

THE VIOLENT STRUGGLE FOR INDEPENDENCE: THE BASQUE-KOSOVO PARALLELS

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This paper represents a comparative analysis of the struggle for independence of two European regions - the Basque Country and Kosovo and Metohija, whose main method was terrorist activity. The objective of the research is to show why, in the case of Kosovo, the KLA was declared a terrorist organization by the western part of the international community, and then won the military support, as well as the support to illegal unilateral secession, while, on the other hand, the Basque ETA was characterized from the very beginning to the end of its existence as a terrorist organization, where Spain received full support in the fight against it, and also in the struggle against the secession of the Basque Country in general. The starting hypothesis of the paper is that the implementation of double standards in these two cases is the result of geopolitical interests of the Western power centres, and not observance of international law and necessary conditions to allow secession of a part of the territory of a sovereign state. The results of the research show that, despite the fact that the Basque people suffered various forms of repression during the Franco era, they did not receive support for the establishment of an independent state, unlike the Albanians from Kosovo and Metohija who were allowed to do so, despite already having the home state of Albania. Methodologically, the paper has used the case study method, comparative analysis method and historical method.

Key words: Basque Country, Kosovo and Metohija, secession, terrorism, ETA, KLA, geopolitics

Introduction

Contemporary Europe faces a great number of challenges including secessionist movements as one of the most important. Their practical importance is reflected in the fact that they can produce the so-called domino effect, that is, potential secession

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of a part of the territory of some country by a wider part of the international community can present authorities in other countries that face the same challenges with a fait accompli. Thus, in the case of the unilaterally declared independence of Kosovo in 2008, which was initiated and publicly supported in the form of recognition by the leading Western centres of political power (US, UK, Germany, France, etc.), it was considered that this case would set a precedent, that is, it will open Pandora's box of secessionist demands throughout Europe - Catalan, Basque, Flemish, Scottish, Padan, etc. However, this did not happen due to the fact that the Western power centres insist that the case of Kosovo independence is a "unique case" and not a precedent. The example of the secession of Crimea from Ukraine and its annexation to Russia is more an exception than a rule and is the result of the Russian objective military and political power, that is, its geopolitical ambitions in the Black Sea region.¹

The Basque secession is much older than the Albanian secession in the territory of Kosovo and Metohija. The Basque people have been unsuccessfully trying to establish their independent nation-state for several centuries, especially in the second half of the 20th and early 21st century. Comparing the Basque and Albanian secessionist efforts from the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century, many similarities can be noticed, such as the violent (terrorist) method of struggle to achieve political goals, the existence of the military and civilian wing in their terrorist organizations and the presence of great linguistic, ethnic and cultural differences between rebel population and the majority population in those countries. Despite this, the results of the struggle between the Basque people and Albanians are completely different - Kosovo is *de facto* independent (though still not *de jure*), and the Basque Country is not.

ETA – origin, development and operation

The period of Francoism was particularly traumatic for the Basque people, their institutions of self-government and culture. The fact that the Basque people (except for those in Navarre) were mostly supporting the republicans during the Spanish Civil War, and that in Franco's eyes they were marked as particularly dangerous enemies (which is why, among other things, the famous bombing of the Basque city of Guernica in 1937 took place), brought the Basque countries the infamous status of "traitorous provinces". Paradoxically, Francoism simultaneously encouraged the industrial and tourist development of the Basque Country.² Having in mind that the Basque people had no institutional channels to fight for the improvement of their conditions in a highly authoritarian and centralized society, it was in such an atmosphere that the Basque terrorism arose as a response to Francoism, but it would later turn out that it was not only inspired by anti-Franco, but also by anti-Spanish sentiments. The famous ETA (Euskadi Ta Askatasuna –

¹ Кристиан Маркссен, „Крымский кризис с точки зрения международного права”, ДПП ИМП, no. 2, 2014, pp. 207-210.

² Rajko Petrović, „Špansko ekonomsko čudo od 1959. do 1973. godine”, *Oditor – časopis za menadžment, finansije i pravo*, vol. 6, no. 1, 2020, pp. 71-72.

“Basque Country and Freedom”) was for decades synonymous with the Basque struggle for independence and one of the most famous terrorist organizations in Western Europe.³ It was founded in 1959 when student activists from the Ekin group differentiated themselves from the Basque Nationalist Party (PNV) and its youth organization EGI. Namely, the fighting Basque youth believed that they led a passive policy towards the Francoist regime. In July 1959, ETA adopted its founding charter, which states that it is a patriotic, non-political and non-religious group that aims to take the Basque future into its hands in order to “preserve the Basque soul”.⁴ In an ideological sense, ETA soon profiled itself as a Marxist group, but its members were not united about the ultimate goal - whether it is a revolution against Francoism, which, as such, also has elements of class struggle or it is about the struggle for the liberation of the Basque Country from Spain in general, regardless of the character of the central government in Madrid.⁵

The first years of activities of the ETA organization did not leave a great impact on the Spanish public and were spent in destroying Francoist symbols throughout the Basque Country, displaying the Basque flag (which was prohibited by law), as well as drawing various slogans against the government and calls for rebellion on the buildings of the Basque cities. However, since 1961, activities have been carried out in a completely different direction. ETA planted a bomb under a train of former Franco volunteers from the Civil War, who were headed to celebrate the rebellion against the Second Republic. There were no victims, but the event resonated with the public and the first arrests of terrorists began. At the fourth assembly, in 1965, ETA definitively set its future terrorist model of action - a spiral strategy of action-repression-action with the aim of eliminating carefully selected targets (politicians, soldiers, policemen, pro-Spanish social activists) with a minimum of human and material resources.⁶ Such a strategy was successful in the decades that followed. Between 1968 and 1980, members of this organization killed 287 and wounded 385 people, including a great number of people who worked for the state - from the murder of the head of the police station in the Basque city of San Sebastian in 1968 to the famous murder of the Spanish Prime Minister and the man who was planned to be Franco's true successor, Admiral Luis Carrero Blanco, in 1973. The civilians in the Basque Country and other parts of Spain were not spared from attacks of this organization. It is enough to mention the bomb attack on the Cafeteria Rolando in Madrid in 1974, where 9 people died and 56 were wounded, as well as the wounding

³ William A. Douglass and Joseba Zulaika, „On the Interpretation of Terrorist Violence: ETA and the Basque Political Process”, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 32, No. 2, 1990, pp. 238-240.

⁴ Rajko Petrović, “Evolucija baskijskog separatizma od 1959. do 2018. godine”, *Godišnjak Fakulteta bezbednosti*, no. 1, 2018, p. 196.

⁵ Ignacio Sánchez-Cuenca, „The persistence of nationalist terrorism: the case of ETA”, in: Kledja Mulaj (ed.), *Violent Non-State Actors in Contemporary World Politics*, Juan March Institute, Madrid, 2008, p. 6.

⁶ Rajko Petrović, “Evolucija baskijskog separatizma od 1959. do 2018. godine”, gen. quote, pp. 196-197.

of 14 people during the bomb attack in San Sebastian in 1978. The response of the regime in Madrid during all those years was harsh. Thus, in 1970, about 5,000 people, both members and sympathizers of the ETA organization, were arrested or detained, while the state police and parapolic forces did not hesitate to use the most brutal methods of killing and torturing them. Therefore, many terrorists found refuge in the so-called French Basque Country, which they used as a logistic centre and a place of escape for a long time.⁷

Franco died in 1975, and his regime dissolved in 1978, when the Constitution of Spain was adopted, which became a parliamentary monarchy and a decentralized state. The right of its historical nationalities and territories, including the Basque people and the Basque Country, to broad political, economic and cultural autonomy was also recognized. As early as 1979, the Basque Country (País Vasco) adopted its statute on autonomy and was recognized as one of the Spanish autonomous communities.⁸ Thus, it acquired a great degree of political autonomy (its bodies of legislative, executive and judicial power), economic and financial autonomy (privileged tax system in accordance with the revived institution of *fuego*), and also cultural autonomy (the Basque language becomes co-official with Spanish in its territory, and the use of the Basque coat of arms, flag and anthem also became the official).⁹ Although a great part of the Basque society positively evaluated the democratic reforms in Spain and accepted to be its integral part, ETA continued its terrorist activities without giving up its main goal - the foundation of an independent Basque Country at any cost. Its leadership not only rejected the draft Statute of the Basque Country from 1979, but also declared the leaders of the Basque Nationalist Party, who accepted the proposed solution, traitors. In the 1980s, ETA carried out several bombings each year. The target was primarily policemen and members of the Spanish Civil Guard (Guardia Civil). In 1980 alone, 27 of them were killed. In a bomb attack in the Dominican Republic Square in Madrid in 1986, 12 young members of the Civil Guard lost their lives, while dozens of people were wounded.¹⁰

Due to its brutality and terror it spread among the Basque people, ETA lost the support of even its most ardent supporters during the 1980s, and its actions were reduced to pure and indiscriminate violence that had lost its classical revolutionary and ideological substratum a long time ago. Its operational capabilities, technical support, ammunition stocks and human capacities declined dramatically during the 1990s, forcing it to negotiate. It first agreed to cooperate with the Basque Nationalist Party and Basque Solidarity (Eusko Alkartasuna), one of the Basque nationalist parties that

⁷ Ibid, pp. 197-198.

⁸ Rajko Petrović, "Istorijsko-politički model regionalizacije u Španiji: izazovi i perspektive", *Kultura polisa*, vol. XV, no. 37, 2018, pp. 59-60.

⁹ „Ley Orgánica 3/1979, de 18 de diciembre, de Estatuto de Autonomía para el País Vasco”, *BOE*, núm. 306, de 22 de diciembre de 1979, págs. 4-5.

¹⁰ Rajko Petrović, *Uloga istorijsko-političkog modela regionalizacije Španije u suzbijanju secesionizma u Kataloniji i Baskiji*, Doktorska disertacija, Fakultet političkih nauka, Beograd, 2021, p. 92.

accepted the Spanish constitutional framework, and then signed the Estella–Lizarrá Declaration in 1998, the first ceasefire agreement since its establishment. Although it violated it in the early 2000s, the Government of José Luis Zapatero began intensive negotiations on ceasefire in 2005. Reduced to the historical minimum of its strength, with the real support of barely 1% of the Basque public, in 2011 ETA agreed to hand over the remaining weapons to the Spanish authorities, so that in 2018 its leadership declared the definitive shutdown of the organization. The results of the ETA half-century actions are terrible - it killed 840, wounded 2,500 and kidnapped 80 people.¹¹

KLA – origin, development and operation

The Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) was founded in 1994 by several Albanian leaders at the time, such as Agim Çeku, Fatmir Limaj, Ramush Haradinaj and Hashim Thaçi, but its undisputed leader from its founding until his death was Adem Jashari. It is a paramilitary and terrorist organization, whose goal was the establishment of an independent Albanian state of Kosovo in the territory of the AP of Kosovo at that time, and also the so-called Greater Albania in a wider perspective. Since the very beginning of its actions, the KLA proclaimed violent struggle as a means of coming to power, and the state of Serbia and its military and police formations as the main enemies that one cannot and must not negotiate with.¹² The KLA began its activities in 1996, when it entered into conflicts with the Serbian police in KiM through guerilla warfare. In addition to 10 policemen, who were killed by its members in the period from 1996 to 1998 (the attack on the police in Vuçitrn in 1997 is well-known), they also killed Serbian and Albanian civilians who did not want to obey them (a total of 24 in the studied period). Due to unconstitutional actions in a sovereign and internationally recognized state, such as FR Yugoslavia, which had a character of an armed rebellion, the authorities in Belgrade put the KLA on the list of terrorist organizations, and the United States did the same. However, dramatic events soon occurred in the field. Since 1998, the KLA has launched a fierce offensive, where the frontal conflict with the Serbian police has spread to practically the entire territory of the AP of KiM, and the terrorists managed to effectively control 1/3 of the observed territory at one point. The severity of the conflict is evidenced by the fact that during 1998, over 50,000 Serbian policemen were involved in the fighting, and that several tens of thousands of people had to leave Serbian and Albanian homes. Adem Jashari himself, among others, lost his life during the fierce confrontation between the KLA and the Serbian police in the village of Donje Prekaze near Srbica. After that, Hashim Thaçi took over the leadership of the KLA.¹³

¹¹ Ibid, pp. 92-93.

¹² Nikola Jović, *Ekstremizam i terorizam na Jugu Srbije*, Master rad, Univerzitet u Beogradu, Beograd, 2015, pp. 30-34.

¹³ Ibid. p. 31.

In March 1999, NATO, under the US directive, launched aggression against FR Yugoslavia due to the alleged ethnic cleansing that the Serbian state started with the assistance of police and paramilitary forces, and the staged (which was later proven) massacre of Albanians in the village of Račak was particularly used for the purpose of propaganda. The failed negotiations in Rambouillet near Paris (February-March 1999) between the leadership of FR Yugoslavia and the political representatives of the Albanians from KiM (with the mediation of the Contact Group) were also one of the immediate causes for the armed aggression against FR Yugoslavia, which was an unprecedented case in modern history. During the three months of fighting, NATO forces assisted and cooperated militarily, logistically and in every other way with the KLA, which was no longer in the State Department's list of terrorist organizations, but its members suddenly became "freedom fighters". Foreign mercenary formations, as well as regular and paramilitary formations from Albania, provided assistance to the terrorists. In a series of decisive battles, such as the Battle of Košare, the Battle of Paštrik and Operation Strela, the Yugoslav Army and the Serbian Police managed to preserve the entire territory of the AP of KiM, despite fierce attacks from a much superior enemy.¹⁴ With the Kumanovo Peace Agreement, signed on June 9, 1999, NATO stopped the bombing of Yugoslavia. The Yugoslav Army and the Police of the Republic of Serbia undertook to withdraw from the territory of KiM within 11 days, the ground safety zone was established between the central part of Serbia and KiM, and KFOR forces were tasked with disarming the KLA. A day later, the United Nations Security Council adopted the UN SC Resolution 1244, introducing the UN Interim Administration Mission (UNMIK) in Kosovo, but the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the FRY, i.e. Serbia, is guaranteed in that area. Although the KLA has been dissolved, its leadership assumed the highest political and social functions and continued to actively work on gaining the full independence of Kosovo. On March 17 and 18, 2004, Albanian extremists carried out ethnic cleansing of a great part of the remaining Serbian population in KiM, where several dozen people were killed, hundreds were wounded, more than 4,000 were expelled, more than 800 houses were set on fire, and 35 Orthodox temples and cultural monuments were destroyed or damaged.¹⁵ On February 17, 2008, the authorities in Prishtina unilaterally adopted the declaration of Kosovo independence, declaring it a sovereign and independent state. The Government of Serbia annulled such a decision as unconstitutional, but did not intervene militarily. The independence of Kosovo was soon recognized by the leading Western powers (US, Great Britain, Germany, France and others), and only five EU member states (Spain, Romania, Greece, Cyprus and Slovakia) did not do so.¹⁶ For several years, the so-called Brussels negotiations of the

¹⁴ Read more in: Nebojša Pavković i Boško Antić, *Košare i Paštrik srpski Termopili*, Medija centar "Obrana", Beograd, 2020.

¹⁵ Branko Jokić (ed.), *Martovski pogrom na Kosovu i Metohiji: 17–19. mart 2004: s kratkim pregledom uništenog i ugroženog hrišćanskog kulturnog nasleđa*, Ministarstvo kulture Vlade Republike Srbije i Muzej u Prištini, Beograd, 2004, pp. 50-69.

¹⁶ Oğuz Güner, „A Legitimacy Question in the European Union: The Kosovo Non-Recognition Quagmire”, *Avrasya Etüdleri*, Vol. 59, No. 1, 2021, p. 81.

authorities in Belgrade and Prishtina that resulted in the Brussels Agreement in 2013 that guaranteed the establishment of the Community of Serb Municipalities in the territory of KiM are ongoing, but the Albanian party has not yet fulfilled its part of the obligation.

The Basque autonomy and Kosovo independence – causes and consequences

Today, neither ETA nor the KLA exist anymore, but their actions have produced various results. On the one hand, the ETA did not fulfill its goal because the Basque Country has never even tried to secede from Spain, let alone declare independence. On the other hand, the KLA did cease to exist in 1999, but its leadership took over the political power in Prishtina and nine years later unilaterally declared the independence of Kosovo, where Albanians effectively exercise power to this day. Therefore, those two similar cases in which the same violent, i.e. terrorist and guerilla method of warfare was used, gave different results. All the mentioned facts related to the Basque and Kosovo case indicate that historical, national, linguistic and similar criteria were not decisive for the decision of a great part of the international community (that is, almost all Western centres of political power) to recognize the so-called Kosovo as an independent state, and at the same time no one even thought to discuss the idea of establishing the independent Basque Country. The reasons, obviously, should be sought in the geopolitical interests of the Western countries in the Balkans, as well as their interests in Spain, and also in the different strength of Spain and Serbia on the international scene.

Analysing the reasons for not supporting the idea of the independent Basque Country, it should be said that, firstly, Spain, during Francoism, when ETA was founded and began to operate, was geopolitically extremely important for the US as the leader of the Western bloc during the Cold War. On the one hand, the US could not allow the spread of communism in the territory of Western Europe, so a Marxist terrorist organization, such as ETA, was incompatible with its geostrategic interests as an ideological antipode to the Western model of democracy that the US exported to the world. At the same time, the official Washington needed Spain to establish military bases in its territory, given that Spain is the gateway to the Mediterranean, which had to be counted on in the event of a major military clash with the Warsaw Pact. Therefore, the US tolerated Franco's internal policy, including the Basque issue.¹⁷ Secondly, Spain is a Western European and Roman Catholic country that represents one of the historical symbols of the rise of the Western civilization. It is a very respectable country with "historic importance", a former colonial power, a country that represents a "window to the Latin American world" and whose language

¹⁷ Alberto Leonart Amsélem, „España, un antes y un después. El pacto U.S.A”, *Anales de Historia Contemporánea*, Vol. 16, No. 1, 2000, pp. 50-55.

is the second world language at the moment. Thirdly, Spain is one of the greatest EU countries and its important political, economic and security factor, without which European integration is unthinkable today. Fourthly, the Spanish crown is related to European and world courts by family and other ties and, as such, still has an important role in international relations, and it is certainly traditionally interested in protecting the territorial integrity of Spain. Fifthly, Spain has been a NATO member since 1982 and is an important link in the overall preservation of the North Atlantic security. Its land, naval and air forces represent a respectable military force, and Spain itself was a participant in NATO operations such as those in Afghanistan, Iraq and the bombing of FRY.¹⁸ Sixthly, Spain is a Roman Catholic country that throughout history has made an immeasurable contribution to the spread of Roman Catholicism to the New World. It has always been of exceptional importance for the Vatican, as evidenced by the concordat that the Vatican signed with Francoist Spain at the time of its greatest international isolation or the technocrats from the Roman Catholic organization Opus Dei that implemented the Spanish economic miracle of the 1960s and 1970s in practice.¹⁹ The Vatican, as a powerful not only religious, but also political institution, gives significant support to the preservation of the unity of Spain. Seventhly, the secession of the Basque Country or any part of Spain would produce a domino effect that would sweep over the rest of Europe. Scotland, Flanders, Padania and Corsica are just some of the European regions that would like to become independent nation states. Such a scenario is inadmissible for the European Union because it cherishes the idea of uniting Europeans and supranational cooperation in which state borders lose their meaning, especially the dissolution of the European continent into a great number of smaller states. This is exactly why official Brussels is one of the greatest proponents of unified Spain.

The reasons for supporting the project of establishing independent Kosovo are rather different from those used as arguments against the independence of the Basque Country and they are certainly dominated by geopolitical ambitions and the selective use of theoretical arguments in favour of secession. Firstly, the establishment of independent Kosovo in the short term, and the so-called Greater Albania in the long term, is undoubtedly a political project of the Western power centres with the aim of weakening the Serbian factor in the Balkans, which is traditionally perceived as pro-Russian, that is, as a potential way for Russia to get access to the warm sea. Here, above all, we mean the ambitions of the US, which was the main assistant in the military and political sense for the completion of this project on the field. Secondly, it is particularly important to mention the interest of the German factor not only when it comes to the support to the so-called independent Kosovo, but also active participation in the establishment and development of the Albanian nation and nationalism, with the official Vienna in the late 19th and early

¹⁸ Juan Avilés Farré, „España, OTAN y los conflictos de la antigua Yugoslavia”, *Anales de Historia Contemporánea*, Vol. 16, No. 1, 2000, págs. 93-94.

¹⁹ Rajko Petrović, „Špansko ekonomsko čudo od 1959. do 1973. godine”, gen. quote, pp. 67-68.

20th century particularly prominent. There are justified doubts that Germany participated in the foundation of the KLA in 1992 and its training, and that it also participated in planting the case of the massacre in Račak on the Serbian party in order to find a reason for NATO aggression against FRY.²⁰ After the unification in 1990, Germany returned to its imperialist efforts, and in particular, the centuries-old project of “penetration to the east” (Drang nach Osten), whose inevitable part is the control of the Balkans and the Serbian ethnic area as its central part.²¹ Thirdly, the support to the Muslim people in Kosovo, as well as in the Balkans in general, is part of a wider strategy of the Western power centres to present themselves to the world Muslim community in a different light compared to their actions in the Middle East, where they have been in a decades-long conflict with a great part of the Muslim people due to natural resources and the future of the State of Israel.²² Fourthly, the economic interests of the Western power centres in the natural resources of KiM are exceptional. It is the area rich in huge reserves of lead, zinc, nickel, cobalt, bauxite, copper, iron, magnesite and lignite, where the latter ranks fifth in the world.²³ Fifthly, KiM represents an important transit zone for transporting drugs from Asia (especially from Afghanistan, where several thousand tons of opium are produced annually, and several hundred tons of heroin can be obtained from it) to Western Europe and it is important to control it for this reason, as well.²⁴ Sixthly, the territory of KiM has special importance today in the context of migrant crisis, where it is a part of the so-called Western-Balkan migrant route through which, until 2015, almost a million migrants from the Middle East went.²⁵

Conclusion

The organizations ETA and KLA were two undoubtedly terrorist formations in Europe, which violently fought for the declaration of the independent Basque Country, that is, Kosovo, in the territories of sovereign and internationally recognized states. Despite the identical desires, determination, even strength on the field and the objective threat they represented, the results of their actions are different, because the Basque Country gained political autonomy, but not independence, while

²⁰ Read more in: Matijas Kincel, *Put u rat, Nemačka, NATO i Kosovo*, Službeni glasnik, Beograd, 2021.

²¹ Fotis Mavromatidis and Jeremy Leaman, „German Influence in the Western Balkans: Hegemony by Design or by Default?“, *Debatte*, Vol. 16, No. 1, 2008, p. 5.

²² Miroljub Jevtić, “Kosovski žeton”, *Politika*, 18.08.2011, <https://www.politika.rs/scc/clanak/188191/Sta-da-se-radi/Kosovski-zeton>, 22.9.2021.

²³ Milomir Stepić, “Kosovo and Metohija: geopolitički aspekti brzog rešenja i zamrznutog konflikta”, *Nacionalni interes*, vol. 38, no. 2, 2020, p. 19.

²⁴ „The illicit drug trade through South-Eastern Europe”, UNODC, Vienna, 2014, pp. 35-65.

²⁵ Natalija Perišić, “Zapadnobalkanska migrantska ruta: uticaj kandidature na članstvo u Evropskoj uniji na pozicije Srbije”, *Politička revija*, vol. 58, no. 4, 2018, p. 93.

the so-called Kosovo is *de jure* an integral part of Serbia, but is *de facto* independent from the authorities in Belgrade, where its independence is recognized by the leading world and European powers such as the US, Great Britain, Germany and France.

The reasons for double standards implemented by the Western power centres on the examples of the Basque Country and Kosovo and Metohija should, as previously explained, be sought in their geopolitical interests, and not in consistent observance of the principles of international law or valid arguments in favour of secession. The question arises: why should not the Basque people, as undoubtedly autochthonous population in the area of the Basque Country that really suffered from the institutional repression of the Francoist regime, have the right to their independent national state if, in addition to Albania, another one is established for Albanians? Why was the killing of Serbian civilians in KiM during the war in the 1990s classified as a “collateral damage” during the “righteous struggle of Albanians” for independence, while the killing of civilians throughout Spain, which was done by the ETA, was labelled as a terrorist and barbaric act by the Washington, Brussels and Berlin administration? Why does the alleged Albanian culture in KiM deserve full affirmation and protection through the institutions of an independent state (although it has never been a victim of systemic repression by the Serbian institutions), while the Basque culture, of exceptional age and authenticity, which was really a victim of systemic and institutional suppression by the Francoist regime, does not deserve the same treatment by the western part of the international community? Why has the Basque Country, as a region of Spain, never been the subject of any territorial division or delimitation, while, for example, the administration of the US President Donald Trump once, in 2018, showed an interest in the thesis on the delimitation of Kosovo and Metohija becoming a part of the negotiations on the future of the southern Serbian province?²⁶ All of these and many other questions have no other answer than the geopolitical interests and pragmatic reasons of the Western powers at a given moment, which draw a fine line between terrorists and freedom fighters when and where necessary.

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²⁶ Dušan Proroković, “Podela Kosova i Metohije: realnost ili zabluda?”, *Vojno delo*, No. 2/2022, April-June, p. 63.

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Summary

This paper represents a comparative analysis of the struggle for independence of two European regions - the Basque Country and Kosovo and Metohija, whose main method of struggle was terrorist action, i.e. armed rebellion. The objective of the research is to show why, in the case of Kosovo, the KLA was first declared a terrorist organization by the western part of the international community, and then won the military support, as well as the support to illegal unilateral secession, while, on the other hand, the Basque terrorist organization ETA was characterized from the very beginning to the end of its existence as a terrorist organization, where Spain received full support in the fight against it, and also in the struggle against the secession of the Basque Country in general. The starting hypothesis of the paper is that the implementation of double standards in these two cases is the result of geopolitical interests of the Western power centres, and not observance of international law and conditions that in theoretical terms have to be met in order to allow secession of a part of the territory of a sovereign state. The results of the research show that, despite the fact that the Basque people are indigenous population in the territories they inhabit, have a specific language and culture and suffered various forms of repression during Francoism, they did not receive support for an independent state, unlike the Albanians from Kosovo and Metohija, who were allowed to do so, despite already having their home state Albania. The reasons for this lie in the fact that Spain is a country of the Western civilization, an important member of the European Union and a Roman Catholic country that enjoys the support of the Vatican, while the project of independent Kosovo is the result of geopolitical interests of the Western countries led by the United States. The current geopolitical situation tells us that we still cannot expect a solution to the Kosovo issue in favour of Serbia, and also that the policy of double standards cannot be sustainable in the long run, given that separatist movements in parts of the Western world (such as Catalan, Scottish and Flemish) are growing stronger and it is difficult to expect that the proclamation of the so-called Kosovo independence will remain a unique case, not a precedent. In methodological terms, the paper has used the case study method, comparative analysis method and historical method.

Key words: *Basque Country*, Kosovo and Metohija, secession, terrorism, ETA, KLA, geopolitics

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