
Kosovo And The Caucasus: A Domino Effect

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After February 2008 when Kosovo Albanian-dominated Parliament proclaimed Kosovo independence (without organizing a referenda) with obvious US diplomatic support (unilateral recognition) with explanation that the Kosovo case is unique in the World (i.e., it will be not repeated again) one can ask the question: is the problem of the southern Serbian province of Kosovo-Metochia really unique and surely unrepeatable in some other parts of the World as the US administration was trying to convince the rest of the international community?

Domino effect

The consequences of recognition of Kosovo independence by one (smaller) part of the international community are already (and going to be in the future) visible primarily in the Caucasus because of the very similar problems and situation in these two regions. At the Caucasus region (where some 50 different ethnolinguistic groups are living together) a self-proclaimed state independence is already done by Abkhazia and South Ossetia only several months after the self-proclaimed independence of the "Republic of Kosova", following the pattern of both the Nagorno-Karabakh (formally a province in Azerbaijan) in 1991 and Kosovo in 2008.

The experts from the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs expressed in 2007 their real fear that in the case of the USA and the EU unilateral recognition of Kosovo independence the same unilateral diplomatic act could be implied by Moscow by recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia as a matter of diplomatic compensation and as a result of domino effect in international relations. It is also known and from official OSCE sources that Russian delegates in this pan-European security organization have been constantly warning before 2008 the West that such scenario is quite possible, but with one peculiarity: from 2007 they stopped to mention possibility of the Russian recognition of the Nagorno-Karabakh's self-proclaimed independence (on September 2nd, 1991). It is most probably for the reason that Moscow does not want (up to now) to deteriorate good relations with Azerbaijan - a country with huge reserves of natural gas and oil.

Why the South Ossetia could be different?

On the first glance it can be said that the Orthodox South Ossetians are equally separatist as the Muslim Kosovo Albanians. However, the South Ossetians are having sympathies towards the Serbs (not for the reason that both of them are the Orthodox Christians), but not towards, as we could expect, separatist Kosovo Albanians. The real reason of such sympathies is similar legal state rights applied by both the Serbs in Kosovo and the South Ossetians.

Historically, the South Ossetia was never really integral and authentic part of sovereign Georgian state, in contrast to Kosovo-Metochia which was not only integral, but culturally and politically the most important region of the medieval Serbian state (called as the Ancient Serbia or Serbia proper) till 1455 when Kosovo-Metochia became occupied by the Ottomans. The present-day territory of Georgia was never before it entered Russia a firmly united state territory in contrast to Serbia which before it lost independence in 1459 was having a long period of experience of the unified state territory with Kosovo-Metochia as its center.

When Serbia de facto regained its independence from the Ottoman Empire at the beginning of the 19th century (de iure confirmed by the European Great Powers at the Berlin Congress in 1878) it was known for her rulers and politicians which historical territories belonged to her with Kosovo-Metochia on the first place. The present day territory of Georgia entered the Russian Empire in parts - segment by segment.

Ossetia as united territory (i.e., not divided into the Northern and the Southern Ossetia as today situation is) became (according to the Russian historiography) voluntarily part of the Russian Empire in 1774. In the other words, the Russian Empress Catherine the Great (1762~H'1796), in order to be surely convinced that the Ossetians are really independent, before incorporation of this province into the Russian Empire sent a special commission which informed St. Petersburg that "the Ossetians are free people subordinated to no one".

Georgia itself became part of the Russian Empire in 1804 (27 years later then Ossetia). This fact is the most important argument used by the South Ossetians in their dispute with the Georgian authorities.

The Southern part of Ossetia was given to be administered by Georgia only in the USSR by decision of three Georgian Communists - J. V. Stalin, Sergei Ordzonikidze and Avelj Enukindze. It has to be also stressed that the border between two parts of Ossetia (the Northern and the Southern) never existed before 1994.

Regarding the Kosovo Albanian case, it is known that the Albanians started to settle themselves in the region of Kosovo-Metochia from the present-day Northern Albania only after the First Serbian Great Migration from the region in 1689, i.e., before the Ottoman occupation of Serbia there were no Albanians in Kosovo-Metochia in any significant number (only 2% according to the Ottoman census in 1455).

It should be also said that, according to several Byzantine and Arab sources, the Balkan Albanians are originating from the Caucasus Albania - in the 9th century they left the Caucasus and have been settled by the Arabs in the West Sicily (and the South Italy) which they left in 1043 and came to the Balkans.

The borders of Kosovo-Metochia were established for the first time by the Yugoslav Communist authorities in 1945, who in fact separated this province from the rest of Serbia together with the Province of Vojvodina. In addition, the Yugoslav Communist People's Assembly issued the decree according to which it was forbidden for about 100.000 expelled Serbs from Kosovo-Metochia during the Second World War by the Albanian authorities to return back to the province. That was the beginning of a great change of the population structure of the province in the Albanian favour in the Socialist Yugoslavia.

The people of the South Ossetia on the referendum about the future of the USSR on March 17th, 1991 voted for existence of the Soviet Union (like the Serbs upon Yugoslavia, but and Kosovo Albanians on referendum to become an independent from Serbia like Georgians from the USSR). The referendum on March 17th, 1991 was organized two months after Georgian army started the war against the South Ossetia in which till September of the same year 86 Ossetian villages have been burned.

It is calculated that more than 1.000 Ossetians lost their lives and around 12.000 Ossetians emigrated from the South to the North (Russia's) Ossetia. This is the point of similarity with expelled around 250.000 Serbs from Kosovo by the Albanian the so-called Kosovo Liberation Army after the NATO

peace-keeping troops entered and de facto occupied this province in June 1999.

A state independence of the Republic of South Ossetia was proclaimed on May 29th, 1992. However, this legal act has not been understood as a "separatist" one for the reason that at that time Georgia was not recognized by no one state in the world as an independent one and Georgia was not a member of the United Nations. However, in contrast to the case of the South Ossetia, the unilateral proclamation of the state independence of Kosovo by Albanians on February 18th, 2008 cannot be treated by the international community as a legitimate act (without permission by Belgrade) as Kosovo by the international law and agreements is an integral part of Serbia (the same legal reason was applied by the international community to the case of self-proclaimed the Republic of Serbian Krayina in 1991 from Croatia).

Differently from the case of Georgia, when the South Ossetia proclaimed the state independence in May 1992, Serbia in 2008, when the Albanian dominated Parliament of Kosovo proclaimed the state independence, was an internationally recognized independent state and a member of the United Nations. This is a common point of similarity between the Ossetians and the Serbs as the nations: both of them are fighting against separation of one part of their national body and the land from the motherland. However, Tbilisi is doing the same like Belgrade, from this point of view, i.e. claiming that the South Ossetia (and Abkhazia) is historical and state part of Georgia. In this point, there is a similarity between political claims of both states - Serbia and Georgia with one significant difference: historical rights of Serbia over Kosovo-Metochia are much more stronger in comparison with the same rights of Georgia over the South Ossetia (and Abkhazia). In the other words, Kosovo-Metochia was all the time, from historical, cultural, state and identity point of views, a central/proper part of Serbia, while both the South Ossetia and Abkhazia have been just borderland provinces of Georgia.

International system of governing and separation

The main argument for the western politicians upon Kosovo independence, as "unique case" of Kosovo situation, is the fact that according to "Kumanovo Agreement" between Miloshević's Serbia and the NATO signed on June 10th, 1999, and the UN Resolution of 1244 (following this agreement), Kosovo is put under the UN protectorate with imposed international system of governing and security. However, such "argument" does not work in the case of the South Ossetia as the Ossetians are governing their land by themselves and much more successfully in comparison with "internationally" (i.e., the NATO) protected Kosovo.

It was quite visible in March 2004 when international organizations and military troops could not (i.e., did not want to) protect the ethnic Serbs in Kosovo-Metochia from violent attacks organized by the local Albanians when during three days (March 17th-19th) 4.000 Serbs exiled, more than 800 Serbian houses are set on fire and 35 Serbian Orthodox churches and cultural monuments were destroyed or being severely damaged.

The "March Pogrom" of 2004 revealed the real situation in the region of Kosovo-Metochia. The position of the South Ossetians in an independent Georgia from 1991 to August 2008 could be compared with position of the Serbs in Kosovo-Metochia after June 1999 under the total Albanian domination. The fact is that the South Ossetia, Abkhazia and Pridnestrovje showed much more political-legal bases and capabilities to be recognized as an independent for the reason that they showed real ability to govern themselves by only themselves, but not by the international organizations as it is in the case of the Albanian-governed Kosovo (the "Republic of

Kosova" from February 2008) after June 1999 up today. They also proved much more democracy and respect for human and minority rights in comparison with the Albanian-ruled Kosovo.

The Nagorno-Karabakh and Kosovo

There are several similarities, but also and dissimilarities between conflicts in the Nagorno-Karabakh and Kosovo. In both cases the international community is dealing with autonomy of a compact national minority who is making a majority on the land in question and having its own national independent state out of this territory. Both the Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians and the Kosovo Albanians do not want to accept any other solution except separation and internationally recognized independence. Both conflicts are in fact continuations of old historic struggles between two different civilizations: the Muslim Turkish and the Christian Byzantine. In both conflicts the international organizations are included as the mediators. Some of them are the same - France, the USA and Russia as the members of both Contact Groups for ex-Yugoslavia and the Minsk Group under the OSCE umbrella for Azerbaijan.

Serbia and Azerbaijan were against that their cases (Kosovo and the Nagorno-Karabakh) will be proclaimed as the "unique" cases as in this case it would be a green light to both Albanian and Armenian separatists to secede their territories from Serbia and Azerbaijan without permissions given by Belgrade and Baku (what in reality already happened).

However, there are significant differences between Kosovo-Metochia and the Nagorno-Karabakh cases. Firstly, Kosovo-Metochia was internal conflict within Serbia (which is after June 1999 internationalized), but in the case of the Nagorno-Karabakh there is external military aggression (by Armenia). Secondly, in difference to Armenia in relation to the Nagorno-Karabakh, Albania formally never accepted any legal act in which Kosovo was called as integral part of a state territory of Albania (with historical exception during the Second World War when Kosovo-Metochia, the Eastern Montenegro and the Western Macedonia have been included into Mussolini's the so-called "Greater Albania"). Delegation from Albania did not take any participation in the talks and negotiations upon the "final" status of Kosovo-Metochia between Prishina and Belgrade in 2007-2013, while Armenia has official status of "interested side" in the conflict in regard to the Nagorno-Karabakh.

However, the Armenians from the Nagorno-Karabakh such status did not obtain. While the Armenian army (i.e. from the Republic of Armenia) was directly involved in the military operations in the Nagorno-Karabakh, officially part of an independent state of Azerbaijan, in the Kosovo conflict of 1998-1999 the official regular army of the Republic of Albania was not involved (differently from a great number of the volunteers from Albania). As a result, Armenia occupied 1/5 of Azerbaijan territory and the victims of ethnic cleansing are only the Azerbaijani. A military weaker Azerbaijan side in comparison to Armenia, which was supported by Russia in arms and other war material, did not apply to the NATO for the military help, but military weaker Kosovo Albanian side in comparison to Serbia's police and the Yugoslav army forces did it during the Kosovo conflict of 1998-1999.

Conclusion

It can be concluded that the Albanian unilaterally proclaimed Kosovo independence in February 2008 is not "unique" case in the world without direct consequences to similar separatist cases following the "domino effect" (the South Ossetia, the South Sudan...). That is the real reason

why, for instance, the government of Cyprus is not supporting "Kosovo Albanian rights to self-determination" as the next "unique" case can be easily the northern (Turkish) part of Cyprus which is by the way already recognized by the Republic of Turkey and under de facto Ankara's protection and the occupation by the regular army of the Republic of Turkey from 1974 onward.

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