear. Albanians bought what they needed while others sold. However, it was surprising that during this whole process, when Serbs were settled in Serbia they declared that they were being expelled by the Albanians. This process made it clear that the real aim was encouraging propaganda through television programs, articles, that Serbs were being violently forced to leave Kosovo. Geert – Heinrich AHRENS, (2007) a well-known German diplomat who was very familiar with the political circumstances in former Yugoslavia, when speaking about the Serbian political campaign of years 1985 and 1986 and the demands of Serbo-Montenegrins for the authorities in Belgrade, among other things, mentions the petition addressed to the federal parliament signed by 216 intellectuals from the circle of D. Čosić, who would later be understood to be the same intellectuals that would draft the Memorandum.

4. The Memorandum of Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts in service of increasing Serbian nationalism

Owing to this kind of policy, the intellectual Serbian elite and especially a part of Academy of Sciences and Arts as well as the Serbian writers association had begun to act. Intentionally or not, on September 24, 1986, the Belgrade newspaper "Večernje novosti" published a strategic document called "MEMORANDUM". The document contained 10 main points describing the economic, political and social situation in Serbia and its population in general within the federation. The document presented the instructions, the paths that the Serbian leadership should follow to stop the so-called persecution of Serbian population. It was for the first time publicly stated there that the establishment of Tito's Yugoslavia had severely damaged the Serbian nation. According to the decisions of the temporary war-time parliament gathered in the Bosnian town Jajca which was temporarily liberated in 1943, the post-war Yugoslav state would be a federation with six equal republics and two autonomous provinces. According to the *Memorandum*, the decisions of that meeting were not legal and damaged the Serbs (Tomašević, 2009). Point 8 highlights the expulsion of the Serbian population from Kosovo, considering it as a spectacular evidence of their historic defeat. Building on the argument that in spring 1981 the Serbian people were declared a special war, one which was open and general, therefore physical, political, legal and cultural genocide against the Serbian population of Kosovo and Metohija was the biggest defeat in the liberation wars that Serbian had from 1804 until the uprising of 1941. Therefore, the equal national relations in Kosovo and Metohija for which the Serbian warriors fought the most, are being extinguished, blaming the Albanians entirely. In this regard, with its clear actions the Albanian nationalists began to turn the opposite (Surroi, 2019) According to medical professor Mirko Simić (2013), a member of Serbian Academy that has been living in London for years, in an interview with "Radio Evropa e Lirë", recalls the purpose of the Memorandum and the reasons for his opposition. According to Simić, the Memorandum was basically the idea that a Greater Serbia should be created: wherever there is a Serb community, it should join Serbia and form a whole in which all Serbs will live in one state. Arguing on his opposition, Prof. Simić points out that the main wrongdoing brought by the Serbian Memorandum was the expulsion of tens of thousands of Serbs from Croatia, the Srebrenica genocide and the tragic events in Kosovo. As a conclusion, he states that the Memorandum is not a "bright spot" of Serbian history, but more of a "black spot" which hardly will be forgotten or erased. This argument lies on the fact that the Memorandum was characterized by a critical

approach to everything that happened, and that there was almost nothing that did not deserve criticism from the position of strategy and theory of social action, that led to a division that became easily visible (Madzar, 1999) Misha Glenny (2000), a journalist familiar with the circumstances in the former Yugoslavia, points out that in its main focus was that Kosovo Serbs were on the verge of being exterminated by the aggressive Albanians. Following the aims of this document, Ekrem Avdić, a well-known Bosnian journalist who was closely following the events of that time, wrote among other things, that this strategic document was for the creation of Greater Serbia which came to be implemented with tanks and artillery by Slobodan Milošević. What has been otherwise called My War, lists the conspirators against the Serbian people, such as Albanians, Croats, and Bosnians, etc. (Avdić, Vllasi, 2013). A clear description of the Memorandum Aims was given by Branimir Anzulović, (1999). The document is dominated by the idea that Serbs must take whatever action is necessary to bring all Serbs into a state as protection against further attempts to annihilate them: establishing full national and cultural integrity of the Serbian people, regardless of the republic or province they live in, it is their historical and democratic right. Achieving equal status and independent development had a deeper meaning for the Serbian people. In less than fifty years, during two successful generations, it was twice exposed to physical annihilation, forced assimilation, conversion, cultural genocide, ideological indoctrination, devaluation and rejection of its tradition under an inducted complex. The fact that everything was analyzed is noted through the meeting held on June 28, 1985 by the Commission for Drafting the Memorandum, the same date as St. Vitus Day/ "Vidovdan" which is viewed by the Serbian historiography as the day of fate; a day that has been ingrained in the collective consciousness of the Serbs as the day of their "great national catastrophe". This connection is early rooted and related to the Battle of Kosovo (1389). Then, on the same day (28 June 1914 according to the Georgian Calendar) the assassination of Austro-Hungarian heir Franz Ferdinand took place, whose part was Vaso Čubrilović, the author of "The Expulsion of Arnauts" and a participant at SASA meetings. This kind of language used at a time when nationalism was rising day after day can rightly be considered as a poison that acts slowly and that in due time will poison all. This approach was more than conscious with the aim of mental devastation of the opponent or the "third" which was different in ethnicity or religious basis. The aim was submission by choosing forms of propagandistic slogans that most of the Serbs came to believe (Hoxhaj, 2008).

Further on, the nationalism articulated by the Serbian intellectual elite was aimed at realizing Serbian politics with its mission to extinguish, assimilate and displace Albanians and other neighboring people with special emphasis on Croats and Bosnians. The misfortune of all this was that it had found a general support within the population of not only those involved in politics. This is best reflected in a description of former US Ambassador in Belgrade, Warren Zimmerman (1989 & May 1992). Among other things, he emphasizes: it is not worth rejecting those murmurs of intellectuals, they were predominant throughout the Serbian society, from vendors, village farmers to journalists. Recalling a personal meeting with a Serbian art historian, in his question of how would she resolve the Kosovo issue, she answered: "Very simply. I would line up all Albanians behind a wall and shoot them." (Judah, 2002).

5. The Rise of Milošević to Power

In the new circumstances, the demands of the Serbian people were very clear: they wanted a leader who would respond to their demands for change, a leader who would openly and unreservedly support them. In this situation, the best choice was Slobodan Milošević. He had been preparing for power since the mid 80s and one of his first objectives was media manipulation. Aware of the importance and impact of propaganda, he soon took control of the Serbian state television and the most influential newspaper "Politika". He saw the media as an essential instrument for his rule, since through media and its manipulation it would be easier to control the party, security services, the army, the academy, etc., which in the end would all become his tools. This plan, behind which it was thought to be his mentor Dobrica Ćosić, turned out to be successful. Having all these powerful mechanisms, Milošević began to play the card of great Serbian expansionist nationalism on the grounds that Serbs are the largest people in Yugoslavia and as such must dominate a centralized federation led by Serbs. Thanks to this policy, Serbs thought of taking advantage of the slight constitutional changes (for economic reform) initiated by the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia in 1986. On the other hand, Serbian propaganda through various writings had long begun to proclaim as necessary the idea of constitutional changes related to the provinces. The aim of it was clear, to pave the legal way for subordination and later for the abolition of autonomy (of Kosovo, March 23, 1989). Furthermore, as noted by Susan L. Woodward, (1996) the Serbian leadership aided by the Federal Presidency, had attempted to follow a less radical way for preventing Kosovar separatists who gained popular support in the Albanian community by isolating leaders in order

to avoid an open disagreement. At the same time, Ivan Stambolić tried to resist the pressure coming from the population and the Serbian parliament to take a hard line on Albanians and protect the Serbian minority. Although, the same had accused Slovenia and Croatia for supporting Kosovo Albanians who refused to discuss reform efforts. International followers of the events in Serbia point out that: Serbian analysts, journalists and publicists defending the Serbian cause began to write various articles the main content of which was: Serbs were suffering genocide; any act of violence against Serbs was seen as an ethnically motivated case. However, there is a consensus among international authors that Milošević's rise begins in Kosovo. Miroslav Šolević, the Serbian representative in Kosovo, noted in the BBC Documentary "The Death of Yugoslavia", that to say that it is not correct to say that we put him in power. But that we made of him a true leader, this is evident. (Percy, Macqueen, 1995) (Avdic, Vllasi, 2013) On the other hand, the Serbian communist leader Ivan Stambolić recalls that when dealing with political issues he had managed to avoid all possible dangers and in this respect Milošević posed no danger to him. He further emphasizes that – his friends (party associates B.Q.) had suggested that he visits Kosovo. In this case he selected Milošević to represent him in a meeting with Kosovo Serbs with the aim of relaxing the interethnic conflict that was growing day by day in the province. (Percy, Macqueen, 1995). In fact, his selection came as a result of an unsatisfactory meeting he had had some time earlier with local Serbs in Kosovo. Such a selection turned out to be completely wrong, because within a short time it turned out that Milošević ended Stambolić's political career. In the context of these developments, Azem Vllasi, Kosovo's political leader at that time, described the political situation as fragile. In the national circles in Belgrade, the issue of Kosovo and the claim against Albanians was one that would easily gain the support of Serbs. Also, the supposedly difficult position of Serbs in Kosovo whom Serbia must protect would easily come at hand in realizing this political propaganda. (Avdiç, Vllasi, 2013). Thanks to this policy, the Serbian community in Kosovo had invited Milošević for a visit on April 20th 1987. In fact, this turned out to be more of a pulse-measure and an opportunity for organization because the discussion in itself was brief and Milošević and the Serbian locals agreed to meet again four days later in Fushë Kosova. In order for this event to have the desired effect, the Serbian nationalist circles had received orders from Belgrade, from Milošević's inner circle, that only Serbs should be part of the event, and should make as many complaints of dissatisfaction as possible, anger, etc., elements these that could be served as "red meat" for Serbian media propaganda now controlled by

Milošević. Taking advantage of the constant complaints of Serbs in Kosovo about how they were being mistreated, raped and deported, Milošević managed to win the crowd. In this context, the case of the Serbian representative in Kosovo, Miroslav Solević, proves this fact, who while expressing the anger in Milošević's presence complained with the words: "We must stop this Serbian exodus, we must stop this flux of people or otherwise there will be no Serbs left... we have a great desire to live here. But we don't like this, no, no." Such extreme complaints were many. Another participant said: "Mr. President, we Serbs know Azem Vllasi and others since Tito's days, we know the Communist Party who have not done anything for us in 20 years." (Percy, Macqueen, 1995). Thus, any Serb who accused and complained about violence and maltreatment by Albanians was frenetically applauded. Hearing one by one "the concerns" from the mass gathered in Fushë Kosova on 24th April 1987, an event that had followed with clashes between protesting Serbs and local police with a stern intimidation, Milošević approached the crowd holding a speech that would become one of his historical speeches: "No one should dare to beat you..." thus managing to gain the support of all Serbian people, especially the Serb minority living in Kosovo. His speeches already found support everywhere at the numerous meetings that were organized, such as the one held in Belgrade in the presence of thousands of people, some of whom were from Kosovo, where he would state: "Every nation has a love that warms its heart forever, for Serbia it is Kosovo" (Malcolm, 1998). These words were broadcasted several times in Serbian media in order to further arouse Serbian nationalism, which mostly served him, and the political analyst for Balkan's Janusz Bugajski (2006) emphasizes the fact that Milošević had already placed most of the Belgrade media under his strict control. However, the ordinary viewers had no idea that the local Serbs in Kosovo had provoked the police and that their complaints were fabricated by Serbian propaganda and that Milošević's myth was built on a lie. This is best evidenced on a simple analysis that in addition to those requests that were constantly being fabricated the main demand of Kosovo Serbs towards the Serbian leadership had to do with the overthrow of the 1974 Constitution. Kosovo had gained the right to self-governance for which Serbs had never seemed to agree and their main goal was the complete subjugation of Kosovo under the slogan "Kosovo is the heart of Serbia." Of course, there were also other economic and social demands. The truth is that if one compared the life of a Serb who has lived in Serbia with that in Kosovo, there was a significant difference in the way of life. However, these facts show the real situation in Kosovo where the Yugoslav policy dominated by Serbs had deliberately

put aside the process of economic development thus remaining the most underdeveloped part within the Federation. In this context, all the citizens of Kosovo were facing this difficult socio-economic situation including the Albanians who were the absolute majority with over 90%. This fact is confirmed by the British Journalist Tim Judah, who provides an annual statistic of year 1979 that shows the difficult economic situation of Kosovo indicating also the average income per capita. For further details, see table no. 3. (Judah, 2002)

However, the effect of the meeting in Fushë Kosova, and other successive meetings, elaborated and detailed by the media had raised Milošević's popularity on pedestal, making him the main political figure in Serbia. Now, this paved the way for him to take control of the party. Zoran M. Marković (1996) states that although the initial instances of nationalism date back to 1986, it was clearly articulated politically only at the 8th Session of the Central Committee of the Serbian Socialist Party (September 23 and 24, 1987). On the other hand, Dušan Bataković, (2006) accuses Albanian nationalism, among others, for bringing Slobodan Milošević to power in 1987.

The Albanian challenge to both Serbia and Yugoslavia led to other inevitable interethnic conflicts. Whereas, Ivan Stambolić recalls meeting Milošević after his return from Kosovo: "He was very enthusiastic, we discussed and he seemed pathetic as he was shouting "it's our homeland". On the other side, Milošević: "The Kosovo Albanians are doing this because the province was virtually a Republic where the local council had the power to implement what I defined as a Nazis policy." (Percy, Macqueen, 1995). The main disagreement at the meeting was between the faction led by Slobodan Milošević who had already experienced the intoxicating scent of the populism during its appearance in Fushë Kosovë in April of that year, and the line followed by Ivan Stambolić who demanded the use of "legal methods" and showed the risk of using Serbian nationalism (Blagojevic, 1999). Dragiša Pavlović, party leader in Belgrade, a supporter of Stambolić, delivered a speech against nationalist demagoguery: "Recently some friends have made anti-communist speeches claiming to offer a solution to Kosovo's problem...some people do not seem to understand that talking in such terms can cause escalation of violence". However, the course of events did not favorize them, and the faction who wanted a "quick solution" for the Kosovo issue won. Milošević had already taken over the party's leadership. In this regard, at the end of September 1987, Milošević forced Dragiša Pavlović to leave the party and a little later (in December 1987) the same happened to his mentor Ivan Stambolić who is said that was murdered on August 25, 2000 by order of Milošević (Percy, Macqueen, 1995).

Now Milošević's path was open, his goal was to gain power over Yugoslavia, alluding to the amendment of the 1974 Constitution with a particular focus on removing the autonomy of Kosovo and Vojvodina. However, in order to achieve this goal, he first had to solve the issue with the political leaders in Prishtina, Novi Sad and also Podgorica. Milošević continued to follow a tactic of attracting masses, a tactic that he used successfully in 1987. Through these meetings, which began in small groups some of which came from Kosovo, but were steadily increasing from 10,000 up to 1 million where protesters often were paid by their employers or often came from employees who had no work to do (Woodward, 1996). Azem Vllasi recalls those rallies. They were a group of Serbs from Kosovo travelling in a bus full of Milošević portraits with banners and placards with primitive content and hate speech, ridiculing those public personalities who even in indirect ways had expressed their disagreement with Milošević's politics (Avdiç, Vllasi, 2013). The ridicule of public figures was confirmed during the rally on November 20, 1988 in Belgrade, while Milošević was delivering a speech, in the background there were shoutings: Arrest Vllasi! ", while he pretended as if he was not hearing them well, and said: "Ne čujem se baš dobro." (I'm not hearing you very well) but I will respond to your request that those who deceive the people, those who conspire against Yugoslavia will be arrested and punished (Percy, Macqueen, 1995). Although the course of events went in favor of the Serbian leader's rallies, the propaganda had had its effects despite all the resistance and Vojvodina's party leadership was resigning; the same was done with Montenegro, where he overthrew its leadership and replaced them with his servile supporters. But his main concern was undoubtedly Kosovo.

6. The Abolition of Autonomy

The dominance of Milošević in Yugoslavian Politics was growing. In fact, its leaders had begun a kind of subjugation to the pressure, and propaganda and in some cases by their own servility and opportunism to maintain their positions and the privileges that official positions offered. Thanks to this policy, the Yugoslavian leadership had blamed the Kosovo Albanian leadership as responsible for the "open outburst of counter-revolution". This attitude is justified by the fact that a number of politicians within the federation, regardless of the republics they lived in, cherished an opinion that Milošević should be allowed to take the "bones" called Kosovo and Vojvodina so he would no longer bite. The events that followed further showed the naivety of these views and a deep unfamiliarity with Serbian hegemonic politics. In his journey, Milošević had clearly understood that in

order to make the necessary legal changes in relation to Kosovo, its political leadership had to be removed. International authors state that the first step in this direction was taken with the dismissal of two Albanian leaders Azem Vllasi and Kaqusha Jashari. According to them, this was done in order to replace these figures with more cooperative figures to destroy the autonomy (Malcolm, 1998; Petritsch, Pichler, 2002). In this context, in early 1989, the Milošević regime had achieved its goal of imposing its power within the federation. Because the political system of Yugoslavia was quite complicated, it consisted of six republics and two provinces which had their right to vote within the federation, (with the right for veto in Republics) now after their submission with the changes in Vojvodina, Montenegro and Kosovo's leadership, Milošević had four votes out of a total eight. However, in Kosovo "happened" as Milošević liked to say "an event where the main protagonist was the people". But this time the main protagonist was the Albanian people. Thus, immediately after February 20, 1989, two days before the adoption of the Serbian constitution in Kosovo, massive protests burst out from the Albanians which were also joined by the miners of the Trepça Industrial Complex (Meier, 1999). They arrived from Mitrovica (Stantrg) to Prishtina on foot in the afternoon after traveling for forty kilometres. They came to support Kosovo's leadership, to oppose dismissals and changes, to express opposition to any pressure on Kosovo and its political leadership. The miners did not stop, and on February 20, 1989, they entered in a hunger strike which was followed by the involvement of others as well as by the leadership of Trepça (Vllasi, 2017). The support of the people was maximal. They bravely inspired hundreds of thousands by acting in cold snowy weather for five full days, and they tried to prove through their behavior that Albanians were not as they were being presented by Serbs..., all this manifestation with a participation of more than 400.000 people went without any single incident, without the break of even a single small window, and to achieve this, an amount of self-control, education and extraordinary awareness was needed. So, the idea was to clearly state the opinion of who Albanians were and what they represented. We are not as you decide to present us, we do not violate, and we do not kill but we express our political will only "with dignity" which is different from you Serbs (Clark, 2000). The Trepça miners' hunger strike became a symbol of Kosovo Albanians resistance. Milan Kučan, the leader of the Slovenian Republic, came out openly in defense of the miners, addressing the Slovenian citizens, among other things: "The strikers are not only defending Albanians in Kosovo, they are defending Yugoslavia and every Republic, including Slovenia." (Norma, Macqueen, 1995). Despite the wide

national protests, the hunger strikers did not manage to attain their goal and stop the Milošević's open aim to suppress Kosovo. In this regard, he took measures to narrow the legal power in Kosovo which was done through the amendment of the 1974 constitution, which would enable Kosovo to be forcefully reintegrated within the legal and political system of Serbia. According to Malcom (1998), changing these amendments would allow Serbia to control the police, the judiciary, and social, political, economic and educational power, the usage of only one official language. For the realization of this project, the Serbian government, under extraordinary circumstances on March 23, 1989, forced the Kosovo parliament to vote the constitutional amendments in a voting full of tension, an event that the Western authors⁵ describe their writings as a complete siege, the entire parliament surrounded by tanks, armored vehicles, helicopters, special police units, members of state security, senior Serbian party officials, etc. This event was comparable to the event when Adolf Hitler took absolute power in 1933. In these circumstances the suppression of autonomy waited only for the official confirmation from Belgrade, wherewith a voting was held in an extraordinary and solemn session held on March 28, 1989 where Kosovo's autonomy had been abolished and now had only been left in the memory of Albanians. The Albanian response was immediate and intense to the ongoing successive measures taken by Belgrade, including here: the continuation of massive protests whose demands were politically rational based on the events that where occurring in Yugoslavia. The Austrian authors W. Petritsch and R. Pichler (2002) came to the conclusion that the Albanians with these protest clearly wanted to show that they had no separatist or nationalist intentions as it was continuously claimed by Serbian propaganda.

7. Gazimestan – the place of myths and legends

To those who were familiar with the functioning of federation, the abolition of Kosovo's autonomy on March 23, 1989 was a clear signal that Yugoslavia was no longer the same. Even for those who at certain moments had dilemmas and "often they had put the blame" on the Albanian nationalism. With the abolition of the autonomy of the provinces of Kosovo and Vojvodina and with the change of leadership in Montenegro, it was clear that Serbia and its leader Milošević had become a serious threat to the further continuation of Yugoslavia. In this regard, Milošević, supported strongly by the Serbian propaganda, had manipulated the masses with the organization of successive rallies, where Kosovo Serbs were the most active.

5 Malcoln, 1998, 357-358; Petritsch, R. Pichler, 2002, 52; Judah, 2002, 81; Clark, 2000, 52; Bugajski, 2006, 24. Schmit, 2012, 243.

Milošević, now elected president of Serbia, was planning an even bigger rally because now they really had a reason: Kosovo was fully conquered and to celebrate this, the 600th anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo was an ideal chance. Preparations for the anniversary began a year earlier and were accompanied by numerous articles in the media, emphasizing that the celebration of the Battle of Kosovo was taking place "in the crucial years of our history" (Zirojevic, 1999). Lenard J. Cohen (2010) describes it as one of the most dramatic and well-prepared events according to a careful scenography in modern Serbian history.

This manifestation was one of the most important, if not the most important in Serbian history. Due to the fact that the dissatisfaction with the political situation that prevailed at that time gave the Serbian state, more specifically Milošević, the opportunity to revive the Primary National Myth. The day of celebration begun early. At 7:00 AM, a liturgy was held in the monastery of Gračanica near the capital city Prishtina. The celebration then moved to the site of the historic Battlefield. The Serbian public seemed moved by feelings similar to massive hysteria (Kaser, Halpern, 1998). The participation was massive, with large numbers of 500.000 up to 1.5 million Serbs coming from across the Federation and a significant number coming from the Serbian Diaspora. Serbian leader Milošević arrived by helicopter on "Vidovdan" on June 28, 1989, landing near a large crowd, straight from the sky like Messiah. "Everything seemed perfect". The first row was reserved for the political elite where the Serbian heads of state and the head of Yugoslavia were lined up (Cohen, 2010; Vllasi, 2017). It was clear that all the attention was on Milošević, the masses were filled with his portrait pictures and were shouting continuously: "Slobo – Slobo!", "Kosovo is Serbia!". He was the main speaker, he seemed confident and very excited by the masses and the opera music playing at the same time in the background with the Serbian patriotic song: "'Ko to kaže, 'ko to laže, Srbija je mala..." (That who said that Serbia is small, has lied), Milošević came in front of the audience and gave a long speech which was evident that it was prepared in details. The content of the speech seemed quite fluctuating, there were cases where he talked about the path of unification, brotherhood, economic reforms, the common good etc., such as: "Today's Serbia is united and equal to other republics, and is prepared to do everything to economically improve the position of all its citizens. If there is unity, cooperation and seriousness, we will succeed in doing so. Serbs have always liberated themselves and when they had a chance they also helped others be liberated. Serbs have never taken advantage of their majority against others. Yugoslavia is a multinational community and it can only survive

in conditions of full equality for all nations living in it. Or the real side of the speech that contained nationalist elements that really showed his real intentions for Serbia to dominate and suppress the Federation. His speech introduction would start with the expression: 'Friends' (communist salutation) a typical greeting of the time, to continue the intoxicating expression of the masses 'in this place-heart of Serbia'. This six-hundred-year anniversary is taking place at a time when Serbia, after many years and decades, has regained its state, national and spiritual integrity. Six centuries from then, we are here again engaged in battles and strife. These are not armed battles however such things cannot be excluded yet.⁶ It was obvious that the speech clearly showed the ultra-nationalist approach with which Milošević manipulated the memories of a famous loss to ignite hatred of the crowds against non-Serb people, especially against Albanians. In this aspect, let consider for a moment the Battle from a historical perspective. It is clear that historians do not always agree on how to interpret the events or the subject of their study, sometimes for personal, political, or ideological reasons or the discovery of new evidence and resources, etc. The Battle of Kosovo does not make an exception to such disagreements. However, the historical data that managed to survive till our time, such as references, various chronicles on which the story of the Battle of Kosovo is built upon which are mostly Ottoman and Byzantine, almost unanimously speak of a coalition of Balkan people composed of Serbs, Albanians, Croats, Romanians, Bulgarians etc., led by Princ Lazar, ruler of the Serbs of Raška.

In this context, the history of the Battle of Kosovo from the time it happened until today is one of the key events in the history of people of Balkans in particular for Albanians as native people of this region and Serbs as claimants of the territory of Kosovo. The issue seemed to be complicated by the fact that Serbian mythology had given this the importance of a totem in the creation of an identity that the Serbian patriotism has held itself for centuries and which unfortunately continues to hold to this day (Pulaha, 1968). Many Serbian scientists and publicists have made a significant contribution to this, thus establishing the scientific advantage of interpreting the "Serbian right over Kosovo" which was in fact taken as the task of Serbian historiography to prove this theory to the European public. In this context, there is actually no author that has written something about Kosovo without writing a few words on this Battle. The American historian, Ferdinand Schevill, (2002), finds that the facts about the Battle of Kosovo

6 Radio Television of Serbia (RTS) Online from: <https://archive.org/details/Gazimestan600thAnniversaryOfTheKosovoPoljeBattle> Compare to: https://cmes.arizona.edu/sites/cmes.arizona.edu/files/SLOBODAN%20MILOSEVIC_speech_6_28_89.pdf (28.04.2020).

are so distorted by the legends of the South Slavs that the truth about this battle will never be revealed.

8. The Serbization of Kosovo – The Albanian Resistance

The events that took place in the following two decades, the end of 80s and 1998-1999 respectively, made Kosovo gain the attention it has today in western diplomacy.⁷ The cause for this is found in the political and legal aggression of Milošević's regime, initially with the abolition of the autonomy which ended any form of cooperation between Albanians and Serbs in Kosovo, further contributing to increase in centuries-old divergences that existed between them, to continue with a systematic violence that took place in 90s. In such a reality, without having many solutions, the majority of Albanians under the leadership of DLK (Democratic League of Kosovo) led by Ibrahim Rugova, had clearly stated that the path they would follow was that of peace, boycotting all Serbian institutions. It should be said that such a policy was strongly encouraged by the United States and the governments of Western Europe so that the ethnic Albanians of Kosovo would follow the moderate non-violent path, perhaps as the best possible way to achieve their goals.

The pacifist policy pursued by I. Rugova resulted with Kosovo remaining at peace during the wars in Slovenia, Croatia and Bosnia. The argument offered by the DLK leadership at the time was that in those circumstances in which Albanians found themselves, especially after the suspension of all security institutions and without army and police, unarmed confrontation with the Serbs would be completely unequal and would bring great bloodshed for the Albanians. However, this was not the whole picture, since even in these early times there existed a more or less modest group which paved an alternative way for the solution to the problem of Kosovo. The growth of these formations was increasing day by day, as a result of the increase in the number of those who had lost patience and confidence in the strategy of the peaceful movement and who were seriously considering resistance. In this context, in the mid 90s, the resistance took a shape in the name of what would be known publicly as the KLA (Kosovo Liberation Army). In such a situation, due to the brutality of the Serbian military police forces, the tendency to eradicate the innocent Albanians civilian population, had obliged the Western Europe and the United States to get more involved in this conflict, intervening militarily with the 78-day campaign of the

7 The British journalist Tim Judah has a different opinion when talking about the historical developments of 1989 and onwards in Kosovo, it is strange how little is known about those years outside the region itself. T. Judah, 2002, 90.

NATO Atlantic Alliance because the issue was not only about the stability of Kosovo but of the entire Balkans region (Daalder, E O'Hanlon, 2000).

9. Conclusion

Considering it from an international point of view, Yugoslavia has always shown interest in the outside world, perhaps due to the combination that represented interethnic religious differences. All merits for the functioning of its survival formula are dedicated to the Yugoslav leader Josip Bros – Tito. However, the classic question that kept popping up continuously about Yugoslavia was: What will happen when Tito dies? Circumstances and events that were continuously taking place led to a gloomy end which was its breakup. The main dilemma was whether this process would be violent or democratic. Time has shown that Tito's death caused deep wounds within the party. True political life had stalled, turning into a constant quarrel between the representatives of republics and of provinces, especially that of Kosovo.

During the 1980s, tensions in Kosovo increased every day more. Of the many problems that would arise, the Albanian-Serbian conflict could be called the basis for the beginning of the fall of Yugoslavia. Tito's death is considered as the opening of the lid for the pot in which the Albanian-Serbian conflict was boiling.

For Albanians, their entire journey within the Yugoslavian federation was difficult and above all it was an imposed process. The Serbian regime, using all the power of Yugoslav government, had utilized violence, discrimination, attempts to assimilate, pressure for displacement, and denial of basic human rights, especially against the Albanians. Its purpose was the serbization of Kosovo.⁸ Therefore, the 1974 Constitution that granted Kosovo an extended autonomy of power in all respects was a window of hope, though not enough, as Kosovo continued to be the poorest region in Yugoslavia in all aspects of life. These and many other facts rightly contributed to the Albanian nationalism resulting in intensive efforts of the leadership of Albanian students at the beginning of the year 1981 (March-April), who organized protests which were joined by tens of thousands of citizens (workers, pupils, farmers). The demands of the protesters were clear: equality with other people of the federation, indicating demands for Kosovo to become a Republic. However, such a request, although just, was contradicted by the Serbian regime. The point was that the Serbs could never withstand the emancipation of the Albanians, let alone being equal to them. Unfortunately, such a policy continues to this day in the new reality created

8 Read more details on the Serbian project from Načertanija 1844 to Operation "Patkoi", 1999.

after February 17th 2008 when Kosovo was declared an Independent State and has received international recognition.

On the other hand, the Serbs have continuously criticized the Yugoslavian leadership. According to them, the policy led by Tito (from 1943 of the Jajca meeting and to the 1974 Constitution) had severely damaged the Serbian nation. In this context, the Serbian intellectual elite, using these arguments, had begun to use the card of nationalism. The SASA Memorandum was a clear narrative of the path that Serbian politics should follow, using the card of instrumentalization, for the allegedly "discrimination of Serbian population within the federation". In these circumstances, the most active were the Kosovo Serbs.⁹ They complained that "Albanians were raping and discriminating them by making life impossible for them in Kosovo". Their complaints to the Serbian leadership were that "if you do not intervene today, it will be too late tomorrow. As a result of the violence, Serbs will be forced to leave Kosovo". The leader in the east, Slobodan Milošević, responded to these requests by implementing his nationalist politics which he launched in April 1987 in Kosovo. With his rise to power, hopes for a life together in the federation were increasingly lost, thus, this being the first step towards the Breakup of Yugoslavia. The abolition of Kosovo's autonomy on March 23, 1989, was a clear signal that Serbian policy would not stop in Kosovo but would continue in the direction of other Yugoslavian people. The course of events was followed by wars, massacres, and expulsion, hundreds of thousands killed, tens of thousands of missing people who first left for Slovenia, then Croatia, and Bosnia, to end with Kosovo, where it began in the late 1980s. In this context, opinions may be different, but in the course of events I have presented and analyzed in this paper, the tragedy of the Yugoslavian people and its cause is to be blamed to the Serbian nationalism led by Slobodan Milošević.

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9 For more details on this issue see: Malcolm, 1998, 352-362; Vickers, 1998, 261-276; Judah, 2002, 66-71; Schmit, 2012, 234-242.

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Početak raspada Jugoslavije – Kosovo kao početna točka

Sažetak

Ovaj rad sadrži kronološki rezime i analizira proces početka raspada Jugoslavije u vezi s događajima na Kosovu u razdoblju 1981. – 1989. Njegova svrha je predstaviti, kroz objektivnan pristup, glavne uzroke koji su doveli do početka raspada Jugoslavije s Kosovom kao početnom točkom. Metodologija toga rada uključuje reflektiranje glavnih događaja u obliku usporedne analize, uspoređivanjem stavova većega broja međunarodnih i lokalnih autora (Albanaca, Hrvata, Srba) uključujući povjesničare, diplomate, političare, novinare i ostale - a neki od njih su bili neposredni pratitelji ovoga razdoblja. Analiza je provedena na znanstvenim radovima, monografijama i dokumentarnim filmovima.

Ključne riječi: Jugoslavija, Kosovo, autonomija, sukob, srpski nacionalizam, Miloševićev režim.