

## **Research Article/ Araştırma Makalesi**

# **The Position of Russian Diplomacy toward the Kosovo Issue (1998-1999)**

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### **Abstract**

The wars in Yugoslavia – both in Bosnia and later in Kosovo – unquestionably aroused the curiosity of the international community, including the Russian Federation. As a result of the war in Kosovo, namely with the NATO intervention, relations between Western countries and Russia entered a deterioration phase.

Russian diplomacy after the 1990s consistently insisted that its status was equal to that of the Western countries, while even resolutely claiming that it was to be consulted when it came to the future of the security architecture in Europe.

The purpose of this article is to present to the readers the role of the Russian Federation in the Kosovo war and Russia's reaction to the NATO military intervention. As we will see, Russia's main concern was the shape

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Doktora Öğrencisi, Üsküp, Makedonya.

that international relations were taking in the post-Kosovo period, and NATO's increasing role in the larger European security.

In this article the main method which will be used is qualitative method. We will use the *descriptive method* also, to describe the developments that characterized Russian foreign policy in the period of Kosovo war. Secondary sources will be used as data collection such as government documents or publications from UN or NATO.

**Keywords:** Yugoslav wars, Kosovo, Russia, UN, NATO Intervention.

### **Rus Diplomasinin Kosova Meselesi ile İlgili Duruşu (1998-1999)**

#### **Öz**

Eski Yugoslavya'daki savaşlar – *hem Bosna hem daha sonra Kosova'da* – şüphesiz Rusya Federasyonu dahil olmak üzere uluslararası toplumun merakını uyandırdı. Kosova'daki savaşın ve NATO müdahalesinin ardından, Batı ülkeleri ile Rusya arasındaki ilişkiler bir bozulmuş sürecine girdi.

'90lı yıllardan sonra Rus diplomasisi Rusya'nın Batı ülkeleri ile aynı statüde olduğu konusunda sürekli ısrar etti. Hatta kararlı bir şekilde Avrupa güvenlik mimarisinin geleceği konusunda kendisine danışması gerektiğini savundu.

Bu makalenin amacı okuyuculara Rusya Federasyonu'nun Kosova savaşındaki rolünü ve NATO'nun askeri müdahalesine Rusya'nın tepkisini sunmaktır. Görüleceği üzere, Rusya'nın endişesi bu savaş sonrasında uluslararası ilişkilerin yeni şekillenme biçimi ve daha genel olarak Avrupa güvenliğinde NATO'nun büyüyen rolü idi.

Bu makalede kullanılacak olan temel yöntem nitel yöntemdir. Kosova savaşı döneminde Rus dış politikasını karakterize eden gelişmeleri tasvir etmek için betimsel yöntemi de kullanacağız. Hükümet belgeleri ve BM veya NATO yayınları gibi ikincil kaynaklar veri toplama olarak kullanılacaktır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Yugoslavya savaşları, Kosova, Rusya, BM, NATO Müdahalesi.

#### **Introduction**

The genesis of the war in Kosovo is directly related to the beginning of the breakup of Yugoslavia, that is, when in 1989 political authorities in Belgrade abolished the autonomy of Kosovo, and consequently the discontent of the Albanian population increased.

In such a situation, the Assembly of the Autonomous Province of Kosovo on July 2, 1990 declared Kosovo an independent and equal entity within the Federation of Yugoslavia. In September of the same year, the deputies in the assembly adopted the highest legal act - the Constitution, which initially declared Kosovo a Republic<sup>1</sup>. One year later, i.e. in 1991, independence was declared through a popular referendum.

After the Serbian state rejected this decision of the Kosovo political authorities, the crisis constantly escalated between the population and the Serbian authorities, and this practically marked the beginning of the war in Kosovo in 1998.

### **Russian Diplomacy and Kosovo War**

The war in Kosovo and the NATO military intervention represents the biggest stalemate in relations between the West and Russia, and also produced the biggest crisis between the two sides since the end of the Cold War and the fall of the Soviet Union. Furthermore, Alexei Arbatov considered that NATO actions provoked the most dangerous confrontation between Moscow and Washington since the Berlin crisis or the missile crisis in Cuba in the early 1960s.<sup>2</sup> Russian scholars of International Relations state that the Kosovo crisis had a significant impact both on the overall situation in the world and on the relations between world powers in the current global order.<sup>3</sup>

Indeed, various Russian circles had warned the Serbian establishment about the Kosovo issue several years before the beginning of the war and the NATO intervention. Since 1996, the newly appointed head of Russian diplomacy, Yevgeny Primakov, had warned Slobodan Milosevic to be careful on Kosovo, because in the

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<sup>1</sup> Enika Abazi, "Çështja e Kosovës dhe Diplomacia Ndërkombëtare (1991-1999): Një konflikt i parashikueshëm". *Studime Historike, Institute of History*. 66/3-4, (2012) p. 196.

<sup>2</sup> Aleksei Arbatov, "NATO – glavnaya problema dlya yevropeyskoy bezopasnosti". Retrieved from:

[www.yabloko.ru/Publ/Articles/arat-33.html](http://www.yabloko.ru/Publ/Articles/arat-33.html)

<sup>3</sup> Anatoly Torkunov, "International Relations after the Kosovo crisis". Melville, Andrei. Shakleina, Tatiana (ed.) *Russian Foreign Policy In Transition Concepts And Realities*, Central European University Press, Budapest, New York, 2005, p. 281.

event of an explosive situation there, it would be difficult to cope with.<sup>4</sup>

Speaking of Yevgeny Primakov, it has to be stressed that he was appointed as Russian Foreign Minister as a result of persisting pressure on Andrey Kozurev, who was already considered as someone who ignored Russian interests in the wars of Yugoslavia (Bosnia and Herzegovina).

Consequently, Kozurev's departure took place immediately after the parliamentary elections held in 1995, which brought to the DUMA a large percentage of deputies with nationalist views and communist deputies. Primakov expressed his ideas on foreign policy at the first press conference he held as Foreign Minister when, among other things, he stated that,

*"Russia was and still is a great power and its policy in relation to the outside world has to correspond to this status".<sup>5</sup>*

The position of Russian diplomacy both within the Contact Group and as an individual state was that the territorial integrity of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was inviolable. Thus, the Russian state insisted on maintaining the existing status quo in the Balkans, and consequently in Kosovo, while trying to maintain international borders intact. In fact, at the beginning of the crisis there were almost no differences and disagreements between Russia and the West when it came to the issue of the status of Kosovo as an autonomous province within the borders of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

According to the UN position, or rather according to the UN Security Council Resolution 1160, any solution to the Kosovo issue had to be based on the territorial integrity of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and had to be in line with OSCE standards, including those

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<sup>4</sup>Evgeniy Primakov, *Russian Crossroads toward the new Millennium*. Yale University Press, New Haven & London, 2004, p.178.

<sup>5</sup>Robert H Donaldson, "Boris Yeltsin's Foreign Policy Legacy", *Tulsa Journal of Comparative and International Law*, 7/3 (2000) p. 295.

set out in the Helsinki Final Act of 1975.<sup>6</sup> This resolution, which was based on Chapter VII of the Charter, envisioned an arms embargo on Yugoslavia, including Kosovo, while any subsequent failure to meet the requirements of the resolution would pave the way for a military reinforcement.

The Russian diplomacy backed the above-mentioned resolution because it hoped that would be a final warning to Milosevic, whereas a second issue was that Russia did not want to find itself isolated among the other members of the UN Security Council.<sup>7</sup>

During his visit to Belgrade in March 1998, Yevgeny Primakov asked Milosevic to come up with an initiative regarding Kosovo's autonomy; to withdraw troops; to start negotiations with Ibrahim Rugova; and to agree on the arrival of a group of OSCE observers in Kosovo.<sup>8</sup>

Territorial inviolability and integrity were a very sensitive issue for Russia and its diplomacy. When referring to the period we are discussing here, we should not forget that Russia was dealing with a similar problem within its own territory.

The case of Kosovo symbolized the case of Chechnya for the Russian state, with which it had to deal— and that was a reason why Russia was sensitive to its territorial integrity being subject to irredentist movements that challenged national sovereignty or national social cohesion. For Russian diplomacy, both Chechnya in Russia and Kosovo in the Balkans constituted domestic issues and any solution had to be sought within the sphere of state autonomy.<sup>9</sup>

US Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott reported that in one case Igor Ivanov, the head of the Russian diplomacy during the

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<sup>6</sup> United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Res. 1160 (31 March 1998), UN Doc.S/RES/1160, Retrieved from: [https://undocs.org/S/RES/1160\(1998\)](https://undocs.org/S/RES/1160(1998))

<sup>7</sup> Paul Latawaski. Martin Smith, *The Kosovo crisis and the evolution of post-Cold War European security*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2003, p. 94.

<sup>8</sup> Evgeniy Primakov, p. 180.

<sup>9</sup> Enika Abazi, "Kosovo Conflict and the Post-Cold War Order: Russia and Turkey Policies". *Turkish Review of Balkan Studies*, 7, (2002), p. 221.

Kosovo war, had spoken very clearly in a meeting with the US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright:

*“Don’t you understand that we have too many Kosovos in Russia!?”<sup>10</sup>*

In fact, the connection between Yugoslavia and the threat of further disintegration for Russia (as a result of the Chechen war) and the wider post-Soviet space was very much alive in the minds of the elite of the Russian foreign policy. During the escalation of clashes between the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) and Serbian security forces, Russian diplomacy and Moscow made efforts to establish a position that opposed any NATO military action, while stressing that no settlement should be implemented without Russia’s participation.<sup>11</sup>

In reality, this position was identical to the previous positions of the Russian diplomacy when it came to not only the issues of the Balkans but also the issues of European security in general. In this regard, Russia considered its presence in the issues that Southeast Europe and the Balkans were undergoing – beyond any real interests in it – as a sign of the restoration of its status, namely that it had to have a role in the developments that Europe was experiencing.

The inclusion of the Russian Federation in the Contact Group – established initially during the Bosnian crisis but had its lifespan extended during the war in Kosovo – was exactly in this vein.

Both in the case of Bosnia and that of Kosovo, Russia intended to push for solutions that were supposed to be approved through key international institutions, such as the UN, where Moscow played an important role and where global issues could not be settled without Russia.

Consequently, the main Russian concern in the case of Kosovo was that the issue of Kosovo and its epilogue would not be discussed within the chancelleries of the NATO alliance, let alone that such an

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<sup>10</sup> Derek Averre, “From Pristina to Tskhinvali: The Legacy of Operation Allied Force in Russia’s Relations with the West”, *Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-*, 85/3, (2009), pp. 575–91.

<sup>11</sup> Dimitar Bechev, *Rival Power Russia’s Influence in South East Europe*. Yale University Press, New Heaven and London, 2017, pp. 42-43.

initiative would be pushed forward from the US diplomacy. This concern was raised by Yevgeny Primakov –then *Prime Minister of Russia* – during a discussion with Secretary Albright, where, among other things, he said,

*“...Russia has its force and other methods present in the Balkans since two hundred years, and it is unthinkable that the Americans want to impose their recommendations on the Balkans without consulting Russia, or to resolve local conflicts in their own manner...”<sup>12</sup>*

On the other hand, the NATO communiqué issued on March 5, 1998, which was one of the first NATO communiqués on the Kosovo issue, stated that,

*“...the North Atlantic Council calls on all sides to take immediate steps to reduce the tensions...”* and that,

*“NATO and the international community have a legitimate interest in developments in Kosovo, inter alia because of their impact on the stability of the whole region which is of concern to the Alliance...”<sup>13</sup>*

This communiqué practically meant that NATO would no longer remain indifferent in relation to the developments in Kosovo, but, instead, would actively follow the developing situation. The fact that the war in Bosnia - only a few years before - produced the scene of the greatest genocidal proportions since the end of World War II, it was more than natural that the NATO Alliance could not stand idly by in front of such a situation that threatened peace and security in the Balkans.

NATO's involvement in the Kosovo war was unacceptable from the Russian standpoint, since, in addition to diminishing Russia's role in the resolution of the conflict, it also meant that the NATO alliance was giving itself a new role in operations while also exercising influence in the regions “out of area”. Because of this reality, NATO

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<sup>12</sup>Evgeniy Primakov, p. 183.

<sup>13</sup>Council statement on the situation in Kosovo. Press Release (1998) 029, (05 Mar. 1998). Retrieved from: [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official\\_texts\\_25989.htm?selectedLocale=en](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_25989.htm?selectedLocale=en)

involvement in Kosovo without the UN Security Council approval was unimaginable for the Russian diplomacy.

During this period when NATO was already seriously involved in the Kosovo issue, Russian diplomacy aimed to become a bridge between the international community and the Yugoslav authorities. Therefore, during Milosevic's meeting with President Yeltsin—*June 1998*— in Moscow, one of the points discussed was that the Serbian side should allow an international monitoring mission in Kosovo, and as a result of the ensuing agreement, the way was paved for the establishment of the Kosovo Diplomatic Observation Mission (KDOM). That mission consisted of various diplomats who would monitor the situation on the ground and inform the international community. However, *the Independent International Commission on Kosovo* noted that the situation on the ground was extremely worrying. In August 1998 it was reported that alarming number of 200-300 thousand Kosovo Albanians had been displaced as a result of the continuous attacks by Yugoslav forces, including shelling of towns and villages.<sup>14</sup>

In September 1998, the Resolution 1199 approved by the Security Council warned for an imminent humanitarian catastrophe, highlighted by the fact that the situation in Kosovo posed a threat to peace and security in the region. This resolution, built on Chapter VII of the Charter, called for a peaceful solution to the problem in Kosovo, which included a greater degree of autonomy and self-government for Kosovo, and reaffirmed the commitment to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.<sup>15</sup>

Russian Ambassador to the UN Sergey Lavrov (*the current Minister of Foreign Affairs*), during his speech at the session that adopted this resolution, stressed that the provisions were in line with

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<sup>14</sup>The Independent International Commission on Kosovo, *The Kosovo Report: Conflict, International Response, Lessons Learned*, Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 74.

<sup>15</sup>United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Res. 1199 (23 September 1998), UN Doc.S/RES/1199,

Retrieved from: [https://undocs.org/S/RES/1199\(1998\)](https://undocs.org/S/RES/1199(1998))



the basic position of Russia, which favors the resolution of the conflict in Kosovo grounded on granting a broad autonomy, and on strict respect for the territorial integrity of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.<sup>16</sup>

Lavrov also mentioned that in the case of unilateral attacks that aimed to resolve the conflict, the Balkans and the whole of Europe would face instability. This concern of the Russian diplomacy stemmed from the fact that the resolution provided for further actions and additional measures to maintain peace and stability, so Russia indirectly excluded the NATO alliance from military intervention in ending the crisis.

In NATO's view, Resolution 1199 paved the way for military intervention, and exactly one day after its adoption, on September 24, the NATO Secretary General issued a statement saying that the North Atlantic Council had approved ACT WARN as an option for a limited aerial campaign in Kosovo. Actually, this statement became an important political signal of NATO's readiness to use force.<sup>17</sup>

Russia's policy in face of this event was that the use of NATO forces on Serbian targets was to be avoided completely, and that is the reason why Russia welcomed Richard Holbrooke's agreement with Milosevic for a ceasefire and to make possible the arrival of the OSCE monitoring mission in Kosovo.

Even during the discussions in the context of the Rambouillet Conference - *February-March 1999* - there was a consensus between the Contact Group<sup>18</sup> when it came to the political principles of the agreement, but it seems that when the issues were raised militarily Russia withdrew from the process, as it was pointed out by Sergey

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<sup>16</sup> Heike Krieger, (ed.) *The Kosovo Conflict and International Law: An Analytical Documentation 1974-1999* Cambridge International Documents Series, Cambridge University Press, 2001, p.153.

<sup>17</sup>Statement by the Secretary General following the ACTWARN decision. Press Statement. 24 Sept. 1998. Retrieved from: <https://www.nato.int/docu/pr/1998/p980924e.htm>

<sup>18</sup>Contact Group Statement - Rambouillet, 23 February 1999. Retrieved from: [https://web.archive.org/web/20070926234216/http://www.ohr.int/other-doc/contact-g/default.asp?content\\_id=3560](https://web.archive.org/web/20070926234216/http://www.ohr.int/other-doc/contact-g/default.asp?content_id=3560)

Lavrov who during the discussions in a UN Security Council session emphasized that

*"... our partners in the Contact Group, behind our backs, decided to discuss the military aspects of the implementation of the agreement, in the context of NATO and not in the context of the Contact Group".<sup>19</sup>*

In fact, the Serbian side categorically objected to signing an agreement that involved the landing of military troops in Kosovo, and the official Russian position was that accepting or rejecting the agreement was a matter of Yugoslavia sovereignty, and that Russia could not impose any agreement on the FRY under the threat of airstrikes.<sup>20</sup>

At this point, the Serbian position was identical to that of the Russian diplomacy because, since the beginning of the crisis, Russia opposed any military solution to the Kosovo issue.

### **NATO Military Intervention and the Reaction of Russian Diplomacy**

The further deterioration of the situation on the ground and the rejection by the Serbian side to sign the Rambouillet Agreement, which foresaw an interim political solution, led to the NATO air campaign and military intervention on the positions of the Serbian forces that started on March 24. However, it should be noted that the North Atlantic Council warned through a statement on January 30 that the NATO Secretary General could authorize airstrikes against targets inside the territory of the FRY if steps are not taken to avoid a humanitarian catastrophe.<sup>21</sup>

Since the very first moments of the bombing campaign, Yevgeny Primakov had contacted Milosevic about the possibility of a meeting in Belgrade, with the aim that after the meeting the latter (Milosevic) would express his readiness to sign the agreement. Primakov's

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<sup>19</sup>Heike Krieger, p. 429.

<sup>20</sup>James Headley, *Russia and the Balkans: Foreign Policy from Yeltsin to Putin*. London, HURST & COMPANY, 2008, p.361.

<sup>21</sup>Statement by the North Atlantic Council on Kosovo. Press Release (99)12, 30 Jan. 1999. Retrieved from: <https://www.nato.int/docu/pr/1999/p99-012e.htm>

attempt was unsuccessful because the Serbian parliament had rejected the agreement the day before.<sup>22</sup> For Moscow, the military intervention constituted a violation of international law on the grounds that such an operation was not carried out with the authorization of the Security Council.

The speech of the Russian representative in the UN Sergey Lavrov during the Security Council session held on March 26 that discussed the NATO intervention stressed that

*“... the aggressive military actions against a sovereign state by NATO without sanctions and by ignoring the Security Council are a real threat to international peace and security”,*

while adding that such actions,

*“...significantly destabilize the situation in the Balkans and Europe, and also directly undermine the foundations of the entire modern international relations system.”<sup>23</sup>*

President Boris Yeltsin called NATO operations in Kosovo “nothing more than sheer aggression”, while for the government of the Russian Federation, the military intervention had “set a dangerous precedent” that “threatens international law and order”.<sup>24</sup> The DUMA members even voted 279 “for” and 34 “against” the Russian government supplying Yugoslavia with weapons and military advisers, but President Yeltsin was against such an idea and rejected it.<sup>25</sup> Russian lawmakers also passed a non-binding resolution with 293 votes in favor and 54 against, which recommended that Yugoslavia be admitted to the Russian Union with Belarus, but it was opposed by Russian Foreign Minister Ivanov who said,

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<sup>22</sup> Evgeniy Primakov, pp. 269-70.

<sup>23</sup> Organizatsiya Obyedinennykh Natsiy. Совет Безопасности Пятьдесят четвертый год. 3989-е заседание. 26.03.1999. S/PV.3989, Retrieved from: <https://undocs.org/pdf?symbol=ru/S/PV.3989>

<sup>24</sup> Paul Latawaski. Martin Smith, p. 14.

<sup>25</sup> Joseph Laurence Black, *Russia Faces NATO Expansion: Bearing Gifts Or Bearing Arms?*, Rowman & Littlefield, 2000, p. 113.

*“Yugoslavia’s accession to the Union is not directly related to the resolution of the issue.”<sup>26</sup>*

Despite deteriorating relations between NATO and Russia as a result of the military intervention, the official Russian policy ruled out any Russian military involvement in Kosovo that meant fighting against NATO forces.

This could be observed in an article that the Washington Post published, which stated that senior US administration officials had received assurances that Yeltsin “has no intention of interfering in the Kosovo conflict.”<sup>27</sup> In fact, even the Russian public opinion strongly opposed Russia’s involvement in the Kosovo war. In an opinion poll conducted in April including respondents from different ethnic groups in eleven different time zones, from villages to Moscow skyscrapers, we see that 86% of the participants stated that Russia “under no circumstances” should allow itself to be drawn into war.<sup>28</sup> Kremlin’s main concern had to do with the shape of the International Relations system in the post-Kosovo period and Russia’s place within it.

For the Russian intellectual circles, such as academic Alexei Arbatov, the primary concern was that NATO took over a new mission in the post-Cold War period, that of being on an equal footing with the UN and OSCE<sup>29</sup> and perhaps at a much higher level of status and power than any of these institutions. It might be

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<sup>26</sup>RFE/RL – Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty - “Duma Recommends Union with Yugoslavia”. *Newsline* – (19 April, 1999). Retrieved from: <https://www.rferl.org/a/1141887.html>

<sup>27</sup>John F. Harris, David Hoffman, “Yeltsin Warning Stirs a Temporary Tempest”, *Washington Post*, (10 April, 1999), Retrieved from: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/inatl/longterm/balkans/stories/russia041099.htm>

<sup>28</sup>James Meek, “Russia sends out mixed signals”. *The Guardian*, (15 April 1999). Retrieved from: [https://www.theguardian.com/world/1999/apr/15/balkans11?fbclid=IwAR26Yn-1X7NI8a9hkkKcyUfj5kYIPfR6EA4RCorqWB0KDKOyBkNQvly\\_RwA](https://www.theguardian.com/world/1999/apr/15/balkans11?fbclid=IwAR26Yn-1X7NI8a9hkkKcyUfj5kYIPfR6EA4RCorqWB0KDKOyBkNQvly_RwA)

<sup>29</sup>Alexei G. Arbatov, *The Transformation of Russian Military Doctrine: Lessons Learned from Kosovo and Chechnya*. Retrieved from: [https://www.marshallcenter.org/de/node/1409?fbclid=IwAR1-XlGMqmcn34S6ZNHm7LByv68pLMRLitLUTEVwOB\\_RBJ1fGQ-tPjVQvw](https://www.marshallcenter.org/de/node/1409?fbclid=IwAR1-XlGMqmcn34S6ZNHm7LByv68pLMRLitLUTEVwOB_RBJ1fGQ-tPjVQvw)

stressed that, in fact, this also reflected the concern of the Russian diplomacy.

The speech of Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov in front of the deputies in the State DUMA immediately after the start of the bombing campaign seemed to be prudent and far from the emotional language and anti-Western national-folk tones. Although relations between Russia and NATO were strained and were going through a difficult time as a result of the Kosovo issue, he nevertheless stated,

*“...anyone who hopes that we will respond similarly to these violations of the UN Charter is wrong”,* while adding that,

*“we will try even harder to form a multipolar democratic world, and a credible European system of security and stability”.*<sup>30</sup>

This implied that establishing a multipolar environment with the Russian Federation both as an important factor and as an active part of European developments in the field of security remained Russia’s key aims in the following period!

While the fact that Ivanov considered the Russian role in the Balkans - where Western diplomacy and NATO were already crucial in ending the wars in both Bosnia and Kosovo - in the context of active participation in the peaceful settlement of conflicts, and as a region of mutual cooperation and a market for infrastructure and energy projects<sup>31</sup> indicated that the role of the Russian diplomacy was increasingly limited and without a decisive voice!

Although consistently opposed to NATO attacks, Russia was at the same time interested in ending the conflict and sitting down at the table of negotiations. The appointment of Viktor Chernomyrdin - *who held the post of Prime Minister from 1992-1998 and whose policies were pro-Western* - as the Russian Federation’s special envoy to Yugoslavia, was an indication that President Yeltsin was not only seeking a deal with the West, but he also believed that Chernomyrdin was able to reach a peace agreement.

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<sup>30</sup>Heike Krieger, p. 484.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid.

Most likely, the appointment of a pro-Western figure such as Chernomyrdin implied that Russia was urging Milosevic to reconsider his positions and to accept reality. In Yeltsin's eyes, Viktor Chernomyrdin was a mediator,

*"... he held a great weight and authority in Yugoslavia, in the West, and in the eyes of the American political elite. This unique combination allowed him to set a negotiating line oriented towards a single goal: a quick cessation of military action."<sup>32</sup>*

Practically, Russia's involvement in the Kosovo talks, now discussed within the framework of the G8 that held its proceedings under the German presidency, brought about Russia's non-exclusion from international efforts to finally settle the Kosovo issue. The meeting of G8 Foreign Ministers on May 6 approved the general principles - *the 7-point plan* - which, among other things, called for an end to the violence; withdrawal of Serbian military and police forces from Kosovo; the deployment of United Nations-approved international civilian and security forces in Kosovo; the establishment of an interim administration for Kosovo that was to be decided by the Security Council; demilitarization of the KLA, etc.

These points were a combination of NATO demands addressed to Milosevic on April 12, on one hand, and the initiative proposal of the German diplomacy, on the other, which also found support from the Russian side. International efforts proved to be successful on June 3, when Viktor Chernomyrdin and EU Special Envoy Martti Ahtisaari finally persuaded Milosevic to accept the G8's demands.<sup>33</sup> The efforts of the international community to achieve peace in Kosovo paved the way for the adoption of Resolution 1244 by the Security Council, which enabled the deployment of peacekeeping troops as part of the international security presence - KFOR - under NATO leadership.

The participation of Russian peacekeepers within KFOR became an undesirable issue in the last days of the Kosovo war when about

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<sup>32</sup>John Norris, *Collision Course: NATO, Russia, and Kosovo*. Greenwood Publishing Group, 2005, pp. 42-43.

<sup>33</sup>Wolfgang Uwe Friedrich, "Kosovo and the Evolution of German Foreign Policy in the Balkans. Wolfgang-Uwe Friedrich (ed.), *The Legacy of Kosovo: German Politics and Policies in the Balkans*, German Issues, 22, (2000), p.21.

200 Russian troops entered Kosovo –*Pristina airport* – after landing a few hours before the arrival of NATO forces. The alarm rang in Western circles that this action of Russia could lead to the partition of Kosovo.<sup>34</sup> Zbigniew Brzezinski during the hearings<sup>34</sup> before the US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations in October 1999, referring to this event, noted that,

*“... the Russian government insisted on having a separate sector”!*<sup>35</sup>

Eventually, the final decision regarding the presence of Russian peacekeepers was not in favor of Russia’s position, but they were deployed in the American, German and French sectors of KFOR. Although the Russian plan was not implemented as intended, through this case Moscow aimed to strengthen its image in the eyes of the international community, signaling that Russia, despite the ongoing crisis, had to be treated as a great power. This is confirmed by General Yunus-bek Yevkurov - the current Deputy Minister of Defense of the Russian Federation - at the time the commander of Russian troops in Kosovo, who stated:

*“At that moment it became clear to the state and the world as a whole that Russia, despite being in a difficult situation, was still able to perform missions abroad... The international community was sent a message that it was too early to put an end to Russia”.*<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> U.S. Congressional Research Service. *Kosovo: Review and Analysis of Policy Objectives, 1998-June 1999*, (RL30265, July 21, 1999), Julie Kim. CRS Report for Congress. Retrieved from:

[https://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc822477/m2/1/high\\_res\\_d/RL30265\\_1999Jul21.pdf?fbclid=IwAR1DW2QKEbM1R3nfyt6KjXGRJ7ZRwLMK5ns5zU2DvKDjIJKoVX6eZquzqCk](https://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc822477/m2/1/high_res_d/RL30265_1999Jul21.pdf?fbclid=IwAR1DW2QKEbM1R3nfyt6KjXGRJ7ZRwLMK5ns5zU2DvKDjIJKoVX6eZquzqCk)

<sup>35</sup>United States, Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations. *The war in Kosovo and a postwar analysis: Hearings before the Committee on Foreign Relations United States*. Senate Hearings, April 20, September 28, and October 6, 1999, Government Printing Office, 106<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> session. Retrieved from: <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CHRG-106shrg57452/html/CHRG-106shrg57452.htm>

<sup>36</sup>Yevkurov, Yunus-Bek. “Nikto ne zhdal, chto vse budet gladko” In, *ITAR-TASS*, (11 June 2021) Retrieved from: <https://tass.ru/opinions/6232774?fbclid=IwAR2mf4VnJPGMhenHuMsFA8wRxP7igyIz uBu8sNg9b-dFVppfeP3rkvz6Ka4>

We can say that the events that the Balkans experienced first in Bosnia and later in Kosovo became for Russia a field from which it perceived itself as an important actor which the West had to consult with when it came to conflict resolution and establishing security in Europe.

One of the main objectives of the Russian Federation since the end of the Cold War – *although the country was economically and financially weak* - was to ensure that the order of the international political system was not implemented within the framework of *unipolarity* in which Russia's status would be ignored, but, instead, within a global consensus where Russia would see an active engagement.

Although the Russian Federation during the wars both in Bosnia and Kosovo was a participant in the negotiations processes within *the Contact Group* - as well as in the G8 discussions on the issue of Kosovo - its position was not decisive as far as the future of the region was concerned. Russia's objections to NATO intervention in Kosovo were largely based on the principle that the operation was conducted without a UN mandate, and that NATO as a military and political bloc was now conducting out-of-area missions. Thus, the concern was whether NATO intervention in the Balkans would precede any eventual intervention in the post-Soviet space?!

However, despite NATO aerial bombing campaign, the official Russian policy agenda did not put on hold its cooperation with Western institutions. It should be kept in mind that during that period Russia was negotiating with the International Monetary Fund to obtain a new debt which would contribute to its efforts for an economic and financial recovery. Following the NATO intervention in Kosovo, the Russian military and political leadership saw that any "obstacle" to begin the second Chechen war in September 1999 was removed. In the Russian view, since the US and NATO used military force for their own purposes, then for Russia it was more than



legitimate to start the campaign on the territory that it claimed as its own, that is, in Chechnya.<sup>37</sup>

Both the Russian public opinion and establishment were now looking for a leader who would economically revive Russia and restore it to a favorable position within the international community.

### Conclusion

In the above paper I explained the attitude and role of Russian diplomacy in the war in Kosovo and the intervention of NATO forces. In the negotiations on the Kosovo issue, the Russian Federation mainly saw its solution within the framework of the territorial integrity of Yugoslavia. The territorial aspect became a sensitive issue for Russia, due to its internal circumstances among other things. According to Russia, any epilogue of the final solution had to go through the mechanisms of the UN.

This intervention led to the freezing of Russian-Western relations, although it did not completely break them off. The main Russian dissatisfaction was over the way the intervention was carried out, namely by bypassing the UN. Moreover, the concern of Russian diplomacy had to do with the fact that in the following period its position in the international system would be increasingly neglected!

Russia saw its status as a *great power* and an important global actor, on which peace and security in the world is dependent, in the framework of the Security Council.

The Russian state refused to recognize a security architecture on the European continent based on a NATO-centric dominance which excluded Russian participation. This was mainly where the anger of Russian diplomacy resulted from, with NATO's military intervention in the Balkan region as well as with its expansion towards Eastern Europe.

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<sup>37</sup> Sharyl Cross, "Russia and NATO toward the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Conflicts and Peacekeeping in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo", *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, 15/2 (2002), p. 32.

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