Kosovo Essay, Research Paper

Kosovo, the province of the previous Yugoslavia is in the center of attention of the whole world. Not many people know, what was really going on in the cruelest war in the Balkans of southeast Europe. Why Kosovars have been fighting for their independence-did they even have the right to do that? This is the most common question asked in many conversations of concerned people around the world. Kosovars, though they share a long common history with the Serbs, have a right and reasons to establish their own independence.

Kosovars history, language, religion, and their numbers in the province of Kosovo have defined them as a separate nation with a right of self-determination and sovereignty. For a long time in history of Yugoslavia “Kosovo Albanians were refused, by dominated by Serbs Yugoslavia’s government, their constitutional rights. Now, after peacefully waiting for some changes, they demand at least their recognition as republic quoting on “their homogeneity, their cultural distinctiveness, and the size of their population, which is no less than that of other communities considered as ‘nations’” (Samary 122).

Currently the majority of the Kosovars are ethnic Albanians. Practically all are Muslim. They converted to Islam from Catholicism and Orthodox Christianity during 500 years of Ottoman Empire rule. (Language 1) Islam has become a major role in the development of their culture and is a main element of their national individualism. Kosovo is a spectacular region with 2 million Albanian inhabitants (Pryce Jones 24). Today Ethnic Albanians create 90% of the whole population of Kosovo. Serbs, Montenegrins, Muslim Slavs and Croats compose the other 10%, with the majority of Serbs among (Curtis 293). Before the end of World War II Serbs made up about half of the population of Kosovo. Most of them left the region for more prosperous parts of Yugoslavia. The structure of Kosovo s population was changed by the fast growth of the Albanians. The least developed region of Yugoslavia had its population in demographic youth. Annual growth rates of Kosovo in 1986 was one of the highest in Europe (2.5%), unfortunately infant mortality rate, a key indicator of population s social, economic, health care, a cultural levels, was highest among all Yugoslavia s republics (63.1 compare to Vojvodina 12.0 infant deaths per thousand births) (Curtis 68-9).

The major characteristic that unifies a group of people is their language. The language is the factor that separates nationalities from each other and forms countries. Ethnic Albanians speak totally different language that any other ethnic group in previous Yugoslavia. They speak Indo-European language as old as Latin and as different I vocabulary and grammar from Serbian as Italian is from Russian. (Language 1). Since the early 1980s Albanians have boycotted state education system and they have been sending their children to schools funded by Albanians living abroad. As a reason of that many young Albanians do not speak Serbian and Serbs never learn Albanian (Language 1). The rules of the Serbian government brought even worse socioeconomic standards. In 1971 36% of Kosovo s Albanians were illiterate (Ramet 189).

The secondary reasons Kosovars seek to maintain their independence is their history and religion. Albanians are descendents of Illyrians, who came to this region from the east in at least 1000 BC. Slavic speakers arrived here by the sixth century ( Albanians and Serbs ). The Serbs dominated the Balkans under Stefan Dusan (1331-55). He conquered the land from Belgrade to present day southern Greece. After his death in 1355 rival nobles divided Serbia and switch loyalty to Turkish sultan in 1371. During that period large numbers of Turkish Muslims settled in the Balkans (Curtis 17). Later on, Serbs made an attempt to free themselves from Turkish patronage and the most powerful Serbian prince, Lazar Hrebeljanovic, raised a multinational force to engage the Turks in the battle of Kosovo Polje on St. Vitus Day in 1389. The Turks hardly defeated Lazar and both prince and sultan died (Curtis 17). Until today the Serbs endowed that battle with myths of honors and heroism that helped them preserve their own dignity and sense of nationhood. The anniversary of that battle is the Serbian National Holiday, Vidovdan (St. Vitus Day), June 28 (Curtis 17). What followed was a long Turkish dominance of Serbs that also resulted in a conversion of many Serbs and Albanians to Islam.

As much as the mosaic of the Balkans is shown in the multinationalism of the region, it is also strongly divided along the religious lines. Catholics of Slovenia and Croatia, Muslims of Bosnia and Kazoo, as well as Eastern Orthodox followers of Serbia are the three most important religions of the region. Judaism and Protestantism are also present but are numerically marginal and do not affect the ethnic relations. The followers of all major religions of the region believe in their special role and superiority over others. Serbs who s Orthodoxy is a distinctive sign of their identity are still proud that even in the hardest oppression time never changed their religion for that one of occupant (Samary 37). Many of them claim that they are Heavenly People and that God protects Serbs . Many Croats and Slovenes claim that God protects them , and that they are under the patronage of the Holy Virgin Mary and Muslims felt that it was they who were doing Allah s will, whereas Christians were infidels (Mojzes 43-4).

Ethnic conflicts and hatred were the negative results of a mixed nation under the power of the Serbian government. The hatred among the ethnic and religious groups of the Balkans became a target of a campaign of Josip Bros Tito. His policy was to unite all Balkan nations into a federation of equal and free people. His slogan of Brotherhood and Unity was not empty demagoguery in a country where hundreds of thousands of men, women and children had lost their lives in the most brutal ways because of ethnic hatred (Udovicki and Ridgeway 58). Tito saw nationalism as a main threat to his multinational federal state. In order to control the growth of the nationalistic ideas in Serbia Tito allowed more representation of Serbs in the new government. Serbs obtained a leading role in the future of the federation that was never compromised. The Serbs controlled federal government, however local governments that consisted of local politicians ran the provinces that were quite homogenous in their ethnicity. At the beginning the new order worked. Because of a very strong enforcement any expression of nationalism was prohibited. People of new Yugoslavia could enjoy peace and economic growth not experienced in a long time. The growth however was not equal among all the provinces. Per capita income in Slovenia, the wealthiest republic was about three times that of Kosovo in 1945 and six times as great by the 1980s. Growing economic differences between the republics was a long term recipe for disaster (Bennet 69).

Tension between the government in Belgrad and governments of individual republics grew after the gap in the foreign debt rose. Republics refused to pay to the federal treasury their share, because proceeds were used mostly to strengthen the army. And that was seen as a direct threat to the republics (Sammary 56). When Tito rose to the position of a leader of the third world countries, he gained support not only from his people, but also Western powers. Yugoslavia was very important for them to maintain the peace during the time of the cold war. When the threat of communism disappeared, Yugoslavia lost its importance to the West, where along with ethnic and religious hatred became one of the many elements destabilizing the Yugoslavia union. After the death of Tito in 1980, power in Yugoslavia stayed in the hands of League of Communists Communist Party renamed in 1952 (Rogel 15-16). Mainly Serbs controlled it.

The destruction of Yugoslavia and drive for independence started in Kosovo in 1987, when Slobodan Milosevic, then leader of the League of Communists of Serbia, used the stories of discrimination against the Serbs by the Albanians, to increase his power to become the president of Serb Republic. Serbs started to attack the Albanians in Kosovo. In 1986, members of the Serbian Academy of Sciences presented memorandum, in which they presented magnified Serbian grievances during their whole history. The target of their complaints were Albanians, who were dehumanized of Kosovo, treated as if they were no more than a Muslim army single-mindedly dedicated to the destruction of Serbian culture. The memorandum stressed that righting the wrongs done to Serbs in Kosovo was vital for the Serbian nation (Zimmerman 17). Serbs were trying to bust nationalism by calling for the idea of Greater Serbia. Kosovo means the same for Serbs what Jerusalem and the West Bank [for] Israelis a sacred ancestral homeland now inhabited largely by Muslims (Zimmerman 13). Serbs have here great monasteries and the patriarch of the Serbian Orthodox Church resides in the Kosovo city of Pec. It will also always be the place of the great battle from 1389. Milosevic used Serbia s national aspirations in his speech in the 600th anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo as the threats for any opponents saying: Six centuries later, again we are in battles and quarrels. They are not armed battles, though such things should not be excluded yet (Zimmerman 20). Albanians were louder demanding their rights and Serbs even more openly tyrannize their freedom of movement. The voices against Serbs rapacity were raised all over the Yugoslav republics, were feared of Serbs nationalism and communism. Even the republics, which allied with Serbia, were against the unity with force. First seceded Slovenia, which was the republic containing no Serbian minority. They were loudly speaking for Albanians, where the human rights were not respected. Next one was Croatia with its leader Franjo Tudjman. Both republics announced their independence on June 25, 1991 (Rogel 25-6) Milosevic was trying to hold them in the union using different ways. He even imposed trade boycotts on Slovenia and Croatia. When this idea failed he started to use an army to hold the Slovenia and Croatia in union, or get the biggest part of them. In Slovenia peace was signed almost immediately. The war with Croatia was reminiscent of World War II s bestial fratricidal killing . As the result ten thousand was dead, 30,000 civilians and soldiers were wounded, 73,000 became refugees and Serbs took one-third of Croatian Republic (Rogel 25-6). Bosnia-Herzegovena was the most diversified, religiously and ethnically. In 1992 they made decision not to stay in Yugoslovia, because of the fear that they would become another Kosovo or Vojvodina, a part of greater Serbia and subject to Milosevic s political will (Rogel 32-3). Leader from Serbia, Bosnia and Croatia signed the peace on 31 October 1995 in Dayton, Ohio. It was sponsored by the US ( Yugoslavia ). Unfortunately the Kosovo s problem was not even discussed, even though the policy of ethnic cleansing in Kosovo was being intensified rapidly by the Serbs Army.

History of Kosovars is marked with the struggle for the rights of a nation of people. Albanians were fighting on the side of the communists in hope to gain equality with other Yugoslavia s nationalities. Instead, Tito feared implications for the Serbia and refused their demands. Since 1960s Serbs had feared to lose control over Kosovo. There were suspicions, that Kosovo s Albanians would secede in order to join their co-nationals in the independent neighboring state of Albania (rRogel 19). However, because of backwardness and poverty, Kosovars were far from this idea. The most educated ones were opting for autonomy and a separate republic. In the 1970s great numbers of Serbs and Montenegrins left Kosovo, which was portrayed by Serbs mass media as an escape from Albanians terror. Only in 1974, after Tito s new constitution, Kosovo gained wide autonomy, which means become a republic in all but name it was autonomous province within Yugoslavia [however] did not have a right to secede (Austin 1). The constant drive for independence in Kosovo was very inconvenient for the Serbs. Police units from Serbia and northern republics were using apartheid methods to kill the freedom movement in Kosovo (Rogel 19).

In 1989, then-Serbian president Slodoban Milosevic, revoked Kosovo s autonomous status and in 1990, to cut Albanians claims declared a state of emergency in the Kosovo Province, ended autonomy, and instituted direct rule from the Serbian capital of Belgrad ( Albanians and Serbs ). Following, many Kosovars lost their jobs. Many schools, hospitals and ethnic, cultural centers were closed. To suppress ethnic soul in Kosovo in 1993 the Serbs moved an army of 100,000 near the Serbian border, creating fear [of] a Bosnian-style ethnic cleansing campaign (Albanians and Serbs ). Albanians leaders pursued different ways to achieve more freedom. The moderate ones were opting for staying in Yugoslavia federation for bigger independence in the future. Ibrahim Rugova leader of KDA wanted free election in the region. He was very strong opponent of Serbia s government, which he says was treating us like a colony. It acts like the European colonial lords in Africa we are for Yugoslavia, if it is possible to find a democratic solution in the European spirit (Cohen 124). Slobodan Milosevic using his superior military force has been pushing all the Albanians out of the borders of Kosovo to make room for Serbs later. Since the Serbs started campaign to eliminate the KLA, they drove hundreds of thousands of ethnic Albanians from their homes. Using terror, burning villages, mass killings and raping women the exodus of Muslims has been steadily increasing (Calabressi 30). They were finding rescue in neighboring countries Albania, Macedonia and Montenegro. According to The Associated Press on the 05/03/99 more than 660,000 people have already left Kosovo since the air strikes began (Austin 1). The situation in Kosovo has reached the point of genocide. Now it is too late to forget what has happened. The scars are too deep, the hatred too strong. It will take more than this generation to heal the wounds of the last few years. It will take education of the peoples involved, learning to compromise and learning the value of human life. That is why the people of Kosovo cannot live in one country with the people of Serbia. That is why they need an independent Kosovo. The most admirable words in support of the Kosovar s independence were by winner in 1986 of the Nobel Peace Prize Elie Wiesel: It would be inhuman to remain indifferent. It would be an insult to our memory, our principles, and our faith and to our humanity. Humanity is being violated in Kosovo. What we see now is so horrendous: a million or more people, men, women and children, innocent, who have done absolutely nothing to deserve their fate. Their homes are destroyed, their businesses abolished, their security taken away, families separated, innocent people killed, massacres, executions. (McGuire 1/sec.2)

The world cannot just watch this happen. The sympathy for this struggling nation is not enough of what the world needs to do; it is human obligation to help them. It is also necessary to prevent similar catastrophe in neighboring Albania and Macedonia. The intervention of the western powers seems just necessary to stop Serbian nationalist Slobodan Milosevic. He is to the Balkans what Saddam Hussein is to the Middle East (Pryce-Jones 24). The major powers can not pro forma just accept what is going on in the middle of the Balkans. The words spoken by the first noncommunist prime minister of Poland since World War II, when he was resigning from the UN commission that investigated human rights in former Yugoslavia, because the western powers were minimizing the atrocities in Bosnia in 1995, suit well the situation in Kosovo: We have been fighting in Poland against a totalitarian system with a vision for the Europe of tomorrow. How can we believe in a Europe of tomorrow created by the children of people who are abandoned today? ( Rogel 141).

Many will ask like Michael Roux: does anyone have the right, based on this or that period of the past, to make themselves exclusive owners of a territory? (Samary 36-7) Both Serbians and Albanians are trying to convince the world that this land destroyed by the war should belong to them. But it is the people themselves that create a country. There were 2 million people living in Kosovo, speaking different language, having unique history and culture. They mostly do not mix and they greatly outnumber other ethnic and religious groups. Nobody has a right to burn the houses. Nobody has a right to rape or kill innocent people simply because they are different. Nobody has a right to run them away from the land they ve been working on for generations. This violates basic human rights that everyone deserves. The people of Kosovo have a right to self- determination.