

Serbia – Russia Military Political Relations in the Process of Solving Kosovo Issue and in the Future

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Considering the previous long-term negative experience, it was logical, and for Serbia also of existential importance, to reconsider the military-political relations and cooperation with Russia related to Kosovo and establish their realistic foundations. Kosovo was the most difficult political challenge of the former Yugoslavia, in particular Serbia. During and after Tito, the uprisings in Kosovo used to be solved by force, using police and army. At the beginning of Yugoslav crisis, it was repeatedly pointed out that the dissolution of Yugoslavia had begun and that it would end with Kosovo. Milan Kucan, the President of Slovenia, said that “Slovenia was being defended in Kosovo”. The authors of Z-4 Plan, which provided a wide-ranging autonomy for the Serbs in Croatia, considered that the Albanians in Serbia should also have such autonomy.¹ Wasn't it the reason for the rejection of Z-4 Plan? During the preparations for Dayton talks, USA suggested to Milošević to discuss also Kosovo, at least preliminary, as the last segment of Yugoslav crisis, but he did not even consider it. During the Dayton talks, the Americans tried more than once to get Milošević's consent to discuss also Kosovo. Since he rejected that possibility, USA enclosed to the Dayton Agreement its unilateral statement about the necessity of solving the issue of Kosovo. On the basis of Dayton Agreement, the talks about the Sub-Regional Arms Control were completed.² Russia was well acquainted with everything and actively participated in the process.

However, Russia had not dealt seriously with the Kosovo issue until the failure of Rambouillet talks. Russia was not able to confront the USA's dominant influence within the Contact Group and during the talks, which had been clear in advance and which no person thinking objectively should criticize. However, Russia did not even influence Milošević to understand that Kosovo would most certainly be lost if, with his policy of refusal and defiance, he allowed the solution to the problem by military force. Evidently, Russia was not obliged to do so, but it could be expected from a fraternal, Slavic and Orthodox country as it presented itself. And after Rambouillet, the influence of politics and Contact Group in deciding about the destiny of Kosovo had been decreasing, while the military factor in the form of NATO took the lead.

Nevertheless, although it is still uncertain whether the official Russian politics could have done more, it is certain that the military structures, secret services and their branches were sending unrealistic assessments, encouraging and pushing Milošević into an armed conflict. Exactly at that time, during and after the failure in Rambouillet, the above-mentioned diplomatic and other representatives repeatedly warned us to take care of ourselves because Russia was not able to help us. On the contrary, as the situation grew graver, Milošević's brutal abuse of Russia and Russian assistance was increasing. He would usually say to his collocutor, whom he seemingly listened to, but in fact he looked down on with contempt and cynicism, that he was right, but “there are certain things that he was not and could not be aware of”. There was no further discussion.

The performance of Russia, at the time when we were losing and lost Kosovo and now when it is trying to “raise it from the dead”, deserves special attention. When we were losing Kosovo, at least four policies were led in Moscow. The policy of Jelcin depended on his mental and physical

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¹ The Plan Z-4 was designed by the Ambassadors of USA, Russia, France and Great Britain in Zagreb.

² The quantity of offensive armaments in five categories (tanks, artillery, armoured personnel carrier, fighter airplanes and attack helicopters) was limited and reduced significantly in FRY, BH and Croatia. It seemed that the problems in the territory of former Yugoslavia were not going to be solved by force any more.

state. However, Jelcin said on time that Russia would not enter into a conflict with NATO, because its security in Kosovo was not threatened. The second policy was led by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Crucified between Jelcin, Duma, Ministry of Defence and others, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was abstained, but they warned us clearly enough to accept the reality and to avoid the conflict with the West and NATO. The third policy was led by the Ministry of Defence, more precisely certain generals, who were threatening NATO in "a good mood" and promising assistance, although they were more aware than the others that it was not going to happen. The most influential policy was the one led by the "others": intelligence and security services, their exponents and intermediaries as well as some official representatives in Moscow and Belgrade.

It is hard to say whether we are ever going to find out at least a part of the truth about their "intrigue". Without that knowledge, we are not able to explain the lies and deceptions for which Serbia and its citizens paid the bloody price. Here are three examples. Before the beginning of air-strikes the Air Force and Air Defence estimated that we were going to knock down 80 NATO aircraft. NATO would not be able to bear such loss and would stop the bombing. D. Ojdanic, Chief of the General Staff of the Yugoslav Army, in his interview on TV Politika on April 28, 1999 said that by then we had knocked down 46 NATO airplanes. Everything is clear if we know that by the end of air-strikes only two airplanes were knocked down. Who and why "served" to Milošević the deceit that NATO was going to enter Kosovo with land forces and due to casualties they would have to cease the aggression?³

At the meeting of the Yugoslav Army General Staff collegium held in January 1999, it was also clearly said that Russia was not going to war for us. General Aleksandar Dimitrijević, Head of Security Directorate, said: "They are wondering how Russia has changed its attitude. According to our data, on the occasion of Albright's visit to Moscow, in the conversations with Primakov, the Russian debt in the amount of 380 billion US dollars was reprogrammed for the following twenty years. I guess we are all smart enough to understand what it means for Russia..." It should be pointed out that this was said by the Head of Security Service and not the Intelligence Service.⁴

The Minister of Foreign Affairs Živadin Jovanović said the following in his conversation with Ambassador B. Jovanović about the conduct of Russia before and during the Kumanovo talks: "But Russia is writing yet another dark page of its history by such attitude towards Serbian interests. It is a very dark, obscure and black page. They have forgotten that practically two and a half month...our people have been killed by the enemy. And Russia has been cooperating in the justification of that murder through such Resolution. Boro, we are in trouble."⁵ Zivadin Jovanović, who says for himself that he strayed into diplomacy, for the nature of his work must have been aware of the truth and the real situation, but he remained silent.

Russia damaged itself, and Serbia even more, when it designed a "big scam" with Milosević and the Army. Without NATO's knowledge, the Russians transferred one part of their SFOR contingent from BH to Kosovo and occupied the airport *Slatina* near Pristina. NATO was surprised and stunned. The NATO commander, General Wesley Clark ordered to the KFOR commander, General Michael Jackson to drive them out, which he refused, fortunately. The relations with Russia in preparing that, not very successful operation and the world in which Milosević lived are illustrated by his anger at the Minister of Defence, Marshal Igor Dimitrievich Sergejev, for not having made a decision yet: "Shame on him, shame on him", and then: "And we are going to say what the Russian are, shame on them, they are embarrassing themselves on a daily basis"⁶. Milosević got angry with the Russians even because they were requesting permission for flying over Hungary and Bulgaria, for the purpose of bringing fresh airdrop forces from Russia. "Why

³ Since before the air-strikes I was a military attaché in the FR Germany and the Netherlands, I was told on several occasions that there was not going to be any land operation. Before my return, after the severance of diplomatic relations, I obtained it in writing. I still keep that piece of paper. The German General confirmed to me, as a Consul General in Frankfurt, that the buildings of the Ministry of Defence and Army Headquarters were rocketed immediately after Ojdanic's lies. He said: "Not even a spokesperson is allowed to lie that much, let alone the Chief of the General Staff."

⁴ Military Secret, I volume, page 11, Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia, Belgrade 2004.

⁵ Idem, page 73.

⁶ Idem, page 84 and 92.

aren't they flying, what do they care whether they are given the permission or not? The Bulgarians are supposed to shoot them?"⁷

In the eyes of the West and NATO one again we turned out to be frauds, only this time in a duet. The Russians were not able to deploy their forces because they had been prevented by the Albanians. The relations with KFOR had been tensed. They also had casualties, and the only Duma thing could do was to conclude "that the cost of presence significantly exceeds the political interest" and to withdraw. The immediate military presence of Russia in the Balkans ceased and its military influence became marginal and limited to military-technical relations concerning the repair and maintenance of Russian military equipment and armament.

Russia did not know which policy to lead even after the Kosovo tragedy to which it contributed. Upon having returned from Moscow, the Chief of Intelligence Directorate of the Yugoslav Army General Staff, said at the collegium meeting of the Yugoslav Army and the Ministry of Interior, in April 2000: "I was received by the Chief of General Staff and other high-ranking military leaders; we have their absolute support, they support our regime, Army, police. All of them there know that Vuk (Drasković – author's remark) is a drug addict, that he is lot of other things..."⁸. It is obvious that the Intelligence Directorate was not dealing with the affairs and tasks it was supposed to deal with and that the defence of regime was its primary assignment. However, the Intelligence Directorate would not have been able to act that way if the Russian military leadership had taken care not to interfere into Serbian internal political relations in a very dramatic moment.

The Russian Minister of Defence I. Sergeyev visited Belgrade and Kosovo on the head of a numerous delegation on December 23rd and 24th, 1999. S. Milošević received the delegation pompously; a glamorous dinner was served and all the members of delegation were awarded the highest honours. Marshal Sergeyev severely condemned KFOR, and he got a large publicity in the regime media. The German General Klaus Reinhardt, KFOR Commander, expected to have a "hot conversation" with the Russians the following day. However, as soon as he said that he was satisfied with the performance of Russian contingent, Lieutenant-General Gennady Shpak, Commander of Airdrop Forces, embraced him. On the departure, Marshal Sergeyev thanked KFOR and said that he would not withdraw the Russian contingent. General Reinhardt wrote down: "Marshal Sergeyev's cordial comments, after the yesterday's thunder in Belgrade, speak for themselves."⁹

Marshal Sergeyev surprised the public a great deal also in June 2000. In Brussels, on the occasion of visiting the NATO Headquarters, he said that "There is no alternative for Slobodan Milošević at the Serbian political stage". Was it the position of official Moscow? Even if it was, the Minister of Defence was not supposed to say that, under any circumstances, neither in Moscow, let alone in the NATO Headquarters, with whom Russia had established the relations a long time ago, both bilaterally and through the Partnership for Peace.

It is also hard to understand why the Russians received the then Chief of the General Staff of Yugoslav Army Nebojsa Pavković, in April 2001, who had been kept in that position by Vojislav Kostunica, contrary to everybody's expectations. Only those well acquainted with the situation knew that Pavković did not have an adequate treatment in Moscow. It was important to him to be received by the Russians and to announce it.

The contradiction in the Russia-Serbia relations concerning Kosovo emerged also through the understanding of alliance and political interest. According to some people, since the beginning Russia has been and still is our ally. At the same time, the opponents (non-allies) are USA, EU and NATO. If the "alliance means the relationship between the two or among more states based on the treaty that defines their mutual permanent or time-limited obligations", Serbia is not in any relation of alliance with Russia, unless the Milošević's alliance with Russia and Belarus related to the establishment of confederation is reincarnated. At the same time, exactly USA, EU and NATO are our allies on the basis of membership in the NATO programme Partnership for Peace. Having in mind that the political interest involves "certain attitude towards someone or something with the aim of achieving own interest or gain", the author wrote: "If the interest of Russia is to defend

⁷ Idem, page 98.

⁸ Idem, page 180.

⁹ General Klaus Reinhardt, "KFOR - Streitkräfte für Frieden", p. 291, Frankfurt am Main, second edition, February 2002.

international law, it is fine, but if it does not succeed in defending Kosovo, it will be only to our detriment. It will become clear that we were not allies, and that our political interests were different. If the goal of Russia is to, if Kosovo becomes independent, request the recognition of independence of Ossetia, Abkhazia and Pridnjestrovlje, in that case it was a brutal political Machiavellism and abuse of "Kosovo sufferance" with the aim of achieving own interests."¹⁰

Today it is clear that it was exactly what happened. I repeat, we cannot reproach Russia for using Kosovo in order to solve the problems of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. As a matter of fact, President V. Putin was clearly warning the West that they would be responsible for what was going to happen as a consequence of their policy concerning Kosovo. However, we do have to refer to Russia an ethical objection. Russia has abused a small Serbia – fraternal, Slavic and Orthodox. After that, Russia has been appearing less frequently in relation to Kosovo. But there is no love and altruism in politics. There are only interests.

It is evident that it would have been better if Russia had not supported and protected us – the way it used to do until the fall of Milošević. Nevertheless, things have not changed significantly even after that. The individuals, who were active at that time, are still influential today; only they are on higher academic and scientific positions. They mention the past only incidentally, focusing on the "defence of Kosovo".

Leonid Ivashov, the former Lieutenant-General and Chief of Directorate for International Military Cooperation, presently the President of Russian Academy for Geopolitical Issues, has even sharper rhetoric today. According to him, the "NATO-fascists" are to be blamed for all of it, for a long-lasting Yugoslav drama and Kosovo. *Since no country can conquer NATO-fascists alone, it is a high time for gathering of those who don't want to be run over by the boot from Washington. The former Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Andrey Kozyrev "betrayed" Serbs and Russia, Viktor Chernomyrdin "sold himself out" to Americans. Serbs are facing a persistent and long battle until Europe recognizes that it has entered into its own historical and geopolitical trap because it has been dull, fearful and apathetic. The brothers Serbs should preserve their spirit, pride and hope because Russia has already been strengthening, Belarus stands on guard, the Bulgarians are beginning to see clearly and it seems that USA will be stopped after all. The Catholics have once again helped in seizing the Orthodox centre in Constantinople. Losing Kosovo is for Serbs equal to taking their hearts out because for them, it means taking away the centre of their Orthodox-Slavic spirit.*¹¹

Konstantin Nikiforov, the Director of Balkan Studies Institute of the Russian Academy of Science, believes that there will be more wars in the Balkans for the land of ancestors and that the West, which is now giving the Albanians the country as a gift, must be aware of that, and adds: "Bearing in mind that the present Serbian leadership said that they did not want to go to the war for Kosovo, only hot heads can think that Russia should go to the war for the preservation of Serbian territory."¹²

Jelena Guskova, the Director of Contemporary Balkan Crisis Studies Centre of the Russian Academy of Science says: "If the Serbian leadership wants to win the battle for Kosovo, it has to be united again, because as long as the Serbian leaders were united, the Americans did not succeed in creating an independent Kosovo without resistance". Guskova also considers that the Kosovo battle is ongoing and that Russia will not yield. She also establishes that the Serbian leadership has already stated that they did not want to fight in the war. She also regrets the frictions among Serbs and the lack of solidarity among Slavs, which is the result of a good "work" of powerful persons in the world and our lenience. Serbs could be scattered worldwide like Jews. Serbs are the only people in the world that stood up against violence and lawlessness and the attempt of ruling from one centre. Serbia has been defending the borders of Orthodoxy and Slavism for 17 years, providing the opportunity to a slow bear, which is Russia, to become aware of its role, tasks and capabilities."¹³

¹⁰ The author wrote several articles in the newspaper Danas about the role of Russia in "defending" Kosovo.

¹¹ Interview for *Vecernje novosti*, 24 February 2008

¹² Interview for *Vecernje novosti*, 20 February 2008

¹³ Interview for *Vecernje novosti*, 8 April 2008

It is obvious that the views of the leading people in Russian Academy of Science have nothing in common with science and *do not* contribute to good reputation of that institution, of Russia and particularly of Serbia. It is a primitive cheap politics and the reflection of personal frustrations. The particularly dangerous remark is that the Serbian leadership has given up the war for Kosovo in advance. The question emerges: in whose name do the mentioned gentlemen/ladies and scientists speak?

A few words of common sense and encouragement came from Moscow as well. Minister Sergey Lavrov supported the signing of Agreement of Stabilization and Accession of Serbia to EU; he pointed out that Serbia should not be treated as a battle field between Russia and the West and highlighted the importance of strategic partnership between Russia and EU, based of equality and respect of interests.

It would be good if the Russian policy and attitude towards Serbia could become more realistic and sober and if such policy could be implemented and announced by the competent department and minister. That would narrow the space for the actions of groups and individuals, both in Belgrade and in Moscow, who prefer the relations between the two counties based on Orthodoxy, Slavism and fraternity (hopefully not of arms).¹⁴

Conclusion and future of military-political relations between Serbia and Russia

If we exclude the indirect connection of Kosovo with the moment and mode in which Russia solved the issue of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Russia has not benefited from being engaged in the Yugoslav crisis, particularly not on the Serbian side. On the contrary, it used its forces and resources, and it lost the battle for military presence and influence in the Balkans, even in Serbia itself. As regards Serbia, it should not have negative consequences neither to internal situation and relations nor to its relations with the neighbouring countries, USA, EU and NATO.

It is important for the both countries that the line of military-political confrontation of USA and NATO and Russia was moved to the East, that is - to the Russian borders as a result of the accession of former Warsaw Treaty members to NATO. Russia not only has the least military-political presence ever in the region, but it is also physically separated from Serbia by the states that are NATO members. As a consequence of those and other civilizational changes, the role and importance of a military factor have been essentially decreased in general, in particular in Europe and the Balkans, in the internal and international relations. The military forces in some countries have been substantially reduced, and their importance has become secondary.

The consequences for Serbia are permanent. Due to the engagement of Russia, as an unequal partner, Serbia was an object in the contradictory relations of big powers. Its political and military leadership was abusing Russia, which also influenced the internal relations in Serbia in respect to supporting radical and anti-European oriented parties and forces. Owing to the Russian support, particularly its direct military engagement and "defence" of Kosovo, today we are farther not only from the NATO membership, but also from the EU, and even from objectively lost Kosovo. Russia has not participated in or influenced in any way the actual reform of army and defence-security system in Serbia.

The military-political relations between Russia and Serbia are not a dominant factor any more in the overall relations between the two countries. On the contrary, they are objectively secondary in relation to the fields of politics and economy - especially energy, and probably some other areas in the future. It is good and it should be in the interest of both Serbia and Russia.

Therefore, it is not realistic to expect that in the following period, as regards Serbia, there will be a real need for the strengthening of military-political relations with Russia. I do not see the reasons for which the military relations with Serbia could have a special importance for Russia in the foreseeable future, without being detrimental for Serbia and its Euro-Atlantic integrations.

The first problem that should be solved in the overall relations between Russia and Serbia, and which also could have a special importance for military relations, is whether the equal

¹⁴ *Danas*, 20 May 2008

relations and objective interests of the two countries will have primacy, whereas Slavism, Orthodoxy and "fraternal relations" based on them would contribute to even closer and more successful cooperation and relations or the starting point will be the "fraternity based on Slavism and Orthodoxy" according to which the interests would be determined and on which the relations between the two countries would depend.

Since Serbia, like all other countries in the region, is still prevalently equipped with Russian technique, the military-technical cooperation is currently realistic and mutually beneficial for the purpose of delivery of spare parts, repair and maintenance of the equipment. It is confirmed by the example of repair of airplanes and helicopters.