

The last decade of the 20th century saw the break-up of the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia into six parts, at the cost of a bloody conflict in which NATO played a major role. From time immemorial, the Balkans have been the main area of friction between East and West. From the north of Greece to the gates of Austria, a strong ethnic tension between the different communities remains, as a result of invasions and conversions. A geo-strategic playground for many nations, destabilization, financing of armed groups, and interventions by mafia forces are commonplace. Anything goes in the Land of the South Slavs.

The break-up of the Eastern bloc has once again opened the Pandora's box of predation and let nationalism loose. Croatia's independence had barely been declared, but was recognised by the Vatican and then by Germany, which had its eye on the Almaty coast. If Tito had finally succeeded in uniting the young Yugoslavia while keeping his distance from Moscow, Hodja at the head of neighbouring Albania had developed a regime whose Stalinist orthodoxy was ridiculous. The whole region was plunged into chaos.

The Serbs, engaged in the Partisan War against Nazism, remembered with pain the Ustasha battalions.

When the acronym u k - Ushtria  lirimtare e Kosov s (Kosovo Liberation Army) - appeared in Kosovo for the first time in 1996, there were cries of Serbian manipulation. But the rapid rise in power of this organisation, made up of Albanians, and the military training aid, now proven, from the German, North American and British services, tell a different story. At the same time, the Italian mafias took advantage of the disorder to bring heroin from Turkey through Albania.

Tensions increased, leading to the intervention of Serbian paramilitary and regular forces in early 1998. They carried out a campaign of reprisals against u k sympathisers and political opponents, with 2000 civilians and fighters losing their lives. Slobodan Milo ević's Yugoslav army opposed the u k and nato in unusually violent battles until June 1999.

That same year, the French doctor Bernard Kouchner was appointed by the UN as administrator of tiny Kosovo. However, exactions of a rare atrocity occurred there. In the hamlet of Rip , the famous yellow house was the scene of a traffic in organs taken from Serbian fighters but also from Roma and pro-Serb Albanians. This butchery lasted until 2008 with the help of private clinics and the logistic support of the Italian mafia. The men at the head of this organisation remained in power in Kosovo, supported and received as 'friends' by the man who became Sarkozy's minister.

The KLA's strategy of provoking open conflict between Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo to force the West to intervene is bogged down in morbid mire.

The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation justified its intervention by calling the Kosovo campaign a «humanitarian war». As soon as the first air raids on Serbia began, the mass exodus of Kosovo Albanians began. Prizren and  akovica in the southwest, Pe  and Istok in the west are expelled by Yugoslav forces. Thousands of people flee on the roads and mountains. A real purge was carried out, the Albanian population was taken out of their homes, civil status records and cadastres were destroyed. Some even had to sign a letter renouncing their right to return home. Food shops

run by Albanians have been systematically looted and burned, livestock and food stocks destroyed in villages under attack. The expellees are forcibly put on trains and taken to the Macedonian border, some choosing Montenegro as a host country.

This planned and organised campaign led to the largest population displacement in Europe since the Second World War.

In 1999 the war became a chase between diplomats and soldiers, and often in the final moments of a war, the last battles gain in intensity. NATO planes increased their sorties and their strikes. On the night of 7 to 8 May, B-2 stealth bombers from the United States dropped three self-guided bombs on the new building housing the Chinese diplomatic mission. The damage was extensive and three Chinese citizens died in the rubble.

German Chancellor Schröder travelled to Beijing to apologise to the Chinese leadership for the 'mistake', and pleaded with China not to obstruct the UN Security Council's Kosovo settlement.

Neither side imagines that it can win militarily. Slobodan Milošević knows that he cannot hold out for long against NATO, and the ill-conceived and badly conducted air campaign, marred by blunders, is likely to provoke an uproar in Western opinion.

The time for diplomacy, that lacy war, has come.

The war ended with the Kumanovo treaty, with Yugoslav and Serbian forces agreeing to withdraw from Kosovo to make way for an international presence. The uçk is disbanded soon after, some members join the Liberation Army of Preševo, Medveđa and Bujanovac and others join the National Liberation Army during the armed ethnic conflict in Macedonia. The Yugoslav army caused the displacement of more than one million refugees, Kosovo proclaims its independence from Serbia on 17 February 2008.

## **Kosovo**

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