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DOCUMENTS FROM THE ARCHIVES OF THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF THE FRENCH REPUBLIC ON THE STANCES OF THE US, FRANCE AND CANADA REGARDING THE 1981/1982 KOSOVO CRISIS

Abstract: Based on the materials gathered from the archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the French Republic in Paris, this article will present the views of the US, France and Canada on the 1981 Kosovo crisis, when unrest and rioting by ethnic Albanians occurred, but also the following year, when (at least on the face of it) order was restored in Serbia's southern province. This approach made it possible to draw comparative conclusions as to whether and to what extent the positions of these countries evolved during the period observed. These include mainly confidential reports sent by these countries to NATO, whose key topic is the situation in Kosovo during 1981–1982. In addition, diplomatic notes (France) and intelligence security reports (a report compiled by the General Secretariat for Defense and National Security of the French Republic) were reviewed. One of the objectives of this paper is to present to the scientific community in Serbia some lesser-known facts about the Kosovo issue—specifically positions of the great powers at a time when the Kosovo issue was not so much in the focus of the international community, starting from 1981, when one of the pivotal crises in the history of the Kosovo issue occurred.

Keywords: Kosovo, 1981 Kosovo crisis, SFRY, USA, France, Canada.

1. Introduction

Up until 1945, the area of Kosovo and Metohija was not territorially defined as a compact one, but was part of some wider areas, such as the Turkish Kosovo Vilayet. In the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, it was divided into regions, and

in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia into administrative subdivisions or *banovinas*, while during World War I and II, it was fragmented into occupation zones.¹ On September 3, 1945, the National Assembly of Serbia adopted the Law on the Establishment and Organization of the Autonomous Kosovo and Metohija Region (AKMR).² From a strictly legal point of view, it is not possible to refer to autonomy before the passing of this Law.³

The Constitution of the FPRY was adopted on January 31, 1946. Under this act, Yugoslavia was defined as a federal people's state in the form of a republic, a community of equal nations, comprised of six sovereign states—people's republics—with the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina and the Autonomous Region of Kosovo and Metohija being part of the People's Republic of Serbia.⁴

Legally, the completion of the KMR's autonomy is reflected in the adoption of the Statute of the Autonomous KMR in 1948, which, to some degree, repeated the provisions of the 1946 FPRY Constitution and of the 1947 PRS Constitutions, but some differences were noted (the region's territorial scope, powers and competences were more precisely specified in the Statute).⁵ The 1953 FPRY Constitutional Law equated the organization of government of the autonomous units with that of the republics, as a step in bringing the autonomies closer to the status of federal units (both Serbia and these units now had executive councils as bodies of executive power).⁶

On April 7, 1963, the Federal People's Assembly promulgated the second Yugoslav Constitution, changing the name from FPRY to the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY). The Autonomous Region of Kosovo and Metohija became equal in rights with the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina, and its name was changed accordingly to the Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija; both Provinces were part of the Socialist Republic of Serbia (SRS).⁷

After the national question was placed on the agenda of the 8th Congress of the League of Communists in 1964, the rise of aspirations of the Yugoslav republics for greater political independence can be observed.⁸ Following the 1966 Brioni Plenum, the Province gradually gained greater autonomy within the Federation by means of constitutional reform. Remodeling of the Federation began with the adoption of amendments to the Constitution of SFRY during 1967 and 1968, which, at that time, already showed some elements of a confederal state setup.⁹ They were followed by amendments to the Constitution of Serbia and to the Constitutional Law of the Socialist Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija in 1969, which further bolstered the statehood of Serbia's southern province.¹⁰

The violent demonstrations of Albanians (primarily university and high school students) in Kosovo and Metohija in 1968 marked the culmination of the volatile political

¹ Gatalović 2014: 52.

² Gatalović 2014: 53; Vukadinović 2021:163.

³ Vukadinović 2021:163.

⁴ Gatalović 2014: 54.

⁵ Vukadinović 2021: 292–295.

⁶ Vukadinović 2021: 299.

⁷ Gatalović 2014: 92; Vukadinović 2021: 456–457.

⁸ Gatalović 2018: 25; Vukadinović 2021: 511–515.

⁹ Gatalović 2014: 518.

¹⁰ Vukadinović 2021: 726.

atmosphere that ensued after the Brioni Plenum.¹¹ The protests began on November 27, 1968, in Gnjilane, spreading to Priština, Podujevo and Uroševac and turning violent (leaving dozens of people wounded and one protester killed).¹² At the demonstrations, Albanians asserted their demands for secession, a Constitution and the establishment of the University in Priština.¹³ The lukewarm reaction to these events by the authorities (just sixteen people were prosecuted on charges of hostile propaganda)¹⁴ and by the League of Communists, cover-up attempts, along with the provincial leadership's denials of the burgeoning of Albanian nationalism, all gave fresh impetus to local Albanians to keep dreaming their dream of secession.

The Kosovo Albanians' desire for a University in Priština materialized already in 1969. Its establishment was preceded by the introduction of classes taught in Albanian in higher education three years before. On November 4, 1966, the teachers' and students' assembly of the Faculty of Law and Economics, in the presence of the President of the Provincial Assembly's Education and Culture Council and the Provincial Secretary for Education and Culture, introduced teaching in Albanian in five courses at that faculty.¹⁵ Officially, the University of Priština was founded on November 18, 1969, when the Provincial Assembly passed the Law on the Establishment of the University.¹⁶ It was the very same University that later became the venue of unrest leading to protests in 1981, this time accompanied by a harsher and more resolute response from the authorities and the Party.

On February 21, 1974, the Council of Nations of the Federal Assembly promulgated the new Yugoslav Constitution, based on the supplemented constitutional amendments adopted in the period from 1967 to 1971. Under the new Constitution of the SFRY, the state was defined as a federal union of six equal republics and two autonomous provinces and the latter were practically granted the same functions as the republics, while the Yugoslav nations received the right to self-determination.¹⁷ This completed the abolition of Serbian sovereignty in Kosovo and Metohija and, therefore, new demonstrations by ethnic Albanians and the great crisis that erupted in Kosovo in 1981 should come as no surprise.

2. The 1981 Crisis in Kosovo and Metohija

Less than a year after the death of Josip Broz Tito, President of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, Albanian demonstrations broke out in Kosovo and Metohija (March 1981). By the end of March, they gradually reached the scale of mass demonstration, turning, in the first three days of April, into an attempt at open rebellion.¹⁸ The students voiced their dissatisfaction with poor food and living standards in the student canteen in

¹¹ Vukadinović 2021: 663.

¹² Vukadinović 2021: 665–667.

¹³ Gatalović 2018: 165–202.

¹⁴ Vukadinović 2021: 673.

¹⁵ Gatalović 2018: 324–325.

¹⁶ Gatalović 2018: 345–346.

¹⁷ Gatalović 2014: 612–613.

¹⁸ Ristanović 2019: 203.

Priština, the place where the Albanian riots actually began.¹⁹

Social reasons and the poor economic situation led to mass discontent among the Kosovo Albanians, and the situation escalated when the students were joined by other social categories—high school students, teachers, factory workers.²⁰ Little by little, the protest movement was spreading, and it became evident that economic and social demands were replaced by national ones, whose bottom line was the Kosovo Albanians' aspiration that the SAP Kosovo should be given the status of republic, and to some extent, also their desire for the unification of Kosovo with Albania.²¹ In Serbia's southern province, peace was restored only after the arrival of the federal police forces, together with special police forces from other republics and units of the Yugoslav People's Army (JPA).²² According to official sources, the total death toll of these violent events in Kosovo and Metohija was nine people—eight protesters and one police officer.²³

3. The 1981 Kosovo Crisis from the Perspective of the US, France and Canada

The 1981 Kosovo crisis attracted the attention of many countries, primarily the Western Bloc. What is common to all countries presently belonging to the "Quint" is that, during the 1981 Kosovo crisis, they gave explicit or implicit support to preserving the territorial integrity of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) and shared the view that the Kosovo issue was exclusively SFRY's internal policy matter.²⁴

It is possible to trace the US view of the 1981 Kosovo crisis through two contemporary documents—one is a telegram sent by the French ambassador from Washington to the head office in April 1981²⁵ and the other is an American note sent to NATO in September the same year.²⁶

In the first document, dated April 8, 1981, entitled "The US and the Kosovo Crisis" and authored by the French ambassador, we learn about the US position regarding the spring events in Kosovo. It should be emphasized that in 1981, Washington was explicit in its view that it was an internal issue of the SFRY and that the US had made it clear to the Yugoslav authorities that the US policy would continue to favor the unity and integrity of Yugoslavia.²⁷ We find out about the causes of the crisis from the second document entitled "Yugoslavia—Internal Situation," which provides us with a more detailed insight into the US stance toward the Kosovo crisis.

¹⁹ Pavlović 2009: 60–62. The following authors also wrote about the 1981 Kosovo crisis: Mertus 1999: 29–41; Vickers 1998: 197–201; Šuvaković, Stevanović 2018: 1204–206; Hetemi 2020: 171–199.

²⁰ Todorović Lazić 2024: 455.

²¹ Ristanović 2018: 371.

²² Ristanović 2019: 197.

²³ Ristanović 2018: 371.

²⁴ Todorović Lazić 2024: 453–470.

²⁵ Diplomatic archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the French Republic (DA MSRF), 1930 INVA, Directorate for Europe, Yugoslavia 1981–1985, folder 2, file 14, ref. no. 858, "The US and the Kosovo Crisis," April 8, 1981.

²⁶ DA MSRF 1930-2-14-763/EU, 'Yugoslavia—Internal Situation,' confidential, NATO, September 23, 1981.

²⁷ Todorović Lazić 2024: 464.

Kosovo demonstrates problems typical of the economically underdeveloped regions of the Third World. The region is the poorest part of Yugoslavia, with an excessive population growth rate with no choices for graduates, while language and social barriers prevent Kosovo Albanians from assimilating into the Yugoslav society. At the same time, Albanian youth has become largely politicized.²⁸

The document highlights the view that Albanians presently have no allies in their efforts toward independence.²⁹

Based on the information available, the fulfillment of the Kosovo Albanians' ambitions for full equality, expressed in their demand for the status of republic within the Federation, is not feasible in the present circumstances. The Serbs would oppose the separation of Kosovo and Albanians are currently unable to mobilize enough powerful allies within the Federation to force the Serbs to cave in.³⁰

The document allows us to identify the factors which, according to the US, favor the continuity and stability of the SFRY. These are: the political system, armed forces, aversion to radical change, fear of the Soviets, past experience of ethnic conflict, worldwide political support enjoyed by the SFRY and its economic basis.³¹ For each of these factors, the document provides an explanation. It starts with the political system, stating that, regardless of its imperfections, the Yugoslav system, as it remained after Tito's death, should not be disposed of but improved.³² For the US, the SFRY's armed forces were a national institution that was cohesive, effective and committed to preserving Tito's legacy.³³ The document also cites the fear of the Soviets as a factor, due to a deterioration in the relations between the East and the West and the increased anxiety among Yugoslavs that the Soviets might respond within the Eastern Bloc.³⁴ Interestingly, the aversion to radical change is also mentioned as a factor. The US view was that the prosperity during Tito's era had entrenched a bourgeois slogan, "Something can be lost," and hence, Yugoslavs were not inclined to radical change.³⁵ Another reason that speaks for stability is the historical experience of ethnic conflict. For the US, the historical experience of ethnic conflicts and their somber legacy are still alive, and the Yugoslav people know all too well the price of nationalist extremism.³⁶ Another factor of stability was the broad political support that Yugoslavia enjoys both in the West and in Third World countries.³⁷ Finally, the document explains why the economic basis is an important factor. By "economic basis," the US means people, land, natural resources, and geography that can sustain considerable growth and evolution toward a modern and developed state, if the government can adjust to a more rational decision-making system at the federal level.³⁸

²⁸ DA MSRF 1930-2-14-763/EU; Todorović Lazić 2024: 464.

²⁹ DA MSRF 1930-2-14-763/EU.

³⁰ DA MSRF 1930-2-14-763/EU; Todorović Lazić 2024: 465.

³¹ DA MSRF 1930-2-14-763/EU.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*

The French viewpoint of the Kosovo crisis will be reviewed through the analysis of two documents. The first one is a note from the French Embassy in Belgrade dated April 22, 1981,³⁹ and the second is a Memo from the Secretariat General for Defense and National Security (Secrétariat général de la défense et de la sécurité nationale–SGDSN) dated May 21, 1981, entitled “Yugoslavia at a Test with Kosovo Crisis.”⁴⁰

During the course of 1981, France maintained its position that demonstrations in Kosovo were a warning that showed an explosion was possible, and that these demonstrations clearly sent a danger signal and the first confirmation of troubles after Tito’s death.⁴¹ For France, the political credibility and preservation of the national balance within the SFRY would largely depend on how the Kosovo issue was tackled henceforth.⁴²

In terms of the causes leading to insurgency, the French believed that the unrest in Kosovo was mainly due to socioeconomic reasons and cited the alarming state of economic underdevelopment, exacerbated by the rapid growth of the Albanian population.⁴³

The French position on the Yugoslav authorities’ response to insurrection in the Province was unambiguous.

The Yugoslav authorities, surprised by the severity of the clashes, responded vigorously, first at the level of the Province and then also at the Republic and Federation level. As for the demands aimed at transforming Kosovo into a federal republic, such a demand poses a threat to the territorial integrity of the Yugoslav state and may lead to its disintegration.⁴⁴

What is immediately noticeable about the French perspective is the fear that riots might spill over to the other Yugoslav republics with a significant percentage of the Albanian population.

Violence, repression, a state of emergency, security measures involving the YPA and bodies of the general people’s defense indicate the leadership’s resolve to crack down on this blaze of nationalism fast, in order to reduce any risk of its potential spillover to Macedonia and Montenegro.⁴⁵

It should also be mentioned what the French viewed as the potential to improve or aggravate the relations between Serbia and its southern province in the future.

Replacing those at the Party helm within the Kosovo leadership, as well as decisions made about the development of the region, could lead to the economic renewal of the Province. On the other hand, demographic developments that prompt many Serbs to leave because they increasingly feel like a minority could lead to a change in the status of the Province and its relations with Serbia. At present, the positions of the federal authorities are very firm, much along the same lines as Croatian or Serbian nationalism was treated in some previous situations. Aware of the fragile unity that exists in the country, the Yugoslav authorities have affirmed their commitment to maintaining national unity.⁴⁶

³⁹ DA MSRF 1930-2-14-128/EU, 22 April 1981.

⁴⁰ DA MSRF 1930-2-14-11, ‘Yugoslavia at Test with Kosovo Crisis,’ confidential–defense, May 21, 1981.

⁴¹ DA MSRF 1930-2-14-11.

⁴² DA MSRF 1930-2-14-11; Todorović Lazić 2024: 459.

⁴³ DA MSRF 1930-2-14-11; Todorović Lazić 2024: 458.

⁴⁴ DA MSRF 1930-2-14-128/EU; Todorović Lazić 2024: 456.

⁴⁵ DA MSRF 1930-2-14-11; Todorović Lazić 2024: 458.

⁴⁶ DA MSRF 1930-2-14-11; Todorović Lazić 2024: 459.

Canada's views of the Kosovo crisis can be traced from the note entitled "The Situation in Kosovo"⁴⁷ sent to NATO on June 26, 1981. According to the Canadians, the situation in 1981, in the aftermath of the spring events, was developing at two levels—one related to Yugoslavia's internal policy and the other centered on the relations between the SFRY and Albania.⁴⁸

When it comes to the first level, Canadians voiced certain criticisms vis-à-vis the Yugoslav authorities.

One of the major objections we can put forward to the Yugoslav authorities is that, during the demonstrations, they did not regularly inform the citizens about what was happening. Over the past few weeks, the media has been full of such information, whose aim, however, is not to present the facts or events, but rather to inform the citizens about what was said about it at the Party session. Last Monday evening, Yugoslav television aired an hour and a half long report on the situation in Kosovo. A team from Belgrade spent a few days at the scene, collecting testimonies from participants. They showed us some pictures, the only ones that exist about the events, claiming that they were taken at the events of 26 March and 1-2 April. Those are striking images of tanks filing through the streets of Priština, along with smoke rising above the rooftops. Aside from the fact that these pictures were presented two months after the events, the report offered little else.⁴⁹

The next segment from the first level observed by the Canadians is the differentiation within the Communist Party headquarters.

So far, several hundred members from Kosovo have been expelled from membership. Shortly after the first demonstrations, the Yugoslav authorities received intelligence that enemy forces had infiltrated several sectors of the provincial administration, including the Ministry of Interior. On 15 June, *Večernje novosti* even put forward a thesis that the real basis for the counter-revolution in Kosovo was not foreign propaganda or national sentiments, but a nationalist ideology hypocritically resurrected and endorsed by the bureaucracy in an attempt to strengthen its authority and privileged position. If that is the case, the bureaucracy would have to pay the price through purges that must be even more radical than the measures currently underway.⁵⁰

At the second level, Canada takes the stance that the events in Kosovo have serious repercussions on the relations between SFRY and Albania.

At first, all cultural agreements and protocols between Albania and Kosovo were suspended. A detailed review of the cultural relations between Yugoslavia and Albania lead to the conclusion that this cooperation was ongoing only with the Albanian population in Kosovo and that Albania systematically rejected any attempt to involve other groups. All future cooperation will be subjected to strict ideological control, but will also need to be balanced, meaning that it can no longer be in favor of one ethnic group alone.⁵¹

The document notes that economic relations between the SFRY and Albania were also affected by the Kosovo crisis.

⁴⁷ DA MSRF 1930-2-14-597/EU, "Situation in Kosovo", confidential NATO, 26 June 1981.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

As the most significant development in the segment of economic relations, Slovenia and Croatia, i.e. their republic governments, refused to vote for the funding required for the construction of the Yugoslav section of the railway between Titograd and Shkodra.⁵²

4. The 1982 Kosovo Crisis from the Perspectives of the US, France and Canada

Based on reports sent by the US to NATO on March 18, 1982, entitled: “Kosovo—One Year On,”⁵³ we can trace the US perspective one year after the outbreak of the Albanian insurgency in Serbia’s southern province. Americans begin their report by an assessment of the situation on the ground in March 1982.

As we approach the first anniversary of the rioting that took place in Kosovo last spring, it is clear that the Yugoslav government is still facing serious problems in the Province. Despite the involvement of the federal authorities and commitment of additional economic aid, the mass (but inept) propaganda efforts to win the hearts and minds of the young Kosovo Albanians and to establish a significant presence of security forces, Kosovo remains troubled.⁵⁴

The US note in particular that, while the measures adopted by the Yugoslav government (political, economic, social, security) helped to contain the problems, they did not remove their root causes, such as: the traditional Slavic (Serbian and Montenegrin) – Albanian hostility, socio-economic inequalities and economic regression.⁵⁵

Albanian nationalists (who seem to be a minority relative to the entire Albanian population in Kosovo) seek to control their own destiny by obtaining the status of republic within Yugoslavia, while a minor part of them wants Kosovo’s ultimate unification with Albania.⁵⁶

The dominant discourse in this US report was that some elements for the outbreak of new riots were still present in Kosovo.

The first element are the young Kosovo Albanians from towns and cities who are mesmerized by nationalism, as reflected in a continuous stream of riots organized by students during the winter within the University campus in Priština, which culminated in the 14 February demonstrations following a basketball game and which the authorities declared to be the most serious incident since last year’s unrest. The second element are Slavic-Albanian relations, which remain tense, driving the Slavic population to migrate from the Province, as one reflection of the issue; occasionally, there are recurrent cases—violence against Slavs and their property, especially in Peć. Finally, the third element is the fact that, despite the partial success in breaking up organized nationalist groups, nationalist pamphlets and slogans continue to appear throughout the Province, while industrial sabotage remains an evident issue.⁵⁷

⁵² DA MSRF 1930-2-14-597/EU.

⁵³ DA MSRF 1930-2-14-217/EU, “Kosovo—One Year On,” confidential, NATO, 18 March 1981.

⁵⁴ DA MSRF 1930-2-14-217/EU.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

The recurrent theme of the document is the poor economic situation in Kosovo.

Kosovo's economy remains in serious trouble. Its businesses continue to operate with a "deep overdraft" and reportedly had a deficit of 75 million USD in 1981. Many companies have difficulty paying salaries to their employees. The official unemployment rate is 27%, but independent estimates put the percentage much higher. According to government officials, the provincial budget is heavily reliant on the contributions from other republics – only 26.4% of the budget revenues originate from the Province. The repayment of foreign debts contributes to the financial burden and the main Province bank had to receive special foreign currency assistance from the National Bank in order to service its foreign debts.⁵⁸

Just like Canada's 1981 note, this US report also points to a deterioration in the Yugoslav-Albanian relations.

Tirana's continuing public support for Albanian nationalists in Kosovo and the Yugoslav government's fear that it would become directly involved have resulted in a serious deterioration of political relations between Belgrade and Tirana. They remained frozen as Tirana continued to do what the Yugoslav government finds provocative by broadcasting Tirana television signal in the Province. The Yugoslav government's efforts to scramble the signal have been effective to some extent. Despite these accusations, we have not seen any conclusive evidence of Albania's direct involvement, i.e., illegal support for Kosovo nationalists to date. It is not possible for us to confirm whether the Yugoslav government's accusations of Albania's covert support to anti-Yugoslav groups in Western Europe are true.⁵⁹

However, the document clearly indicates that Yugoslav-Albanian relations are showing a trend of improvement.

The two countries are trying to maintain bilateral relations at the pre-1981 level. Indeed, the two neighboring states have recently signed a series of bilateral treaties on transport, including for the resumption of construction of the Titograd-Shkoder railway (which was temporarily suspended).⁶⁰

The US report offers some predictions of what might happen in Kosovo during the spring of 1982.

There are genuine concerns among the American contacts in Yugoslavia about what the spring of 1982 might bring after the basketball match demonstrations on 14 February in Priština, given the lingering presence of elements for new riots. Our contacts in Kosovo, including those from the University of Priština, predict more student demonstration this spring, claiming that their preparations are underway. The authorities are evidently concerned about this. Although we cannot predict exactly what the future will bring, chances are that the spring in Kosovo will not be a peaceful one.⁶¹

From reading this document, one gets the impression that the new outbreak of unrest in the Province is possible, along with some hints of what this new unrest might look like.

⁵⁸ DA MSRF 1930-2-14-217/EU.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

If that happens, these will be mainly student demonstrations, a large-scale dissemination of pamphlets and writing of nationalist slogans, in a continued effort to intimidate Serbs and Montenegrins, combined with the acts of industrial sabotage.⁶²

The document goes a step further and provides an assessment of how the Yugoslav forces would deal with potential new rioting in Kosovo.

Yugoslav armed and security forces seem to be capable of containing such incidents and even limiting them, but probably not of preventing all forms of violence, so the US assessment is that the new insurrection of this scale is unlikely to affect the stability of Yugoslavia.⁶³

Further, it also explains why they believe that the new unrest would not harm the stability of Yugoslavia.

The main reason is based on the fact that there is little sympathy for Kosovo Albanians among the other Yugoslav ethnic groups: a spillover effect, i.e., that the nationalist activities in the Province would trigger unrest in other SFRY republics, such as Croatia, is highly unlikely.⁶⁴

Nevertheless, it notes that, despite the low likelihood of affecting the country's stability, the new riots would not pass without any consequences and lists some of them.

New riots in Kosovo would: 1) amplify the existing problems in Kosovo, 2) distract SKJ's attention ahead of the XII Party Congress in June (expected to be attended by numerous foreign delegations), 3) tarnish the image of the SFRY in the eyes of foreign bankers at a time when the Government is trying to project stability in order to receive new loans; 4) contribute to further straining of political relations with Albania, and 5) suggest that Kosovo is the main political responsibility at this time of increasing tensions in Europe.⁶⁵

Finally, the report raises some concerns that such unrest might lead to foreign interference, which would have attendant consequences for the stability of the Balkan region.⁶⁶ It is worth mentioning an almost visionary view of the Kosovo crisis described in this report. Namely, for the US, Kosovo had more than just local significance and required careful monitoring in the months and years to come.⁶⁷

The French note dated June 17, 1982, entitled "Yugoslavia–Internal Situation,"⁶⁸ is divided into three parts, presenting three groups of problems faced by the SFRY in 1982 (economic, national, and institutional). The note begins with a reminder that two years have elapsed since Tito's death (May 4, 1980) and that, during this time, Yugoslavia dismissed some alarming predictions that appeared after his death about the state's uncertain future.⁶⁹

The first part of the note begins by outlining the economic problems in Kosovo:

⁶² DA MSRF 1930-2-14-217/EU.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ DA MSRF 1930-2-14-667/EU, "Yugoslavia – Internal Situation", 17 June 1982.

⁶⁹ DA MSRF 1930-2-14-667/EU.

Autonomy close to independence enjoyed by the republics and provinces did not contribute to the transparency of the single market of labor, goods and capital in Yugoslavia (its per capita income showed a gap of nearly 7 to 1 between Slovenia and Kosovo in 1977).⁷⁰

It also examines some other economic problems faced by the SFRY in 1982.

We should also add the decline of the dinar, as well as the chronic deficit in trade and payments, manifested in significant indebtedness to the West—20 billion dollars in 1981. The Yugoslav authorities responded by adopting the Economic Stabilization Plan in June 1980. This move and financial assistance from the IMF (\$ 1.66 billion agreed in 1981), as well as assistance from some Western countries (especially France and West Germany), enabled the reduction of the current payment deficit from \$2 billion in 1980 to \$750 million in 1981, but at the cost of disruptions in supplies for production and increased trade with CMEA countries, where the quality of Yugoslav products was more acceptable than in the West and where delays in deliveries were more tolerated.⁷¹

The second part of the note deals with the national problems in the SFRY. It starts by recalling the national problems in Croatia during the 1970s.⁷²

The federal solution adopted after World War II and liberalized after the problems in Croatia in 1971 has failed to resolve all national problems. Tensions between Serbs and Croats persist. This materialized in the trial for the spreading of enemy propaganda, whose most famous victims included General Tudman, student Paraga, writer Gotovac and Professor Veselica.⁷³

After a brief review of the issue with Croatia, the French note focuses on the Kosovo issue, which France clearly regarded as the greatest problem for the Yugoslav authorities at that time.⁷⁴

Populated by more than 80% Albanians, underdeveloped despite natural resources, unable to offer employment to a large number of students from the University of Priština, the Autonomous Province of Kosovo (together with Macedonia and Montenegro, also populated by Albanians) was the scene of clashes in March, April and May 1981, as well as in the same period this year. The official figure of 9 casualties in the spring of 1981 seems to be intentionally understated. The number of convictions eventually was above 500 and those convicted (professors, students, teachers, workers)—mostly young people, were sentenced to prison terms not longer than 5 years. The severity of the repression applied by the Yugoslav authorities does not seem sufficient; also, economic aid from other republics, though officially slightly increased, will not have immediate effects, even if it turns out to be sufficient to appease the Albanians.⁷⁵

However, the French take an optimistic view when it comes to the SFRY's capacity to deal with these problems.

Difficulties that the Yugoslav authorities need to face are such that they cannot be ignored.

⁷⁰ DA MSRF 1930-2-14-667/EU.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

Economic problems could be solved with increased funds from the West. The Kosovo problem will not disappear only through the use of repression. However, the SFRY is not without assets in fighting these troubles. The factors of unity remain strong: the indispensable role of the Yugoslav League of Communists and the army, supported by territorial and civil defense. Especially worth mentioning is the Yugoslavs' demonstrated remarkable ability to resist any serious threat that could put their country in a crisis situation (both internal and external).⁷⁶

Compared to the 1981 note previously analyzed in this paper, the Canadian note entitled "Kosovo,"⁷⁷ sent to NATO on September 22, 1982, discusses the Kosovo crisis in much more detail, one and a half years after the riots.

One and a half years after the unrest in Kosovo, it seems that the Yugoslav authorities have been successful in suppressing any organized challenge to the established order. There is no doubt that such a challenge existed. Officially, Yugoslav authorities claim to have identified 4 organizations and 55 groups (the distinction between them remains unclear) whose members were arrested. The recent series of five trials resulted in convictions and prison sentences for 62 members of these groups. For most of them, charges include spreading of enemy propaganda and organizing demonstration, although some have been charged for the possession or attempted possession of weapons. 529 individuals faced criminal charges as a result of the demonstrations, while 1,117 were convicted for misdemeanors.⁷⁸

The note separately deals with the purges carried out by the Yugoslav authorities within the security system in Kosovo.

The authorities have managed to put in place an intelligence and security system that would make any future attempt to disrupt the law and order difficult, if not impossible. This involved a lot more than removing key individuals at the top of the organizational structure. As recent reports show, some low-ranking police officers face disciplinary procedure or are charged with nationalist crimes; there have been several cases of police officers of Albanian ethnicity who were charged with rape or attacks against Serbs. According to these reports, there have been 162 replacements within the higher ranks of the state security system in Kosovo: 27 station commanders, 32 deputies and 50 junior commanders, while 2800 new police officers were hired.⁷⁹

The document specifies that the purges took place both in the government and party hierarchy in Kosovo.

One of the defendants in the recent trials was Ukshin Hoti, the former deputy secretary of the Kosovo Executive Council for relations with other countries. Within the Kosovo League of Communists, 190 members were expelled, 30 deleted from the Party list, 32 suspended from their jobs, while 182 were subjected to "other measures," and 1,626 new members were admitted (who were apparently previously carefully examined).⁸⁰

This document also raises a controversial question: Did one part of the Government,

⁷⁶ DA MSRF 1930-2-14-667/EU.

⁷⁷ DA MSRF 1930-2-14-833/EU, "Kosovo", confidential, NATO, 22 September 1982.

⁷⁸ DA MSRF 1930-2-14-833/EU.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

Party or the security structure over the past decade have a tacit agreement that Kosovo should acquire the status of a republic?

Some groups whose activities were recently revealed have allegedly been active since 1972. Some of these groups appear to have received assistance from Albania, but there is no evidence that this assistance came from the official Albanian government. One of the defendants stated that he had expected the proposal seeking the status of republic for Kosovo to come from the Kosovo League of Communists. Other defendants stated that they had not even known that what they were doing was "hostile activity." This defense was immediately dismissed at the trial.⁸¹

For the Canadians, there was no doubt that the organized activity among the Albanians aimed to win Kosovo the status of republic was largely stopped for the time being, but the desire for such status had not disappeared.⁸²

It seems obvious that, after a decade of encouragement, building their confidence and pride in the Albanian language and culture, many, if not all Kosovo Albanians⁸³, want the recognition of the status of republic for Kosovo.⁸⁴

The Canadian note goes on to discuss the reasons why the Yugoslav authorities were refusing to allow the status of republic for Kosovo.

Probably the most frequently quoted is the emotional one, namely that Kosovo used to be the seat of the Serbian medieval kingdom and the battle that took place at the Kosovo Field, when Serbia lost its independence and fell under a five-centuries-long Ottoman rule, is a 'holy place' for the Serbs. For Kosovo to cease to be part of the modern Serbia is unacceptable for the majority. The Yugoslav Constitution bars the republic status for Kosovo, in the part where it makes a distinction between nations and nationalities. The Yugoslav nations (South Slavs—Serbs, Croats, Slovenes, Montenegrins and Macedonians) each have their homelands in one of the Republics within the Federation. The sixth Republic is based on a South Slav nationality—Muslims. The Autonomous Provinces of Kosovo and Vojvodina make integral parts of the Republic of Serbia and are based on the nationalities of non-Slavic population with homelands outside Yugoslavia (Albania and Hungary). Representatives of the nations and nationalities have equal rights and the Republics are not ethnically pure—many Serbs live in Croatia and many non-Muslims, Serbs and Croats, live in Bosnia and Herzegovina. More remarkably, a significant Albanian population group lives in both Montenegro and Macedonia. The Yugoslav system was designed to ensure ethnic unity in diversity and so that people belonging to all nations and nationalities can live in peace. The nationalism we witnessed in Croatia in the early 1970s and the developments in Kosovo one and a half years ago are the main antitheses to the system and the greatest concern for the federal government.⁸⁵

The note also addresses the Albanians' motives and reasons for wanting a republic.

The Yugoslav republics retained the right to self-determination, including the right to secession, and the Albanians therefore aim for Kosovo to become a republic that will secede and unite with Albania.

⁸¹ DA MSRF 1930-2-14-833/EU.

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ This Canadian document uses the term Kosovars to refer to the Kosovo Albanians; that term is not found in other contemporaneous documents analyzed in this paper.

⁸⁴ DA MSRF 1930-2-14-833/EU.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

In some extreme and high-profile cases this is certainly the case, however, the vast majority of Kosovo Albanians are aware that they have fared much better than their brothers in Albania. The majority are generally realistic enough to realize that, although the right to secession was granted to the republics, it is undesirable that any republic should seek to secede from the Federation. For the Kosovo Albanians, the appeal of obtaining the status of republic for Kosovo would put Kosovo on an equal footing with Serbia and would thus remove a disconcerting feeling of being dominated by the Serbs. Hence the constant tendency for young people, individually or in small groups, and usually on occasions suitable for expressing their sentiments, to chant republican slogans.⁸⁶

The document also provides an overview of the situation regarding the tensions between the Kosovo Albanians and Serbs and Montenegrins leading to the Serbs' and Montenegrins' migration from the southern province.⁸⁷

Albanians harass, even rape and kill Serbs and Montenegrins. A combination of these tensions and more attractive economic prospects elsewhere have resulted in a trend of migration of Serbs and Montenegrins from Kosovo. It should be noted here that internal population mobility is very common in Yugoslavia; there is even a joke that Belgrade is the largest Montenegrin city in Yugoslavia. Many Kosovo Albanians live and work in Slovenia, where the Slovenians call them "guest workers". Some 258,000 Serbs and Montenegrins lived in Kosovo in 1971, 102,000 left Kosovo in the following decade. The trend is said to have started back in mid-1960s, when Aleksandar Ranković, the former head of the Yugoslav Security Service, was ousted. His name is associated with the suppression of Albanian nationalism in Kosovo. Serbian and Montenegrin migration from Kosovo increased after the Albanian rebellion in 1968. Although there is no official data yet, this migration is also believed to have increased following the 1981 riots. The legislation currently enacted will help to annul the sales of real properties where the sale was provably done under coercion. However, such measures will only slightly increase the share of Albanians in Kosovo, which is due less to the Serb and Montenegrin exodus and more to the Albanian population growth rate. Between 1961 and 1981, the number of Albanians in Kosovo doubled.⁸⁸

Finally, the note reviews and sums up the Yugoslav policy towards Kosovo.

The main element of Yugoslav policy toward Kosovo has been economic aid. Kosovo receives 45% from the Federal Development Fund; 80% of the Province's budget comes from federal sources. Current plans require that Kosovo's economic development should proceed 60% faster than the rest of the country. The change introduced after the 1981 insurgency is that only half of the funding from the Federal Development Fund will be delivered directly to the Province; the rest will be made available to companies in Kosovo to match investments made by counterpart organizations from other parts of the country. Behind this change is the obvious intention to strengthen economic ties between Kosovo and other parts of the country and to reduce the power of the provincial government. The Yugoslav authorities hope that an increase in the living standard will serve to lessen the appeal of Albania, one of Europe's poorest countries. However, it is unlikely that any action taken by the Government so far will diminish the sense of national identity and cohesion among the Albanians in Kosovo. If the past ten years can serve as some kind of guidance or instruction, it is that the increase in living standard will also raise, rather than reduce, their self-confidence.⁸⁹

⁸⁶ DA MSRF 1930-2-14-833/EU.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

The document also contains several suggestions for the Yugoslav authorities on how they should treat Albanians in the future.

What the Yugoslav authorities could further do is to encourage the cultural self-affirmation of other nations. Such an attempt has been made with the Turkish minority in Kosovo, which means that it could also be attempted with the Albanian minority. A complementary approach could be to encourage Yugoslavism—a tendency to identify with the country as a whole rather than with one specific nation or nationality, although in 1981, only 1% of Yugoslavs lived in Kosovo. Another possible approach would be to work on increasing the differences between the subgroups of Albanians that definitely exist.⁹⁰

In its conclusion, the document highlights the importance of the revival of nationalism in the SFRY after the 1981 unrest in Kosovo.

In light of the Yugoslav experience with nationalism during World War II and more recently in the case of Croatia in the 1970s, the federal authorities' concern over its revival in Kosovo is understandable.⁹¹

The final position of the Canadians regarding the further situation development in the southern province is moderately optimistic.

Despite all the above measures, it is difficult to predict how the aspirations to gain the republic status republic for the Province will be further restrained. Over the past 35 years, the Yugoslavs have proved adept in political and social adjustments and their ability to successfully cope with this challenge must not be discounted in advance.⁹²

5. Conclusion

The situation in Kosovo during 1982 was mostly peaceful and it seemed that any organized threat to the Yugoslav system had been curbed. However, the key economic, social, and political factors that led to the 1981 unrest were still present in 1982. This is one of the conclusions drawn from the analysis of documents from all three countries. They share a common view on how the SFRY should tackle the challenges brought by the Kosovo crisis, and it was generally optimistic (more explicit for some, and somewhat moderate for others). Unlike the US, which believed that repression was sufficient for the Yugoslav authorities to cope with the riots, France and Canada argued that it would be necessary to change the existing policy of repression when the riots did occur and, in addition to providing economic aid to Kosovo, the SFRY should find new methods to fight Albanian separatism. However, only in the case of the US, can we detect a certain fear (or desire⁹³) that the great powers might get involved in resolving the crisis. The

⁹⁰ DA MSRF 1930-2-14-833/EU.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ It is not possible to confirm the presence of such wishes and aspirations in these documents. However, in some confidential reports of the Albanian Minister of Foreign Affairs from 1968, support by the US intelligence services to the activities of the extreme right Albanian emigrée groups can be noted. Vukadinović 2023: 159–176.

aspect of relations between the SFRY and Albania was important for Canada and the US, and they devoted a significant part of their reporting to this issue. In addition, the relations between Albanians and Serbs and Montenegrins in Kosovo were particularly important for Canada, in the context of reasons leading to migration of these Slavic nations from the area. Canada even explicitly stated that Albanians pursued different forms of harassment against Serbs and Montenegrins. We can see from the documents that the US retained its view that Albanians did not have enough allies within the SFRY in order to exert pressure on Serbia to give in to their demands, a position repeated in 1981 and 1982. Finally, we can say that both in 1982, as well as the year before, there was consensus among the Western Bloc countries that the issue of Kosovo was an internal issue of the SFRY. It should be taken into account that, at the time, the Cold War was still ongoing, and this was perhaps one of the main reasons why the great powers advocated for Kosovo to remain within Yugoslavia. But even in these circumstances, some subtle hints can be noticed that the crisis over Kosovo might turn into a serious regional crisis that we have witnessed at the end of the twentieth century.

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**ДОКУМЕНТА АРХИВА МИНИСТАРСТВА СПОЉНИХ ПОСЛОВА
РЕПУБЛИКЕ ФРАНЦУСКЕ О ОДНОСУ САД, ФРАНЦУСКЕ И КАНАДЕ
ПРЕМА КРИЗИ НА КОСОВУ 1981/1982**

Резиме

Нешто мање од годину дана након смрти Јосипа Броза Тита, на Косову и Метохији су избиле албанске демонстрације (март 1981). До краја марта оне су постепено достигле размере масовних демонстрација, а током прва три дана априла претвориле су се у покушај отворене побуне. Протестни покрет се ширио – било је сасвим очигледно да су економски и социјални захтеви замењени националним захтевима заснованим на тежњи косовских Албанаца да САП Косово добије статус републике. Мир је успостављен тек након уласка савезне јединице милиције заједно са специјалним снагама милиције из других република и јединицама Југословенске народне армије (ЈНА). На основу архивске грађе прикупљене у Дипломатском архиву Министарства спољних послова Републике Француске у Паризу, овај чланак представља погледе САД, Француске и Канаде према косовској кризи 1981. године, када су избили албански нeredи и побуна, али и годину дана касније када се бар чинило да је ред успостављен у јужној српској покрајини. На тај начин могу се извући упоредни закључци о томе да ли су се и у којој мери ставови ових земаља променили у периоду који је предмет разматрања. Међу документима су углавном поверљиви извештаји ових земаља упућени НАТО-у, у којима је кључна тема ситуација на Косову током 1981. и 1982. године. Поред њих, представљене су и дипломатске ноте (Француска), а постоје и обавештајно-безбедносни извештаји (извештај креиран у оквиру Генералног секретаријата за одбрану и националну безбедност Републике Француске). Један од циљева овог рада јесте да научној јавности у Србији представи оно што је мање познато о косовском питању – ставове неких земаља међу великим силама у периоду када косовско питање није било толико у фокусу међународне заједнице почев од 1981. године, када се догодила једна од кључних криза у историји косовског питања. Основни економски, друштвени и политички фактори који су довели до немира 1981. године били су присутни и 1982. године. Ово је један од закључака који произилазе из анализираних докумената у све три земље. Ове земље имале су заједнички став о томе како ће се СФРЈ носити са изазовима које је донела криза на Косову, и он је генерално оптимистичан (неке су оптимистичније, друге су нешто умереније). За разлику од САД, које сматрају да је репресија довољна да се југословенске власти носе са немирима, Француска и Канада тврде да је потребно нешто променити у постојећој политици репресије када дође до немира, и, уз економску помоћ Косову, пронаћи нове методе за борбу СФРЈ против албанског сепаратизма.

Кључне речи: Косово, Косовска криза 1981, СФРЈ, САД, Француска, Канада.