

Autonomy or Independence: Yugoslav and Post-Yugoslav Minority
Politics in Vojvodina and Kosovo

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“Whether ‘tis nobler in the mind to suffer...
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles?”
William Shakespeare

Abstract

By offering a comparative analysis of minority politics and arrangements for the autonomy of Hungarians in Vojvodina and Albanians in Kosovo, this article discusses the reasons that in the Albanian case minority strivings lead to violence, while Hungarian case remained peacefully accommodated within a society, even providing internal cohesion and good neighbourly relations. The analysis follows both minorities from their post-1918 and post-1945 status in the two Yugoslavias respectively, as well as in post-1990 Serbia to date. The questions that this comparative research aims to investigate are: can these two cases shed more light to tackling minority issues to prevent conflicts and accommodate diversities, or provide an exemplary case of positive cross-border cooperation and approach towards minorities? This analysis argues against the simplistic notions that see ethnic relations and conflicts in the Balkans as the result of centennial hatred and historically deeply rooted hostilities, advocating a more nuanced perspective sensitive to subtleties and internal interrelations and mutual dynamics in tackling majority/minority issues.

Keywords: Vojvodina, Kosovo, Yugoslavia, Hungarians in Serbia, Albanians in Serbia, Hungarian national council, Minority rights, Non-territorial autonomy

The aim of this paper¹ is to offer a comparative analysis of minority politics and autonomy arrangements in Yugoslavia and Serbia up to the present day, in particular in relation to Hungarians in Vojvodina and Albanians in Kosovo; the goal is to see in more details whether – and if so, why,

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in the case of Kosovo autonomy-targeted arrangements and strivings led to violence, while in Vojvodina such efforts remained peacefully incorporated in a polity and even serve as a solid foundation for good neighbourly relations.

Hungarians and Albanians had a rather comparable “start” in both Yugoslavias during the XX century. Firstly, the Hungarians actually outnumbered the Albanians in the new Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (later renamed Yugoslavia) (472,409 to 441,740 in 1918; 467 658 to 439 657 in 1921); secondly, the new, post-1945 socialist Yugoslavia had a federal principle in which Serbia contained two largely autonomous provinces, primarily accommodating Hungarians in Vojvodina and Albanians in Kosovo (Banac 1988: 58; Grupković 1988; Ramet 2006). Yet, arguably, the outcomes of both ethnic minorities could not be more different – owing to a demographic explosion, Kosovo Albanians soon became an absolute majority in the province, demanding more and more political rights that the Serbs opposed, which ultimately led to a harsh conflict and ethnic war in Kosovo. Despite continuous efforts in the normalization of these relations, this conflict continuously plays itself as the domination of one nation over the other one, so that “what predominates now in the minds of most Serbs and Albanians, as well as most outside observers, is the image of a deeply rooted and unbridgeable rift between Serbs and Albanians, more ‘ancient’ and clear-cut than the division in Bosnia” (Duijzings 2000: 8).

The Hungarians in Vojvodina, in distinction, reduced in numbers due to a number of factors, some being low fertility rate, migrations and colonization of Vojvodina by Serbs and Montenegrins during the 20th century. Since the abolishment of Vojvodina’s autonomy by Slobodan Milošević in 1990, they focused and achieved more in terms of non-territorial autonomy, mostly encompassing their personal, cultural, language rights and local autonomy and, more recently, the Hungarian minority council (Korhecz 2015, Beretka 2019). In stark contrast with the Serbian-Albanian relations, highest Serbian and Hungarian officials claim that “current relations between Serbia and Hungary are the best they have ever been in history” (Serbian President Vučić on September 11, 2017, see: Beretka 2019), and that “Serbia has regained its esteem and returned to European politics... Today, the EU needs Serbia more than Serbia needs the EU” (Hungarian President Victor Orbán on 15 May, 2020, see: MTI-Hungary Today, 2020).

The questions that this paper aims to investigate are: was it necessary that the two ethnic communities’ striving for autonomy have such drastically opposite outcomes? Can these two cases shed more light to tackling minority issues to prevent conflicts and accommodate diversities? Can

this rather lasting positive trend in Serbian-Hungarian relations and the rights for minorities enjoyed by both Hungarians in Serbian and Serbs in Hungary provide us with an exemplary case of positive cross-border cooperation and approach towards minorities, which, according to recent scholars, “could potentially offer a template for addressing ethnic tensions in other Central and East European countries” (Smith and Semenyshyn 2016) and thereby potentially offer a template for addressing ethnic tensions in other Central and East European countries. Arguably, such analysis departs from a perspective that marked post-1990s scholarship which perceived Serbian and regional ethnic relations as marked by centennial hatred and historically deeply rooted hostilities, and seek for the explanations of conflicts that focus on the power dynamics and political situation in the early 1990s.

The comparative perspective on Kosovo and Vojvodina and the issue of opposite directions that the intra- and extra- Serbian-Albanian and Serbian-Hungarian relations had during the Yugoslav crisis has not been adequately addressed so far. Erin K. Jenne stressed the role of the external, international factors in spurring internal conflicts. She juxtaposes secessionist vs integrationist approach of Kosovo and Vojvodina alongside a number of other comparable cases to claim that “when the minority’s external patron credibly signals interventionist intent, minority leaders are likely to radicalize their demands against the center, even when the government has committed itself to moderation. It follows that the successful mediation of triadic conflicts is possible only after relations have been normalized between the minority’s host government and lobby actor at the international level.” (Jenne 2007: 2) Other scholars, approaching the issue of conflicts in Kosovo and the Balkans in general, stressed the role of national and political myths and centuries long Serbian-Albanian hostility in spurring the Kosovo conflict (Merthus 1999), saw the recent Balkan wars as primarily religious conflicts (Sells 1996) or, *mutatis mutandis*, blamed Serbian nationalist ideology for igniting conflicts in the Balkans since the 19th century (Anzulović 1999, Malcolm 1998). This article fully acknowledges the role of the external factor as well as historical, cultural and symbolical forces influencing the Kosovo issue. However, after providing the comparative overview of minority politics towards Hungarians and Albanians in the two Yugoslavias and up to the present Serbia, it stresses the oppressive measures and legal arrangements put forward by the Milošević’s regime in Serbia in the 1990s, rather than the centennial hatred and national myths, together with international and military support towards the Kosovo independence, as ultimately leading to a violent ethnic conflict and war.

Overview of Yugoslav policy towards Albanians and Hungarians between the Balkan wars of 1910s and 1990s

As the result of the collapse of two vast empires in the early XX century, the Ottoman Empire and Austro-Hungarian one, a large number of Albanians and Hungarians ended up living under Serbian sovereignty within the two Yugoslavias during the larger part of the XX century. Serbian expansion during the 1912-1913 Balkan Wars saw Serbia doubling its territory southwards, including the present day Kosovo and North Macedonia. In the official Serbian discourse, this was a just war of liberating oppressed Serbian brothers, but also bringing freedom to other nations suffering from the Turkish yoke (see: King Petar I: 1912). In reality, however, while Serbia after 1912 more than doubled its territory southwards on the expense of the collapsing Ottoman Empire, Serbs constituted only around 1/3 of the population of these majority Albanian populated areas (see: Weigand 1924).

The Great War the following year disrupted the establishment of full Serbian sovereignty over these newly acquired regions, but the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian empire after the war brought new territorial gains to the Serbs. On November 24 and 25 1918, National Assemblies of Srem and Great National Assembly of the Serbs, Bunjevci and other Slavs for Banat, Bačka and Baranja respectfully decided to join these territories with Serbia. Subsequently, Vojvodina as part of the Kingdom of Serbia was included in the Kingdom of Serbs. The Assemblies did not adequately reflect the ethnic structure of Vojvodina: “Of 757 deputies present, 578 were Serbs, 84 Bunjevci, 62 Slovaks, 21 Ruthenes, 6 Germans, 3 Šokci, 2 Croats and one Hungarian.”, even though approximately one third of population were Hungarians and another third Germans (Njegovan 2001).

Hungarians and Albanians in the First Yugoslavia; (e)migration, colonization and demographic trends

The territories and ethnicities of Vojvodina and Kosovo did not enjoy particular autonomy in the first Yugoslavia. After WWI, the newly formed Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes was divided into districts and counties. According to the administrative division of 1922, the present territory of Vojvodina was divided into the Backa, Belgrade and Srem districts (Bjeljac& Lukić, 2008). Similarly, present-day territory of Kosovo was officially named South Serbia, comprising

12 districts. In 1929, new territorial distribution has been introduced; a conflict between Serbian and Croatian MPs resulted in a shooting in the parliament in 1928 which caused a major political crisis; to avoid nationalistic outbursts, new Constitution and new territorial distribution was imposed in 1929, as well as the new name: the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. Yugoslavia now had new territorial distribution into nine banovine, named after the main rivers in the area, in order to avoid national elements. Notably, Hungarians were incorporated in a large Danube banovina, where they comprised 18,2% of the population, while Albanians were divided between Vardar and Zeta banovina, where they constituted approximately 1/3 of the total, majority Serbian, population.²



Picture 1 - The division of Yugoslavia to banovine in 1929

The policy towards Kosovo in the interwar period had been marked by the efforts towards its integration into Serbia, deosmanization, agrarian reform and colonization. While Albanians were essentially not forcefully displaced or expelled from Kosovo *en masse* immediately after the war, the interwar policy was disadvantageous for them – the redistribution of land meant that some border areas were taken from their previous Albanian owners and distributed to Serbian and Montenegrin colonists. Moreover, Yugoslav laws limited the land ownership to half a hektar (1,2 acre) per family member, which, in the rural and often mountainous and impoverished areas inhabited by Albanians, was insufficient for economic sustainability and progress (see: Jovanović 2019). In addition, Albanians did not enjoy particular rights to political organization,

² <http://publikacije.stat.gov.rs/G1931/Pdf/G19314001.pdf>. The very methodology of drawing the borders of banovine indicated the intention to, wherever possible, secure the Serbian numerical superiority or at least strengthen the Serbian influences (Petranović, 1993, 12, 39).

representation nor education in Albanian. Nevertheless, the overall results of the colonization of Kosovo were relatively modest – in the interwar period some 19 500 families were settled in Kosovo in over 1000 colonies, but many returned afterwards for reasons such as poor arable land, insecurity, overburdening by the state credits and the like. (Jovanović 2013).

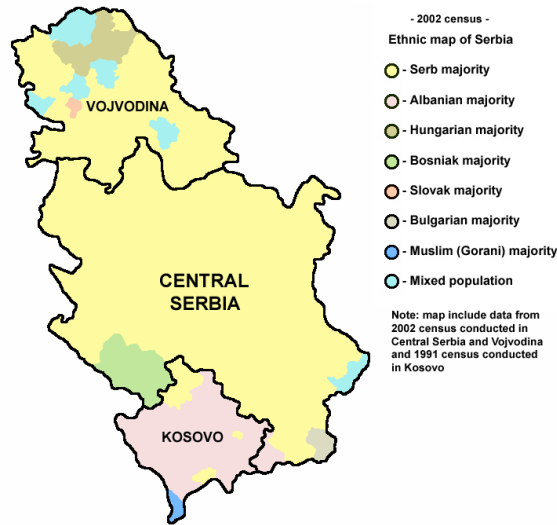
Another measure applied by the Yugoslav authorities in Kosovo the interwar period was resettlement and emigration. During the 1930s, Yugoslavia and Turkey made plans and even signed treaties to resettle hundreds of thousands of Yugoslav Muslims to Turkey; while these plans *stricto sensu* applied only to the Turks and the Albanians were not included in these negotiations, the Yugoslav authority intended to use the wide interpretation of the term “people of the Turkish culture” to include as many of its citizens of Albanian nationality (Jovanović 2011: 110). While the Yugoslav and Turkish authorities encouraged immigration, it is hard to identify the exact numbers of émigrés. Numbers are uncertain, and are a matter of dispute – reliable scholarly sources mention around 19 000 persons that immigrated from Kosovo to Turkey between 1927 and 1939 (Smlatić, 1978, 251-256). Even though there are no reliable data for the period 1912-1927 nor about immigration to Albania, it is most probable that we are dealing with tens rather than hundreds of thousands of émigrés to Turkey and Albania. Consequently, the changes in the overall demographic structure in Kosovo in the interwar period were not drastic, with the share of Serbian population rising from 25 to 34% while the Albanians declined from 65 to 60% approximately.

The results of population resettlement and colonization were more lasting in Vojvodina. By 1931, it increased its population by over 90 000 people, out of which over 56 000 through colonization (Bjeljac and Lukić 73). Such agrarian reform aimed to pacify rural population, remove foreign land-owners and reward the war veterans, mostly Serbs from Montenegro, Herzegovina and Lika, settling in areas where there was an excess of land, non-cultivated, state-owned, municipal or deserted land (Pavlovic, 2004). According to estimates, up to 20,000 families or as many as 100,000 colonists and their dependents were settled in Vojvodina during the period of colonization after the First World War (Erić, 1958). This was about 6% of the total population of Vojvodina according to the 1931 census (Bjeljac and Lukić 74).

Vojvodina and Kosovo in the Socialist Yugoslavia: autonomy, colonization and demographic trends

During WWII, most of Kosovo was part of the so called “Great Albania”, a puppet state established by the occupying German and Italy forces. During that time, repressive measures performed by the occupying and local Albanian forces caused an exodus of tens of thousands of Serbian and Montenegrin colonists. Vojvodina has also been occupied and seeded to NAZI puppet states of Horti’s Hungary and NDH (Independent State of Croatia). The losses of Serbs and Jews during the war, as well as retaliatory measures by the communists against local Germans and Hungarians in late 1944 and 1945, were common. The Second World War saw rather dramatic changes in Vojvodina’s demographics. Practically the entire German population of Vojvodina has been expelled to Germany, shrinking from 328,631 in 1931 to just 41,460 in 1948. While Hungarians were occasionally also exposed to measures such as expulsion and even executions at the end of the war, their numbers grew from 413,000 in 1931 to 433,701 in 1948.

Both Vojvodina and Kosovo were immediately granted autonomy in the new, socialist Yugoslavia. The communists decaled their goal of dealing with nationalism and bringing equality to all, and therefore envisaged the new Yugoslavia on the principles of federalism and equality. Originally designed already in late 1943 meeting during the war, Yugoslav Federation according to the 1946 constitution had six republic, with Serbia including the autonomous province of Vojvodina (*pokrajina*) and autonomous region (*oblast*) Kosovo and Metohija, which had a lower status of autonomy. Albanians and Hungarians were not listed as nations “narodi” but as “nacionalne manjine” (national minorities) (See: Varady 1997: 10-12). Kosovo region was thus a constitutive part of Serbia, comprising 15 counties with the seat in Prizren (see: Petranović, Zečević, 1987, 170-172). The Law prescribed equality in the rights of Albanians, Serbs and Montenegrins, as well as the equal use of Albanian and Serbian language in schools and public administration.



Picture 2 – The borders of Vojvodina and Kosovo and current population distribution

Still, unfavourable circumstances for Kosovo Albanians continued after WW2. True, the communist authorities in 1945 forbade the return of the most of Serbian colonists to Kosovo, and returned the land given to the colonists to its previous private owners, thereby attempting to correct the injustice made towards the Albanian peasants during the first wave of colonisation. Nonetheless, most administration in the years after the war was non-Albanian, Kosovo had disproportionately high Serbian leadership, immigration – encouraged by Turkey, continued and even intensified, and repressive measures were undertaken particularly in the areas where Albanians were seen as irredentists (i.e. cooperative towards the occupiers in WWII), and as “Stalinists” after Tito-Stalin split in 1948 (Jovanović 2019).

While the colonization to Kosovo has been stopped and even reversed, the socialist Yugoslavia strongly advanced the colonization of Vojvodina. Over 60 000 houses in Vojvodina – mostly belonging to the expelled Germans – were confiscated for the use of colonists, and by the end of 1947, 36,430 families with 216,306 members were colonized in Vojvodina, mostly from majority Serb rural areas of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia (Bjeljac and Lukić 2008: 84). Thus, by 1948, Serbs amounted to 50% of the population, Hungarians remained at 26,4%, while the Germans were reduced to 1,8% (Bubalo-Živković et al, 2014). While it would be easy to see here the conscious intention of Yugoslav authorities to shift ethnic structure of Vojvodina, in reality the motives for the colonization were economic rather than nationalistic – fertile and rich Vojvodina land was given to rural population from poorest parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia, which were mostly inhabited by Serbs and Montenegrins.

After 1948, the organized colonization and immigration to Vojvodina was not significant, and the ethnic structure remained relatively stable until the 1990s, when hundreds of thousands of Serbs fled or were expelled from Croatia at the beginning of the war in 1991 and 1992 and after the collapse of the Serb-ruled regions in Croatia in 1995. The greatest number of refugees in Serbia has been recorded in 1996, with 617,728 persons. While some afterwards returned, emigrated abroad or remained in Belgrade and central Serbia, it appears that approximately one third of them settled in Vojvodina. Again, while it is easy to see here another state-organized colonization of Vojvodina, scholars emphasized that the existence of kinship or friendly ties between the refugees and the 1945-1948 and later colonists, who came from the same regions of Bosnia and Croatia, were the major drive for them to settle permanently in Vojvodina (see: Lukić 2015).

Meanwhile, the position of Kosovo and especially Kosovo Albanians (in distinction to other Albanians in Yugoslavia) improved rapidly in SFRY. The 1966 Brioni Plenum of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia saw the defeat of the hard-core communist wing led by Aleksandar Leka Ranković, opting for a stronger Yugoslav state, from the more federal-based option of Edvard Kardelj. In the following years drastic changes occurred. The name Metohija – meaning: monastery's land and thereby marking Kosovo's attachment to Serbian Orthodoxy – was deleted from the province's name, Kosovo had increasing number of Albanian leaders, initially educated in Belgrade and elsewhere. Moreover, in 1969 University of Prishtina has been founded, paving the way for the new, locally educated Kosovo elite. From 1968 and especially 1974, „Kosovo became a Socialist Autonomous Province (SAP) and obtained its own constitution, Parliament, government, central bank, constitutional court, as well as representation in the federal institutions independent of the Republic of Serbia, and thus was a republic in everything but name” (Cakaj and Krasniqi, 2016: 155).

Vojvodina enjoyed the same autonomy sealed by the constitutional changes in the 1960s and especially in 1974. Serbian political and intellectual elite was not altogether enthusiastic by these changes, and Serbian scholars tend to be rather critical of its overall effects: “Many authors believe that the 1974 Constitution gave to the republics and provinces prerogatives of the state, which endangered the federal state. Some even want to trace the destruction of the country and the savage civil war to the crises which resulted from the constitutional changes.” (Pavlović 2009). The extent to which the provinces were autonomous even led to some political paradoxes where provinces could independently issue law but Serbia needing their approval for its constitution and

its laws were valid only in Serbia proper. The provinces had equal saying in the federal institutions, often voting differently from those of the Republic of Serbia” (Pavlovic 2009).

Hungarian scholars, on the contrary, tend to see these political arrangements, and the overall climate in Yugoslavia, in a positive light, especially in comparison with the later authoritarian and nationalistic policy of Milošević’s regime in the 1990s. Varady thus says that “the past several decades in Yugoslavia, particularly the 1960s and 1970s, may not have been a fully enjoyable present, but they have become a respectable and even enviable past” (Varady 1997: 17). Arday, similarly, concludes:

All in all, for a while, Hungarians in Yugoslavia enjoyed a more favorable situation than their compatriots in other countries in the Carpathian basin, even including Hungary. For example, after 1952-1953 there was no mandated collectivization, and private farms were allowed. Virtually everybody was allowed to go abroad, and millions worked temporarily in Western Europe in the "golden" sixties and seventies. They had a mass media which satisfied the needs of the population. What the Hungarians in Vojvodina missed most was an independent organization to articulate their political will, safeguard their interests and organize their educational activities. (Arday 1996: 478).

Year	Total population	Hungarians		Germans		Serbs		Croats		Slovaks	
	Number	Number	%	number	%	Number	%	number	%	number	%
1880	1,172,729	265,287	22.6	285,920	24.4	416,116	35.5	72,486	6.2	43,318	3.7
1890	1,331,143	324,430	24.4	321,563	24.2	45,7873	34.4	80,404	6.0	49,834	3.7
1900	1,432,748	378,634	26.4	336,430	23.5	483,176	33.7	80,901	5.6	53,832	3.8
1910	1,512,983	425,672	28.1	324,017	21.4	510,754	33.8	91,016	6.0	56,690	3.7
1921	1,528,238	363,450	23.8	335,902	22.0	533,466	34.9	129,788	8.5	59,540	3.9
1931	1,624,158	376,176	23.2	328,631	20.2	613,910	37.8	132,517	8.2	..	..
1941	1,636,367	465,920	28.5	318,259	19.4	577,067	35.3	105,810	6.5	..	..
1948	1,640,757	428,554	26.1	28,869	1.8	827,633	50.4	132,980	8.1	69,622	4.2
1953	1,701,384	435,210	25.6	..	..	867,210	51.0	127,040	7.5	71,191	4.2
1961	1,854,965	442,560	23.9	..	..	1,017,713	54.9	145,341	7.8	73,830	4.0
1971	1,952,533	423,866	21.7	7,243	0.4	1,089,132	55.8	138,561	7.1	72,795	3.7
1981	2,034,772	385,356	18.9	3,808	0.2	1,107,375	54.4	119,157	5.9	69,549	3.4
1991	2,013,889	339,491	16.9	3,873	0.2	1,143,723	56.8	98,025	4.9	63,545	3.2
2002	2,031,992	290,207	14.3	3,154	0.1	1,321,807	65.0	56,546	2.8	56,637	2.8
2011	1,931,809	251,136	13.0	3,272	0.1	1,289,635	66.7	47,033	2.4	50,321	2.6

Table 1. Ethnic structure of the Vojvodina population (1880-2011)

Year	Total population	Albanians		Serbs		Montenegrins		Turks	
	Number	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	number	%
1921	439,010	288,907	65.8	114,095	26.0			27,915	6.4
1931	552,064	331,549	60.0	180,170	32.6			n.a.	
1948	727,820	498,244	68.5	171,911	23.6	28,050	3.9	1,315	0.2
1953	808,141	524,559	64.9	189,869	23.5	31,343	3.9	34,583	4.3
1961	963,988	646,605	67.1	227,016	23.5	37,588	3.9	25,764	2.7
1971	1,243,693	916,168	73.7	228,264	18.4	31,555	2.5	12,244	1.0
1981	1,584,441	1,226,736	77.4	209,498	13.2	27,028	1.7	12,513	0.8
1991	1,956,196	1,596,072	81.6	194,190	9.9	20,365	1.1	10,445	0.5
2011	1,739,825	1,616,869	92.9	25,532 ³	1.5			18,738	1.1

Table 2. Ethnic structure of the Kosovo population (1921-2011)

Hungarians in Vojvodina 1990 to the present: from political mobilization to national minority councils

In response to Milošević's abolishment of Vojvodina autonomy, Hungarians in Vojvodina formed their national party – Democratic Community of Vojvodina Hungarians (*Vajdasági Magyarok Demokratikus Közössége*, henceforth: VMDK) in 1990, and adopted the *Memorandum on the Self-Governance of Hungarians Living in the Republic of Serbia*. The Hungarians focused on minority rights, demanding: a. personal autonomy with rights in the areas of education, culture, media and the use of language, b. territorial autonomy for majority Hungarian municipalities, and c. special local autonomy for municipalities with a Hungarian majority. However, the Milošević regime showed no intention of granting collective rights to Hungarians, despite their arguably more cooperative approach to his rule and Serbia. Beretka observes: “Unfortunately, the international community acted only as a passive observer in this process, and ultimately Serbia did not appreciate the fact that a well-working model might serve as an example of good practice in the former member states of Yugoslavia with their own significant ethnic-Serbian minorities.” (Beretka 2019) In 1994, by then compact Hungarian political body split when a number of Hungarian intellectuals left VMKD to form Alliance of Vojvodina Hungarians (*Vajdasági Magyar Szövetség*, VMSZ). While VMSZ also advocated national minority autonomy,

³ The Kosovo Serbs massively boycotted the 2001 census. Without fully reliable data, scholars estimated the number of Serbs in Kosovo nowadays to be at 130 000 and 140 000 (see: Čeriman and Pavlović 2020: 341).

in distinction to VMKD it also demanded the restoration of the autonomy for Vojvodina similar to its status in the then already former Yugoslavia and on the basis of the 1974 constitution, but later shuffled that policy and focused primarily on the constitution of national minority councils, or in other words, on personal autonomy. “In any case, representatives and sympathisers of the party took part in the work of committees responsible for drafting laws and by-laws concerning national minority rights both at the national and provincial levels. Some of the most fundamental elements of these acts (including provisions about the national minority councils) are the direct result of the VMSZ’s political stances taken around the turn of the century.” (Beretka 2019). Simultaneously, international community seemed to show an increased interest in the position of the Hungarians in Serbia, with US and UK backing up dialogue between the Vojvodina Hungarian political leaders and Serbian opposition leaders, both before and after the NATO bombing. As a result, Vojvodina Hungarians contributed to the overthrow of Milošević’s regime, participated in the large political coalition in 2000, and the then VMZS president, József Kasza, became the Deputy Prime Minister in the newly formed government of Zoran Đinđić.

This government in 2002 adopted the two most important laws: the Law on Certain Competences of the Autonomous Province and Law on the Protection of Rights and Freedoms of National Minorities (the National Minority Act). As Beretka argues, good relationship between leading Hungarian and Serbian intellectuals at the time, such as legal expert professor Tibor Várady, greatly contributed to the ultimate recognition of Hungarian collective rights and the actual transfer of legal and property rights to the Hungarian national council. Following this, Hungarians elected their Hungarian National Council through an electoral assembly in 2002, in order to resume their law granted rights to self-government and use of their mother tongue, education, culture and information. Unfortunately, it was only after the final ratification of the National Minority Councils Act in 2009 that the Hungarians were actually able to resume their rights (Korhecz 2015: 152 et passim). These post-Milošević laws also restored some competences that Vojvodina enjoyed in the former Yugoslavia; nevertheless, taken overall, scholars still tend to describe Serbia as asymmetrically decentralized and unitary state and see the status of Vojvodina as “legally not totally clarified” (Beretka and Székely 2016: 6).

From 2010, Hungarian national minority council members are elected through direct vote, with participations of approximately 40% of the registered votes, and with VMSZ winning the overwhelming majority of seats (28 out of 35 in 2010, 31 out of 35 in 2014 and 30 out of 35 in 2018) (see: Beretka 2019). The council has wide competences in the fields of education and culture – approval of textbooks in Hungarian, membership in the governing boards and cultural institutions and provide opinion on key issues regarding schools where Hungarian is taught. For instance, “in the case of public educational (kindergartens, elementary and secondary schools, grammar and vocational-training schools) and cultural institutions (theatres, libraries, museums etc.) which are dominantly linked to a national minority (for example the language of instruction is exclusively or dominantly a minority language), the national council which is entitled to propose one third of the managing (school) board members and to give consent for the nomination of the director of the public institution.” (Korhecz 2015: 155). In terms of ownership, the founding rights of these public institutions, as well as several media outlets in Hungarian, have been partially transferred to Hungarian national council. The Council also has a saying in the structure of public media services on Hungarian and has an annual sum allocated to it from the state budget to implement its activities, and is allowed to rely on additional support from Hungary. Its activities also include the protection of cultural heritage, support for education in Hungarian by various means, providing fellowships for Hungarians students, offering free legal aid, translation services etc. Moreover, all public authorities are obliged to ask the opinion of the HNC on any decisions concerning the education and dissemination of public information in the Hungarian language or to change street names in municipalities with substantial Hungarian populations. (Korhecz 2015)

While scholars tend to see this as the “a good (or even the best) example” and “success” (Beretka 2019), some challenges still remain. Long halt in its adoption (2002-2010), initial hesitation of local and provincial authorities in transferring founding and decision-making rights that required court actions (Korhecz 2015: 155-6), relatively modest financing that makes it too reliable on Hungary’s support and, by extension, influence (in 2018, Serbia allocated 770,000 euros, while Hungary gave 1,000,000 euros to the Hungarian National council), and – its unimpeded functioning being dependent on the good relations and cooperativeness (or loyalty) of the Hungarian representatives with the leading Serbian politicians and parties (Beretka 2019).

Elections	Party	Votes/Percentage	Seats
1990 Parliamentary	VMDK	132.726 (2,64%)	8 (out of 250)
1992 Parliamentary	VMDK	140.825 (2,98%)	9 (out of 250)
1993 Parliamentary	VMDK	112.456 (2,61%)	5 (out of 250)
1997 Parliamentary	VMSZ	50.960 (1,235%)	4 (out of 250)
2007 Parliamentary	VMSZ	52.510 (1,30%)	3 (out of 250)
2008 Parliamentary	Hungarian coalition (Magyar koalíció – Pásztor István)	74.874 (1,81)	4 (out of 250)
2012 Parliamentary	VMSZ	68.323 (1,75%)	5 (out of 250)
2014 Parliamentary	VMSZ	75.294 (2,10%)	6 (out of 250)
2016 Parliamentary	VMSZ	56.620 (1,50%)	4 (out of 250)
2020 Parliamentary	VMSZ	71.893 (2,23%)	9 (out of 250)
1992 Vojvodina	VMDK		8 out of 120
1996 Vojvodina	VMSZ VMDK		13 out of 120 1 out of 120
2000 Vojvodina	VMSZ VMDP		14 out of 120 1 out of 120
2004 Vojvodina	VMSZ VMDK		10 out of 120 1 out of 120
2008 Vojvodina	VMSZ VMDK		13 out of 120 1 out of 120
2012 Vojvodina	VMSZ	62,272 (6,15%)	7 out of 120
2016 Vojvodina	VMSZ Hungarian Autonomy Movement	47.034 (4,88%) 16.452 (1,71%)	6 out of 120 2 out of 120
2020 Vojvodina	VMSZ	75.218 (9,29%)	11 out of 120

Table 3. Performance of Hungarian parties at Serbian parliamentary and Vojvodina elections

Kosovo: From passive resistance and the formation of parallel institutions to war and independence

Responding to autonomy abolishment, which Kosovo Albanians considered to be unconstitutional, Kosovo Parliament on July 2 1990 declared Kosovo to be the Republic, equal to other Yugoslav republics. Serbia responded by abolishing the Kosovo Parliament and removing editors of all main Albanian media in Kosovo, and stopped financing Kosovo institutions. Kosovo Albanians responded by building parallel institutions. In September, MPs met in secret to adopt the Kosovo Constitution and held an informal referendum on independence. And went on to proclaim Kosovo independence from Yugoslavia. In reality, during Milošević's rule (until 1999) Kosovo functioned as a parallel system with official Serbian institutions of the autonomous province Kosovo and Metohija and Albanian institutions of the "Republic of Kosovo" which Serbian authorities considered illegal and tried to prevent by police force. On the ground, Kosovo was a police state, hundreds of thousands of Albanians lost their jobs from the public sector, most

schools in Albanian were closed and teachers lost their salaries, and Albanians were often arrested and tortured; while Milošević's rule was fundamentally oppressive to its own citizens, Kosovo Albanians suffered its terror the most. Ibrahim Rugova, the leader of the Kosovo Albanians, advocated non-violent resistance, and rejected invitations of Croatian and Bosniak leaders to open another front against Serbia during the 1991-1995 wars, advocating formation of parallel educational, health and tax system, boycott of the Serbian elections, institutions and population censuses, all of which most Albanians supported at the time. (Pavlica 2019)

The Armed Conflict

However, after the 1995 Dayton Peace Agreement, Kosovo Albanians shifted to an armed conflict. In 1996, new force called Kosovo Liberation Army (Ushtria Çlirimtare e Kosovës – UÇK) criticized peaceful resistance and started with terrorist attacks against Serbian police forces and civilians, as well as “loyal” Albanians i.e. those who continued working in Serbia-controlled institutions. Their actions intensified in 1997, and brutal response by Serbian special police forces, who in several cases destroyed entire houses killing insurgents with their family members, and by mid-1998 grew into a mass resistance movement and full-fledged war, with many of Rugova's supporters switching their support to KLA. Serbian police and army forced launched a wide offensive against KLA, and their actions included the use of “excessive and random force” resulting in the destruction of villages, population displacement and civilian deaths. These actions were the official reason for the NATO bombing of Serbia from March 23 to June 10. Immediately after the bombing started, Milošević launched ethnic cleansing campaign which saw the expulsion of 862.979 registered refugees, as well as summary execution and war crimes committed in Kosovo during the war (Serbian, Albanian and international forces provide competing numbers of casualties, crimes and destruction during of this conflict; Gashi 2019 provides a useful comparison). The results were devastating: “Whatever form of interethnic cooperation was left following the period of segregation in the 1990s was destroyed during the 1998-1999 war in Kosovo.” (Cakaj and Krasniqi 2016: 159).

The war ended by the Kumanovo Agreement and the 1244 UN Resolution, which saw the withdrawal of all Serbian military and state sovereignty and the establishment of international, UN mandated protectorate over Kosovo. „The results of the action: last large KLA groups were broken.

Liquidated around 2000, much more than in any other previous operation. 900.000 left the country. Remaining terrorists 1000, remaining civilians 300.000“ (War diary of police general Obrad Stevanović, in: Pavlica 2019).

Alongside with Serbian forces, some 100,000 Serbs fled from Kosovo in the following days. Attacks on Serbs, their killings, kidnaping, expulsion continued and in the following years the number of Serbs and other non-Albanians displaced from Kosovo rose to some 200,000 people (Internally Displaced Persons, 2020). In March 2004, another wave of violence against the Serbs followed; international forces this time settled the situation by force after several days, seeing the destruction of hundreds of Serbian houses and 35 Serbian Orthodox churches and monasteries, killings of 8 civilians and expulsion of some 4000 Serbs, mostly from rural enclaves, thereby leaving huge large parts of Kosovo without a single Serb (Human Rights Watch 2004). In February 2006, negotiations on the final status of Kosovo started, with Western countries opting for a “conditional independence”. Serbian side advocated wide autonomy concept but Kosovo Albanians rejected any proposal that would see Kosovo as part of Serbia; on February 17, 2008, Kosovo Assembly proclaimed independence, with all 109 present MPs voting for it, and the 11 Serbian representatives boycotting the vote. Since then, Serbian government annulled that decisions as illegal act and continued to work against Kosovo independence, preventing its admission to international bodies and institutions, while most Western, 23 out of 28 EU countries and approximately half of the countries worldwide recognized Kosovo’s independence. Since then, Kosovo became a member of a number international bodies, but not of UNESCO, Interpol and UN (for a more in– depth overview of Kosovo history, see: Vickers 1998, Mertus 1999; for an insight into a more contemporary political situation, see: Judah 2008).

Why (no) violence?

In summarizing, both nationalities in Serbia in a way eventually fulfilled their main aspirations – since 1990, the Albanians consistently boycotted Serbian institutions and rise to arms, eventually proclaiming full independence, even though it remains somewhat disputed, not fully internationally recognized and Kosovo being economically undeveloped and politically isolated. The Hungarians consistently participated in the elections and in practically all post-Milošević’s Serbian governments, and, despite ethnic incidents including hate graffiti, acts of vandalism and

even violent youth clashes which continued till mid 2000s (Petsinis 2008: 271; Rácz 2018: 138), ultimately got favourable laws that secure their educational and cultural, but not territorial autonomy. Nevertheless, some scholars still argue that “different ethnic groups live (at best) peacefully ‘next to each other’, but far from ‘with each other’, as life in Vojvodina is often described (Rácz 2012: 596).

Yet, the question remains why the approaches of the two nationalities towards the majority Serbs and central government were so different?

In the remaining pages, I offer several tentative explanations. Firstly, in responding to Milošević’s abolishment of autonomy, Kosovo Albanians had an overwhelming majority in the province, and therefore could claim that their parallel institutions actually represent the popular will. In distinction, the Hungarians in 1990 constituted under 20% of the Vojvodina population and could therefore hardly hope to make any valid claim for the secession of Vojvodina or a referendum of its status. Further, the demands for Kosovo as a constitutive part of the former Yugoslavia – and thereby its separation from Serbia – were gaining prominence already in the former Yugoslav times, with periodic massive outbreaks of popular revolt among Kosovo Albanians since the late 1960s, most notably in 1981. The Hungarians, in contrast, did not show any such ambitions during the Yugoslav times, nor had that idea as dominant and pushed forward by either their political structures or political leadership of Hungary during the 1990s.

In addition, one could easily argue that the Hungarians have been comparatively better off both economically and thereby socially as well. In economic terms, despite the apparent economic crisis throughout the 1980s, Vojvodina consistently had higher GDP from both Serbia proper and the Federation, which exceeded Kosovo GDP by over 4 times. In contrast, Kosovo remained by far the poorest region, with GDP over 7 times lower than the Slovenian one, and even experienced nearly 14% drop in its GDP between 1980 and 1989 (see Table 4). Kosovo was also by far the most densely populated region in Yugoslavia, with poorer infrastructure, educational and job prospects than the rest of the country. While there were hardly any prominent cases of ethnic conflicts and repressions over Hungarians in the 1980s, repression against Albanian protesters was already common in the 1980s, with Milošević increasing the pressure towards turning Kosovo in a *de facto* police state.

Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita in Yugoslavia: 1980 vs. 1989
(All figures in 1972 US Dollars)

	1980	1989	Change
All Yugoslavia	17764	16820	-5.3%
Slovenia	35320	33103	-6.0%
Croatia	22505	21238	-5.6%
Bosnia	11722	11424	-2.5%
Montenegro	14034	12398	-11.7%
Serbia	17453	17429	0.0%
- Vojvodina	20029	20063	+0.0%
- Kosovo	5013	4317	-13.9%
Macedonia	11946	10891	-8.8%

Table 4. GDP per capita in Yugoslavia (1980-1989). (Source: Mills 1989)

One should add several more elements to this picture. When asked about the reasons for the breakout of the Bosnian war, a character from the Bosnian writer's Nenad Veličković 1999 novel *Lodgers (Konačari)* responds that the war is waged because Croats have Croatia, Serbs have Serbia, but the Muslim don't have Muslimania ("Hrvati imaju Hrvatsku, Srbi Srbiju, a Muslimani nemaju Muslimaniju", Veličković 1999: 8). In this context, Hungarians from Vojvodina had an alternative in the neighbouring, rapidly developing and EU aspiring Hungary, for either moving there permanently, finding a job or using it as a stepping stone for going further abroad. Kosovo Albanians, in distinction, were far more isolated, with Albania being virtually sealed off by Enver Hoxha from 1948 till the fall of communism in 1992, with no proper connecting roads and infrastructure, and suffering from its late transition, internal conflicts and state collapse that peaked in 1997. In other words, while obtaining Hungarian passport and crossing the border was – at least potentially – a way to alter your unfavourable circumstances as a Vojvodina Hungarian, Kosovo Albanians would gain nothing by crossing to impoverished and internationally isolated Albania, which was even poorer than Kosovo itself; more so, for Kosovo Albanians, traveling abroad through the 1990s usually involved an unpleasant, perhaps potentially risky and somewhat humiliating procedure of obtaining a passport and visa from Belgrade, whose government they did not want to recognize.

In this context, another point about Kosovo and Albanians from a more symbolical realm is at place. Responding to the question why did massive riots break out in Kosovo in 1981 despite the years of relative stability and economic growth, Cakaj and Krasniqi make a suggestive reference to Peter Sloterdijk's emphasis of the psychopolitical role of *thymos* – “the irreducible impulsive core of the self's pride”, and remind that Kosovo Albanians “have been constantly portrayed as inferior” and had unequal national status in Yugoslavia (Cakaj and Krasniqi 2016: 157). Indeed, ever since the late 19th century, the Albanians were seen in the Serbian public discourse as a treat and intruders (see: Pavlović 2019), and an increasingly hostile perception of Albanians in the late Yugoslav period and their frequent treatment as *pariahs* in the 1990s only amplified such dissatisfaction amongst them.

In addition, Vojvodina never acquired such high symbolical status that Kosovo enjoys in the Serbian political discourse. Kosovo is the *locus* of the 1389 Kosovo Battle of Serbian Prince Lazar against the advancing Ottomans, commonly understood as *the* event that marked the downfall of the Medieval Serbian Empire and centuries-long enslavement. Thus, it is unsurprising that Milošević in 1989 chose Gazimestan – the exact site of this medieval battle – for his greatest political rally that gathered as many as one million Serbs to Kosovo. While he did not overtly advocate an armed conflict as the way or improving the position of Serbs and Serbia, the notions of glory, battle and fighting permeated his speech (see: Milošević 2006). Arguably, Kosovo's typical description as “the heart of Serbia”, “the cradle of Serbian nationhood and statehood” throughout the 1990s remained immersed in mythopoetical and symbolic realm, thereby preventing any *real-life*, viable and moderate political solution. In contrast, Vojvodina – while also being undisputedly Serbian territory in the public discourse – remained perceived as inherently multinational, *shared* space that has and therefore deserves somewhat specific status and arrangement.

Finally, Milošević constituted his rule and popularity by returning Kosovo under Serbian central rule and reversing ethnic relations in Kosovo in the Serbian favour; alongside to his support to efforts of the Bosnian and Croatian Serbs to seced from their countries through war, it clearly signalled that he will not make any major concessions over Kosovo without a force. Adding to that the military defeat of Serbs in Croatia 1995, international sanctions against Serbia enforced from 1992 onwards with devastating effects on Serbian economy and society, international perception

of Serbs as culprits and war criminals and weak Serbian position in international relations, Milošević and his regime appeared as the shadow of a confident, nationally awakened, strong Gazimestan Serbia. Nonetheless, even after years of passive resistance and suffering apartheid in Kosovo, Ibrahim Rugova, the founder and President of the Democratic League of Kosovo since 1989 and the undisputed leader of the Kosovo Albanians throughout this period, remained faithful to his ideals of achieving Kosovo independence through civil disobediences, boycott and protests. However, when the then USA establishment found in the KLA members their new protégées and openly supported the insurgents, even bypassing Rugova (see: Brown 1998), it remained clear that the armed and uniformed secessionists are being recognized as the new Kosovo Albanian leaders.

To sum up, while certainly relevant, explanations driving chiefly from the economic sphere are insufficient to account why did ethnic strivings and tensions – present by both Hungarians and Albanians – resulted in ethnic violence and war in Kosovo. Equally so, the popular *Balkanistic* explanation in Todorova's sense that explain the Kosovo conflict as the result of the centennial, Balkan hatred fail to account for the specific power dynamics between the Serbs and Albanians in the late Yugoslav and early post-Yugoslav period – arguably, it was the sheer contrast between the (too) broad post-1974 minority rights and the complete abolition of such rights in post-1989 Kosovo that made the Albanians disinterested in any solution, even nominally, within Serbia. However, in accordance with the aforementioned Jenne's theory, despite the war and Yugoslav dissolution between 1991 and 1995 and Milošević's continual refusal to negotiate with the Kosovo Albanians, only after the external, international factors spurred internal conflict and the Milošević's regime brutal response, did ethnic strivings resulted in the armed conflict. Finally, one could perhaps remind of a Foucaultian notion of power and resistance as intertwined and relational, and thereby argue that particularly and increasingly oppressive forms of power relations that existed in Kosovo ignited particularly violent forms of resistance in Kosovo, whereas such relations in Vojvodina remained less antagonizing.

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