

# EDUCATION AS AN ASPECT OF SOFT POWER IN SOLVING THE KOSOVO-METOHIIJA PROBLEM

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**S**olving the Kosovo-Metohija issue is a long-term problem that is of great scientific and social importance, both for the immediate participants in the dialogue and for the Balkans. The paper discusses the potential of education as an aspect of soft power, which can serve as a tool for establishing a “new climate” between political officials in Belgrade and Pristina. The main hypothesis of the paper is that education, as one of the aspects of soft power, has broad potential in solving the Kosovo-Metohija issue. The scientific methods of content analysis - historical and quantitative method will be used in the paper. The main objective of the paper is to improve relations and communication between Belgrade and Pristina in relation to this issue, through educational cooperation. Recommendations for the execution and development of educational cooperation, which can contribute to the improvement of the situation and the achievement of positive outcomes acceptable to all participants in the Kosovo-Metohija dialogue have been presented. Soft power is imposed as an effective solution for achieving harmonized interests, peace and stability.

*Key words: soft power, dialogue, education*

## The historical overview of events in Kosovo and Metohija

**C**onflicts between Serbs and Albanians go back a long time ago, from the Middle Ages; they are of an ethnic character and arise from cultural and religious differences. After Stefan Nemanja founded the Serbian state, the territory of

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Kosovo and Metohija was under the rule of Serbs for “some 300 years.”<sup>1</sup> After the death of Emperor Dušan in 1355 and the fall of the Serbian Despotate into the Ottoman slavery in 1459, changes in the Balkans followed, which resulted in the tightening of relations between two nations. Due to Islamization of Albanians, conflicts became more frequent. A great part of the Serbian population moved out of the territory of Kosovo and Metohija, and “the Albanian population from the mountainous regions of Kosmet and Northern Albania came down to the valleys (Kosovo and Metohija) and filled the gaps created by the departure of Serbs”.<sup>2</sup>

The First and Second World Wars were marked by armed conflicts and sporadic violence. The territory of Kosovo and Metohija became an administrative and political unit with the Constitution of the FPRY from 1946. Furthermore, this territory received the status of an autonomous province with the Constitution of the SFRY in 1963. After 1974, Kosovo and Metohija was declared a “constituent element” by the Constitution. The last two decades of the 20th century were characterized by the strengthening of the ethno-nationalist movement, the disintegration of the former Yugoslavia, political and armed conflicts that culminated in the 1998–1999 armed conflict.

After the NATO bombing, in July 1999, the UN Security Council Resolution no. 1244 was adopted in order to establish and maintain the peace of the Serbian and Albanian community in Kosovo, build trust and establish a system of joint decision-making. However, to this day, the Serbian community is constantly under threat due to the strong ethno-nationalist aspirations of the Albanian party because “Kosovo Albanians see today themselves more as victims, and not as perpetrators of crimes. According to their understanding of reality, Serbs have always done much worse things than them, which gives them the legitimacy and moral right to revenge without precedent. Unfortunately, such attitudes are uncritically justified by some international representatives, which encourages them to continue the conflict with Serbs”.<sup>3</sup> The ethnic and religious structure of the population of Kosmet has changed depending on who has been in power. The issue of Kosovo and Metohija is complex, emotional and deeply rooted in history, because, as Knežević points out: “Kosovo and Metohija is the holy land for Serbia, a special spiritual and sacred territory, Athos and Jerusalem.”<sup>4</sup> Therefore, special attention should be paid to this issue.

## The current situation in Kosovo and Metohija

The current events in the north of Kosmet upset the region and call into question the international presence in Kosovo and Metohija, and remind the international community that it should react in accordance with the mandate and prevent any

<sup>1</sup> Todor, Mirković, „Kosovo i Metohija – devet vekova posle“, *Vojno delo*, Vol. 66, No. 2, p. 187.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p. 191.

<sup>3</sup> Miloje, Zdravković, „Uzroci prvih sukoba Srba i Albanaca kroz istoriju“, *Nacionalni interes*, vol. 40, no. 2, 2021, p. 201.

<sup>4</sup> Miloš Knežević, „Razmišljati o Kosovu i Metohiji. Smisao unutrašnjeg i spoljašnjeg dijaloga o kosmetskom problemu“, *Nacionalni interes*, vol. 30, no. 3, 2017, p. 35.

unilateral actions in Pristina that further undermine interethnic relations and security. On September 20, 2021, the Pristina authorities violated the Agreement on Freedom of Movement by issuing an Administrative instruction on the registration of vehicles with the status of neutral KS license plates. The media reported on numerous violations of the Agreement. Tensions continued in 2022.<sup>5</sup> The previously mentioned events indicate that the current situation in the north of Kosmet is worrisome and requires solving the problem in order to preserve the safety and survival of the Serbian people in Kosovo and Metohija and ensure legality, compliance with international agreements and stability in that territory.

In Brussels in 2013, with the mediation of the European Union, an agreement on the normalization of relations between Belgrade and Pristina was reached.<sup>6</sup> The first article of the agreement mentions the community of municipalities, where Serbs form the majority population in Kosovo. The other articles of the agreement arise from the statute, rights and competences. Both parties have pledged that they will not block each other on the way to the European integration. However, in the light of the new situation, the mentioned articles for the Pristina party represent only a dead letter on paper. A great part of the EU members has supported Kosovo's accession to international organizations (IMF, World Bank, sports organizations FIFA, UEFA, etc.), and not regional organizations which the so-called Kosovo allegedly claims the right to.

Serbia seeks to preserve its territorial integrity.<sup>7</sup> The course of (non)recognition of the so-called Kosovo independence took place in several stages: from the explosion of recognition, the inertia of the slowing down of recognition, until the withdrawal of some recognitions<sup>8</sup>. "It is often pointed out from the departments of the European arbitrators that Serbia is a key factor of peace and stability in the Balkans"<sup>9</sup> and that it should consider every possible aspect of solving the Kosovo-Metohija problem. "Because the alleged independence of Kosovo - as a new Albanian state out of and without Serbia - is not just any random and secondary lie in the Serbian/Albanian relations, but the greatest possible lie that provocatively hurts the vital historical, national and state interests of Serbia"<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> Petković: „Upad KBS na sever pokrajine grubo kršenje sporazuma, KFOR mora da reaguje“, Kancelarija za Kosovo i Metohiju, Vlada Republike Srbije, September 25, 2022, <https://www.kim.gov.rs/lat/v4880.php>, 12/10/2022.

<sup>6</sup> "Brussels Agreement: First Agreement of Principles Governing the Normalization of Relations" The Government of the Republic of Serbia in the service of citizens, <https://www.srbija.gov.rs/cinjenice/en/120394>, 11/10/2022.

<sup>7</sup> "Constitution of the Republic of Serbia", *Official Gazette of the RS*, no. 98, November 10, 2006, Article 182. <http://www.pravno-informacioni-sistem.rs/SIGlasnikPortal/eli/rep/sgrs/skupstina/ustav/2006/98/1/reg>

<sup>8</sup> Milomir Stepić, „Kosovo i Metohija: geopolitički aspekti brzog rešenja zamrznutog konflikta“, *Nacionalni interes*, vol. 38, no. 2, 2020, pp. 22-23.

<sup>9</sup> Đorđe Radovanović, Filip Obradović, „Od ideje do prakse – Briselski sporazum i Kosovsko-Metohijska svakodnevnica“, *Baština*, Priština – Leposavić, vol. 30, no. 52, 2020, p. 351. doi: 10.5937/bastina30-29157

<sup>10</sup> Miloš Knežević, „Razmišljati o Kosovu i Metohiji. Smisao unutrašnjeg i spoljašnjeg dijaloga o kosmetskom problemu“, *Nacionalni interes*, vol. 30, no. 3, 2017, p. 34

The causes of the Kosovo-Metohija problem are deeply rooted in the past, so it cannot be solved in the short term, quickly. "In the search for a mutually acceptable Serbian/Albanian solution to the Kosmet problem, it is necessary to have good will, show patience, and also persistence."<sup>11</sup> Therefore, solving the problem of Kosovo and Metohija requires a comprehensive approach, which, in addition to the actions of prominent leaders and politicians, also requires the active participation of the scientific community in the internal dialogue. It is necessary to consider the potential of soft power to solve this problem. The idea is to foster dialogue and bring two nations closer together through active educational cooperation.

## The potential of soft power for solving problems in Kosovo and Metohija

The Kosovo-Metohija problem is delicate and requires sophisticated means to solve it. It is necessary to avoid force, to involve the region and the entire international community, not only its Western part, and "non-Western actors have also to be involved"<sup>12</sup> in order to conduct a dialogue on this issue at the highest level, in a planned manner and with great diplomatic skills. The strength of a state's foreign policy actions depends on its overall power (political, economic, military, technological, energy, environmental). Many authors indicate that power is the "most significant and controversial" central concept in the interpretation of international relations.<sup>13</sup> It implies "the prospects of a person or several people to implement their will in some joint action, even despite the resistance of others who participate in that action."<sup>14</sup> Therefore, power is the ability of actors to "impose their will on the others, relying on the effectiveness of the means of force in case of disobedience".<sup>15</sup> However, it is a much broader concept than force, because it includes a lot of possibilities for imposing will, while physical coercion (force) is only one of them.

The relation of power arises from the relationship between people, which is "manifested in the behaviour of those who carry it out or when the behaviour of a group of people corresponds to the wishes of one or a group of them".<sup>16</sup> Power is

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<sup>11</sup> Živojin Đurić, „Politički i nacionalni aspekti državnog pitanja u dijalogu o Kosovu i Metohiji“, *Nacionalni interes*, vol. 30, no. 3, 2017, p. 14.

<sup>12</sup> Dušan Proroković, „Podela Kosova i Metohije: realnost ili zabluda“, *Vojno delo*, no. 2, 2022, p. 71.

<sup>13</sup> Hans, J. Morgentau, *Politics Among Nations. The struggle for power and peace*, 4th ed., Knopf, New York, 1967, p. 27; Robert Gilpin, *War and change in world politics*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 1981, p. 13.

<sup>14</sup> Maks Veber, *Privreda i društvo*, II, Prosveta, Beograd, 1976, p. 30.

<sup>15</sup> Georg Schwarzenberger, *Power Politics*, Stevens, London, 1951, p. 14.

<sup>16</sup> Karl Freidrich, *Man and His Government*, New York, 1963, p. 163.

multidimensional and can be viewed from the aspect of achieving a certain goal,<sup>17</sup> influence,<sup>18</sup> security<sup>19</sup> and ability.<sup>20</sup>

In the system of international relations, each political unit strives to achieve its security, relying on power forces. The ability to influence decisions or control behaviour of others is often related to the possession of some resources. In the past, traditional resources (population, territorial characteristics, i.e. size and geostrategic position, natural resources, military capacity, economic strength and political stability) were the sources of power. However, technological development and the process of globalization have led to the "networking of society"<sup>21</sup> and gave birth to new resources of power. Hence, modern definition of power cannot be based only on its earlier features.<sup>22</sup>

Soft power is based on intangible sources of power, such as culture, ideology and knowledge. The great powers today generally use more sophisticated means to achieve their goals, such as the appeal of an idea or the ability to set political priorities in a way that shapes the desires of others. The strength of soft power is based on the attractiveness of a country's culture, political and social system. Hence, soft power is imposed as one of the forms of solving the Kosovo-Metohija problem because „soft power, as a complex instrument for solving foreign policy tasks with reliance on civil society, information-communication and other methods and technology that appear as an alternative to classic diplomacy, is an indispensable component of politics in modern conditions“.<sup>23</sup>

The paper suggests using the potential of soft power through the concept of development and investment in education, educational capacities and knowledge exchange among the population in Kosovo and Metohija. The mentioned aspect of soft power has the potential for the rapprochement of culture between two nations (that are both current and future participants in the dialogue). The idea is to essentially provide through an educational moment, international practice and exchange of knowledge, a good basis for successful, long-term communication between the Serbian and Albanian parties in the territory of Kosmet, bringing together future generations that will also lead a dialogue in order to better understand each other, which in the long term, leads to calming tensions and accepting diversity, if not through assimilation, then through tolerance of different cultures and religion. By gradually expanding various forms of cooperation through education, the participants of the Kosovo-Metohija dialogue can be brought closer in the long term by finding common

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<sup>17</sup> See: Makijaveli Nikolo, *Vladalac*, Ušće, Beograd, 2004; Hans, J. Morgentau, *Politics Among Nations. The struggle for power and peace*, gen. quote;

<sup>18</sup> Klaus Knorr, "Power and Influence", *Power & Wealth. The Political Economy of International Power*, Palgrave Macmillan, London, 1973, pp. 3-30.

<sup>19</sup> Frederick Schuman, *Design for Power: The Struggle for the world*, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1941.

<sup>20</sup> Raymond Aron, *Paix et guerre entre les nations*, Calman Lévy, Paris, 2004, p. 58; Raymond Aron, *Les Etudes politiques*, Gallimard, Paris, 1972; Charles W. Freeman, *Arts of Power. Statecraft and Diplomacy*, Blackwells, 1997.

<sup>21</sup> Manuel Kastels, *Uspon umreženog društva. Informacijsko doba - ekonomija, društvo i kultura*, Delfi, Beograd, 2018.

<sup>22</sup> Joseph S. Nye, "Soft power", *Foreign Policy*, Vol. 80, 1990, p. 154.

<sup>23</sup> Miroslav Mladenović, Jelena Ponomareva, „Meka moć Rusije – Uslov njenog geopolitičkog uspona“, *Srpska politička misao*, vol. 51, no. 1, 2016, p. 13.

values and interests. This enables the preservation of the language, culture and tradition of the Serbian nation in Kosovo and Metohija, and also the preservation of collective memory, that is, the mitigation of the cultural war that is being waged in that territory.

## Education as one of the mechanisms of soft power

Generally speaking, education, as one of the aspects of soft power, has the capabilities of a unifying and conquering force because "how and how much a country invests in its promotion and affirmation" is shown by "scholarships for the education of foreign students at its universities, as well as a whole series of other activities in the field of culture, first of all, and also education and science, which spreads the reputation and influence of one's own country in the world".<sup>24</sup>

According to the Work Plan for 2021, the Government of Serbia allocated RSD 2,549,840,000 to support the work of the University of Pristina with its temporary headquarters in Kosovska Mitrovica<sup>25</sup> in order to improve education and material and technical equipment. Therefore, the Republic of Serbia keeps a pace with contemporary social trends and strives to provide peace, security and respect of the human rights of members of all communities in Kosovo and Metohija.

Despite its location and regardless of the level or type of education it provides, the school primarily performs an educational and cultural function. Its socialising function, which could provide a better understanding of both parts of the population in Kosovo and Metohija, reconcile opposites through the exchange of ideas, customs and values, is also indispensable. The investment in educational infrastructure and knowledge exchange that focuses on human resources development can be an important field of cooperation between two nations. Cooperation through various programmes of education, self-education, professional development, practice, field research or other forms of practical work could meet the needs of the local population and, indirectly, play a socialising function. Such activities not only enable the end users (pupils, students and teaching staff) the access to knowledge and adequate conditions of education and work, but also contain important potential for a better understanding of people and reconciliation of opposites through the exchange of knowledge, experience and spread of ideas. Getting to know the customs and values of the other nation enables a better understanding of it.

However, some authors criticize the mechanisms by which some culture actually generates the attractiveness that produces the desired foreign policy outcomes. Thus, for example, Noya<sup>26</sup> claims that a great part of the resources of soft power is in market economy or civil society, out of the state control. Nye<sup>27</sup> points out that soft power resources are not often controlled by state, but are usually independently held by non-state actors. He believes that the effectiveness of such resources is more in

<sup>24</sup> Jovan Ćirić, „Meka moć i globalno upravljanje svetom”, *Strani pravni život*, vol. 58, no. 3, 2014, p. 101.

<sup>25</sup> „The Work Plan of the Government for 2021”, *Government of the Republic of Serbia*, February 2021, Belgrade, <https://www.srbija.gov.rs/dokument/45678/strategije-programi-planovi.php>, p. 708.

<sup>26</sup> Javier Noya, „The Symbolic Power of Nations”, *Place Branding*, Vol. 2, No.1, 2006, pp. 53-67.

<sup>27</sup> Joseph Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, Public Affairs, New York, 2004.

the context and receptivity of the audience, where the “subjugated party” is attracted to the dominant party, which can create an environment that is more accessible to promote the foreign policy goals of the dominant party. Therefore, it is very important to foster active, long-term and planned cooperation between two nations, not only at the level of the educational system, but also in scientific circles.

## The recommendations for implementing and developing cooperation in the field of education

Firstly, the unstable situation in the north of Kosmet inhibits and slows down the development of the region, its democratization, regional cooperation and affects the destabilization of neighbouring countries. This situation indicates the need to approach the Kosovo-Metohija problem as a regional issue. Therefore, within the studied topic, cooperation in education is suggested, first of all at regional level, including grants, projects and other forms of teaching and scientific cooperation that would involve the engagement and rapprochement of both nations through the mentioned educational activities. The incentives from national and foreign donors can greatly serve as a type of support to the implementation of educational cooperation between Belgrade and Pristina.

Secondly, it is necessary to appoint and identify actors who would actively participate and monitor possible opportunities for educational cooperation between Belgrade and Pristina. That is, it is necessary to develop institutionalized channels that would provide a basis for the exchange of knowledge and experience between both nations.

Thirdly, there is a need for lobbying, in an individual, group or institutional manner, which would encourage the Pristina officials to be ready for cooperation and communication regarding educational cooperation. In this way, the Pristina party would be more easily involved and better informed about possible opportunities for cooperation in education.

Fourthly, it is necessary to work in a long-term, planned and systematic manner on developing the awareness and interest of the educational system in Pristina to cooperate with Belgrade. This can be achieved by involving the intellectual elite, whether local or foreign experts, in leading a dialogue that would develop and nurture an open educational culture that can greatly weaken the ethno-nationalist aspirations, reconcile the opposites and, ultimately, facilitate the dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina.

Fifthly, it is necessary for both parties to recognize the positive effects and prosperity from calming tensions, either through joint educational cooperation and various types of investment in education, or through lobbying by experts. In this way, good bases can be established for building a sober climate between two nations that see peace and stability as the only way for their further prosperity.

## *Conclusion*

The Kosovo-Metohija problem is the current and unavoidable topic in the present, and it will probably be so in the future, as well. It has arisen as a result of actions of many different factors and requires a delicate and comprehensive approach to its solution, which is

influenced by many external factors. In modern society, we learn about the topicality, dimensions of some problem and its eventual consequences through a complex network of modern forms of communication, through digital media or social networks. Today, states strengthen their position by investing in modern power resources (technology, knowledge, economic growth) that contribute to the development of a sophisticated form of power, known in the literature as soft power. Practicing soft power can help overcome political tensions and barriers. Hence, the potential of soft power emerges as an effective tool for solving the Kosovo-Metohija problem. Educational cooperation is primarily suggested because it enables the maintenance of communication and exchange of knowledge between the participants of the dialogue. Education can serve as an important aspect for solving the Kosovo-Metohija problem because it contains great potential for overcoming differences through the spread of ideas, customs and values and enables two nations to come closer to each other through the exchange of ideas and knowledge, better understand each other and find a compromising solution.

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## Summary

The Balkan Peninsula is characterized by a great ethnic and cultural diversity. The events in the north of Kosovo and Metohija during 2021 and 2022 showed that solution for the problems in Kosovo and Metohija has become rather complex. These events threaten the peace and stability of the Western Balkan region because the situation in Kosovo and Metohija is far from stable. The Open Balkan Initiative, which was launched to facilitate relations within the Western Balkan region, did not reduce the number of problems and potential risks. An urgent response by the international community is needed to preserve peace and stability and prevent moderate actions by Pristina that threaten the basic human rights and freedom of the Serbian population in the territory of Kosovo and Metohija. The violent actions by Pristina showed that the international agreements including the Resolution 1244 and the Brussels Agreement did not meet expectations.

The Kosovo and Metohija issue is a long-term problem and requires commitment, efforts, dialogue and patience. The Kosovo and Metohija dialogue is an unavoidable topic in the present, which is already a part of the new future. Solving this issue is complex and cannot be quick. The ethnic and religious structure of the Kosovo and Metohija population has been changing depending on who has been in power. The Albanians in Kosovo and Metohija, as a national minority, do not have the right to self-determination, according to international law and the internal constitutional law of the SFRY and Serbia. Being such a social issue, it is influenced by many factors and difficult for solving.

In contemporary society the media have a great influence. A lot depends on the way certain event will be presented, what kind of a message it sends, how long its topicality will last, etc. The information about events in the north of Kosovo and Metohija should be presented using a diplomatic language, and not to incite hatred on both parties. That is the only way to conduct a productive dialogue on this topic.

Power is a central concept in the interpretation of international relations. The strength of a country's foreign policy depends on its power (political, economic, military, technological, energy, ecological). Besides traditional elements of power, modern countries rely on soft power. This is the ability of a country to persuade others to do what it would like by attraction rather than coercion or the use of force.

The contemporary era is characterized by neo-imperial and neo-colonial policies of large states, as well as military and economic alliances, which affects international circumstances so that the valid rules of international law have been replaced by pressure, threat, coercion, lawlessness and force politics. The world power centers consider the Kosovo-Metohija problem through the prism of their geopolitical interests. For example, the issue of Serbia's integration to the EU is in the focus whenever Serbia or the Serbian people face any greater challenge. This is not a coincidence, but the fate of the geopolitical position in the Balkans. It is necessary to avoid force in solving the Kosovo and Metohija issue.

The paper shows the potential of soft power. Education is presented as one of the aspects of soft power which can contribute to better communication and understanding through acceptance of diversity and mutual respect of all dialogue participants. Student exchange and other practice programs may help people of both nations to find common interests and values.

Key words: *soft power, dialogue, education*

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