

THE REDEFINITION OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE SERBIAN AND ALBANIAN NATION – THE BASIS OF THE SECURITY CONSOLIDATION OF KOSOVO AND METOHIIJA

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Достављен: 03. 02. 2022.

Језик рада: Енглески

Кориговано: 15. 03, 22. 04. и 21. 07. 2022.

Тип рада: Прегледни рад

Прихваћен: 26. 08. 2022.

DOI број: 10.5937/vojdelo2203099S

A lot of arguments support the view that the so-called Republic of Kosovo represents a model of a state that is based on violence, injustice, imposition and the absence of any idea of compromise. The national arrogance and aggressive ideas of Greater Albania, as well as the megalomaniac, violent and undemocratic character of the actions of the interim authorities in Prishtina, represent a real danger for further dissolution of the Balkans, which is why this area is perceived as an area of unfinished conflicts.

From the point of view of accomplishing national interests, Kosovo and Metohija represents the greatest security challenge for the Republic of Serbia. The danger of further collapsing and diminishing the Serbian ethnic space, especially of changing the original Serbian character of the southern Serbian province and threatening the identity heritage of the Serbian nation represent particularly dangerous trends in the conflictual character of relations between Serbs and Albanians.

The importance of Kosovo and Metohija and the severity and complexity of the problem that the southern Serbian province faces emphasize the necessity of defining a long-term strategy for its solution. With its content, it has to be a clear expression of conceptual readiness for solving the complex Kosovo-Metohija problem. At the basis of such a strategy, which is the starting hypothesis of this paper, is the necessity of redefining the relationship between the Serbian and Albanian nation and stopping the inertia of centuries-old mistrust and animosity between them. The stated position, which has a strategic character, is the cornerstone of the security stabilization and reintegration of Kosovo and Metohija.

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The main methodological procedures of the research process in this paper are comparative historical method and the method of document content analysis, the case study method, comparative analysis method and historical method.

Key words: Kosovo and Metohija, long-term strategy, redefinition, Serbian-Albanian relations

Introduction

Kosovo and Metohija, which has a special place in the historical, identity and geopolitical reality of the Serbian nation, makes the Republic of Serbia face rather difficult temptations brought about by its damaged state territorial integrity. That is precisely why, as the historical, religious and spiritual centre of the Serbian nation and the Serbian state, Kosovo and Metohija represents the most difficult test for the Republic of Serbia, especially if it is known that the territory of the southern Serbian province is the origin and generator of many security challenges, risks and threats to national and regional security.¹ The pronounced aggressiveness of the actions of the Prishtina interim institutions, especially the endangerment of the historical and spiritual heritage of the Serbian nation, as well as its continued physical endangerment in Kosovo and Metohija, represent the most serious aspects of threatening the national security of the Republic of Serbia.

The Serbian nation has not often had adequate answers to the challenges imposed by the unfavourable strategic environment. Kosovo and Metohija are a striking example of this. The complexity and seriousness of security and other problems emphasize the necessity of defining a strategic response - a long-term strategy for solving the problem of Kosovo and Metohija, which will be a thoughtful and consensus-based view of the challenges and limitations that stand in the way of solving the problem of the southern Serbian province. At the base of such a strategy, i.e. its cornerstone, is redefining the relationship between the Serbian and Albanian nation and stopping the inertia of their long-term mutual mistrust, animosity and hostility.

As a programme document for solving the mentioned problem, the long-term strategy for solving the problem of Kosovo and Metohija has to primarily eliminate the elements of spontaneity, voluntaristic and "ad hoc" decisions and actions based on such decisions. In particular, it should reflect the strategic readiness of the Serbian nation to search for ways to reintegrate Kosovo and Metohija in the territorial framework of the Republic of Serbia. In this sense, such a strategy should offer instruments and ways of using them in order for the direction of the Serbian-Albanian relations to acquire more appropriate contents as important prerequisites for security socialization in the area of Kosovo and Metohija.

¹ Stanislav Stojanović, "Izazovi i perspektive Kosova i Metohije", Medija centar "Odbrana", Beograd, January 2022, no. 356.

The contemporary Serbian-Albanian relations – a chronicle of misunderstanding

The Serbian-Albanian relations have long been a metaphor for conflictual relations. The particularly strong animosity and pronounced hostility mark the contemporary moment of their mutual relations. We are talking about relations that essentially define the fate of both nations, so redefining those relations and creating a framework for content that will encourage mutual understanding and appreciation is a strategic interest for both nations.

Since the establishment of the first nation states in the Balkans in the 19th century, the relations between Serbs and Albanians have been characterized by misunderstandings and conflicts, which is why they are viewed as two clearly distinct communities separated by origin, language, religion and specific culture and tradition. It can be reasonably considered that these differences arose primarily as a consequence of the process of Islamization of the Albanian population during the 17th century and the establishment of a system of domination of a nation over the other, as the main principle, that coexistence in the Ottoman Empire was based on.² Such relations, which favoured Albanians, encouraged the mass emigration of Serbs from Kosovo and Metohija and their partial Islamization, which will rapidly lead to the demographic superiority of Albanians. The established demographic and other differences will continue to gain in intensity and will decisively define the character of the Serbian-Albanian relations to this day.

Islamization, which under the influence of the Great Eastern Crisis, in the period from 1875 to 1878, would acquire an increasingly clear militant character, then the constitution of the Albanian national programme, the weakening of the Ottoman power and the territorial claims of both ethnic groups in the area of Kosovo and Metohija today, will represent strong incentives to polarization in the Serbian-Albanian relations. In this regard, the liberation of Kosovo and Metohija in the First Balkan War and its reintegration into the Serbian state after five centuries of slavery, represented a serious obstacle for the Albanian plans for ethnic unification. It is generally believed that these tendencies have gradually generated the establishment of the long-term Serbian-Albanian enmity.

The dissatisfaction of Albanians with the new, mainly Slavic state that was formed after the end of the First World War, will further radicalize the Serbian-Albanian relations between the two world wars. Pro-Quisling behaviour and the joining of the majority of the Albanian nation, first to fascist Italy, and later to Germany during the Second World War, strengthened the Serbian-Albanian relations of mistrust. Attempts to affirm the Albanian nation through adequate participation in the institutional arrangements of the SFRY only briefly alleviated the repressed aspirations of Albanians for their state in the territory of Kosovo and Metohija. Such ambitions were directly aimed at further demographic collapse of the Serbian population and the tightening of relations with it. The riots and rebellions of Albanians at the

² Miloje Zdravković, "Uzroci prvih sukoba Srba i Albanaca kroz istoriju", *Nacionalni interes*, no. 2, 2021, pp. 183-204.

end of the 1990s, the continuous violence against Serbs and the expressed pressure to leave the area of Kosovo and Metohija, as well as the occasional inappropriate attitude of the Serbian authorities in solving the Albanian secessionist demands, have led to more open violence by the Albanian extremist and terrorist groups. The clear support of the European countries and the US to the secessionist policy of Kosovo Albanians has imposed the view that the Serbian-Albanian dialogue is not possible.

The NATO aggression, and later the establishment of the so-called independent Kosovo have radicalized the relations between Serbs and Albanians to the ultimate limits.³ Albanians got an illegal state, and Serbs became an anathema and expelled from the greatest number of areas where they lived for centuries, with a gross disavowal of historical facts and the spiritual heritage of their people. On the basis of violence and unjust and gross violation of international norms, the so-called independent Kosovo has been projected as a failed state model that ignores the idea of compromise, as a basis for overcoming ambitions and accumulated frustrations of both nations, radicalizing the idea of winners and losers in the Serbian-Albanian relations. At the same time, the weakness of democratic traditions and the ineffectiveness of the institutions of the Prishtina authorities made that area the most neglected in Europe, that is, a dead corner of Europe, which accumulates the huge conflict potential.⁴

The national arrogance and aggressive idea of Greater Albania pose a danger of further dissolution of the Balkans, which is why it exists as an area of unfinished wars, especially if it is known that the platform of a nation - a dream is a rather expansionist platform.⁵ The megalomaniac and violent character of such aspirations is potentially even more dangerous if it is known that the territory of the southern Serbian province represents the suitable ground for the development of a radical interpretation of Islam, which represents a real danger not only for the region, but also for Europe as a whole. That is precisely why Kosovo and Metohija, from the point of view of the security of the Republic of Serbia, is a challenge of the first order. The threat to the identity and physical security of the Serbian nation and the permanent change in the Serbian character of that area, as well as the danger of the violent reintegration of the north of the province and placing it under the full control of the Prishtina authorities, represent a dangerous direction of further radicalization.

The current situation is deeply at odds with the interests of the Serbian nation. At the same time, such a situation cannot be in the long-term interest of Albanians because it is their conflict with one of the most numerous ethnic communities in the Balkans. The historical interest of both nations is to find a mutually acceptable framework for redefining mutual relations. In support of such thoughts is the indisputable fact that the Serbian-Albanian relations throughout history are not only the relations of misunderstanding and conflicts, but they have also had friendly frameworks for a great part of history. Regardless of the fact that the current

³ Efe Sivis, "Foreign Policy Perspectives and Superpower Politics Competition of U.S. and Russia over Kosovo", *The Journal Social Science*, Volume 4, Number 7/2020, p. 88

⁴ Martin Hajperc, *Macchiato diplomatija: Kosovo, mrtvi ugao Evrope*, Albatros plus, 2017.

⁵ Dimitrije Bogdanović, *Knjiga o Kosovu*, SKZ, Beograd, 2006, p. 211.

perceptions of the Serbian-Albanian relations suggest that these two nations have been in a conflict since the earliest times, it can be said for sure that this is not the only feature in the history of their mutual relations. However, the image of an Albanian or a Serb as an eternal enemy and an essentially “other” has been so long and deeply inscribed in the consciousness of both nations that today it has become impossible to think out of these categories.⁶

Contrary to the prevailing opinion today about the centuries-old enmity between Serbs and Albanians, historical sources from the past indicate that Serbs and Albanians did not consider their relations exclusively as problematic for centuries. In fact, a more objective and detailed consideration of those relations leads to the conclusion that in a great part of the past, Albanians and Serbs mostly lived together next to each other and with each other, and not only against each other. Therefore, one cannot speak of an ancient, centuries-old anti-Albanian or anti-Serbian discourse before the second half of the nineteenth century.⁷ Finding a way out of deeply entrenched positions imposes the need to reevaluate the Serbian-Albanian negative mutual perceptions. The common past and tradition and examples of cooperation and solidarity open room for a critical analysis of the contemporary Serbian, Kosovar and Albanian society, hinting at the prospect of overcoming myths about the “innate” and “eternal” Albanian-Serbian enmity.⁸

Without going into the historically insufficiently studied relations of the pre-Christian period, it is an indisputable fact that Albanians in the early Middle Ages were a part of the population that lived in the areas under the rule of the Serbian nobility. During the medieval Serbian statehood, the relations between Serbs, as the dominant demographic population, and other ethnic communities, including Albanians, were not conflictual, but of a much more symbiotic character.⁹ At the same time, it is known that the close ties between the Serbian ruling and Albanian noble families, which were created during the time of the first Serbian rulers from the Nemanjić dynasty, became particularly intense and close during the invasion of Turks, when both nations found themselves on the path of a much more powerful force and a greater danger.¹⁰ The personality of Skanderbeg, whose Serbian origin on his mother's side is not in dispute, is associated with the uprising against the imposition of the Ottoman authority, which was a reflection of the dissatisfaction of both Serbs and Albanians. Other historical sources can be added to this, saying that a great number of Montenegrin and Albanian tribes cherished the tradition of their common origin and mutual blood relationship.¹¹

⁶ Aleksandar Pavlović (eds.), *Kada su se voleli Srbi i Albanci*, Evropski pokret u Srbiji, Beograd, 2019, p. 16.

⁷ Ibid, p.

⁸ Aleksandar Pavlović (eds.), *FIGURING OUT OF THE ENEMY Rethinking Serbian-Albanian Relations*, UNI FR, Belgrade, 2015.

⁹ Dimitrije Bogdanović, *Knjiga o Kosovu*, gen. quote, p. 207.

¹⁰ Duško Lopandić, „Srpsko-albanske dinastijske veze u srednjem veku”, in: Aleksandar Pavlović, (eds.), *Kada su se voleli Srbi i Albanci*, p. 8.

¹¹ Aleksandar Pavlović, (eds.), *Kada su se voleli Srbi i Albanci*, gen. Quote, p. 6.

Of course, it would be unfounded, based on the aforementioned historical data, to draw a conclusion about permanently good and idyllic relations between the Serbian and Albanian population, especially if one knows about the turbulence of many historical processes in the Balkans. Nevertheless, the abovementioned examples show that during a great historical period, Serbs and Albanians did not view their relations only through expressions of mutual hostility and intolerance. Some of the views of Dositej Obradović, Marko Miljanov and Dimitrije Tucović speak in support of this. Dositej and Miljanov emphasized the closeness of the old values of the traditional societies of Serbs, Montenegrins and Albanians, while Tucović promoted the Balkan cooperation and connection based on social democratic principles.¹² In this sense, they represent examples that can be used to change the negative views that these two nations have had about each other for a long time and, contrary to the current discourse of hostility, promote different relations between them.

The strategic points of the redefinition of the Serbian-Albanian relations

Strategy, as a programmatic viewpoint of state on ways to protect the most important vital national interests, has always been the knowledge and skill of the highest level of reflection about reality and response to the challenges of a conflict-defined strategic environment based on them. The main idea of strategy as a planned action is that reality should not be a product of spontaneity, and fundamental values should be adequately and long-term secured because randomness, spontaneity and "ad hoc" solutions cannot be considered a strategy.¹³ Basically, strategy is understood as a choice of means by which actors should achieve their goals, and the essential requirement that is put before strategic thought, as the highest level of mental activity, is how to think that one would not do anything and in any way, i.e. ensure a more consistent relationship between action and thought.¹⁴

The fact is that the Serbian nation often did not have strategic answers to many historical challenges. Probably, the lack of strategic answers was a consequence of the fact that it did not have fully defined strategic approaches to a number of rather difficult questions, and the issue of the Serbian-Albanian relations is of strategic importance for the Serbian nation, even though it usually did not attach such importance to that relationship. Today, it is clear that this issue is strategic, so advocating the process of redefining the Serbian-Albanian relations is an option that has a strategic character, regardless of how hard such an idea seems to be

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Robert Kennedy, „The elements of strategic thinking, Teaching Strategy > Challenges and Response”, *Strategic Studies*, U.S. Army War College, 2010, p. 6

¹⁴ Stanislav Stojanović, „Posebnost odnosa strateške kulture i strategije”, *Vojno delo*, LXXI, no. 8, 2019, pp. 32-51.

achievable in the current conditions. Namely, when it comes to perspectives for finding sustainable solutions for Kosovo and Metohija, which would not be contrary to the interests of the Serbian nation, the idea of redefining the Serbian-Albanian relations is a hard-to-dispute basis for the long-term security stabilization of Kosovo and Metohija, as the first step towards finding a political solution for the sustainable status of the southern Serbian province.

Searching for the most effective strategic response of the Republic of Serbia to the problems of Kosovo and Metohija is a very demanding undertaking associated with countless uncertainties. The approach from the position of “irreconcilable differences” in terms of ethnicity, language, script, especially in terms of different visions of social and state organization, is a particularly aggravating factor. There are also pronounced geopolitical limitations, unfavourable neighbouring environment, as well as the danger of further reconfiguration of the post-Yugoslav territory. This is only a part of strategic challenges that manifest strong limiting effects in the process of defining a strategy for redefining the Serbian-Albanian relations, which could open room for the revitalization of the territorial integrity of the Republic of Serbia in the future.¹⁵

The long-term strategy for Kosovo and Metohija, in many of its features, is specific. Firstly, it has to include a national programme that requires faith, persistence and dedication. It is an approach that has to be a clear expression that Serbs care about Kosovo and Metohija, as the key to their identity, much more than Albanians.¹⁶ At the same time, the mentioned strategy has to necessarily imply perseverance, patience and general social commitment. It is a long-term strategy, bearing in mind the longevity of negative narratives and practices in the Serbian-Albanian relations. Therefore, a strategic response has to be long-term, and the constitutive contents of the strategy, which is even more important, have to be the principle of compromise, comprehensiveness, massiveness, offensiveness, Europeanisation and democracy.

The idea of compromise is crucial in the fight for more favourable relations with Albanians and for stopping the historical inertia of mutual suspicions, mistrust and hostility. Namely, compromise would be an expression of mutual concessions and, above all, an effort to overcome the models of distance, misunderstanding and conflicts and the establishment of the contents of cooperation and better understanding. At the same time, compromise, as opposed to extremism, expresses the effort to establish balance, which should ensure the maximum sense of benefit, and also the minimum sense of dissatisfaction. Therefore, the key feature of the long-term strategy of redefining the Serbian-Albanian relations has to necessarily be its compromise character, which should reaffirm the right to a special relationship of the Serbian nation towards Kosovo and Metohija, and also not challenge the legitimate interests of Kosovo Albanians. In this regard, the historical right of Serbs to the territory of Kosovo and Metohija, which is based on unequivocal historical facts, strong

¹⁵ Stanislav Stojanović, Veljko Blagojević, “Strateški izazovi Kosova i Metohije”, *Politika nacionalne bezbednosti*, Beograd, no. 2, 2017, p. 137.

¹⁶ Boško Suvajdžić, *Ključ od Kosova*, Albatros, Beograd, 2021.

medieval cultural heritage and the centuries-old Orthodox demographic character of that area, which was violated by the violent actions of Albanians, are indisputable arguments. In this sense, Kosovo and Metohija is the permanent source of identity of Serbs and their spiritual and mental physiognomy.¹⁷ Of course, such a commitment should not be unilaterally defined and should not be at the expense of the legitimate interests of Kosovo Albanians. This means that the authenticity of the Albanian nation in the territory of Kosovo and Metohija and the right to the uniqueness of tradition, culture, language and other heritage, including the uniqueness in terms of political organization, must not be questioned. Likewise, the real suffering of Albanians in certain periods of the establishment of the Kingdom of Serbia, the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, the SFRY and the FRY during the 20th century cannot be ignored, regardless of the clear opposition of the Albanian elite to the authorities of the new states.

At the same time, the critical reevaluation of the Serbian-Albanian relations, especially their contemporary content and the reaffirmation of friendly voices represent a particularly important aspect of the compromise character of the long-term strategy on Kosovo and Metohija. Thus, historical examples of cooperation between two nations, the closeness of medieval nobles and other ruling structures, as well as their alliance in opposing the Ottoman rule, similar epic presentations of the battle in Kosovo,¹⁸ as well as many examples of their mutual solidarity in the turbulent times of the 19th and 20th century, represent precious examples. Furthermore, affirming positive perceptions within the Serbian and Albanian culture can alleviate animosity in the long term and create frameworks for more objective views on the perspectives of the Serbian-Albanian relations and the search for a compromise model of a political solution to their relations.

Comprehensiveness as the second constitutive principle of the strategy implies the broadest programmatic approach in resolving the Serbian-Albanian relations as the basis of the long-term consolidation of the situation in the territory of Kosovo and Metohija. Basically, comprehensiveness should ensure the full inclusion, above all, of institutions of different profiles and at all levels of state and social organization. In this sense, comprehensiveness of actions has to necessarily include political, cultural, economic, security and any other institutional and non-institutional action. Bearing in mind that the defined goal of the strategy and its value contents can generate strong mobilization potential, it is realistic to expect social support and full social engagement in its implementation.

Massiveness, as an important basis for the effectiveness of the mentioned strategy, implies a wide range of different approaches and activities that would be practiced in the process of its implementation. In other words, engagement within the strategy has to include activities and their actors in all spheres of social engagement, equally in international politics, security and defence policy, culture, education, media. In this sense, economic integration processes that can contribute to

¹⁷ Sanja Bošković, *Kosovski kulturološki mit*, Službeni glasnik, Beograd, 2014, p. 20.

¹⁸ Ana Di Lelio, *Bitka na Kosovu u albanskom epu*, Biblioteka XX VEK, Beograd, 2010.

relaxation in the perception of mutual relations between Serbs and Albanians are of special importance, and in particular infrastructural and other facilities that promote interdependence can be valuable for opening new perspectives.

Offensiveness in the approach also belongs to the principles that are a condition for the success of the mentioned strategy. The experience of the last few decades of the Serbian-Albanian conflict indicates the constant defensiveness of the Republic of Serbia, including the inconsistency in its actions. There is a general belief that Serbia was mainly concerned with defining the answers to the challenges that Albanians continuously imposed. This is exactly the importance of offensiveness as a principle of strategy because it opens up room not for forced, but for premeditated actions that promote different views to the Serbian-Albanian relations.

Democracy of actions is a principle that should emphasize a strong commitment to activities that promote the main civilizational values of the democratically developed world. Therefore, it is essential that the promotion of advocacy for better relations implies activities that follow democratic foundation. In a special way such efforts strengthen the credibility of efforts for new Serbian-Albanian relations, and the democratic basis of actions represents an exceptional opportunity for establishing positive synergy and support in the immediate and distant environment. It is particularly important to promote a peaceful perspective and stability of the region and to resolve open issues through dialogue.

An important aspect of the strategy is the idea of Europeanisation. With the mentioned constitutive principles of the strategy, it ensures much wider credibility, especially due to the general belief that Europeanisation is the basis of the long-term stabilization of the Balkans, especially the territory of Kosovo and Metohija. Geographically and culturally, the Balkans belongs to the European civilizational discourse, and therefore the community of the European states cannot be a complete project without the integration of that area¹⁹. A dramatic character of the events in the Balkans represents an important incentive for the policy of integrating Balkan societies into the community of the European states and the belief that the Europeanisation of the Balkans is the way to overcome its nightmarish historical context.

The sustainability and feasibility of the strategy

A strategy makes sense only if it is effective. A strategic character is appreciated if a strategy, employing resources, finds ways to achieve defined goals. The principles of the long-term strategy for Kosovo and Metohija, especially its main idea of redefining the Serbian-Albanian relations, represent an important basis of its constitution. However, the effectiveness of a strategy is conditioned not only by constitutive aspects, but also by many limits imposed by the immediate and distant environment.

¹⁹ Stanislav Stojanović, Jovanka Šaranović, „EU Strategy for Western Balkans and Perspective of further Europeanization of the Balkans”, in: Božidar Forca, *The Scope of the Strategy of the European Union for the Western Balkans, Belgrade, 2020, p. 102.*

The exclusivity of the Albanian factor and the pronounced ignorance of the Serbian interests progressively aggravates the difficulty of the Serbian-Albanian relations, and thus the sustainability of the strategy, especially in the first period of its implementation. At the same time, such attitudes additionally promote the radicalization of the political actions of the Serbian political actors to Kosovo and Metohija.²⁰ However, great changes in the Albanian corps, the overcoming of some of the specifics in the traditional behaviour of Albanians, the changed demographic trend, the intensification of economic interdependence, including certain geopolitical changes, hint at the possibility of reconsidering the extreme positions of the practical policies of the Kosovo Albanian elite. The further improvement of the good neighbourly relations between Serbia and Albania is of particular importance for the sustainability of such a strategy to start the process of consolidation of the Serbian-Albanian relations. The upward trend in improving political cooperation, albeit still cautious, generates a positive impact on cooperation in other fields of public and social life of both countries, especially when it comes to economy, energy, transport and culture.²¹

Of course, a less biased and more objective perception of international actors about the events that led to the extremism of the Serbian-Albanian relations and the establishment of the so-called Republic of Kosovo is one of the most important preconditions for the success of the strategy. Although the planned reconfiguration of international relations until recently has represented the announcement of a more appropriate international context for solving the problem of Kosovo and Metohija, the strong changes that the Russian-Ukrainian war will cause in international politics may challenge such expectations.

The US ambition for undisputed control of the Balkans and the Atlanticization of the remaining parts of the post-Yugoslav area will represent the backbone of the US action in the following period. The Atlantic geopolitical lines will be imposed even more strongly as a framework for the actions of the members of the European Union, especially when it comes to the Balkans, regardless of the occasional advocacy for greater strategic autonomy in its actions. However, it is estimated that the contested superiority of the US, as well as the increasingly clear demands of challengers, will open up room for a more objective view of the future of the Balkans.

The fact is that China is trying to strengthen its aspirations towards global leadership with the Belt and Road project and its greater, mainly economic presence in Europe. The countries of Southeast Europe, where China has launched large infrastructural projects, represent an important stronghold of such a commitment.²² Hence, its clearer positioning to the issue of Kosovo and Metohija is noticeable, trying to find a balance between, on the one hand, the postulates of "Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence" and "Community of the Common Future of Humanity" and, on the other hand, the foreign policy agility that is

²⁰ „The Serbia-Kosovo Normalization Process: A Temporary U.S. Decoupling“, Centre for Strategic International Studies, 27 May 2021.

²¹ Igor Novaković, Dragan Djukanović, Dragan Petrović, *Serbian Albanian Relations and Perspectives – A View of Serbia*, ISAC Fund Belgrade, 2010.

²² Stanislav Stojanović, Jovanka Šaranović, "Azijski Pacifik i američko-kinesko nadmetanje", *Srpska politička misao*, vol. 71, no. 1, 2021, Belgrade, p. 115.

In recent years, the Russian Federation has demonstrated its revitalized power in international politics, with the Balkans with its specifics representing an important motive for its increased interest, especially in the context of strained relations with the EU. However, it is certain that the war in Ukraine will open room for a strong challenge to its international policy, so it is realistic to expect a global disavowal of its support in the search for a compromise solution to the problem of Kosovo and Metohija, which may have a limiting impact on the scope of the strategy.

Furthermore, the undiminished influence of important geopolitical actors, primarily Germany and Turkey, on the processes in the southern Serbian province has a particular political impact. The strong presence of German economic actors in the process of the revitalization of the Serbian economy and democratization of public life can serve as a prerequisite for reconsidering the emphatically tough attitude of this country to Kosovo and Metohija. On the other hand, Turkey, which is strongly motivated to strengthen its influence to the Islamic world and the immediate environment through the revitalization of the entire spiritual and political heritage of the Ottoman Empire, will increase its interest in the historically, geographically and culturally close Balkan nations. The progress in relations with Turkey, especially its presence in the execution of important economic and infrastructural projects in Serbia, can be the basis for greater understanding when it comes to the interests of the Serbian nation in the long run.

The credibility of foreign policy actions in relations with the immediate and distant environment, especially with the key actors of international politics, represents a strong aspect of the success of the strategy. A clear, principled and predictable policy of foreign policy relations with the most important actors in international politics is of the greatest importance. At the same time, the credibility of neighbouring policy has an important place in making assumptions for the success of the long-term strategy. A principled policy with neighbours and the promotion of neighbourly closeness can encourage more of their sensibility in the perception of the importance of a compromise solution to the problem of Kosovo and Metohija.

The political stability of the Republic of Serbia and its continuous economic development are the conditions without which the long-term strategy is essentially impossible. Political stability, which primarily implies democratic and stable development, as well as consensus regarding the most important strategic issues of the future of the Republic of Serbia and Serbs is the basis of a credible policy towards Kosovo and Metohija. The high level of political structure and predictability of democratic actions is an important aspect of the success of the strategy of redefining the Serbian-Albanian relations. At the same time, the success of the mentioned strategy is particularly related to the economic development of the Republic of Serbia and its continuous economic progress. Economic strengthening, improvement of the economic strength of the state, as well as its greater integration into economic processes, represent a factor that has the first-rate stimulating potential for improving relations between Serbs and Albanians. It is the fact that politically stable societies that are developed in an economic sense can count on credibility in international politics.

Credible military potential represents an important argument for action, primarily as a deterrent. After all, the central concept of strategy is power, especially today

when it is clear that military power and military potential remain irreplaceable aspects in the implementation of any strategy.²³ They are particularly important from the point of view that they reduce the possibility of the Albanian radicalized groups to undertake measures of violent integration of the north of Kosovo and use violence in such aspirations. Strong military forces, in this sense, would be an important deterrent against such violent actions by Kosovo Albanians.

Of course, this should not call into question the position that the accomplishment of the strategic interests of the Republic of Serbia has to involve democratically profiled actions because only action that promotes the culture of peace and social democratic and humane development can foster understanding and solidarity between the Albanian and Serbian nation.²⁴ The proactive and flexibly oriented strategy of the Republic of Serbia, based on the development of innovative concepts of projecting soft power is the basis without which it is not possible to neutralize the negative trends in the Serbian-Albanian relations and strengthen the international legitimacy of the Republic of Serbia. In the conditions when the Serbian-Albanian relations are burdened by a difficult legacy, such a profiled long-term strategy would gradually accumulate effects that would influence the edge of disagreement and open confrontation between Serbs and Albanians to acquire the contours of rather more conciliatory views on the future of their relations.

Conclusion

Although the idea of the Serbian-Albanian reconciliation, in the context of the current exclusive narratives, seems unattainable, it is surely the only sustainable framework for the permanent consolidation of security in the area of Kosovo and Metohija. The qualitatively different Serbian-Albanian relations would open up the possibility of overcoming distance and pronounced animosity in their relations and would gradually create the basis for improving security. Neutralising security restrictions and establishing more appropriate atmosphere of mutual relations would provide an opportunity for more measured positions, primarily from the Albanian party, and a more successful dialogue when it comes to the final status of Kosovo and Metohija.

The long-term strategy for solving the problem of Kosovo and Metohija, whose main idea is to establish new Serbian-Albanian relations and stop the trend of intense hostility in their relations, is a platform that can open new perspectives and provide positive outcomes. Such a strategy is of interest to both nations. Abandoning such an approach and persisting in the continuity of hostility and misunderstanding, which characterizes the current relations, would mean a further progressive deterioration of security conditions not only in that area. At the same time, abandoning such an approach would make the permanent loss of Kosovo and

²³ Stanislav Stojanović, Posebnost odnosa strateške kulture i strategije, gen. quote, pp. 32-51.

²⁴ Ljubiša R. Mitrović, „The Geopolitics of the Balkans in the 19th and 20th Centuries-Between National Emancipation Movements and Geostrategic Games of the Great Power”, *Facta Universitatis*, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Niš, 2/2011, p. 101.

Metohija more certain and simultaneously the permanent, irreparable identity mutilation of the Serbian nation, and the erosion of the spiritual idea that has been the foundation of the state character of the Serbian area for centuries. Moreover, denying the possibility of overcoming the distance and hostility towards the Serbian nation would greatly undermine the development perspective of Kosovo Albanians.

Being trapped in an inextricable framework of enmity has always been a dangerous platform, both for individuals and collectivities. The Serbian-Albanian relations as a metaphor for misunderstanding, animosity and continuous conflicts are certainly not the only possible context for the relations between two nations. That is why the long-term strategy on Kosovo and Metohija, with the main idea of new Serbian-Albanian relations, is necessary and possible.

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Summary

There is no doubt that the so-called Republic of Kosovo is a failed model based on violence, injustice and absence of any idea of compromise. The national arrogance and aggressive ideas of Greater Albania, as well as the megalomaniac, violent and undemocratic character of the actions of the interim Prishtina authorities, represent a real danger for further dissolution of the Balkans.

From the point of view of the protection of national interests, Kosovo and Metohija represents a security challenge for the Republic of Serbia of the first order. The danger of further collapsing and diminishing the Serbian ethnic space, especially of further changing the original Serbian character of the southern Serbian province and endangering the identity heritage of the Serbian people, are particularly dangerous trends in the conflict between Serbs and Albanians.

The importance of Kosovo and Metohija and the severity and complexity of the problem that the southern Serbian province faces emphasize the necessity of defining a long-term strategy for its solution. Strategy has to be a clear expression of conceptual readiness to solve the complex Kosovo-Metohija problem. The basis of such a strategy is the need to redefine the relationship between the Serbian and Albanian people and stop the inertia of centuries-old mistrust and animosity between them. This attitude, which has a strategic character, is the cornerstone of the security stabilization and possible reintegration of Kosovo and Metohija.

Key words: Kosovo and Metohija, long-term strategy, redefinition, Serbian-Albanian relations

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