

DUPI Working Paper No. 2000/9

The fall of Milosevic and the Kosovo problem

Kenneth Schmidt Hansen

Abstract:

Despite all precautions taking by Slobodan Milosevic the Presidential elections held in Yugoslavia 24 September 2000 turned out to be his Waterloo. It is an outspread belief that the political regime in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia that Slobodan Milosevic represented was one of the last obstacles to bringing peace and stability to the Balkans. Despite this outspread belief, it is in this paper argued that the problems in Kosovo are not just the product of the policy pursued by Milosevic which implies that they not necessarily will be easier solved in the years to come even though a democratic revolution has taken place in Yugoslavia. No solution to the Kosovo problem seems available that will satisfy both the Serbs and the Kosovo-Albanians. But perhaps most interesting, it seems reasonable to argue that even maintaining status quo, i.e. not deciding for the final status of Kosovo, might turn out to be a problem for the current democratic developments in Belgrade.

Introduction:

Slobodan Milosevic and the political regime in Yugoslavia he represented was for a long time the major object for analysis when the prospects for stability in the Western Balkans were to be considered. This was especially true in connection with the Kosovo crisis where Milosevic's policy towards Kosovo before, during and after the crises was seen as a major obstacle for solving the problems.¹ Furthermore, most observers of the situation in the Western Balkans considered the Yugoslav political regime an obstacle for bringing peace and prosperity to the Balkans in general.² Yugoslavia under Milosevic represented a direct military threat to its nearest neighbors, which of course hampered the possibilities for the region to undergo a more normal and peaceful development.

¹ As an example, see report by the International Crisis Group, 10 August 1999, "Transforming Serbia: The key to long term stability".

² See Chris Patten in "Nato Nyt", nr. 3, 2000 and Ivo H. Daalder in The San Diego Union-Tribune, 15 October 2000, "He's gone – The End of Milosevic Era". Furthermore an article by Javier Solana, High Representative of the European Union, for the Common Foreign and Security Policy, called "A European future for Serbia" brought in International Herald Tribune, (25-10-2000) stressed that "during this decade the regime in Belgrade was the main obstacle to stability in the region as a whole".

Therefore, recent political changes in Yugoslavia naturally draw special attention. At first eyesight, the fall of Slobodan Milosevic does seem to promise new and peaceful possibilities, not just for Yugoslavia, but for the Balkans in general. While this is obvious for most observers this paper intends to draw attention once more to Kosovo, a problem strongly related to Yugoslavia which might still remain in the foreseeable future despite the political changes in Yugoslavia. Together with the rest of the Balkans, especially Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo has attracted substantial international political and economic support during the last decade³, and the problems related to Kosovo may not be easier solved despite the new political situation in Yugoslavia. No solution seems available to the Kosovo problem that will satisfy both the Kosovo-Albanians and Serbia.

In the following a few comments will be given regarding the character of the political changes and what have been achieved so far as a consequence of these changes. This is done in order to clarify the political environment in which problems are now being handled. In connection with that it will be argued that the problems in Kosovo have only very little to do with the character of the political regime in Yugoslavia. Consequently, they will most probably remain in the years to come.

The isolation of Serbia and Milosevic's downfall:

The political regime in Yugoslavia has been seen as one of the last obstacles to bringing stability to the whole region. That is not least to the fact that the years under the rule of Milosevic (1987-2000) isolated Yugoslavia both economically and politically. The isolation not only harmed the possibilities for a democratic and economic development in Yugoslavia but also made it difficult for the rest of the region to move away from the damaging image of the Balkans as the 'European powder keg', an image that has haunted the Balkans for a long time.⁴

³ "The EU and its Member States have contributed over \approx 18 billion since 1991" Javier Solana, "A European future for Serbia" in International Herald Tribune, (25-10-2000).

Only very few observers foresaw the developments that took place in Serbia in the fall 2000. Most observers did not foresee the possibility for having Milosevic removed from power when he on 27 July 2000 announced the date for simultaneous presidential and parliamentary elections in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) and municipal elections in Serbia⁵. The elections were set for 24 September 2000.⁶

Most observers did not believe in the Serbian opposition who at that time had shown only little unity in times when it was needed. Furthermore nothing indicated that Milosevic would hold free and fair elections. Not only did he control most of the media, he also had the election legislation worked out in a way that benefited the political regime in power.⁷ In fact, the legislation governing the elections held 24 September 2000 was not in accordance with international standards in significant respects, nor for that matter with OSCE commitments.⁸ Furthermore, most observers did not consider the chances that the people would take to the streets and oust Milosevic from power high. To the contrary, the ability of the population to oust Milosevic from power was considered low, due to the fact that mass demonstrations had been held several times before during the last 13 years and each time Milosevic had survived these mass demonstrations.

On the other hand, the fact that elections were to be held opened a possibility of change in Yugoslavia. The international community continued its energetic engagement and seized the opportunity to support the opposition, who despite earlier controversies had launched a united campaign. The support resulted, among other things, in a declaration, from the EU foreign ministers, which promised that the economic sanctions against Serbia would be lifted if

⁴ As also recognised by the Croatian Prime Minister, Ivica Racan at a meeting in the Danish Foreign Policy Society 4 July 2000, Copenhagen.

⁵ *...few expected that the end result would be a democratic revolution reminiscent of the exhilarating events the rest of Eastern Europe had witnessed more than a decade ago.* Ivo H. Daalder, Senior Fellow, Foreign Policy Studies in The San Diego Union-Tribune, October 15, 2000.

⁶ See report from the International Crisis Group, 19 September 2000, "Yugoslavia's Presidential Election: The Serbian People's Moment of Truth".

⁷ See report from the International Crisis Group, 19 September 2000, "Yugoslavia's Presidential Election: The Serbian People's Moment of Truth".

that the Serbian people voted Milosevic out of office.⁹ The elections were perceived as the “*Serbian people’s moment of truth*”¹⁰, and the EU did what it could to remind the Serbian people that Serbia belonged to Europe¹¹. Despite these assurances and the political support given from the outside, most Serbs thought that Milosevic would use fraud to secure himself a victory or cancel the election and declare a state of emergency.

None of these scenarios came through. Despite of all Milosevic’s preparations, which should have secured him another four years in power, he did not win a majority of votes in the elections. Instead, the opposition declared their presidential candidate the winner of the election¹². Milosevic tried to delay the process by claiming that a second election round was necessary since neither of the presidential candidates according to figures released by those faithful to Milosevic had won a majority in the first election round. The opposition who claimed to have won in the first election round rejected a second election round. The opposition did play high by rejecting to participate in a second election round, but eventually came out as the winner because street protests ended up forcing Milosevic out of power. Instead Vojislav Kostunica were declared winner of the elections and sworn in as president of The Federal Republic of Yugoslavia 9 October 2000. Thirteen years under the rule of Slobodan Milosevic came to an end.

Serbia no longer an international pariah:

As already stated, stability in Yugoslavia is considered a prerequisite for the creation of stability in the Balkans, a view which is especially prevailing

⁸ OSCE, Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights. “Assessment of Election Legislation in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and Serbia”, 30 August 2000.

⁹ Jacob Langvad, Information, 19 September, 2000, “EU mobiliserer serberne mod Milosevic”.

¹⁰ See report from the International Crisis Group, 19 September 2000, “Yugoslavia’s Presidential Election: The Serbian People’s Moment of Truth”.

¹¹ The message issued by the EU’s Foreign Ministers that was supported by 14 other European countries, stressed that “*a vote for democracy in Serbia will be a vote for Serbia in Europe*”. http://europa.eu.int/external_relations/see/fry/index.htm.

¹² Even before Vojislav Kostunica was sworn in as president and even before the final results of the elections had been made public, Romano Prodi, President of the European Commission came with a statement congratulating the democratic opposition in Serbia with their victory. The statement was released 27 September 2000 – <http://www.eurunion.org/news/press/2000/2000058.htm>.

among the European political elites.¹³ There is no doubt that Yugoslavia, located in the heart of the Balkan Peninsula, is the obvious trade and transit corridor between the European Union and the rest of South Eastern Europe. This is best illustrated by the importance of the Danube River as a transportation route. The transformation in Serbia opens, hopefully once and for all; the Danube River to unhindered trade.¹⁴ This is particularly important because the Danube River is the economic artery of the region¹⁵.

With the political transformation and lifting of the sanctions previously imposed on Yugoslavia, more 'normal' economic patterns in the whole region will hopefully reassert themselves. This is not to say that the economic development will be smooth. On the contrary, lessons learned from the East-European countries indicate that political transformation only opens up possibilities and that the road towards higher living standards and less unemployment will be long. That will make it difficult for the new political leadership in Yugoslavia, a leadership that has to prove its worth to a probably impatient population¹⁶.

On the other hand, the promises made by the European Union and the rest of the international community to the Serbian opposition before the elections have so far been kept. Where the keyword in the policy toward Serbia under Milosevic used to be 'exclusion' it has now changed to 'inclusion'. The result has been that *"Serbia was showered with praise and promises of aid and friendship on Monday (October 9) by the European Union"*¹⁷. The EU lifted the key sanctions, which were initially imposed on Yugoslavia after Yugoslavia's/Serbia's attempt to subjugate Kosovo.

¹³ See "Kosovo Report" by the independent international commission on Kosovo, 2000.

¹⁴ Bernard Chevener, the head of EU's Danube Commission, stated on 14 November that work to clear the Danube River will begin next spring. It is the intention that this work will be finished by summer 2001. The EU has allocated ≈ 22 million to the project. Radio Free Europe, 15/11/00.

¹⁵ See STRATFOR 17 Oktober 2000: "Yugoslavia: Redrawing the Balkan Map.

¹⁶ Therefore, it is obvious that what is needed now more than anything else is economic results.

¹⁷ Jonathan Steele and Gillian Sandford in The Guardian Weekly, October 12 to October 18, vol. 163/No 16. See also STRATFOR, "Redrawing the Balkan Map", October 17, 2000.

Furthermore, Yugoslavia has now been re-admitted as a member of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the United Nations (UN) and the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe.¹⁸ Yugoslavia has also re-established diplomatic relations with the governments in Washington, London, Paris, and Berlin.¹⁹ All in all, Yugoslavia has by now in a tremendous speed been welcomed back from its self-chosen isolation.²⁰ Kostunica offered the international community, and in particular the European Union, a possibility to change the ineffective sanction policy toward Yugoslavia and replace it with a policy oriented at *“the full integration of the Balkan countries into the political and economic mainstream of Europe”*.²¹

According to what has been said and done so far one should expect that the possibilities for establishing stability in the Balkans have improved significantly. *“The year 2000 began with democratic change in Zagreb, and this autumn much hoped democratic changes has taken root in Belgrade and thereby creating new possibilities for stabilizing the region”*.²² Much has happened and there is no doubt that the political atmosphere in which political problems are now being addressed has changed for the better. But do these changes necessarily imply that the problems in Kosovo become easier to solve? The political changes in Yugoslavia will most likely improve the possibilities for solving internal problems in Yugoslavia, such as economic improvement, the building of democratic institutions, improving the human rights situation and perhaps even come to an agreement with Montenegro, Serbia’s sister republic in Yugoslavia. But the point is that this does not necessarily imply for the problems at hand in Kosovo, which is important to be aware of.

¹⁸ And several other international organizations.

¹⁹ Radio Free Europe, 17/11/00.

²⁰ That is seen from the point of view of the international community. Serbia has never deliberately chosen isolation.

²¹ Javier Solana, “A European future for Serbia” in International Herald Tribune, (25-10-2000).

²² http://europa.eu.int/external_relations/see/fry/index.htm.

Kosovo – no solution in sight:

It is important to recognize that the problems in Kosovo are not just a product of the policy pursued by the political regime of Slobodan Milosevic. The conflict between the Albanians in Kosovo and the Serbs has lasted for as long as Kosovo has been a part of Serbia, which implies that the conflict has been taking place in various ways since the creation of Yugoslavia in 1918.²³ This is not to say that the problems in Kosovo can be simplified and described simply as the resurgence of old hatred, rather it is to recognize that the problems are extremely complicated and should be treated as such.

As an illustration of the problems in Kosovo the Kosovo-Albanians, even though they have a constitutional right to do so, did not participate in the elections that led to Milosevic's downfall, simply because they did not and still don't consider themselves a part of Yugoslavia.

The Kosovo-Albanians did not fight the Serbs in order to make changes happen in Serbia, they fought for the independence of Kosovo. Thus, the reactions among the Albanians in Kosovo to the changes in Serbia were far from those seen in the European Union. In Kosovo Vojislav Kostunica is perceived to be as dangerous to Kosovo as Slobodan Milosevic was, with the same nationalistic opinions, but contrary to Milosevic, with the full backing of the international community.²⁴ This is extremely well illustrated by a picture presently circulating in Kosovo which shows Vojislav Kostunica with an automatic rifle in his hand, allegedly during a visit to Kosovo in 1998.²⁵

The strong international military presence in Kosovo represented by KFOR²⁶ was to a certain extent justified by the fact that Yugoslavia under Milosevic

²³ Håkon Wiberg, Center for Freds og Konfliktforskning, nyhedsbrev nr. 3 June 1999.

²⁴ Ole Nyeng, Information, 27. Oktober, 2000.

²⁵ International Crises Group, "Reaction in Kosovo to Kostunica's Victory, October 10, 2000.

²⁶ Kosovo Force. According to UN resolution 1244 Annex 2, The international security presence with substantial North Atlantic Treaty Organization participation must be deployed under unified command and control and authorized to establish a safe environment for all people in Kosovo and to facilitate the safe return to their homes of all displaced persons and refugees. For further details about the role of KFOR in Kosovo, see the Military Technical Agreement (MTA) between the International Security Force (KFOR) and the Governments of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the Republic of Serbia from June 9 1999.

was considered a direct military threat to KFOR and the Albanians in Kosovo. The transformation of Yugoslavia has changed that. The massive military presence can no longer be justified using this argument. With Yugoslavia as a member of the OSCE, UN and the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe, Yugoslavia can no longer be considered a military threat to the international troops deployed in Kosovo²⁷. The Albanians do not share this view. As already stated the Albanians in Kosovo fought for an independent state and not to bring about political changes in Serbia²⁸. Therefore, in Kosovo, Serbia is still perceived to be the biggest threat to their political goal and security.

Although the result of the recent local election in Kosovo was that the allegedly more moderate politician Ibrahim Rugova and his party LDK won²⁹, Rugova immediately stated that there could be only one solution to the Kosovo problem - independence. *"This election had both local and national context – which is independence of Kosovo"*.³⁰ Rugova does not stand alone with this point of view, a clear majority of the Albanians also favor independence. It was for this objective that they have been fighting on several occasions³¹. Even the respected owner of Kosovo's leading daily, "Koha Ditore", Veton Surroi, who in general is perceived to be among the most moderate in Kosovo, sees no solution but independence, although he does accept that it can take years to decide the final status of Kosovo.³² The new federal Prime Minister in Yugoslavia, Zoran Zizic, said on 6 October that, "Belgrade will respect its international obligations such as the Dayton agreement" but criticized the UN and NATO actions in Kosovo, stressing that Kosovo remained an integral part of Yugoslavia³³.

²⁷ KFOR Commander Lieutenant-General Cabigiosu said on 6 November that his troops no longer played the same military role in Kosovo now that the democratic changes had taken place in Yugoslavia. Radio Free Europe, 07/11/00.

²⁸ See report from the International Crisis Group, 10 October 2000.

²⁹ Radio Free Europe 08/11/00.

³⁰ Herald Tribune, Frankfurt, Monday, October 30, 2000.

³¹ See Radovan Vukadinovic, 2000 and Ivan Krastev, in *The International Spectator*, vol. XXXV, no. 3, July-September (2000).

³² International Crises Group, "Reaction in Kosovo to Kostunica's Victory, October 10, 2000.

³³ Radio Free Europe, 06/11/00.

Vojislav Kostunica has himself ruled out the possibility of giving Kosovo independence, his argument being that it would destabilize the whole region.³⁴ The respective points of view are mutually exclusive which makes it almost impossible to reach a solution that could satisfy both the Serbs and the Albanians.

A few comments should be added which does put the situation in Kosovo into perspective. There are more reasons than those already mentioned why Kosovo may not be granted independence. On the one hand, it is explicitly stated in the UN resolution 1244³⁵ that all Member States should respect the territorial integrity of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, which implies that Kosovo, according to international law, can't be granted independence. On the other hand, there is the question of whether or not a Greater Albania should be created, or perhaps more important whether or not there among the Albanians in general is the political will to work for the establishment of such a state. Besides living in Albania proper the Albanians in the Balkans are also living in Kosovo, Macedonia (FYROM³⁶), Serbia, Greece and Montenegro.³⁷ An independent Kosovo could be seen as a step towards creating a Greater Albania, and Macedonia (FYROM) which has a large minority of Albanians is very much aware of the destabilizing potential which might arise if Kosovo is given independence. Basically, the questions regarding an independent Kosovo simply address the spillover possibilities, which are intimately linked to the Kosovo problem. This is what Vojislav Kostunica refers to when speaking about regional destabilizing possibilities.

As the situation is at the moment there is no solution to the status of Kosovo that would satisfy neither the Albanians nor the Serbs. Neither seems any solution available to the international community. The current policy pursued is therefore a wait and see policy. That has also been illustrated by Bernard

³⁴ Radio Free Europe, 13/11/00.

³⁵ Adopted by the Security Council at its 4011th meeting on 10 June 1999.

³⁶ Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

³⁷ Zlatko Isakovic, "Democratization, Democracy and Ethnic Conflicts in the Balkans", 2000.

Kouchner's³⁸ recommendation of holding parliamentary elections in Kosovo in the spring 2001, but at the same time stressing that it still is too early to decide the future of Kosovo.³⁹

That it is too early to decide the future status of Kosovo is not the opinion of the "Independent International Commission on Kosovo" which very recently released their report on the Kosovo intervention and the problems in Kosovo. One of their arguments was that the current status of Kosovo might contain a paradox. *"The aims of reconstruction and the development of democracy and a market economy depend on the capacity to establish the rule of law and other essentially state-building institutions. Yet the explicit goal of the Kosovo protectorate is not to build a state, but rather to prevent its formation"*.⁴⁰

This further complicates the situation in Kosovo. It is not just impossible to settle the problems in a way that satisfies both the Serbs and the Albanians, nor has it so been possible to solve the more basic security problems within Kosovo – such as the rule of law instead of anarchy. At the moment the international military presence in Kosovo is not even close to securing basic human physical security, even though that is an important part of its role in Kosovo where KFOR is supposed to establish a safe environment.

For reasons already pointed out, the current belief is therefore that Kosovo should not be granted independence but solving the problems in Kosovo requires stability of the kind normally found in well functioning states. Despite heavy military presence, the international community has so far not delivered this stability. It seems relevant to note that Krastev⁴¹ has pointed out that even though state borders in Europe tend to be of less importance, this situation first materialized when states had been created and had consolidated their power.

³⁸ Bernard Kouchner is the head of United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK). While passing the UN resolution 1244 the Security Council at the same time authorized the UNMIK to begin the long process of building peace, democracy, stability and self-government in Kosovo. See <http://www.un.org/peace/kosovo/pages/unmik12.html>.

³⁹ Radio Free Europe 17/11/00.

⁴⁰ Kosovo Report by the independent International Commission on Kosovo, 2000, page 241.

⁴¹ Krastev, in *The International Spectator*, vol. XXXV, no. 3, July-September (2000).

Even further it should be noted that the Kosovo problem might prove damaging to its surroundings, even though the status quo, i.e. not deciding for the final status of Kosovo, is maintained successfully. Maintaining status quo has perhaps the consequence that Kosovo for a rather long time remains unstable and a potential 'powder keg' which might prove damaging to the development of the democratic processes in Serbia. In this respect Zlatko Isakovic argues that: *"As a rule, ethnic conflicts, and especially escalated ones, have negative impacts on democracy, and at least partly disable development of the democratization process. Successful democratization needs national unity as a basic precondition, which can hardly be fulfilled due to existing ethnic conflicts, particularly in multiethnic societies. The more conflicts, the harder it is to achieve democracy, and less to experience it"*⁴². If Isakovic is right in stating that ethnic conflict restrains the democratic process, and much seems to be in favor of this argument⁴³, then the democratization process in Serbia might be hampered for as long as the Kosovo problem exists as a Serbian problem.

Conclusion:

It has not in this paper been the intention to give straight answers to straight questions. Rather, it has been the intention to comment on recent developments in Yugoslavia and at the same time to question the outspread belief that the new political regime in Serbia/Yugoslavia necessarily implies that the problems at hand, especially in Kosovo, will be more easily solved.

The problems in the Balkans have not been addressed in debt in this paper, which of course affects the certainty with which conclusions can be drawn. On the other hand, it seems reasonable to argue that the changes that have occurred in Serbia/Yugoslavia so far have proven positive and most likely will continue to be so in the future, not only regarding internal developments in Yugoslavia, but also in relation to the overall developments in South East Europe.

⁴² Zlatko Isakovic, "Democratization, Democracy and Ethnic Conflicts in the Balkans", 2000, page 20.

Thus, several things seem to indicate that the fall of Milosevic not necessarily implies that solutions are easier reached. Any decision regarding the final status of Kosovo will inevitably be disapproved by either the Albanians or the Serbs. While this is the situation as of today it cannot be ruled out that the situation might change in the future. One has to be aware that political goals only very seldom are constant over time. But what has been found so far is that the character of controversies between the Serbs and the Kosovo-Albanians involve more problems than just those problems related to the kind of political regime reigning in Belgrade.

It has further been found that securing a peaceful environment in Kosovo, which is an important part of KFOR's task in Kosovo, has not been possible so far. That is damaging to those other important tasks that have to be done in Kosovo. This paper offers no solution on what to do. One could conclude that the Kosovo problem has no perfect solution, but first and foremost it should be concluded that the Kosovo problem has only very little to do with the character of the regime ruling in Belgrade. Thus, even maintaining status quo in Kosovo might turn out to be a problem for the current positive democratic developments in Belgrade.

⁴³ See also Hans Mouritzen, "External Danger and Democracy" 1997.