

RECONCILIATION AS A NATIONAL SECURITY TOOL FOR KOSOVO AND SERBIA

Albatros Rexhaj

PhD, National Security Studies, UBT College,
Pristina, Kosovo. Email: albatrosrexhaj@gmail.com

DOI: [10.5281/zenodo.13470524](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.13470524)

Abstract

Kosovo and Serbia share a strategic goal, the integration into the EU, defined as the critical national interest of both sides. However, due to the failure to reconcile a new armed conflict might emerge. While asking how the failure to reconcile impacts Kosovo's and Serbia's strategic goals, this paper aims to define and explain reconciliation's relevance and importance as a national security tool. Taking note of neo-functional principles of interdependence and cooperation as founding pillars of the EU and the realist offensive/defensive setting, which characterises the present relations between Kosovo and Serbia, this paper argues that, alongside the EU integration goal, genuine reconciliation should be Kosovo and Serbia's ultimate national interest and security goal as a bedrock for normalising the relations.

Keywords: Reconciliation, Kosovo, Serbia, Trust, National Security, EU, Peace.

INTRODUCTION

Traditionally, for decision-makers and scholars, national security was primarily contextualised around the concept of military security, narrowly understood as the ability of states to defend themselves. The end of the cold war and the new emerging dynamics that followed have reshaped the national security paradigm from a concept revolving around military security towards a broader definition. In the contemporary setting of international relations, national security covers almost everything that can affect the ability of a particular state to develop and prosper.

The case of the conflict between Serbia and Kosovo is one of the cases where the pre and post-cold war national security paradigms co-exist. Kosovo considers itself an independent country, while Serbia vows to struggle arguing that eventually Kosovo needs to be reintegrated into Serbia. In the meantime, both Kosovo and Serbia have declared their strategic determination for EU membership.

On 27 February 2023, Kosovo and Serbia reached an agreement in which, among other, it is said that "Neither Party will block, nor encourage others to block, the other Party's progress in their respective EU path based on their own merits. Both Parties shall respect the values referred to in Articles 2 and 21 of the Treaty of the European Union", (EEAS, 2023).

The problem, identified by this research, is that the current national security policies of Kosovo and Serbia are not in sync with the publicly declared strategic goals for European integrations, peaceful resolution of conflicts and cooperation.

The existing prior research indicates that these policies are also not in sync with the opinion, desires and aspirations of ordinary citizens since ordinary people, regardless of ethnicity or other background, prefer reconciliation and cooperation to resolve differences.

RECONCILIATION AS A NATIONAL SECURITY TOOL

According to the Oxford English dictionary, reconciliation is the action of restoring estranged people or parties to friendship; the result of this; the fact of being reconciled (Oxford, 2023). The term “reconciliation” can refer either to a process by which transformation of relations after destructive conflicts occurs, or to an outcome of such process (Kriesberg 2004). For the purposes of this paper, we need to focus on the meaning of reconciliation in the context of post conflict situations. Desmond Tutu, the South African Anglican bishop and theologian, known for his work as an anti-apartheid and human rights activist, said reconciliation is the most natural thing in the world (Tutu, 2007) However, even in this narrow context, there is no formal or widely accepted definition of reconciliation. In the context of post conflict situations, reconciliation matters because the consequences of not reconciling can be serious. Without the change of destructive attitudes and behaviour and replacing them with new constructive relationships, the absence of active conflict, or reaching a certain peace agreement ending hostilities, is not enough.

Peace agreements help to end violence and guide initial reforms, they do not bring about conditions that automatically overcome the rifts that generated violence. Grievances, injustices and antagonisms left unaddressed can – and often do – form the basis for renewed conflict and violence (Clogg & Parlevliet, 2021). This means that without reconciliation the fighting can break out again. From the contextualisation above one can conclude that “peace” is essentially connected and dependent on reconciliation. According to Bar-Siman-Tav, reconciliation poses a condition for shifting interim peace to a stable one. ‘Only reconciliation can build mutual trust and provide mutual assurances for maintaining peace. Reconciliation is probably the most difficult condition [for peace], because it asks for a deep cognitive change, a real change of beliefs, ideology, emotions...’ (Bar-Siman-Tov 2004).

Mollendorf argues that reconciliation is a normative ideal that can be pursued through public policy (Mollendorf, 2007). This implies that reconciliation can imply significant political value and can be pursued as national policy goal. Even though reconciliation seeks to repair damage from past violence and prevent new conflict, the existing literature has almost no record of reconciliation as a national security goal. Interestingly, the rare examples of attempts to recognize reconciliation as a goal to increase national security come from the Indian subcontinent. Saparamadu, a lawyer and civic activist from Sri Lanka, highlight the interesting detail of how certain governments link national security to one community. Saparamadu notes that this puts the national security agenda and the reconciliation agenda in direct contradiction (Saparamadu, 2019). Satheesmohan from the Department of Strategic Studies, Faculty of Defence and Strategic Studies of the Sri Lankan Defence University, promotes reconciliation, as a way forward to inclusive National Security. Satheesmohan argues that national reconciliation could be a stable platform for sustainable peace and security in the post-conflict phase, highlighting that an inclusive national security is a necessity to strengthen national security (Satheesmohan, 2015).

Gotabaya Rajapaksa, former President of Sri Lanka, also notes that national security can be enhanced through reconciliation (Rajapaksa, 2014). President Rajapaksa appears to recognize that reconciliation is critical for peacebuilding and conflict prevention; it is the best form of conflict prevention and key to sustaining peace in the long term. Along these lines of thought, General Nasir Khan Janjua, former National

Security Adviser to the Pakistani government and the President of the National Defence University, argues that at a regional level, reconciliation involves power politics, power projections, clash of wills, clash of nation hoods, domination, intimidations and undermining competitions. Janjua argues that at a regional level reconciliation is undermined in the name of nationhood regardless of the suffering it can cause (Janjua, 2012).

Even though it is not widely recognized as such, the case of Franco-German reconciliation is a solid example of how reconciliation has contributed to the national security of both France and Germany. From a historical point of view, according to Ulrich Krotz, Franco-German relations have had three grand periods: "hereditary enmity" (down to 1945), "reconciliation" (1945–1963) and since 1963 the "special relationship" embodied in a cooperation called Franco-German Friendship (Krotz, 2014). In less than 100 years, these two European powers have gone from being bitter enemies and fighting countless wars to enjoying a 'special relationship' of resilient cooperative bilateralism. As Lily Gardner Feldman writes, "in the annals of international relations, there is probably no equivalent of the dense network of ties, institutions, and common policies that bind the policy elites and societies of France and Germany today. Enmity has been transformed into amity." France and Germany not only managed to permanently terminate a long history of conflict, fierce national rivalries, and claims of "hereditary enmity," but managed to transform their relationship into one of trusted partners, friends, and allies. According to Quentin Lopinot, "Germany and France may be the two countries that have traveled the farthest in the shortest period of time to transform their relationship from bitter enemies to close friends (Huber, 2020).

CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

As noted by the Nobel Prize Committee, transforming Europe from a continent of war to one of peace is the greatest accomplishment of the EU. In its explanation, on why the Committee decided to award the Peace Prize to the EU, the Nobel Committee turns its eyes to the European interior: such former arch-enemies as France and Germany have become permanent friends and close partners, and the division into East and West has been overcome. It also sees the EU's foreign policy as having an important role to play: the EU enlargement policy is, according to the Committee, contributing to reconciliation in the Balkans; it is also having an impact beyond its borders in Europe and so helping to spread democracy and human rights (Leininger, 2012). The EU extended the membership prospect to Western Balkans countries at the Thessaloniki Summit in 2003. The EU's main goal is stabilising and democratising the region while preparing it for full integration into the EU. While strictly speaking not a conflict resolution tool, the accession process has always been expected to have a positive spill-over effect on reconciliation as it would have incentivised the governments in Belgrade and Pristina to put behind old quarrels in the name of a common European future (Bargues et al, 2022). However, despite efforts to create this spill-over effect, credible survey's, conducted by independent organisations, paint a grim picture related to the prospects for regional peace.

In June 2022, the International Republican Institute published its 2022 Western Balkans Regional Survey, among other also on the public support for EU integrations. The survey results show an overwhelming public support in Kosovo for EU integrations and a decline of public support in Serbia (IRI, 2022).

An outside observer could easily argue that with its determination to embrace European values and become members of the EU, Kosovo and Serbia, or Serbs and Albanians as two distinct ethnic groups, are aspiring to follow in the footsteps of France and Germany in overcoming former divisions and animosities. However, this logical assumption is not matched by the reality on the ground. The Security Strategies of Serbia and Kosovo are focused on similar goals (e.g. fight against terrorism and transnational crime, interoperability with the states involved in the European security structures and the NATO Partnership for Peace program), goals shared by the rest of the region. However, despite the declared commitment towards EU integrations as a joint goal, Kosovo and Serbia have failed to reconcile and normalise relations.

Pages 24 and 25 of the National Security Strategy of Serbia, chapter on security challenges, risks and threats, talks entirely about measures to enforce Serbia's claim over Kosovo:

Separatist aspirations in the Republic of Serbia are fully manifested in the territory of the Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija, which has had a negative impact on other areas in the south of the Republic of Serbia, but which have no greater influence on other parts of the state. Unilateral actions of the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government in Priština, attempts at obtaining membership of international organisations and requests to decrease and abolish international presence in the Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija indicate continued attempts to secede that part of the territory of the Republic of Serbia, which poses a threat to our national interests that will, according to expectations, be continued in the period to come.

Unlawfully unilaterally declared independence of the territory administratively covered by the Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija is not founded on the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia, the Charter of the United Nations and the UN Security Council Resolution 1244, and, as such, it is unacceptable for the Republic of Serbia since it jeopardises its national values and interests.

Armed rebellion can jeopardise the security of the Republic of Serbia, whereat the greatest threat is posed by extremist groups which operate in the area of the Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija (MoDRS, 2022).

Page 7 of Kosovo's Security Strategy highlights Serbia's claim as the cardinal security threat:

The core security threat for the Republic of Kosovo derives from Serbia's territorial claims, violation of sovereignty by illegal structures supported by the Serbian state and from the active and ongoing efforts of the Serbian state to prevent Kosovo's advancement and integration into Euro-Atlantic structures, and other international organizations and mechanisms.

The possibility of a conventional military attack against the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic of Kosovo is low, primarily due to the presence of the NATO-led Kosovo Force (KFOR) and the increase of Kosovo Security Force protection capacities. The global and regional security environment requires that such a threat be constantly assessed and considered, because despite the fact that the potential of any military action remains deterred, Serbia has made its intervention intent clear and continuously demonstrates military means and capabilities (GoRKS, 2022).

Due to the failure to normalise relations, Kosovo and Serbia cannot cooperate and share experiences. Furthermore, the failure to reach a comprehensive agreement on the normalisation of relations creates a context where the authorities of both sides must consider the possibility that a new armed conflict might remerge.

In October 2021, the Economist reported on Serbia's "weapons shopping spree" and \$1.4 billion-a-year military budget under the headline "A Balkans arms race" (Vuksanovic, 2021). While presenting the 2022 and 2027 military development plan additional investments have been announced with at least €500 million to be added to the annual military budget (EuroActiv, 2021). In response, in the course of five years, Kosovo has doubled its defence budget from 51 million euros in 2017 to 102.3 million euros in 2022 (Sopi, 2022) The 2023 budget foresees a total 123 million euros for defence, a 20% increase compared to 2022 (Himbeqa, 2022).

In addition to the regular government spending, Kosovo Government has established a special voluntary fund, named the Kosovo Security Fund, and has asked citizens and members of the diaspora to contribute to it (Bami, 2022). In July 2023, Kosovo bought a significant shipment of modern weapons from Turkey, including Turkish drones Bayraktar TB-2, which gained fame after being used by Ukraine in warfare against Russia (Euronews, 2023). In March 2021, the Kosovo Centre for Security Studies observed the Kosovo citizens' perception through one open-ended question without pre-defined options. The majority of respondents, respectively 44 percent, hold the opinion that Serbia is the main external threat to the security of Kosovo. A large proportion of respondents, 20 percent of them, stated that they have no information on what potentially poses an external threat to Kosovo's security. The "Others" category summarizes the less-frequent answers that do not consist 1 percent of the total answer and mostly includes answers that are more relevant to the internal threats or threats posed to immediate communities (KCSS, 2021).

In a similar survey conducted in 2022 in Serbia, by the Belgrade Centre for Security Policy, 40% of respondents believes that there will a new war because of Kosovo. In the same survey, regarding the possible instigator of the new war, the Serbian public opinion is convinced that Kosovo Albanians will provoke it.

Another survey, conducted jointly by the Kosovo Centre for Security Studies and the Belgrade Centre for Security Policy, shows that citizens of Serbia are less optimistic compared to Kosovo citizens about the future of the relations between the two.

Majority of the Serbs do not expect to see normalization of relations with Kosovo Albanians regardless of the outcome of the dialogue. The citizens' perception of the Kosovo-Serbia dialogue seems to suggest that they do not view the process to mean normalization between the two societies, but it is rather seen as normalization between governments. Therefore, normalization of the relations process should not supplant the clear necessity that these results show for a process of reconciliation and healing between peoples of Serbia and Kosovo (KCSS&BCSP, 2021).

The problem, identified by this research, is that the current national security policies are not in sync with the publicly declared strategic goals for European integrations, peaceful resolution of conflicts and cooperation. The existing prior research indicates that these policies are also not in sync with the opinion, desires and aspirations of ordinary citizens since ordinary people, regardless of ethnicity or other background, prefer reconciliation and cooperation to resolve differences. These findings are reconfirmed with an in-depth survey conducted exclusively for this research. With

these data in hand, and other relevant observations, this research tries to provide a new approach to policy building to solve the identified gap between the existing national security policies, the declared strategic goals, and the aspirations of ordinary people.

THEORETICAL RATIONALE

While reflecting on the works of Walt and Brooks, Stares argues that states define their national interests by pursuing to maximise their military force. This theory is in line with the realist view of international relations as a reflection of the anarchic order of international relations. As Stares argues, self-help is an unavoidable fact of life with no sovereign body to maintain international order (Stares, 1998). Brooks analyses the nuances between the two duelling contemporary realism paradigms, neorealism and post-classical realism. According to Brooks, both paradigms have a systemic focus; both are state-centric; both view international politics as inherently competitive; both emphasise material factors rather than nonmaterial factors, such as ideas and institutions; and both assume states are egoistic actors that pursue self-help (Brooks, 2003). In the global context of international order, since the UN is not a supranational organisation capable of governing international order, the realism paradigm assumptions of states are valid. However, in the regional context of contemporary Europe inspired by neo-functionalism ideas, a national policy driven by realist assumptions is questionable.

The earliest advocates of neo-functionalism, Ernst Haas and Leon Lindberg used this theory to explain the creation of the European Economic Community (Niemann, 2016). The roots of neo-functionalism can be found in a very general assumption, common to many social science theories, namely that the consequences of some behaviours can explain their existence and trajectory. For whatever reason – organic, mechanical, ideological, or ethical – human beings decide to resolve their problems by engaging in specific tasks ("functions"), which usually involves cooperation with others. If the functions are satisfactorily accomplished, the cooperation will persist and may even become institutionalised (Niemann, 2016). In contrast to the realist paradigms, the neo-functionalism paradigm is focused on ideas and international institutions.

Neo-functionalism is at the core of the EU integrations. Neo-functionalism is associated with the political and economic goals and the integration strategies of the founding fathers of the EU. Jean Monnet believed that achieving integration in one sector of common policy amongst sovereign states would eventually lead to a 'spillover' into other policy areas (Dunn, 2012). The spillover concept is at the core of neofunctionalism. Spillover is defined as a process in which the creation and deepening of integration in one economic sector would create pressures for further economic integration within and beyond that sector, and greater authoritative capacity at the European level (Rosamond, 2000)

Monnet's predictions were accurate since, over time, the European Union has evolved into a hybrid organisation, partly an intergovernmental organisation and partly a supranational organisation. Supranational elements lie with the economic, political and justice/home affairs integration. In contrast, the intergovernmental elements lie with the common foreign policy and security policy. While the United Nations, as a 100% international organisation, is based on voluntary cooperation and coordination among its members and that the member states do not surrender any power (or sovereignty)

to the UN, decisions taken by a supranational organisation must be obeyed by the member states because member states do surrender power in specific areas to the higher organisation (CES, 2010). It goes without saying that, even though security/defence remains a sovereign prerogative, EU member states are focused on collective security rather than fearing each other.

In the conventional sense, according to Holmes, national security is the safekeeping of the nation as a whole. Its highest order of business is the protection of the nation and its people from attack and other external dangers by maintaining armed forces and guarding state secrets (Holmes, 2014). This definition is fully in line with the realism paradigms. Any country outside of the EU context develops its national security strategy in line with the realism paradigms by primarily focusing on maximising its military power. However, due to the supranational nature of the EU, the EU member states are guided by the principle of maximising cooperation among member states, in the context of the EU Global Strategy, which in 2016 has replaced the EU Security Strategy (EU, 2016). It is self-implied that non-member states which aspire to EU membership should adopt the principle of cooperation, not just with the existing EU member states but also with other aspiring member states. In the case of Kosovo and Serbia, both sides should focus on removing obstacles obstructing the expected cooperation.

According to Geneva-based DCAF, a leading think tank in security studies, a national security policy is an official description of how a state aims to provide for its security and that of its population. National security policies consider national interests and values, governance structures and decision-making processes. Usually, they culminate in a long-term vision of state and human security in the future. (DCAF, 2015). EU integration and membership for Serbia and Kosovo is a national interest and strategic goal. Recently, on 14 December 2021, in its conclusion on enlargement, stabilisation and association process, The Council of the EU has reaffirmed the critical importance that the normalisation of relations has on the EU paths of both Kosovo and Serbia: The Council expects Kosovo and Serbia to engage in the EU-facilitated Dialogue in good faith and in the spirit of compromise to achieve a comprehensive legally binding agreement in accordance with international law and EU acquis. This agreement should address all outstanding issues and contribute to regional stability. This is crucial so that Kosovo and Serbia can advance on their respective European paths (CoEU, 2021). However, despite this conditioning, reconciliation has not been declared a national interest by either side.

Reconciliation is the logical foundation of any process related to normalising relations between former enemies. Daniel Bar-Tal, professor of psychology at Tel Aviv University, Israel, defines 'reconciliation' as "a psychological process for forming lasting peace". In this process, past rivals come to mutual recognition and acceptance, have invested interests and goals in developing peaceful relations, feel mutual trust, positive attitudes, and sensitivity and consideration of the other party's needs and interests (Brounéus, 2003). Professor Brandon Hamber from the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation in South Africa, among other definitions, defines 'reconciliation' as an ideology based on an intercommunal understanding and as a form of community building (Hamber, 1998). Hamber's emphasise on community building is applicable in our case study. An EU without internal borders, actively promoting internal cooperation and inter-dependable security, is built on community-based principles (Geremek, 2005); therefore, reconciliation is paramount for Kosovo

and Serbia. While a national security policy is a general description that sets priorities and goals for security provision, a national security strategy, as a practical document, describes how the goals set in a national security policy can be achieved (DCAF, 2015). The National Security Strategy of Serbia highlights the “improvement of national security and defence through the process of European integration” (NSS Serbia, 2021). As it can be seen, the EU integration, as a leading national priority and goal of Serbia, directly affects the contents of the national security strategy, including the field of defence. However, considering that Serbia’s EU integration process is conditioned with the normalisation of relations with Kosovo, the National Security Strategy of Serbia lacks a practical vision on how reconciliation with Kosovo is going to improve the national security and defence of Serbia. The same reasoning applies to Kosovo as well. The governing strategy (2021-2025) of the Government of Kosovo, the section on national security and defence, focuses on the build-up of military forces, NATO and EU membership (GoK, 2021), totally ignoring reconciliation as a bedrock of any normalisation of relations with Serbia.

At present, enormous resources are invested in defence, militarisation and attempts to undermine the stability of the other side. Kosovo and Serbia are in a constant offensive/defensive realist setting, with both sides arguing that investments in the security/defence sector are critical for national security. Offensive realism seeks power and influence to achieve security through domination and hegemony (Lobell, 2010); thus, reconciliation, or any other type of normalisation of relations, is practically ignored.

The law of diminishing marginal utility finds its application in our case study. The father of consumer choice theory, Alfred Marshall, believed that the more of something you have, the less of it you want: a phenomenon economists call diminishing marginal utility (GJ, 2013). Regardless of the continually increased buying of weapons and military equipment, arguing it as an investment in security, authorities of both Kosovo and Serbia fail to create good security feeling the public would acknowledge, since incidents, and not cooperation, is the keyword of the public narrative. The above-presented state of play between Kosovo and Serbia is like the prisoner’s dilemma model from game theory. The prisoner’s dilemma is a fundamental example in game theory where rational actors fail to cooperate even if they would benefit from doing so (Jervis, 1978). By focusing on their narrow self-interest, both parties invest their resources on militarisation and efforts focused on undermining each other, meaning that in the long run, they both lose. However, if they would focus on their collective self-interest, which is the process of EU integrations as a common strategic goal, an investment in genuine reconciliation would end up being a success for both sides since resources which Serbia and Kosovo currently invest in could invest in other, genuinely important, public projects. Failure to reconcile influences the ability to attract foreign investments, a critical element for the economic development, and, most importantly, the progress of EU integrations as a strategic goal of both sides.

CONCLUSION

The traditionalist conception of security is the so-called negative security, state-centric and military-centric, while positive security is not the replacement of negative security; instead, it is something additional (Roe, 2008). For security to be meaningful and durable, it would have to amount to a positive or stable peace structure. This would imply considerably more than negative peace equated with an absence of war, as

merely one particular form of 'direct violence'. Genuine peace and security would presuppose an elimination of, or at least a reduction of, structural violence (Moller, 2000). When Paleri's definition of security, as something that means "untroubled by danger and fear" (Paleri, 2008), is analysed through the prism of findings presented above one can argue that ordinary people aspire positive security.

The theory of positive security contends that a central foundation for enabling or creating security is trust (Gjorv, 2012). As suggested by Bar-Tal, trust is essential for any reconciliation process. In the case of Kosovo and Serbia, trust-building, as a critical component of the reconciliation process, should be identified as a national security goal, as a tool to achieving normalisation of relations, a pre-condition for the already defined strategic goal of EU membership, and also as a tool of achieving positive structures of security. A genuine commitment towards EU integrations should imply that Serbia and Kosovo abandon their offensive/defensive realism paradigms, which dictates the need for maximising security, in favour of a neo functionalist paradigm of relations which dictates the focus on shared interests and needs; therefore, the positive security as the goal. If both sides are genuinely committed to EU integrations, as a model of neo-functionalist regulation of relations, reconciliation, as a pre-condition for the normalisation of relations, should be the primary objective of achieving national security.

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