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*Strategies and Goals of Russian Diplomacy During the Kosovo
Conflict (1998–1999)*

ABSTRACT

The article supports the thesis that despite Cold War-style oratory and criticism of NATO's intervention against Yugoslavia, Russian policy on Kosovo's armed conflict represented a realistic and pragmatic approach. It points that the Russian leadership was conscious of the domestic political and economic problems as well as the unfavourable post-Cold War shift of power and changes of the international system and knew that Russia could not reply to the unilateral NATO's air campaign against Yugoslavia. It argues that Moscow admittedly wanted to avoid NATO's intervention in the Balkans which inevitably undermined the international position of Russia, but despite some political gestures and claims about the traditional Russo-Serbian friendship had no direct geopolitical interests at the Kosovo conflict, did not believe the Milosevic's "truths" and actively participated at the high-level international peacemaking initiatives together with the West. It claims that Russia actually supported Western efforts aimed to stop the violence at the province and start political dialogue between Belgrade and the Kosovo Albanians about the autonomy of the province. It finally argues that Russian constructive approach "helped" the Alliance to end its war over Kosovo and stresses that peace proposals offered to Belgrade were collectively worked out and endorsed by the West and Russia.

Key words: the Balkans, Kosovo, foreign policy of the Russian Federation, global shift of power, military intervention, NATO, the West and Russia

INTRODUCTION

It seems eligible to claim that NATO's military intervention against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) (1999) represented one of the most important moments in present political history, a "welcomed" or "dangerous" precedent that,

to a large extent, defined the emerging system of the post-Cold War international relations. There are also some well-grounded arguments to claim that crisis around Kosovo paradoxically demonstrated the ongoing cooperation and constructive approach to the Western-Russian relations. In fact, during the period of 1998–1999, Russian policy towards the Kosovo issue was generally realistic and pragmatic and Moscow actively participated in many diplomatic efforts aimed at finding a political solution to the Kosovo conflict. What is more, Moscow never wanted or planned a serious political or military confrontation with the West over Kosovo's status or the Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic's authoritarian regime. Questions, which despite tough criticism were addressed to NATO and traditional assurances about a Russo-Serbian brotherhood, represented a far less geopolitical importance for the Russian Federation as it initially seemed.

RUSSIA TOWARDS THE CONCEPT OF NATO'S MILITARY INTERVENTION AGAINST THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF YUGOSLAVIA

It was justified to argue that during the period of 1998–1999, when the conflict in Kosovo went into phase of open military confrontation between the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) and Serbia/Yugoslavia, Russia together with the West participated in all high-level international diplomatic initiatives to stop violence in the province and find some political solution, which could guarantee substantial Kosovo's autonomy within Serbia. It was a fact that Russia, as one of the constitutive members of the Contact Group, agreed on political, military and economic sanctions imposed on Yugoslavia by this international forum.¹ The sanctions of the Contact Group represented the collective response of the international society to Belgrade's repressive policy in the province as well as an instrument to "enforce" Serbian consent on serious political negotiations with the representatives of the Kosovo Albanians. Although Russia actually withdrew from some sanctions which weakened its general impact on Yugoslavia, it, nevertheless, agreed on that instrument, accepting the views of the Western states about the serious need for an international engagement and a political-economic pressure on Milosevic over the Kosovo crisis [*Statement on Kosovo adopted by the members of the Contact Group, meeting in London on 9 March 1998; Statement on Kosovo adopted by the members of the Contact Group in Rome on 29 April 1998*].

What is more, despite indispensable declarations of the traditional Russian-Serbian friendship and claims about Albanian separatism and terrorism, Russia generally

¹ The Contact Group for former Yugoslavia was created in 1994 as a result of Russian political initiative. The Group represents the *ad hoc* high-level international consultative body, capable of dealing with the problems of post-Yugoslav states. The members of the Group are the United States, Russia, Great Britain, France, Germany and Italy [Yesson 2001: 202].

supported Western criticism on Belgrade's policy in Kosovo at the United Nations Security Council. Moscow actually tolerated Western strategy of "coercive diplomacy", i.e. political pressure on Serbian leadership aimed to stop violence in Kosovo and activate the political dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina, backed by a threat of NATO's military intervention against the FRY. It was quite symptomatic that Russia did not block the adoption of the Security Council's resolutions 1160 and 1199 which stressed the fact of growing humanitarian crisis in Kosovo, expressed serious criticism about the Belgrade's military strategy against the KLA (mainly the use of force by Serbian police and Yugoslav army against civil Albanian population) as well as constantly called on the warring parties to start the talks and find a political solution to the ongoing conflict.

Of course, there were some clear limitations of this cooperation. In effect, Moscow expressed open and strong protests against plans of any military intervention against the FRY and "kept an eye" on the Security Council's resolutions in order to exclude any legal terms, which could directly or indirectly endorse a military attacks against Yugoslavia. Russia also declared that it would veto any draft of the resolution which would legitimize more decisive policy towards Belgrade, what actually complicated Western attempts to find a legal mandate for a planned NATO airstrikes. Finally, Moscow constantly argued that unilateral military acts against Yugoslavia, a sovereign and independent state, would represent a serious violation of the international law with a potentially disastrous effects to the post-Cold War international order [Simma 1999: 7; Wheeler 2000: 261].

Ironically, Russia was not the only one who opposed the idea of the military intervention in Kosovo. It was a well-known fact that, on the one hand, NATO members were deeply divided on this issue and for a long time, preferred to send "signals" about its willingness and readiness for airstrikes, but on the other, they were actually highly reluctant to start the military campaign against Belgrade, perceiving this possibility as a support for Albanian secessionist movement and violation of the UN Charter. What was more, both Russia and NATO members supported the territorial integrity of Yugoslavia, openly rejected Albanian claims about Kosovo's independence and agreed on future Kosovo's status, i.e. its autonomy within Serbia. To sum up, Russia actually shared its view on the Kosovo conflict with the majority of NATO members. Both of them perceived the perspective of military attacks as the least-wanted solution and expected that growing and collective political pressure from the West and Russia supported by the "signals" (*de facto* threats, which were criticized, but, at the same time, tolerated by Moscow) about the possibility of NATO airstrikes would finally let both parties of the Serbian-Albanian conflict sit at the negotiating table. This strategy of cooperation between West and Russia on the Kosovo conflict certainly had a serious chance for a success, but it missed the point that neither Belgrade nor the Kosovo Albanians were interested in the political dialogue about Kosovo's autonomy and opted for a unilateral military solution on the battlefield. In effect, despite growing and generally unified pressure from the West

and Russia, Belgrade and Pristina consequently blocked a serious political dialogue about the status of the province.

Russia also took some unilateral diplomatic initiatives aimed to dismiss the perspective of NATO's military intervention. Kremlin's diplomatic activity in fact mirrored and supported the efforts of the Western diplomats, who, consequently, visited Belgrade and Pristina and tried to establish a political dialogue between Serbia and representatives of the Kosovo Albanians. The most important Russian initiative, which had to confirm Russian political power and ability to subordinate its allies was a Moscow Agreement signed by Russian President Boris Yeltsin and its Yugoslav counterpart Slobodan Milosevic. On 16 June 1998, after several hours of bilateral negotiations, Milosevic agreed with Yeltsin that Yugoslavia would comply with the demands of the Contact Group and Security Council. Yugoslav President officially declared that Serbia would immediately start a political dialogue with the Kosovo Albanians about the autonomy, guaranteed security of the Albanian civilians, welcomed the return of the Albanian refugees and internally displaced persons, accepted free access to the Kosovo population for humanitarian organisations and agreed that foreign diplomats would monitor the situation in the province. Although Milosevic did not promise to reduce a police and military presence in Kosovo, he diplomatically agreed to think over this measure when activity of KLA would stop, and despite some tacky elements of this argumentation even Western diplomats, who criticised Milosevic for the excessive and indiscriminate use of force against Albanian population, had to admit that Yugoslavia was a sovereign state with the right to control and protect the integrity of its territory [Simma 1999: 6; Wheeler 2000: 260; Bellamy 2002: 77–91; *Joint Statement by Mr Slobodan Milošević, President of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, and Mr Boris Nikolayevich Yeltsin, President of the Russian Federation, Moscow, 16 June 1998*].

Moscow Agreement was a diplomatic success for Russia. Milosevic, who until recently ignored the calls of the international society, promised in Moscow to comply with its main demands. This situation created a far-reaching impression that despite the end of the Cold War, dissolution of the Soviet Union, clearly limited Russian sphere of influence and some serious internal problems, Russia remained a powerful player at the international forum, an equal strategic partner to the West and the only political and military power able "to stop" NATO's intervention as well as to put an effective pressure on a "stubborn" leadership at Belgrade. To sum up, Yeltsin–Milosevic Agreement officially confirmed that Russia still had a substantial influence on the situation in the region, European security and the whole international system [Uzelac 1998: 8].

Although it is certainly a fact that the Moscow Agreement weakened NATO's arguments for intervention and its willingness to start air campaign against Yugoslavia, Yeltsin's diplomatic success soon became highly questionable. In a month or so, it was clear that nothing really changed and Serbian police and Yugoslav military units continued its counter-insurgency campaign in Kosovo. What is more, Belgrade

started a regular military offensive against the KLA, which led to the escalation of the warfare and deepened the refugee crisis. This all meant that despite promises given to Yeltsin in Moscow, Yugoslav President pushed for his political “trademark”, a *fait accompli* and unilateral military solution of the conflict. In fact, Milosevic was not the only one to blame for the escalation of the crisis. In the middle of 1998, not only Serbia but also the KLA and even liberal Albanian intellectuals gathered around Ibrahim Rugova, were reluctant to start the bilateral dialogue about autonomy and gasped by the tactical military successes of the KLA supported the idea of liberation war and independence. However, it was clear that Belgrade did not do much to improve situation in Kosovo and simply ignored the Moscow Agreement [Bellamy 2002: 14–92].

Yugoslav President probably thought that he could play his usual diplomatic “games” with Russia like he did for years with Western diplomats during the wars in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina (1991–1995), but it was a serious political mistake. Surprisingly, Milosevic probably did not understand the fact that the implementation of the Moscow Agreement was indispensably related to the international position of Russia. In fact, the ignorance of the Moscow Agreement challenged the international credibility of Russia and undermined the authority of President Yeltsin, who probably seriously expected that Belgrade would start implementation of the Agreement. President Milosevic also seemed not to notice the actual cooperation between the West and Russia on the Kosovo question and misled by Kremlin’s political declarations clearly overestimated the Russian support for Belgrade and him, personally. In other words, Russia really wanted Serbian leadership to comply with the Yeltsin–Milosevic Agreement, at least partially. But when Milosevic showed to the world that Moscow had no power to subordinate even its closest allies, had no political instruments to stop Milosevic, Russia slightly changed its position on the Kosovo conflict. The nature of this change was quite complex, because Russia still seriously opposed to NATO’s military operation against the FRY and continued its unilateral diplomatic efforts aimed to recede the possibility of airstrikes. In effect, high-level Russian officials visited Belgrade and tried to convince Milosevic of the need to comply with the demands of the international society. At the same time, Moscow, that wanted to play an active role in the high-level international dialogue on the Kosovo issue, accepted and actually supported the growing Western political pressure on Belgrade. What was more, the Kremlin started to send some unofficial political “signals” to the West, that Moscow could eventually tolerate a limited military engagement against uncompromising Milosevic’s regime [Bellamy 2002: 14–92].

The mentioned change of the Russian position on Kosovo was reflected by the contents and language of the Security Council’s resolution 1199 adopted on 23 September 1998. In contrast to the previous resolution 1160, resolution 1199 was more critical about the nature of the Serbian policy in Kosovo. Although resolution 1199 did not officially approve any form of military intervention against Serbia, the Security Council decided that further disregard of its demands by the warring par-

ties would let to consider a “[...] further action and additional measures to maintain or restore peace and stability in the region”. This moderate and balanced solution showed that Russia shared or at least accepted the Western criticism of Milosevic’s regime. It was also a clear warning that the Security Council is ready for a more decisive response to the Kosovo conflict, at least officially [*Resolution 1199 (1998) Adopted by the Security Council at its 3930th meeting, on 23 September 1998*].

Moreover, that approval of the UN resolution 1199 opened the way to a political compromise at the North Atlantic Council (NAC). The day after the decision of the Security Council, NATO members collectively decided that resolution 1199 represented a sufficient legal basis to start preparations for a possible military engagement and approved the issuing of Activation Warnings (ACTWARN) for two types of military operations against the FRY, i.e. a phased air campaign (the bombardment of Yugoslavia) and a limited air option (a missile strikes on the Yugoslav territory). On the one hand, ACTWARNs were clearly an instrument of the Western “coercive diplomacy” to enforce Milosevic’s compliance with the measures of the Security Council and important political signal of NATO’s “readiness” to bomb Yugoslavia. On the other hand, ACTWARNs obviously did not start any airstrikes against Yugoslavia and, in fact, many members of the Alliance remained reluctant to implement such a scenario. However, the approval of ACTWARNs obliged NATO members to start military preparations for envisaged operations against the FRY. It was then a serious “technical” step towards NATO’s military engagement against Belgrade. So, to sum up, Russia certainly knew that the adoption of the UN resolution 1199 would unblock the Greek veto against ACTWARNs at the NAC, but, nevertheless, voted for the adoption of the resolution 1199. In effect, Russia contributed to the approval of ACTWARNs, apparently [Bellamy 2002: 92–94; *Statement by the Secretary General following the ACTWARN Decision*, Vilamoura, 24 September 1998].

The growing ambivalence of the Russian diplomacy about the Kosovo issue and Milosevic himself became clear at the London meeting of Foreign Ministers of Great Britain, France, the United States and Russia on 8 October 1998. During the meeting, Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Igor Ivanov stressed that Russia opposed to the use of force against Yugoslavia and would veto any draft of the Security Council resolution, which could entitle NATO to intervene. While it was clear that Moscow would block any attempts for the intervention at the UN, the Russian minister surprisingly declared that Russia would certainly denunciate the Alliance for its unilateral and illegal acts if NATO bombed Serbia without the mandate of the Security Council but would not do anything to physically stop NATO's intervention. In this diplomatic way, Ivanov actually announced to his counterparts that Russia was against airstrikes, however, it would not plan any military response to NATO, if the Alliance eventually decided to start the air campaign against Belgrade [Bellamy 2002: 92–93].

The next example of cooperation between the West and Russia on the Kosovo conflict was Russian support for the Rambouillet peace conference and draft of the

peace proposal which guaranteed Kosovo's autonomy within Serbia, prepared by a mediator and the U.S. Ambassador to Macedonia Christopher Hill. Contact Group decided to literally "enforce" a political dialogue and compromise between Belgrade and Pristina and agreed on the peace conference on 29 January 1999. Shortly before the meeting of the Contact Group, U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright went to Moscow for informal talks with Russian Minister Igor Ivanov. During the meeting, Ivanov told Albright that Russia did not accept the use of force against Yugoslavia but agreed that serious military threat could convince Milosevic to participate in the planned conference.² In exchange, he got a guarantee that the West was still interested in the political solution of the Kosovo question and Russia would play an active role in this diplomatic process. It was quite a favourable compromise for Russia that could negotiate, moderate and implement internationally agreed solution on Kosovo. It also gave Moscow some political power to influence Balkan policy of the West [Simma 1999: 8–9; Gazzini 2001: 406–407; Bellamy 2002: 125–126; *Statement by the Contact Group*, January 29, 1999].

The Rambouillet peace conference started on 6 February 1999. The talks between representatives of Serbia and the Kosovo Albanians were supported by three international mediators – Christopher Hill (USA), Boris Mayorsky (Russia) and Wolfgang Petritsch (Austria) who was the representative of the European Union. Although negotiations in Rambouillet faced strong criticism and accusations that it was a "total farce" or open Western "dictate" to Serbia, it was also a fact that Russia participated in the conference and expected Belgrade to finally compromise on the Kosovo's autonomy. What is more, during the first and the second round of negotiations in Rambouillet and Paris, the West and Russia took some additional diplomatic efforts to change Milosevic's position on the Rambouillet Agreement. On 8 March 1999, Milosevic met with German Minister of Foreign Affairs Joschka Fischer and EU Commissioner for Foreign Relations Hans van den Broek who offered him a possibility to renegotiate some aspects of the peace proposal. Two days later, Yugoslav President met with American diplomats Richard Holbrooke and Christopher Hill, who asked him to sign the agreement. On 12 March 1999, Russian Minister Igor Ivanov came to Belgrade and asked Milosevic literally for the same – to sign a peace agreement with the Kosovo Albanians. In an ineffective attempt to change Milosevic's view on the Rambouillet Agreement, Ivanov probably promised that if Serbia agreed on the peace plan, Russia would send to Kosovo a substantial contingent of Russian troops [Teraz Iwanow 1999: 17; Bellamy 2002: 145–156; Allin 2002: 56–57].

² The idea of the Rambouillet peace conference was officially "supported" by NATO, that repeated the threat of its military intervention and declared that the Alliance was ready to take all measures if the warring parties would reject to participate in the conference [*Statement to the Press by NATO Secretary General, Dr. Javier Solana*, 28 January 1999].

It is widely known that the negotiation in Rambouillet and Paris ended without a success because the Serbian delegation did not want to seriously negotiate and eventually rejected the offered peace agreement. It is also a fact that the representatives of the Kosovo Albanians signed the agreement only because of the strong diplomatic pressure from U.S. Secretary Albright who despite the protests of the Russian mediator Mayorsky changed the text of the peace agreement and agreed on the main Albanian demand for the referendum on independence. In that situation, Russia, which still opposed the upcoming NATO's airstrikes against the FRY, had no choice but to defend its "stubborn" ally. It stressed alleged Serbian readiness for further negotiations and political compromise, as well as openly questioned a free will of the Albanian delegation, who eventually signed an agreement in Paris. Russia also argued for the continuation of the outgoing international diplomatic efforts and Serbian-Albanian political dialogue. As the Russian mediator, Boris Mayorsky said, "One signature, unfortunately, doesn't make an agreement" [Bellamy 2002: 131–146; Allin 2002: 56–57; *Excerpts from the Interview with Foreign Minister Ivanov*, March 23, 1999; Whitney 1999: <http://www.nytimes.com/1999/03/18/world/kosovo-talks-near-end-as-serbs-build-up.html>].

RUSSIAN RESPONSE TO NATO'S OPERATION "ALLIED FORCE" (MARCH–JUNE 1999)

Initial reaction of the Russian Federation to NATO's air campaign against the FRY was quite predictable. On 24 March 1999, President Yeltsin, who a month before declared that Moscow would not allow the West to take Kosovo back from Serbia, spoke out against bombing, indignantly condemned the Alliance, declared that military operation against the FRY had no mandate of the Security Council, represented a clear example of aggression, blatant violation of international law, dangerous precedent and the serious threat to the international security. Yeltsin also pointed out that Russia would never accept NATO's self-declared role of the world policeman. That same day, Russian Permanent Representative to the United Nations Sergey Lavrov presented similar arguments at the Security Council. Within two days, Russia, Belarus and India prepared a draft of the resolution demanding to stop the bombardment of Yugoslavia, but it was officially vetoed on 26 March, what relativized Russian political and legal accusations of NATO airstrikes [McCoubrey 1999: 33–34; Judah 2000: 273; Bellamy 2002: 139; *Statement by Russian President Yeltsin*, March 24, 1999].

Yeltsin's criticism of the Alliance primarily reflected the fact that NATO's policy undermined the international prestige, position and power of Russia. A military intervention in the Balkans, a region historically, politically and culturally close to Russia, represented a painful evidence that despite the Western support for President Yeltsin himself and the processes of modernization and democratization of Russia, NATO members would not respect the political will of the relatively "weak" Russian

state. It also meant that previous territorial limitations of NATO's activity were not yet binding and the Alliance was ready for out-of-area operations, i.e. stabilization and peace-enforcing missions, a concept was not originally envisaged at the Washington Treaty (1949). In other words, NATO's operation "Allied Force" reflected the geopolitical shift in the international relations, a phenomenon unfavourable for Russia, which lost part of its political power and international importance, politically struggled with the NATO's enlargement and its military activity relatively "near" Russian borders [Antonenko 1999–2000: 125–131; Kobrinska 2000: 38–48; Simic 2001: 106–112; O'Loughlin, Kolossov 2002: 595].³

Apart from harsh denunciations of NATO's campaign, traditional Cold War language, anti-Western moods and threats that Russia could target its strategic missiles at the Western European states (which actually never happened) and would "reply" to NATO's land invasion, Russia took more visible measures. The personnel of NATO's Information Office in Moscow was expelled from Russia, the Russian Permanent Mission to NATO at the Alliance HQ in Brussels was closed, Russia suspended its membership in the Partnership for Peace (PfP) and officially broke off all contacts with the Alliance. Russian Duma suspended the procedure of the ratification of the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty with the United States (START II) while the Communist Party in the Duma pushed for an enigmatic, geographically awkward and never realized idea of the Union State of Russia, Belarus and Yugoslavia. Russia also gave an impression that it seriously deliberated on sending weaponry to the FRY, but it was only a clear propaganda exploited by Milosevic's regime. In fact, Russia kept out from any military involvement in Kosovo war and neither advanced anti-aircraft systems nor less sophisticated weaponry were sent to Yugoslavia. Moscow was perfectly aware of the fact that Russia had no real interest in this armed conflict and should not get entangled into a deep political or even military conflict with NATO because of the trouble caused by Milosevic. In effect, Russian military presence in the region was limited to sending a reconnaissance ship to the Adriatic Sea, which was a sign that the Western states should not ignore the political will, military power and geopolitical interests of Russia in the Balkan region. But it was literally all what Russia could and really wanted to do to help Serbia in its war with NATO [Daalder, O'Hanlon 2000: 127; Judah 2000: 274; Bellamy 2002: 174; Sell 2002: 286; Bohlen 1999].

Despite tough anti-Western oratory, Russia almost immediately started its unilateral diplomatic efforts to stop NATO's air campaign, what actually supported NATO's strategy of "polite bombing", aimed not to military defend the FRY, but to bring Milosevic back to the negotiation table and enforce his consent for a peace plan on Kosovo's autonomy. On 30 March 1999, Russian Prime Minister Yevgeny

³ Yeltsin's criticism of the air campaign against the FRY was also the result of the ongoing crisis on the political scene in Russia. Decisive anti-Western rhetoric weakened the arguments of the Communist opposition in the Duma and dismissed the possibility of Yeltsin's impeachment [Bieleń 2002: 260].

Primakov, Minister of Foreign Affairs Igor Ivanov, and Minister of Defence Igor Sergeev came to Belgrade and unsuccessfully tried to convince Milosevic to accept political demands of NATO to stop the war in Kosovo [Daalder, O'Hanlon 2000: 127–128; Judah 2000: 273–274].

Milosevic's stubbornness was an unpleasant surprise for NATO members, who never really wanted or planned a serious military engagement against the FRY and obviously thought that soon after first bombs hit Yugoslavia, Milosevic would change his mind and finally accept the offered peace plan for Kosovo. But when Yugoslav President decided to go on war with NATO, the Alliance was actually "forced" to continue its airstrikes. This paradoxical situation soon turned out to be advantageous for Russia.

Although start of the bombing seriously hurt the international prestige of Russia, prolonging NATO's airstrikes and political stalemate helped Russia to come back on the main political scene. When it became clear that NATO needed Russian support to force the political compromise on Milosevic and end the war in Kosovo, Russia, that wanted airstrikes to stop and wished actively participate in the high-level international dialogue on Kosovo, accepted its role as a mediator between the West and Belgrade. In effect, despite criticism of NATO's policy, Russia was ready for a functional compromise with the West. Moscow positively responded to the draft of the peace plan presented by Germany on 14 April 1999, which conceded the main peacemaking role to the G8 and UN (not NATO). That same day, President Yeltsin appointed moderate Viktor Chernomyrdin as his Special Envoy for the Balkans. Chernomyrdin's appointment was a clear signal of Russian constructive approach and gesture to the West. It was also President Yeltsin, who called American President Bill Clinton during the NATO Summit in Washington (23–25 April 1999) and insisted that it was time to end NATO's intervention [Brzezinski 2000: 325; McWhinney 2000: 71].

The political compromise between the West and Russia over Kosovo was officially agreed upon at the meeting of the G8 Foreign Ministers in Petersberg Castle near Bonn on 6 May 1999. In the atmosphere of a consensual discussion, the representatives of Germany, the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, France, Italy, Japan, and Russia decided that Yugoslavia should withdraw its police and military forces from the province, accept the international civilian and military presence in Kosovo under UN mandate, interim UN administration and substantial self-government for Kosovo. The G8 meeting was a success of international diplomacy. The Petersberg Agreement created a political foundation for the end of airstrikes, a strategic compromise over the transition from NATO's "unilateral" military action against the FRY to diplomatic and "multilateral" forum of the G8 and, finally, the United Nations. It all meant that Russia was back into international decision-making processes concerning the Kosovo conflict and as a mediator between NATO and Milosevic would literary help the Alliance to end the war and, to some extent, moderate Western policy. The G8 meeting was also a clear evidence of the international consensus on the Kosovo issue. It was a signal for Milosevic that it was time for

a political compromise, because despite some nuances, the West and Russia spoke one voice and Moscow definitely would not help Serbia militarily. In effect, on 18 May 1999, the FRY officially announced its readiness for talks on G8 demands. The next day, Viktor Chernomyrdin went to Belgrade to present and discuss G8 peace proposals with Milosevic. Until the end of May he visited Belgrade a couple of times and tried to convince Milosevic that the acceptance of the G8 demands was an obligatory condition to end the NATO airstrikes [Bellamy 2002: 186; Ifantis 2002: 21; Zyla 2015: 134–135; *Statement by G8 Foreign Ministers, Petersberg*, 6 May 1999].

Although the West and Russia agreed on the Petersberg Agreement, its general character left the space for a different interpretation and led to some disputes between NATO and Moscow that wanted a guarantee of functional autonomy for its military contingent in the province, the Kosovo Force (KFOR) led by NATO. At that time, the Kremlin opposed handing over its soldiers under NATO command, argued for a separation of the Russian contingent within KFOR and its own sector in North Kosovo without any troops from NATO member states. Russia also claimed that KFOR should not include military personnel from countries that participated in the operation “Allied Force”. Moscow also spoke in favour of immediate ceasefire when the FRY would accept the peace proposal (i.e. before the start of the withdrawal of Serbian police and military forces from the province) and asked for leaving in Kosovo a small number of the Yugoslav army personnel. Since NATO opposed Russian demands there was an urgent need to clarify different positions, prepare the final draft of the peace plan and present it to Milosevic. Russian diplomat Chernomyrdin, the representative of the EU, Finnish President Martti Ahtisaari and the U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott met four times with the aim to find the solution. After rounds of tough negotiations, Russian delegation accepted the unified KFOR command and control structure, agreed that NATO would suspend its airstrikes, as soon as the Serbian and Yugoslav units began the verifiable withdrawal and accepted that there would be no Yugoslav military personnel in Kosovo. So, it was quite clear that Moscow stepped aside from its demands and simply approved the position of NATO members. Some aspects of the Russian military engagement within KFOR remained unresolved, though [Daalder, O’Hanlon 2000: 169–171; Bellamy 2002: 182–194].

The final version of the peace proposal was agreed by Chernomyrdin, Ahtisaari and Talbott on 2 June 1999. The proposal reflected the G8 general principles on the political solution of the Kosovo crisis and demanded Yugoslavia to withdraw all police and military units from the province, agree on international security presence in Kosovo (KFOR) under NATO command, interim UN administration and Kosovo’s autonomy within the FRY. That same day, Ahtisaari and Chernomyrdin, as the official representatives of the EU and Russia, went to Belgrade and met with President Milosevic. After listening to the proposal, Milosevic asked about the changes to the agreement. Both representatives stressed that it was not possible and said that the FRY may only accept or reject the proposal. In this situation, Milosevic, who was aware of the fact that Yugoslavia simply could not further ignore a unified diplomatic front

of the West and Russia, accepted the peace proposal, which was later officially confirmed by the vote of the Parliament of Serbia. All political and military agreements related to the end of the NATO's airstrikes against the FRY were finally reaffirmed and endorsed by the Security Council's Resolution 1244 adopted on 10 June 1999 [Daalder, O'Hanlon 2000: 173–174; Judah 2000: 278–279; *Proposals brought by the EU envoy, Finnish President Martti Ahtisaari, and Special Envoy of the President of the Russian Federation for the Balkans Victor Chernomyrdin*, 3 June 1999].

The political compromise between the West and Russia over Kosovo did not finish “technical” disputes about the functioning of the Russian contingent within the KFOR. Moscow admittedly agreed that it would be a unified KFOR command and control structure, but still did not want to hand over its military personnel under NATO command and insisted on its own KFOR sector in the north of the province. In order to stress the seriousness of its demands, despite the visit of the American diplomat Strobe Talbott who came to Moscow and tried to achieve a functional compromise on NATO–Russia relations within KFOR, Moscow decided to make the unilateral move. On 11 June 1999, about 200 troops and 30 armoured vehicles of the Russian military contingent within the Stabilisation Force in Bosnia and Herzegovina (SFOR) replaced the “SFOR” mark with the “KFOR” one and headed towards Kosovo through central Serbia. Although Minister Ivanov promised Secretary Albright that this unit would not enter Kosovo, the Russians seized the airport in Pristina. Moscow's strategy surprised and confused NATO member states. In the tense atmosphere, SACEUR General Wesley Clark ordered KFOR Commander General Mike Jackson to block the road and literally stop the Russian troops on their way to Pristina's airport, but the latter refused to obey the order, argued that it violates KFOR's mandate and stressed that he did not want to start the Third World War because of this incident. Jackson's decision was politically accurate. Any open demonstration of force against the Russians who simply could not stand against overwhelming NATO personnel, represented a potentially danger situation, which could undermine mandate of the mission and the future NATO–Russian cooperation within KFOR. It seemed that by this unilateral action, Moscow planned to secure a transportation of about 7,000 troops from Russia. Russian *fait accompli* was probably aimed at the “enforced” change of the structure and deployment of the KFOR personnel. This operation soon proved to be useless, though. When Romania and Bulgaria did not open their space for the air transport from Russia, after a few days, Russian soldiers were forced to ask NATO troops for a basic supply. The crisis around the Russian contingent within KFOR was finally resolved on 18 June 1999 in Helsinki during the meeting between U.S. Secretary of Defence William Cohen and Russian Minister of Defence Igor Sergeyev. They agreed that Russia would send to Kosovo about 3,600 troops, who would be deployed in the American, French and German sectors. Moscow gave up on the idea of a Russian KFOR sector, a solution expected by Belgrade and Serbs in North Kosovo and, finally, abandoned its claims concerning the separation of the Russian contingent within KFOR. It was clear then

that Moscow accepted all of NATO's demands for the international military presence in Kosovo [Daalder, O'Hanlon 2000: 176; Judah 2000: 284–285; Levitin 2000: 138; Schwartz 2000: 154; Topolski 2004: 229; *Agreed Points on Russian Participation in KFOR, Helsinki Agreement*, 18 June 1999].

CONCLUSIONS

The end of the Kosovo armed conflict showed that despite strong criticism of the NATO's military engagement against Yugoslavia, the final political solution was developed and endorsed together by the West and Russia. Although it was a fact that Moscow in practice agreed on most Western demands addressed to Milosevic, it was also hard to deny that a Russian constructive approach and dialogue with the West helped to find a diplomatic solution to the Kosovo conflict, shortened the time of the airstrikes and certainly limited the overall scale and costs of NATO's military intervention. What is more, despite some views that NATO's intervention strained the relations between the West and Russia to the breaking point, soon after the end of the war, NATO–Moscow relations started to improve significantly and led to the strategic rapprochement in the form of the new Russia-NATO Council (2002). All in all, Russian factual political cooperation with the West on the Kosovo problem represented a huge disappointment for many Serbian citizens, who probably seriously expected that Russia would help Belgrade militarily in its war with NATO. Among the Serbs, this situation gave rise to the belief that Russia “betrayed” or “sold” Serbia to the West for its own political purposes. Although such opinions were certainly emotional, biased and pejorative, they paradoxically represented quite an accurate interpretation of the conditions, strategies and goals of the Russian policy on the Kosovo conflict.

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