# TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF MAPS .............................................................................................................................. v

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.............................................................................................................. vi

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION ..................................................................................................... 1

CHAPTER II: MAPS ..................................................................................................................... 10

CHAPTER III: OVERVIEW ......................................................................................................... 14

1.1 Kosovo and Albanians ........................................................................................................... 15
1.3 Why is Kosovo so Important to Serbs? .............................................................................. 16
1.4 South Ossetia and the Ossetians ....................................................................................... 18
1.6 Why is South Ossetia Important for Georgia? ................................................................. 20

CHAPTER IV: HISTORY ............................................................................................................. 22

2.1 Kosovo: Serbs and Albanians .............................................................................................. 22
2.2 South Ossetia, Georgia and Russia ................................................................................... 27

CHAPTER V: CONFLICTS EMERGE ........................................................................................ 31

3.1 Kosovo from Tito’s Death to the War ................................................................................. 31
3.2 South Ossetia: Conflicts at the Dawn and Dusk of the Soviet Union ............................ 38

CHAPTER VI: BLOODSHED AND INDEPENDENCE ............................................................. 45

4.1 Violence in Kosovo and 1999 Bombings ........................................................................... 46
4.2 The “Resolution” and post-1999 Kosovo ......................................................................... 51
4.3 Ethnic Violence in post-1999 Kosovo .............................................................................. 52
4.5 Creation of Governance Structures .................................................................................. 54
4.6 Politics and Corruption ...................................................................................................... 57
4.7 Negotiations on the Status of Kosovo, Ahtisaari Plan and Independence .................. 59
4.8 South Ossetia after the 1992 Sochi Agreement ............................................................... 61
4.9 South Ossetia: The “Five-day War” and Independence .................................................. 64
CHAPTER VII: CONCLUSION............................................................................................................... 70

5.1 The “sui generis” Argument ..........................................................................................70
5.2 Real-life Implications.................................................................................................75
LIST OF MAPS

Map A - Map of Kosovo and Western Balkans ................................................................. vi
Map B - Map of South Ossetia and Caucasus ............................................................... vii
Map C - Map of Kosovo and Western Balkans ............................................................ viii
Map D - Map of South Ossetia and Caucasus ............................................................. ix
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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Since the end of the Cold War, ethnic, religious, and racial conflicts have contributed to numerous civil wars and intrastate conflicts. In fact, in the last two decades more wars have been fought within states than between them (George 2006). One of the recurring reasons for such wars has been the desire of ethnic or religious minorities to secede from host countries. The activities of some secessionist movements, and governmental responses to them, have resulted in civil wars, riots, terrorism, and ethnic bloodshed (Sorens 2006).

In recent years, separatist movements and the reaction of the international community to the creation of “new states” have captured my attention. Modern secessions brought to light the controversies that lie between the heavyweights of global politics because there are clear inconsistencies in their decisions in seemingly similar situations. These inconsistencies create an impression of double standards that major states apply in the process of international policymaking. Therefore, I am eager to compare and analyze the most recent secessions, in order to find out whether different treatment of their claims was due to factual differences between them.

In my thesis I will undertake a comparative analysis of two recent secessions, one in the Balkans and the other in the North Caucasus. Specifically, I will examine the events of the year 2008 and proclamations of independence by two regions: first by Kosovo in February and then by South Ossetia in August. Kosovo is a Serbian
secessionist region mainly populated by ethnic Albanians. On February 17, 2008, with joint pre-coordinated effort and diplomatic support from the United States (US), the Serbian province of Kosovo unilaterally declared its independence. The US along with several western European states strongly supported this solution to the long-standing problem and immediately recognized Kosovo’s independence. As of today the region is formally recognized as an independent state by 75 member-states of the United Nations (UN), roughly one third of the total UN membership. However, several countries fiercely opposed the proclamation; among them are Russia and Serbia, while others, such as China, Brazil and India, express great concern. Until today the international community remains divided on this issue, with some saying that independence is justly deserved by Kosovo and others arguing that it clears the way for other secessions in the future by providing them with a solid model of a successful separation from a sovereign state.

Later that year, on August 7, 2008, the “five-day war” broke out in South Ossetia, one of Georgia’s two secessionist regions, Abkhazia being the other one. At first the conflict involved only Georgian and South Ossetian forces, but within a day from its outset the Russian Army became involved, backing the South Ossetians. Very quickly the Russian forces became the dominant force in the conflict. When the armed hostilities ended, Russia recognized the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. This move is often perceived by the western diplomats and media as a response to the Kosovo’s unilateral declaration of independence.

I will investigate the Kosovo and South Ossetia secessions because these are the regions with most recent developments. Furthermore, both have a rich and controversial
history of conflicts, alliances, wars, and often find themselves at the intersection of interests of large world powers. It is important to note that Abkhazia, along with South Ossetia, is another Georgian secessionist region and is in no way less important than South Ossetia. The factors that influence Abkhazia’s independence movement are in large part similar to those in South Ossetia and generally the conclusions made about one of these can be attributed to the other. Therefore, the issue of Abkhazia’s independence movement will not be covered in this thesis, as it would not add any benefit of comparison to the content of the thesis.

When Kosovo unilaterally declared its independence, the diplomatic recognition of several major states, including the United States of America and most European Union (EU) countries – 22 out of 27 EU members - came very quickly. But as the year went on, along with clear Serbian and Russian dissatisfaction, various political actors expressed their concern about the recognition of Kosovo. Remarkably candid on this issue was the Russian leadership:

The precedent of Kosovo is a terrible precedent, which will de facto blow apart the whole system of international relations... They have not thought through the results of what they are doing. At the end of the day it is a two-ended stick and the second end will come back and hit them in the face. - Russian President Vladimir Putin (Bromwich 2008).

What Putin meant was that the precedent of recognizing Kosovo’s statehood, without Serbian consent, is particularly dangerous for contemporary international relations, as it has a potential of altering generally accepted international norms that deal with sovereignty, equality, and territorial integrity. Some of these norms were agreed upon
after World War II in the UN Charter. Article 2 of Chapter I of the Charter deals specifically with this issue: it guarantees the respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity of all members of the UN (United Nations 1945, 3). Serbia as a member of the UN, therefore, is a victim of violation of its internationally recognized borders by the unilateral declaration of independence, according to the fundamental international law – the UN Charter. Another renowned international agreement which outlined the principles of the territorial integrity of states, and which was violated by Kosovo’s independence proclamation is the Helsinki Final Act of 1975. The preamble of the Helsinki Final Act states:

The participating States will respect the territorial integrity of each of the participating States. Accordingly, they will refrain from any action inconsistent with the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations against the territorial integrity, political independence or the unity of any participating State, and in particular from any such action constituting a threat or use of force (Participant States of the CSCE 1975, 5).

These international norms evolved in order to secure the borders and to reaffirm the equal sovereignty of states and their exclusive right of managing internal territorial questions, thus protecting Europe from potential violent conflicts over the redrawing of borders.

Moreover, besides such historic agreements as the UN Charter and the Helsinki Final Act, Kosovo’s independence also violated a relatively recent UN Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 1244. This resolution reiterated the “sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia”, of which Serbia is a legal successor (United Nations Security Council 1999). Serbian and Russian discontent with the
violation of the Resolution 1244 was further heightened by the fact that three of the five permanent members of the UNSC, namely France, the US and the UK, who are among the signatories of this resolution, recognized Kosovo’s independence on the first day of its proclamation.

In his view of the situation, Putin was joined by other European and non-European leaders, who made similar statements:

The unilateral approach by Kosovo may cause a series of consequences and lead to severe negative influences on the peace and stability of the Balkan region – Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Liu Jianchao (Agence France Presse 2008)

It is not an isolated question which is only applicable to that small part of the Balkans - President of Slovakia Ivan Gasparovic (B92 News 2008).

For me Kosovo is, above all, a precedent. We’ve opened a Pandora’s Box in Europe that could have disastrous consequences - Czech President Vaclav Klaus (B92 News 2008).

However, more convincing in their claims that Kosovo might set a desirable precedent for secessionist movements were the leaders of these movements themselves. Daniel Turp, one of the leaders of the sovereignty movement in Quebec, stated that Kosovo’s recognition “sets the stage for Ottawa to eventually recognize an independent Quebec” (CBC News 2008). Others were quoted saying:

For us, the Kosovo precedent is an important but not the only key factor. Historical and legal factors and reality itself suggest we have more right to independence – Igor Smirnov the leader of Transdniester, Moldova’s secessionist region (RIANovosti 2007).

After the recognition of the independence of Kosovo by a large number of Western states... conditions favorable to the recognition of Abkhazia's independence have appeared – statement by the Parliament of Abkhazia (Agence France Presse 2008)
At the same time those who supported Kosovo’s independence reiterated their support for principles of national self-determination, which in the case of majority Albanian-populated Kosovo was evident. They also claimed that Kosovo is exclusive in its exceptional circumstances and therefore cannot be a precedent. The American view voiced, by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, was diametrically opposite to that of Putin:

…we’ve been very clear that Kosovo is *sui generis* and that that is because of the special circumstances out of which the breakup of Yugoslavia came. The special circumstances of the aggression of the Milosevic forces against Kosovars, particularly Albanian Kosovars, and it’s a special circumstance (Rice 2008).

Secretary Rice also found support in her understanding of Kosovo’s independence among the leaders of other states. For example, British Foreign Secretary David Miliband also supported the idea that Kosovo is “unique” and cannot serve as a precedent for other separatist movements (BBC News 2008). Canadian Foreign Affairs Minister Maxime Bernier was quoted stating the following:

So for us it's a unique case and as a declaration issued by Kosovo's parliament also makes clear, and this is what's important for us, the unique circumstances which have led to Kosovo's independence mean it does not constitute any kind of precedent (CBC News 2008).

At that moment, the international community observed the formation of two camps with diametrically opposed perceptions of Kosovo’s independence and of its potential consequences. One camp headed by Russia claimed that the principles of Kosovo’s recognition could be used by other secessionist movements to justify their
claims. The other camp headed by the United States argued that Kosovo is a special case that could not be regarded as a precedent.

The situation became more complicated in the aftermath of the “five-day war”; Russia strengthened its argument about Kosovo’s recognition being a precedent for other secessionist regions by recognizing the independence of both Georgian secessionist regions. The Russian leadership was demonstrating to the West “the other end of the stick” mentioned above. This could not have come as a surprise to western policymakers because as early as 2006 Putin was making statements that hinted what the Russian course of action would be if Kosovo were recognized by the West:

Principles must be universal; otherwise there is no confidence in the policies that we conduct. If one thinks that Kosovo can be granted full independence, then why should we deny the same to the Abkhazians and the South Ossetians (Mirzayan 2007, translated by thesis author)?

The post-proclamation events in South Ossetian case were very different than those after Kosovo’s proclamation of independence. Kosovo gained the recognition of twenty-one states in the first month of its independence, and today it is recognized by seventy-five UN member-states. South Ossetia’s statehood, however, is recognized by just four UN member-states so far: Russia, Nicaragua, Nauru, and Venezuela.

The lack of consistency in the recognition of these two regions as well as the diametrically opposed views of Russia and the US in regard to these events present an attention-grabbing dichotomy. Therefore, the central question which this thesis will strive to answer is the question of the actual differences between South Ossetia and Georgia versus Kosovo and Serbia in terms of their history, minority oppression, evolution of
their secession movements, reasons behind their calls for independence, and the character of international involvement in both regions. The answer to this question will provide an understanding of whether, by any standards, Kosovo can or cannot be considered to be a precedent for South Ossetia along with other secessionist regions. Finding the answer to this question could be important for the study of international relations, as it is this answer that will most likely determine the guiding principles for a variety of other secessionist movements in their struggles for independence. This thesis, nevertheless, does not intend to argue the legitimacy of American or Russian actions in Kosovo or South Ossetia, but rather to conduct clear analysis, which will enable the reader to competently compare both situations.

The main body of the thesis will consist of an evaluation of the historic events and developments in both regions, particularly the relationship between the minority nationality and the governing majority nation. The thesis will explore the following:

- The circumstances under which each region became a part of the host country.
- The relationships between the ruling and ruled groups.
- Various explanations for why Kosovo and South Ossetia are so important for Serbia and Georgia, respectively, with reference to cultural, economic and security perspectives.
- The historical precursors that created a need for secession in the minds of both Kosovo Albanians and South Ossetians.
A comparative analysis of both regions will cover the events that led to the deterioration of relations between central governments and ethnic minorities and subsequently grew into bloody conflicts. An overview of ethnic conflicts in these regions during the 1990’s and an identification of the main actors in these conflicts, internal as well as external, will be given. I will then analyze whether each region succeeded in the creation of an independent and self-sufficient state and government infrastructure during the period of their *de-facto* independent existence, following the armed conflicts of the 1990s. All of the abovementioned analyses will be conducted in parallel for both regions in order to provide a better comparative comprehension of the matter.

The conclusion will focus on the comparative assessment of the two regions in terms of their history and nature of separatist claims. It will provide the necessary knowledge to assess the degree of similarity between Kosovo and South Ossetia in their claims for independence.

Nationalism still stands strong in the minds of many ethnic minorities, and they are likely to be inspired by the events in Kosovo and South Ossetia. Looking back in history, one can conclude that “outbreaks of secessionism have tended to occur in worldwide cycles” (Sorens 2006). One can observe that in the wave of decolonization following the World War II and in the dissolution of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia. The danger of creating a precedent for other secessionist movements combined with the sensitivity of this issue for central governments reveals the destructive potential of these changes.
CHAPTER II: MAPS

Map A - Kosovo and Western Balkans

Map B - South Ossetia and Caucasus²

Map C - European Language Distribution

Map retrieved on April 12, 2011. From: http://simplecomplexity.net/map-of-european-languages/
Map D – Ethno-Linguistic Map of the Caucasus Region

Ethnolinguistic Groups in the Caucasus Region

Caucasian Peoples
- Abkhaz
- Circassian
- Georgian
- Dagestani
- Veinakh

Indo-European Peoples
- Armenian
- Greek
- Kurdish
- Ossetian
- Slavic
- Russian

Altaic Peoples
- Turkic
- Mongol

CHAPTER III: OVERVIEW

The Balkans acted as the “powder-keg” of Europe in the history of the continent. The history of the region is a succession of disputes, conflicts and war. And, since the dissolution of Yugoslavia in the beginning of the 1990s, the region once again erupted in numerous conflicts. More often than not, these conflicts were based on religious and ethnic differences between the rivals. One of the most controversial, complex and disputed issues regards the province of Kosovo. The controversy around Kosovo stems from the fact that the overwhelming majority of the population in the region is now Albanian, which is strongly determined to secede from Serbia. At the same time Kosovo has been an integral part of Serbia for centuries, and the Serbs have very strong cultural and religious ties to the region, which they call “Old Serbia.”

The Caucasus region is similarly rich in conflicts. Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union many inter-state and intra-state hostilities emerged in this mountainous area, including the Nagorno-Karabakh war between Armenia and Azerbaijan, the war in Chechnya, and of course the conflicts in South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Caucasus has a very long and complicated history. Located on the border between Europe and Asia, Caucasus has always been at the crossroads of civilizations. Largely due to this fact today it presents a complicated combination of diverse ethnicities, languages, and religions.
Kosovo and Albanians

Kosovo comprises a territory of 4212 square miles, is located in the southwestern part of Serbia, and has as its neighbors FYROM (Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) to the south, Albania to the west, and Montenegro to the northwest. The current estimate of Kosovo’s population is roughly 1.8 million, of which around 92 percent are Albanians and the remaining 8 percent consists of Serbs, Roma, Bosniaks, Turks and Gorani (Central Intelligence Agency 2011). Serbs account for 4 percent of Kosovo’s population and are compactly located in the northern part of the region, in the district of Kosovska Mitrovica.

Albanians are the biggest group populating Kosovo, but an even larger number of Albanians resides in Albania proper. Kosovo’s Albanians account for over 1.6 million people (UNMIK 2002). The total Albanian population worldwide is roughly 8 million people. Sizeable Albanian diasporas are present in many Balkan and western European states, such as: Greece, Turkey, FYROM, Italy, Germany and Switzerland. Albanians are predominantly Muslim, as a result of Ottoman influence. Christian Albanians, however, represent a considerable share of the total population, with roughly 20 percent being Christian Orthodox and 10 percent Roman Catholic (Central Intelligence Agency 2010).

They are known for a very high birth rate, which is in fact the highest in Europe. The government of self-proclaimed Kosovo estimates that if the growth rate remains steady the population will double by 2050. Unlike the rest of Europe, Kosovo is also very young, with over 40 percent of the population younger than 19 years of age (Institute for
Special Planning 2004). Chronic overpopulation is among the most important reasons for the region’s poor economic performance.

Why is Kosovo so Important to Serbs?

This question has many answers, as there are many reasons why Serbs are so intent upon keeping Kosovo within Serbia. This steadfast determination is composed of a mix of pragmatic, spiritual and identity factors, all of which make Kosovo a special place for the Serbian nation. Not only do the Serbs consider it a legitimate part of their national territory, but they also view it as the cradle of their state. The territory is important economically with its rich natural resources, and holds a strategic location between southern and central Europe, and the Adriatic and Black seas.

Serbs claim that Kosovo is the heart of their nation, culture and religion – their beloved “Old Serbia.” The Serbian academic, Predrag Simic, says Kosovo is “an area that sublimes the collective identity of the Serbian people just as Jerusalem does, for instance, for the Jewish nation” (Simic 1995). Serbs associate Kosovo with all the suffering endured through centuries of Ottoman subjugation. And the Battle of Kosovo marked the fall of the medieval Serbian empire on June 28, 1389, to be followed by five centuries of subjugation to the Ottoman overlord. This land is a symbol of Serbian martyrdom, which until today provides them with a legacy of Kosovo’s importance for their history. Therefore, the Battle of Kosovo is a determinant for both their unity and their identity, as Slavs and Orthodox Christians. This is further emphasized by the fact that June 28 is one of the biggest Serbian national holidays. The legacy of the Kosovo Battle fought in 1389
continues to stand strong in the heart of every patriotic Serb. In fact this legacy lies at the basis of the modern Serbian state and national self-awareness.

The modern state originated in the nineteenth century, during and after the 1804-15 uprisings against the Ottomans. These uprisings represent the second of three traditions which were central in the development of modern Serbian statehood. The first of these traditions, the cult of the Battle of Kosovo, marked the defeat of the medieval Serbian state. The cult of the 1804-15 uprisings announced the beginning of the reborn state; while the third tradition, the cult of the 1912-18 wars, declared the confirmation of that new state (Vucinich 1991).

Furthermore, there are many Serbian historical and religious monuments in the region, which play a crucial role for the Serbs’ Orthodox heritage. Among those are some of the oldest and largest Serbian Monasteries, dating back to 13th and 14th centuries. These include the Patriarchate of Pec, the seat of the Serbian Orthodox Church from the 14th until the 19th century. Many of these monasteries are on the UNESCO’s World Heritage List, including the Patriarchate of Pec, Gracanica, Visoki Decani and Our Lady of Ljevis monasteries (UNESCO 2006).

The viability of Kosovo as an important economic asset is dubious, as it possesses controversial characteristics of economic potential. On one hand, Kosovo has always been the resource base of the Serbian economy. It possesses significant deposits of coal, lead, zinc, chromium, silver and gold (Veremis 1998). All of these, particularly the large deposits of coal, improve the potential for the industrial development of the region. On the other hand despite such riches the region’s main economic activity today is agriculture. And it has a pitiable history of economic performance despite all the potential benefits of having resources at hand. Despite being heavily subsidized for decades by the
central government of Yugoslavia, Kosovo remained the least developed region of the country (Veremis 1998).

The security of the Serbian minority population in the region is another factor. Many in Serbia are afraid that if Kosovo becomes an independent state, Kosovo’s Serbs will be the subject of discrimination and aggression by the Albanian majority. History has shown that these fears are not far-fetched. For example, during the Second World War, Albanians closely collaborated with the Italian occupation forces in Kosovo. Due to this partnership Albanians gained the position of power and “tens, if not hundreds, of thousands of Serbs fled and were replaced by Albanian newcomers” (Ker-Lindsay 2009, 9). A similar situation occurred earlier during the Ottoman rule. This pattern whereby Serbs were pushed out of Kosovo each time when Albanians gained control over the province, worried the Serbs inside Kosovo and in Serbia proper.

Last but not least, it is a question of respect and national pride for the Serbian nation that has gone through turbulent times in the course of the last two decades. Being stripped from a part of territory makes Serbs feel neglected and offended by some actors of the international community, who have recognized Kosovo’s independence.

South Ossetia and the Ossetians

If one is to judge the value of the land by its location, then the Caucasus can surely be considered a top-notch property for its strategic position. It is placed between two seas, the Black Sea in the west and the Caspian in the east, which are fed by Europe’s two largest rivers, the Danube and Volga. For centuries it has been at the crossroads of
trade routes, linking the Volga basin and fertile soils of Ukraine with Turkey and Persia, and through the Black Sea connecting with the nations of the Mediterranean (Lang, 1-2). Today it remains an important link that connects Europe and Asia.

The Caucasus region has been ethnically diverse for centuries, containing dozens of tribes and nations living side by side. Most of them have distinctive languages, history and traditions. Among these peoples Georgians are the second largest group after the Azeri. A population of over 4 million makes Georgians an influential economic and cultural group in the Caucasus (GeoStat 2010). Their nation is also very old, dating back over three thousand years (Lang, 1).

Ossetians can be described as generally light-skinned, often blonde or brown-haired, with many having blue eyes; unlike most other ethnicities populating the Caucasus region, Ossetians resemble Northern Europeans in their physical appearance. The Ossetian language belongs to the family of Indo-European languages, in particular to the Iranian group, but it uses a slightly modified Cyrillic alphabet (Robakidze 1985, 55-58).

One can be puzzled by the governmental division of the territory in which Ossetians live. Geographically they populate a single area: a region on both sides of the Caucasus Mountain range. However politically they are divided into South and North Ossetia, which lay south and north of the mountain range. North Ossetia is now a federal unit of the Russian Federation, while South Ossetia is a breakaway region of Georgia. Located on the southern foothills of the Caucasus ridge, South Ossetia has North Ossetia as a neighbor to the north and, in other directions the region is surrounded by Georgia. Its
total area is 1500 square miles. A census has not been conducted in the region since the
last Soviet census in 1989, but many sources estimate its population to range from 70 -
80,000 people (BBC News 2010). To simplify the estimation of its size, one can compare
it to Portage County in Ohio, which contains twice the population of South Ossetia and is
just 200 square miles smaller in area.

The ways in which Ossetians came to inhabit the Caucasus are widely disputed.
The Ossetian sources argue that their ethnic group is directly descended from the Alans,
Scythians, and Sarmatians who migrated to the Caucasus around five thousand years ago.
Georgians often claim that Ossetians started moving into Georgia from the 17\textsuperscript{th} to the 19\textsuperscript{th}
century, thus making a claim that Ossetians are relative newcomers.

Why is South Ossetia Important for Georgia?

The dispute over South Ossetia’s territory lacks the same magnitude of scholarly
debates over issues regarding the historic value of these lands for Georgians. There is
also very little discussion regarding any monuments, religious places, or other objects of
significant historic heritage for Georgians that would be located in South Ossetia.

Also South Ossetia is not an asset of strategic economic importance. The region
lacks natural resources and most of its economy is based on subsistence farming, which is
much harder to undertake, than in Kosovo, due to the rugged terrain of the southern
slopes of the Caucasus Mountains.

This region, however, is valuable for its strategic location. It cuts deep into
Georgian territory and holds valuable crossings through the Caucasus Mountains that
separate Russia and Georgia. The Roki Tunnel is located in South Ossetia, which is one of three auto-routes that cut through the Caucasus ridge and currently offers the only all-season passage from Russia into South Ossetia and Georgia. A significant portion of the region’s budget comes from the tolls paid for the transit through the Roki Tunnel. There is also no official border between South Ossetia and Georgia, because instituting such a border would mean the acceptance of Ossetia’s separation for the Georgians, and Ossetians are benefiting from such transparency of travel. Contraband, therefore, is another widespread economic activity, because the current situation allows the smuggling of goods free-of-tax from Russia into Georgia through the Roki tunnel (Freese 2005). The southern border of South Ossetia is also located in close proximity to the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) oil pipeline and Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum (BTE) gas pipeline, both of which transport hydrocarbons from Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan, through Georgia and into Turkey.

South Ossetian secession certainly plays an important emotional role in the national sentiment of Georgians, though not in the same form as Kosovo for the Serbs, as it lacks a religious dimension. The secession of this region is one of the key challenges for Georgia since it gained independence from the USSR. Managing to keep South Ossetia within its territory would reaffirm Georgian statehood, and prove that it is strong enough to deal with internal conflicts on its own, without Russian support and in spite of its influence.
CHAPTER IV: HISTORY

*Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.*

*(George Santayana)*

Although the central goal of this thesis is to analyze the secessions of the regions and not their past, it is critical to understand the historical precursors in order to understand the conflict. One of the basic arguments for the importance of history is that humanity can draw conclusions and learn from its own mistakes through the study of the past. Yet, history is not an exact science and diverging opinions often develop even among historians. This is particularly true of the Balkans and the Caucasus: the regions are so rich in the diversity of their ethnicities and in historic events that it becomes commonplace for each group to adopt its own understanding and interpretation of history.

**Kosovo: Serbs and Albanians**

There is much controversy surrounding Kosovo’s history. Many Serbian historians claim that before the southern Slavs arrived in the sixth century, the region was only populated by small number of peoples, representing a mixture of the inhabitants of Western Balkans, including the Illyrians. They argue that although there could have been a small number of Albanians in the Middle Ages, the majority of the population was Serb. Albanians started migrating into Kosovo in large numbers first in the fifteenth century with the Ottoman conquest and later with the “Great Migration” of Serbs in the
Seventeenth century (Vickers 1998, xii-xiii). Another argument for Serbs is the toponyms, as the names of most geographic and historic monuments have Serbian roots, including the word Kosovo itself.

At the same time Albanians claim to be the descendants of Illyrians and Dardanians, and that their forefathers lived there before the times of the Romans. Thus, the Slavs are foreign to that land; and the migration into Kosovo of large masses of Albanians after the Ottoman conquest was their return to the homeland.

In general Albanian historians do not deny that some Albanians occupied Serbian lands. But they tend to minimize the size of the colonization, while letting their opponents read between the lines that, after all, these immigrants were going back home, the lands they occupied having belonged to their Illyrian ancestors… (Vickers 1998, 2-3).

Albanians also challenge the Serbs in arguing that the Battle of Kosovo was just as important for them, as for Serbs. Because, along with Serbian forces, Albanians and other Balkan peoples gathered to jointly face the Ottomans. In short, Tim Judah, Balkan correspondent for The Economist, sharply describes the controversy between Serbian and Albanian historiography: “…‘the who was there first’ argument has long been fought in the trenches of academia” (Judah, Kosovo What Everyone Needs to Know 2008, 18).

Following the Battle of Kosovo on June 28, 1389, the Ottomans were able to quickly replenish forces and make further advances in the Balkans. Remaining unchallenged, they annexed and installed vassalages throughout the Balkan Peninsula. Ottoman occupation of the Balkans significantly influenced the migration patterns; however it did not come as a swift transformation, but was rather a slow gradual process.
By the end of the sixteenth century, herdsmen from northern Albanian mountains began to relocate into Kosovo.

Before nationalism became a strong force, religion was the “great divide” between Serbs and Albanians. Ottomans too employed the principle of religious identity, rather than ethnicity, when governing diverse communities under their control (Vickers 1998, 25). Before the fifteenth century most Albanians and Serbs lived side by side in relative peace, as both were at that time still largely Orthodox Christians. The Ottomans, however, were pressuring local populations in Kosovo, and elsewhere, to embrace Islam. Albanians more often than Serbs succumbed in order to avoid financial burdens applied to Christians, and also because “many Albanians in Kosovo regarded Islam as the religion of the free people, while Christianity – in particular Orthodoxy – was that of Slaves” (Vickers 1998, 25). Therefore, by the seventeenth century large numbers of Albanians that migrated into Kosovo were Muslim.

This widespread convergence among Albanians subsequently led to gradually increasing tensions between Serbs and Albanians, which would eventually transform into open hostilities. Intolerance towards Christians was also elevated as a result of Habsburg-Ottoman wars of 1690 and 1739. Because Christians were often cooperating with the Austrians, they were seen as the group that would easily betray the Ottomans in succeeding conflicts, and religious pressure gained momentum after both of these wars. Thus, 37,000 Serbian families fled Kosovo in 1690, gaining asylum in Hungary. A similar exodus occurred after the war of 1739. This massive flight of Serbs is called the Great Migrations. It drew another wave of migration of Albanians into abandoned fertile
lands of Kosovo, which was encouraged by the Ottomans (Judah, Kosovo What Everyone Needs to Know 2008, 33). It is worth mentioning that Christian Albanians also often fled Kosovo in significant numbers, finding new homes mainly in Italy and Greece.

The flight of Christians, especially Serbs, continued as a gradual process in the course of the next century. However, important changes were occurring to the power balance in Europe, which came with the gradual decrease in the power of the Ottoman Empire. Along with steadily decreasing power of their empire, the Ottomans began slowly liberating the Balkans. As the power of the Ottoman Empire decreased new states formed and a new force emerged in the region: nationalism was gaining strength.

After the Young Turk movement consolidated its power in 1912, a new policy was employed by the Ottomans, which called for greater centralization and reduction in the autonomous rights of various minorities of the empire. Unwilling to give up their autonomy Albanians revolted demanding autonomy, which ultimately led to the defeat of the Ottomans at the hands of Albanians. However, most importantly it revealed the Porte’s weakness and subsequently led to the Balkan Wars. This resulted in significant changes on the map of the Balkans. The Treaty of London, signed on May 30, 1913, recognized Albania’s independence, however Serbia as a victor regained Kosovo. The Serbs fulfilled their centuries-old dream by regaining their “sacred jewel” but by that time only 30 to 40 percent of Kosovo’s population was still Serb (Judah, Kosovo What Everyone Needs to Know 2008, 39).

On June 28, 1914, Archduke Franz Ferdinand was assassinated in Sarajevo, marking the beginning of World War I. During the war the Serbs were temporarily
pushed out of Kosovo by Bulgaria and Austria-Hungary, yet the Serbs returned in 1918. After the World War I ended the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes was established. The foundation for it would be the Serbian state lead by the Karadjordjevic royal family. Throughout the period from 1918 to the beginning of World War II, the Serbs undertook efforts to increase their numbers in Kosovo. This in turn caused Albanian dissent, as they lacked any specific minority rights. During World War II the situation reversed itself once again, as Kosovo was united with Albania, controlled by Italy. Thus Albanians, who widely collaborated with Germans and Italian forces, temporarily regained control of the region (Vickers 1998, 121-122).

After World War II King Peter II was deposed, and the Communist-led Federal People’s Republic of Yugoslavia was formed. It was modeled after the USSR, as a socialist state with constituent republics and autonomous provinces. Kosovo lacked a special status and autonomous rights until the 1960s, when Albanians started gaining minority rights. The proliferation of Albanian intelligentsia, education in native language and an increasing number of Albanians in the Communist party “nomenklatura” all became a reality. The increasing acceptance of Kosovo’s autonomy culminated with its recognition as the Socialist Autonomous Province in the 1974 Constitution (Vickers 1998, 160-178).

Thus, one can conclude that the tensions between the Serbs and the Albanians in Kosovo have been gradually increasing since the 14th century. Their relations have seen sporadic waves of violence, as well as great population shifts, and have been greatly influenced by many outside forces. It is also true that prior to the Ottoman conquest,
these two ethnicities had managed to live peacefully alongside each other for centuries. Today the relations between Albanians of Kosovo and the Serbs are once again in crisis, and some might even argue that outside forces once again play a critical role. In any case, it is clear that both Serbs and Albanians have compelling arguments and substantiated claims to the land in question.

South Ossetia, Georgia and Russia

The same group that was named “Oss” or Ossetian by Georgians was also referred to by the name of “Alans” by Greek, Persian, Arabian, Armenian and Byzantine authors. According to the ancient Armenian historian Moses of Chorene in his History of Armenia, the Georgians attacked Armenia with the support of the Alans, between 87 and 103 A.D (Robakidze 1985, 59). Georgians and Ossetians had particularly close political ties, as Georgia was interested in having a reliable barrier to invasions from the north, as well as having military support in times of need. Georgian medieval historian Leonti Mroveli writes that “Even during the Farnavaz, first king of Iberia, Ovsi (Ossetians in Georgian) were the allies of Georgians” (Robakidze 1985, 69). The relations among Georgians and Ossetians were largely warm and friendly and they often acted as allies against common enemies.

During the 13th century the Mongols took control over the region, and in 1238 they led a successful campaign against Ossetians. Thus, in the 13th century many Ossetians were forced to move across the Caucasus ridge, into parts of the Kartli region in Georgia. When Mongolian power weakened, George V of Georgia drove the Ossetians
out of the Kartli valley. The Ossetians then concentrated in the mountainous region of Kartli, on the south slope of the Caucasus, and created compact settlements there (Robakidze 1985, 87-90). These events marked the initial relocation of Ossetians from the north onto the southern slopes of the Caucasus, roughly today’s South Ossetian territory.

By the beginning of 17th century South Ossetians firmly settled in the Kartlian Kingdom. And by that time they started playing a political role, pushing Georgian leaders for an alliance with the Russian empire. By the 18th century Ossetians take such an active role in Georgian kingdom that along with Georgians participate in the Russo-Turkish war of 1768-1774 (Robakidze 1985, 126). The Treaty of Kucuk Kaynarca signed in 1774 between the Russian and Ottoman empires, freed Georgia from Turkish troops. Then in July 1784 Russia and Georgia signed the Treaty of Georgievsk. It stipulated that Catherine the Great became the suzerain of Georgia, and Russia gained the right to direct Georgian foreign policy; in turn Russia promised territorial integrity and protection against foreign invasions, especially Turks and Persians (Encyclopædia Britannica 2010).

The integration of Georgia and the Russian Empire continued in the early 19th century and was in part done at the request of Georgian monarch. The Bagratid dynasty had ruled Georgia since the Early Middle Ages, but at the end of the 18th century internal intrigues bitterly divided the royal house. The Georgian King George XII was confronted by his stepmother Queen Darejan, who wanted to see one of her own children on the throne (Lang, 38-40). To avoid being murdered by one of his own half-brothers, King George XII invited Tsar Paul I to introduce Russian troops into Georgia and mediatize
the Bagratid rulers under Romanov dynasty. Mediatisation meant that Georgia would not be just a protectorate, but would fall under full authority of the Russian tsar, with the condition that the dignity of the Bagratid dynasty would be forever preserved as nominal monarchs of Georgia (Lang, 39). Paul agreed at first, but then decided to go one step further, and in December 1800 he signed the proclamation on the incorporation of Georgia into the Russian empire. Shortly after, King George died, his heir David Bagrationi, was taken to St. Petersburg where he joined the Russian Governing Senate, which was a legislative, judicial, and executive body of the Russian Empire created by Peter the Great to replace the Boyar Duma (Gvosdev 1969, 104). Since then until the mayhem of the Russian revolutions in the early 20th century, Georgia along with South Ossetia experienced conditions similar to those in other areas of the Russian Empire, and it was subjected to the same territorial divisions into uezdy (districts) administered by Russian authorities.

The Russian revolutions of 1917 would have a significant impact on Georgia, as in other areas of what once was the Russian Empire. The main political power in Georgia became the Social Democratic party, controlled by the Georgian Mensheviks, who rose to power in the February 1917 Revolution. After the Bolshevik-led November Revolution in Russia, the Georgian Menshevik government established the Democratic Republic of Georgia.

The independence of the Georgian Democratic Republic would not last long, as the young state faced multiple challenges to its independence. General Denikin’s white forces were right next door in the North Caucasus, the Ottomans requested the Muslim-
inhabited regions, and territorial disputes arose with Armenia. Furthermore, the Bolsheviks were gaining strength both inside Georgia and externally. Ossetians were loyal to Russia and wanted to join the Bolsheviks of Soviet Russia. Soon the first violent clash between Georgians and Ossetians took place.

From this short historic outline, one can conclude that the life of South Ossetians was tightly linked with that of Georgians ever since they crossed the Caucasus ridge to find protection from the Mongols. The common struggles of these ethnicities against foreign invaders ensured close links between them over the centuries. It is also important to note that throughout the centuries of Russian presence in the region, first as Russian empire and later as Soviet Union, Ossetians had always maintained cordial relations with Russians and were generally regarded as “loyal citizens” (BBC News 2010).
CHAPTER V: CONFLICTS EMERGE

Socialist ideology, which dominated both the Soviet and Yugoslav state systems, overlooked the divisions along the national lines, and adopted the Marxist ideas of class divisions. Nationalism in both countries was, therefore, looked upon as a dangerous notion that could divert the proletariat from its struggle with the bourgeoisie. Nevertheless, when both states began to show signs of imminent collapse, nationalism emerged as the force that drove the constituent republics apart, first in the Soviet Union and in Yugoslavia. The biggest trouble emerged when nationalist movements began to appear within the republics themselves. Such was the case in the Transdniestra region in Moldova, Nagorno-Karabakh in Azerbaijan, Republika Srpska in Bosnia, and, of course, South Ossetia and Kosovo in Georgia and Yugoslavia, respectively.

Kosovo: From Tito’s Death to the War

In the late 1960s the policy of the Yugoslav federal government concerning Kosovo shifted toward liberalization. These reforms proliferated after Marshal Tito removed Alexandar Rankovic, the interior minister, who also headed military intelligence (OZNA) and the political police (UDBA). Rankovic was Serb and a strong Yugoslav centralist, who kept a close eye even on remote signs of separatism. He hardly tolerated the demands of Kosovo Albanians for greater autonomy and the adoption of Albanian-oriented political, social and cultural policies in Kosovo.
(Judah, Kosovo What Everyone Needs to Know 2008, 51-53). In 1967, for the first time, Tito visited the region and subsequently initiated a number of measures that would improve the position of Albanians in Kosovo as well as within Yugoslavia overall.

The economic growth of Yugoslavia in the 1960s and 1970s bolstered all these changes. For Kosovo the pace of change gained momentum after the 1965 implementation of the federal fund for underdeveloped regions. The largest share of this fund, 40 percent, was given to Kosovo for improvement of its economic performance (Rogel 2004, 73). Many in Yugoslavia felt that they were supporting the demographic explosion of poorly educated Albanians, who became dependent on these generous subsidies: as, in spite of massive financial assistance, Kosovo continued to be the most economically backward area in Yugoslavia (Veremis 1998).

During that period the province underwent significant changes in most aspects of economic, political and cultural life. The region experienced a process of cultural renaissance, and Albanian became an officially accepted language. Education was also advancing, and the province was permitted to introduce the Albanian language in elementary education. Prishtina University opened its doors for the first time in 1969 (Rogel 2004, 70).

The culmination of this restructuring came in the adoption of a new Yugoslav constitution of 1974. Among other issues it granted Kosovo the status of Socialist Autonomous Province, making it one of the eight official units of Yugoslavia. And although it remained a part of Serbia, Albanians acquired new controls in the province
and on federal level, including their own constitution, parliament, and representation on the federal council (Ker-Lindsay 2009, 10).

After the adoption of the 1974 Constitution, Kosovo Albanians even gained a privileged political position in comparison with the Serbs, since Albanians were represented in three legislative bodies, the federal, the Serbian one, and the local assemblies. Thus, they were able to influence policy on three levels, while Serbs did not have representation in Kosovo’s assembly and therefore had no legal say in Kosovo’s internal affairs. This was a significant leap for the Kosovo’s Albanians, despite the fact that they did not achieve the higher goal – the status of a republic independent of Serbia and equal with the other six republics of Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY).

The structure of the Yugoslav federation was such that nations and nationalities were regarded as distinct qualifications of identity. Serbs, Croats, Slovenes, Montenegrins, Macedonians and Bosnian Muslims were regarded as the six nations of Yugoslavia. Albanians, Hungarians, Bulgarians, Czechs, Italians, Romanians, Slovaks and Turks held the status of nationalities, which effectively meant minorities (Ker-Lindsay 2009, 9-10). In practice a minority could be larger in terms of numbers than nations, but could not be categorized as a nation, because nationalities had a homeland outside Yugoslavia. In their demands for becoming the seventh republic in SFRY, Kosovo Albanians would not receive *sui generis* status in the 1970s (Rogel 2004, 73). It was considered that granting a nationality-driven province the status of a republic within the Federation was dangerous. Belgrade suspected that in the long run this nationality
could be tempted to exercise the implicit right to secede, technically possessed by republics in the constitution of SFRY (Raic 2002, 265-272). This vision would prove itself prophetic some thirty years later.

In Kosovo, as well as elsewhere in Yugoslavia, significant changes started to occur soon after the death of Tito on May 4, 1980. Less than a year after his death, protests broke out at Prishtina University. Starting as a complaint about the university’s meal plan, protests soon morphed into a political cause (Judah, Kosovo What Everyone Needs to Know 2008, 57). And above all, the demands for Kosovo to become a republic were voiced once again. Belgrade retaliated by arresting the activists, which in turn fueled wider protests. This escalation ended only after lives were lost and the government initiated a state of emergency, closing schools and introducing a curfew (Binder 1981).

In the course of the next decade many people in Kosovo would be at some point in time arrested or questioned in regard to the 1981 protests. These measures would later haunt the Yugoslav leadership, since many of those imprisoned would later become Kosovo Liberation Army activists (Judah, Kosovo What Everyone Needs to Know 2008, 58). It was also an important sign of caution for other nationalist minded people of SFRY.

During the course of the Albanization of Kosovo many Serbs were replaced in their traditional roles by the Albanians, therefore feeling estranged. The demographic realities along with Tito’s policies played a central role in the alienation of Kosovo’s Serbs. The population pattern had changed significantly by then in comparison to the post-war years:
For example, in 1948 there were 199,961 Serbs and Montenegrins in Kosovo, or 27.5 percent of the population. At the same time there were 498,242 Albanians or 68.5 percent of the population…In 1991 the Albanian figure was more than 1.6 million, or 82.2 percent, as against 215,346 Serbs and Montenegrins, who then made up 10.9 percent of Kosovo’s people (Judah, Kosovo What Everyone Needs to Know 2008, 59).

It was a collection of “push and pull” factors that influenced such immense demographic change, along with a significantly higher birthrate among the Albanians when compared to Serbs. The main “pull” factor was that many Serbs were leaving Kosovo, attracted by better jobs and quality of life in Belgrade and other cities in Serbia proper. At the same time better education, political changes and the elevation of more Kosovo’s Albanians to the privileged positions in society acted as a “push” factor, by shrinking the traditional advantages of Serbs in Kosovo.

Many Serbs saw previous policy transformations and the demographic changes in the province as disturbing signs. In September 1987 Slobodan Milosevic gained control of Serbia’s Communist party and eventually became the Yugoslavia’s new leader. He shifted the focus of domestic politics away from socialist principles by concentrating more on the national questions. He began reversing previous liberalization policies, pursuing the goal of reintegrating Kosovo with Serbia, by restoring Serbia’s pre-1974 Constitution status. Milosevic did not hesitate in the use of forceful measures, using police and the army to subdue the opposition if it was too vocal in its demands.

On March 23, 1989, the deputies of the Kosovo assembly, under the pressure of tanks and police, which surrounded the building, renounced the autonomy. The surrender of autonomy gave Serbia full power over the province (Judah, Kosovo What Everyone
Needs to Know 2008, 67). Although these actions directed at bringing the unruly autonomy back under the central control of Serbs propelled Milosevic’s popularity sky-high among Serbs, it would have disastrous repercussions for the Yugoslav federation.

It is worth mentioning that on June 28, 1989, the Serbs celebrated their national holiday, the 600th anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo. By some estimates a million people, mostly Serbs, gathered on the site of the historic battle, the field of Blackbirds (Judah, Kosovo What Everyone Needs to Know 2008, 67-68). It was a symbolic moment for the Serbs, and Milosevic took full opportunity to incite their patriotic feelings. In his speech he drew clear parallels to the feuds between the rulers at the Battle of Kosovo and contemporary Yugoslavia, concluding that throughout history the Serbian people were the ones who suffered from poor rulers and their compromises (Vickers 1998, 239).

The moment has come when, standing on the fields of Kosovo, we can say openly and clearly – no longer!. Today, six centuries later, we are again fighting battles, they are not armed battles although such things cannot yet be excluded (Vickers 1998, 239).

Knowingly or accidentally Milosevic predicted the fate that Yugoslavia soon faced.

When Milosevic used tanks to revoke Kosovo’s autonomy, he also stimulated anxiety among the nations of Yugoslavia, fueling nationalism. Such sentiments were particularly strong in Croatia and Slovenia. Both republics held independence referendums, on December 22, 1990, in Slovenia and on May 19, 1991, in Croatia. In these referendums overwhelming majorities voted for independence from Yugoslavia. Then on June 25, 1991, the parliaments of both Slovenia and Croatia passed declarations of independence (Raic 2002, 79).
When Croats, Slovenes, and later Bosnians began seceding from the Yugoslav federation, the large Serbian populations of those regions did not readily accept the separation from Serbia. The Serbs of Croatia and Bosnia in turn also proclaimed independence, as they did not want to become a minority in newly forming states and tried to stay within the structure of Serbia. Therefore on December 19, 1991 the Croatian Serbs announced the formation of the Republic of Serbian Krajina, and in Bosnia and Herzegovina the Republika Srpska was formed by the local Serbs on January 9, 1992. Conflicts erupted in all three republics and in each of them the Yugoslav National Army (JNA) supported the local Serbian populations of the republics. But while in Slovenia the conflict lasted ten days (“Ten-Day War”) and had a minimal number of casualties, the situation developed differently in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, where the war would last until December 1995 and would be notoriously bloody among all belligerents (HLC 2010).

Surrounded by all these swift developments in the former Yugoslav republics, the events in Kosovo would be temporarily pushed to the sideline. Meanwhile a new party had formed in the province, the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) headed by Ibrahim Rugova. On September 21, 1991, the parliament of Kosovo declared independence, which was immediately deemed illegal by the authorities in Belgrade (Judah, Kosovo What Everyone Needs to Know 2008, 69). This declaration would mean little at that point, since all of the power over the region was in the hands of the Yugoslav central government.
On May 24, 1992 the Kosovo Albanians organized an unofficial election of the president and the parliament. Ibragim Rugova became the underground president of Kosovo. Naturally the people elected would not be openly functioning and would make up parallel power structures in Kosovo. Rugova then engaged in a policy of non-violent resistance (Ker-Lindsay 2009, 11). Whether he truly believed that peaceful opposition would bring independence, or he just understood that Kosovo Albanians could not effectively oppose the Yugoslav Army is unclear. He is often quoted saying:

We are not certain how strong the Serbian military presence in the province actually is, but we do know that it is overwhelming and that we have nothing to set against tanks and other modern weaponry in Serbian hands (Judah, Kosovo: war and revenge 2000, 61).

Kosovo remained relatively quiet during the 1992-1995 wars. In these years Kosovo Albanians established an alternative institutional network. They organized primary education for children in the Albanian language, a rudimentary health system to employ ethnic Albanians and even a tax system to finance their activities.

In November 1995, the Dayton Peace Accords marked the end of the Bosnian war. The issue of Kosovo was bypassed in the agenda and negotiations. The West expected Serbs to deal with the province’s grievances as an internal issue. Kosovo Albanians, however, felt unjustly side-stepped and understood that the policy of non-violent resistance was merely fruitful for them. Soon a new force came to light, the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA).

South Ossetia: The Conflicts at the Dawn and Dusk of the Soviet Union
During its short period of independence from 1918 to 1921, the government of Georgia faced numerous internal problems. One of these problems was the drive for national self-determination and unification with the Bolshevik Soviet Russia displayed by the Ossetian minority. After centuries of relatively calm coexistence, the first noteworthy violent clashes between Ossetians and Georgians occurred in the period from 1918 to 1920 when the Georgian Army and People’s Guard retaliated harshly against the rebellious Ossetians.

The National Soviet (Council) of South Ossetia had been set up soon after the February 1917 Revolution, calling for the self determination of Ossetians (Vaslavsky 2010). Soon the pro-Bolshevik members comprised a majority of the Council and voiced the intention to incorporate South Ossetia into Soviet Russia. In Russia proper, the Bolsheviks gained significant power, as the October Revolution followed the February Revolution. By October 25, 1917 (Old Style Julian Calendar), the Russian Provisional Government was deposed and Bolshevik-dominated soviets were created.

The first uprising of Ossetian peasantry began in February and lasted until March of 1918, after their refusal to pay taxes to the government in Tbilisi. Punitive detachments of the Georgian People’s Guard suppressed the rebellion without hesitation by means of artillery and machine guns (Robakidze 1985, 271-273). This increased the resentment among Ossetians towards the Menshevik government and Georgians, at the same time expressing sympathetic sentiments regarding the Bolsheviks (Cornell 2002). A number of rebellions occurred in 1919, but the Georgian Menshevik forces stifled all of them. In the
same year the Georgian government outlawed the National Soviet of South Ossetia (Lang, 228-229).

However, a truly memorable South Ossetian uprising occurred in June 1920. By 1920 a large number of South Ossetians had become pro-Bolshevik and displayed a clear desire to join Soviet Russia. A joint North and South Ossetian force gathered in Vladikavkaz, the capital of Russian North Ossetia, on May 31, 1920, and from there marched south, crossing the Caucasus ridge into South Ossetia. By June 8, 1920, Ossetian forces expelled the Georgian People’s Guard, and took control of the region, announcing the desire to unite South Ossetia with Soviet Russia (Robakidze 1985, 290). Within a few weeks the Georgian government suppressed the Ossetian dissenters, regaining control of South Ossetia by the end of June. The Georgian People’s Guard displayed shocking violence during the operation. Over twenty five large South Ossetian villages and several smaller ones were burnt to the ground, extensive areas were depopulated, five thousand Ossetians were killed, over thirteen thousand subsequently died from hunger and epidemics, and over twenty thousand fled into Soviet Russia (Cornell 2002).

These tactics, however, did not prevent Georgia’s fate of becoming a constituent part of the Soviet Union. The Red Army gained total control of Georgia on February 25, 1921, seven months after the violence in South Ossetia had erupted. Soon Georgia, along with Azerbaijan and Armenia, joined the Transcaucasian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic (TSFSR). And the South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast (SOAO) was created
within Georgia on April 20, 1922 (Potier 2001, 13). In 1936 the TSFSR was dissolved and the Georgian SSR became a one of the fifteen constituent republics of the USSR.

From then until the break-up of the USSR, South Ossetians lived a fairly stable and peaceful life. As other Soviet citizens; they experienced the war against the *kulaks*, collectivization of farms, industrial development, purges, and the implementation of five-year plans; they fought alongside all other Soviet nations in the Great Patriotic War, enjoyed free and advanced education and healthcare systems, and participated in the scientific advances of the USSR. In short, they benefited from the advantages and suffered through the shortcomings of the Soviet system, on par with the rest of Georgia and other socialist peoples. And despite the painful and enduring memories left by the atrocities of 1920, South Ossetians and Georgians did manage to live peacefully and in concord with each other until the break-up of the USSR.

In the latter part of the 1980s the entire Soviet bloc has fallen victim to political disorder and became permeated with nationalist movements. But the situation in Georgia turned out to be more perilous. The dissolution of the USSR not only caused political chaos, but also contributed to the onset of two ethnic conflicts, in the Georgian provinces of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. South Ossetia became the scene of a violent ethnic confrontation, lasting from 1989 until 1992 (Potier 2001, 8-14).

The leader of the Georgian independence movement, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, was largely popular due to his Georgian nationalist ideas. The main focus of the Georgian nationalism was self-determination and independence from the Soviet Union, however it also had an impact on the minorities within Georgia. South Ossetians felt the increasing
enmity towards their autonomy from the Georgian nationalist forces, and in 1988 they formed their own national movement, the *Ademon Nykhas* (Popular Shrine). One of the first signs of increased tension was a letter published by Ademon Nykhas, showing its support to the people of Abkhazia in their assertions of independence (Potier 2001, 13). A multitude of declarations and demonstrations further aggravated the situation for the contesting sides. Georgians were asserting their desire to secede from the Soviet Union and create a nation-state. Georgian independence would in effect transform the virtual boundary between South and North Ossetia into a factual border between two sovereign states. This was perceived as a serious threat by South Ossetians, and they began to voice their desires for greater autonomy.

In August 1989, the Supreme Soviet of Georgia initiated a Georgian language program. This program was intended to increase the use of the Georgian language, especially by the minorities. It included a Georgian language test for admission into universities, programs for the promotion of Georgian history, the official institution of Georgian national holidays, creation of military units consisting only of ethnic Georgians, and the campaign for the settlement of Georgians in areas dominated by minorities (Bremmer 1993).

Then on November 10, 1989 the Supreme Soviet of South Ossetia stated the intention of transformation from an autonomous oblast into an autonomous republic, an objective similar to that of Abkhazia (Gahrton 2010). The decision was canceled the next day by the Supreme Soviet of Georgia, which also fired the First Party Secretary of South Ossetia. Then on November 23, Zviad Gamsakhurdia headed what he called as “a
peaceful meeting of reconciliation,” which was in fact a march of 20,000 Georgian
nationalists toward the South Ossetian capital Tskhinvali (Gahrton 2010). Sensing
danger, Ossetians blocked the road to the city and the first clashes took place
(International Crisis Group 2004). Although Soviet internal forces, present in the region,
prevented large-scale violence this incident had a weighty destabilizing effect.

Prior to the elections held on October 28, 1990, the Supreme Soviet of Georgia
outlawed all parties which did not have Georgian-wide interests (Potier 2001, 13-14).
This decision practically excluded the Ademon Nykhas from parliamentary elections in
Georgia. It was interpreted by the South Ossetians as a way of cutting them off from any
decision making power, and gave them a sense of what they could expect in an
independent Georgia (International Crisis Group 2004).

On September 20, 1990, South Ossetia declared itself a Soviet Socialist Republic;
this practically meant a declaration of independence from Georgia and full sovereignty
within the USSR (International Crisis Group, 2004). Furthermore under the Soviet
Constitution, the status of a Soviet Socialist Republic technically could give South
Ossetia potential secession rights on par with Georgia. Zviad Gamsakhurdia, who by then
effectively was the leader of Georgia, rapidly reacted by reducing South Ossetia to the
status of a common Georgian administrative unit, which essentially meant revoking any
autonomous power of the region (Gahrton 2010).

Then on December 9, 1990, South Ossetians unilaterally elected their first
president, Torez Kulumbekov. The Georgian government initiated a state of emergency
in the region, which was followed by fighting and violence. On January 5, 1991, (just two
days before the celebration of the Orthodox Christmas) several thousand Georgian troops entered Tskhinvali, and urban warfare in the South Ossetian capital lasted over a year. Purportedly Georgian official forces as well as irregular militias committed atrocities during the conflict (Gahrton 2010). The 2004 report by the International Crisis Group provides the following data regarding the devastation brought on by the conflict: “...some 1,000 dead, 100 missing, extensive destruction of homes and infrastructure, and many refugees and internally displaced persons” (Gahrton 2010).

On June 24, 1992, a ceasefire agreement was signed in Sochi by the new Russian President Boris Yeltsin and the new President of Georgia Eduard Shevardnadze. The ceasefire outlined a peacekeeping mission consisting of four forces: Russian, Georgian, South Ossetian, and North Ossetian. Under this scheme the performance of the peacekeeping mission would be monitored by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

By 1992 many imperative developments had occurred outside South Ossetia. The USSR no longer existed and Russia had a new leader, following the deposition of the last Soviet president, Mikhail Gorbachev. Georgia gained independence and its nationalist leader Zviad Gamsakhurdia, who initially led the Georgian nationalist movement, was also ousted from power.

The problem of South Ossetia’s status was not fully resolved with the ceasefire. But it brought peace and stability to this volatile region for over a decade. In the following years an independent government and state infrastructure developed. The status quo gave South Ossetia the ability to exist as a de facto independent state.
CHAPTER VI: BLOODSHED AND INDEPENDENCE

When the conflict in Bosnia was finally settled at Dayton in late 1995, Kosovo quickly became the next concern of the international community in regard to Yugoslavia. The Kosovo Liberation Army continuously intensified its activities in the region and after a period of hesitation, in mid-1998 Milosevic ordered the Yugoslav Army (which by that time consisted only of Serbs and Montenegrins) to engage in a fierce operation of bringing the region under the control of Belgrade. Then in March 1999 NATO began the Operation Allied Force. The operation lasted until June and consisted of bombing Yugoslavia in order to force Milosevic out of Kosovo. Then, almost a decade of international administration followed, but a decision on the status of Kosovo was still unresolved between the Serbs and Albanians. In February 2008 this gridlock morphed into a new international paradox, as Kosovo unilaterally declared its independence.

Just months after Kosovo’s declaration of independence in August 2008, two major events attracted the attention of media worldwide: the first one celebrated peace and sportsmanship among nations - the Olympics in Beijing and the other, the South Ossetia war, was an outburst of violence and human suffering. However, for the purposes of this investigation the event of prime importance is not the war itself, but the recognition of independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia by Russia. On August 26 Russian President Dmitry Medvedev announced the recognition of independence of
South Ossetia and Abkhazia. This diplomatic move is often regarded as a spin-off from the disagreements over Kosovo’s independence.

Violence in Kosovo and 1999 NATO Bombings

The decisions reached at the Dayton peace talks disenchanted and even aggravated many Kosovo Albanians. Their concerns were not even on the agenda at the meetings. Kosovo was deliberately taken off the list of negotiations in order to rapidly reach a decision on Bosnia (Rogel 2004, 77). Such an obvious bypassing of Kosovo’s situation presumed that western diplomats were not going to promote any fundamental transformations, but would instead treat Kosovo as an internal concern of Serbia. Even the long-standing ally of Kosovo’s independence movement, the Albanian President Sali Berisha, was persuaded by western diplomats to publicly support this solution of Kosovo’s problems (Vickers 1998, 287). Many in Kosovo felt abandoned by the West and by Albania. They came to a sobering realization that the nonviolent policies, pursued by the Kosovo’s president of the shadow government Ibrahim Rugova, were unproductive. His policy of peaceful resistance was well regarded on the international stage but, in the view of Kosovo’s Albanians did very little to advance the cause of independence. The idea that an offensive strategy in the struggle for independence is the right way to go was gradually replacing moderate solutions. By that time a militant organizations, the Kosovo Liberation Army (UCK/KLA), already existed in Kosovo (Rogel 2004, 77).
The KLA was quickly gaining popularity, both in Kosovo and especially among the large Albanian diaspora abroad. The support for KLA from abroad did not end with mere sympathy; it was heavily financed by wealthy Albanians from Western Europe (Rogel 2004, 77). This, however, was not the only funding they received from abroad; reportedly, some funds were coming directly from Islamic militant groups in the Middle East. Furthermore, many members of these guerilla groups received training in Albania, Pakistan and Iran (Vickers 1998, 291).

The fact that the West paid so much attention to the Bosnian case and largely avoided the Kosovo problem led many Kosovo Albanians to believe that “the international community understood only the language of armed conflict, and not that of non-violence” (Vickers 1998, 294). Starting with 1996, the KLA began “sporadic guerilla activity” employing targeted violence against Serb officials and civilians (Rogel 2004, 77). In April 1996 the KLA, in a letter to the BBC World Service, publicly acknowledged its participation in the killings of Serb policemen and civilians in the Decani and Pec regions of southern Kosovo as a part of “struggle for the liberation of Kosovo” (Vickers 1998, 293). The KLA killings of Serbs, and even Albanians who were suspected of association with Serbs, intensified and gained popularity among Kosovo Albanians during 1997 and 1998 (Rogel 2004, 78).

As a response to the violence against Serbs, which escalated in 1995, Milosevic increased the presence of Serbian forces in Kosovo, both military and police. But at that time, their activity was limited to reinforcing security on the streets of Kosovo and periodic arrests of the KLA activists. By 1996, Serbs in Belgrade demanded an urgent
crackdown on the “Albanian terrorists and separatists,” and Milosevic’s opposition also blamed him for an “ostrich-like” behavior in dealing with the KLA (Vickers 1998, 300-303).

Kosovo’s Serbs, seeing a lack of initiative from Belgrade in protecting them, began to mobilize. They feared suffering the fate of the Croatian and Bosnian Serbs who had been forced to become a minority in another state. The tensions grew continuously over the next two years, along with gradual escalation of violence, as both the KLA and Serbian forces intensified their activities and grew in number. But it was not until 1998 that decisive steps would be taken by Belgrade in their fight against the KLA.

In February 1998, the US special envoy Robert Gelbard described the KLA as “without a question, a terrorist group” (Gibbs 2009, 183). This was possibly perceived as a green light for action by Slobodan Milosevic. Later that month, Serbian security forces laid siege to the town of Prekaz, which included the use of artillery, in an effort to arrest Adem Jashari, the KLA commander of the Drenica region. The three-day siege of his family compound left over 50 Albanians dead, including Jashari and his family members, other KLA fighters, and civilians (Judah, Kosovo: war and revenge 2000, 139-140). The Serbian officials issued a report regretting the death of civilians, but stating that the blame was on the “terrorists who opened fire on police and prevented civilians from leaving the area” (BBC News 1998).

The events in Prekaz led to a quick increase in the number of Albanians who were resorting to arms and joining KLA, or simply claiming to be KLA fighters. The KLA was rapidly gaining a foothold in most of Kosovo’s areas. In some areas, where the KLA
achieved dominance, Serbs and other non-Albanian minorities who did not flee were ethnically cleansed or murdered (Judah, Kosovo What Everyone Needs to Know 2008, 82). On June 23, 1998, the KLA took over an important coal mine in Belacevac, but after six days Serbs recaptured the mine (Judah, Kosovo What Everyone Needs to Know 2008, 82). In July, the KLA tried another offensive, taking the Trepca mine and the Orahovac town. The Serbs defeated the KLA unit and retook the town and the mine in four days, and a counteroffensive by Serbian police and the army followed with maximum vigor. Tens of thousands of Albanians had to flee from the regions where the Serbian forces were hunting down KLA fighters. Although militarily assertive, these measures were suicide for Milosevic in terms of the international image of Belgrade’s policies: “They were simply herding large numbers of terrified people straight into the arms of foreign media” (Judah, Kosovo What Everyone Needs to Know 2008, 83).

The conflict escalated further in early 1999. On January 8, Serbian forces began an offensive on the KLA-controlled village Racak. When the offensive was over, the Kosovo Verifying Mission (KVM), an OSCE structure, reported finding 45 dead people who appeared to have been executed by Serbian forces after taking control of the village (Rogel 2004, 78). By that time, it seemed that the patience of the West was wearing thin because, despite all the diplomatic efforts since 1995, violence was escalating. The last chance to end the violence in Kosovo diplomatically, before the West would directly interfere in the conflict, was given to the sides at a conference in a French chateau in the town of Rambouillet.
The Rambouillet talks were organized in February of 1999. The proposed agreement, however, was not signed because both parties found it unacceptable. At first the Albanians did not want to accept the agreement because the KLA refused to agree to anything short of independence, but the document reiterated the principle of Yugoslav territorial integrity. Later, the Yugoslav government was not ready to accept the agreement, which *de jure* called simply for wide “autonomy” for Kosovo, but objectively provided Kosovo with factual independence. They were also not ready to offer the right of free passage on entire Yugoslav territory to 30,000 NATO troops that would be deployed in Kosovo as a part of the agreement. The conservative American analyst, Doug Bandow, agrees that it was an unacceptable document for Milosevic. Mr. Bandow – senior fellow at the Cato Institute, Vice President of Policy for Citizen Outreach, and Special Adviser to President Reagan – was quoted saying that:

The Clinton administration presented a document of surrender for Serbia’s signature at the Rambouillet conference in early 1999. Yugoslavia would have had to concede the territory’s almost certain independence after a short, indecent interval and in the meantime agree to act like a conquered province, according the North Atlantic Treaty Organization transit rights throughout the entire country. Milosevic said no, as would have the leader of any Western country presented with a similar document (Bandow 2009, 16).

This view is also supported by ex - Secretary of State, and Nobel Peace Prize winner Henry Kissinger who says that “…the Rambouillet text, which called on Serbia to admit NATO troops throughout Yugoslavia, was a provocation, an excuse to start bombing” (Bancroft 2009).
The day after the failure of Rambouillet agreement, on March 24, 1999, NATO began bombing Serbia. The bombings lasted until June 10, 1999 and were directed against Serbian military and civilian infrastructure, including bridges, government offices, TV towers, factories, and accidentally the Chinese embassy. After more than seventy days of bombing, Yugoslav president Slobodan Milosevic accepted the introduction of NATO forces into Kosovo, but not the rest of Serbia.

The “Resolution” and post-1999 Kosovo

The main product of peace negotiations, which followed the bombing campaign, was the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244. The resolution demanded that all military forces of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) leave Kosovo, which they did, along with the entire Serbian-run administrative apparatus that ran the region previously. For a brief period, this created a power vacuum and chaos. This was especially noticeable in the Albanian-dominated parts, because in the northern areas populated by Serbs, local administration was able to stay and continue functioning (Judah, Kosovo What Everyone Needs to Know 2008, 93).

Resolution 1244, however, was designed to deal with this issue: it delegated the administrative authority in the region to a UN body, namely the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK). According to Resolution 1244 UNMIK was charged to establish:

…a functioning interim administration, including the maintenance of law and order; second, to promote the establishment of substantial autonomy and self-
government, including the holding of elections; and third, to facilitate a political process to determine Kosovo’s future status (Yannis 2001, 19).

Simultaneously the NATO-led Kosovo Force (KFOR) was mandated by the UN to assist UNMIK “through the deterrence of new hostilities in the area and the establishment of a secure environment throughout Kosovo” (Yannis 2001, 19).

The part of the Resolution 1244 that assured the Serbs of the acceptability of such direct foreign involvement into Kosovo’s internal affairs reiterated the “sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia” (United Nations Security Council 1999, 2). UNMIK was to prepare Kosovo for self-governance and then transfer the authority back to Belgrade. Relying on these guarantees from the UNSC, although not in the least overjoyed with such developments, the Serbs agreed to the termination of hostilities and passed on the authority over Kosovo to the UN and NATO (Weller 2008).

Ethnic Violence in post-1999 Kosovo

In June 1999 when the bombing campaign ended, the FRY began withdrawing from the region. In the early stages of the deployment UNMIK and KFOR focused primarily on the withdrawal of Yugoslav forces. “The international community was neither operationally nor mentally prepared for the scale of violence that engulfed Kosovo following the departure of FRY forces, and thus early responses of KFOR and UNMIK were inadequate” (Yannis 2001, 35). As the KLA filled some of the power vacuum, violence against non-Albanian minorities became commonplace in Kosovo. While proclaiming the success of the peacemaking “Operation Allied Force” in ending
the ethnic conflict, NATO’s KFOR, for the most part, failed to prevent the killings and ethnic cleansing committed by KLA against Serbs, Roma, and “Albanian collaborators.”

Behind the façade, of a reconciled Kosovo lies a tragic reality... the minority Serb population live in isolated enclaves where children can neither play nor go to school lest they be attacked. Desecration of their cemeteries and churches has become commonplace. And smuggling, racketeering, prostitution, and drug trafficking have all become regular economic activities. Kosovo today is both an economic and political failure. Western military intervention was supposed to preserve a multi-ethnic society. This has not happened, ...Today the land of Kosovo and Metohija is less multi-ethnic than it has ever been in its history (O'Shea 2005, 61-65)

This came as a result of “NATO's reliance on the KLA in fighting the ground war against Belgrade's forces in the March-June 1999 war” (Wolfgram 2008). The KLA was the main force for ground operations against the Serbian army during the bombing campaign, which was conducted by NATO from high altitudes.

Even after all Yugoslav armed forces completed their withdrawal from Kosovo and the international administration could focus better on the intra-Kosovo conflicts, both UNMIK and KFOR were able to achieve little success in preventing and stopping sporadic ethnic violence. The biggest recurrence of violence after 1999 occurred in March 2004. Mobs of Albanians attacked Serbs throughout the region, burning their houses and Orthodox Churches. The two-day riots left 31 people dead and about 500 injured (BBC News 2004). “Some 800 homes and 35 Orthodox churches and monasteries were destroyed in the riots and about 4,000 Serbs were forced to leave their homes” (B92 News 2010).

UNMIK and KFOR, nevertheless, followed up with legal action to investigate the March 2004 events. About 400 criminal cases were reviewed in regard to violence in
March of 2004, and 67 out of 143 convicted Kosovo Albanians received prison terms of over a year (B92 News 2010). Thus, although UNMIK and KFOR were ineffective in preventing ethnic violence in Kosovo, they have shown considerable vigor in successfully prosecuting those guilty of the crimes committed in March of 2004.

Creation of Governance Structures

During its lifetime UNMIK has achieved significant successes in building Kosovo’s administrative, political, economic, judicial, and law-enforcement institutions. Of course, in the initial stages it had to position itself as a supreme body in all of these domains. Before Kosovo’s own institutions took over, UNMIK gave Kosovars a chance to live a relatively normal life. Of course, the word “normal” has to be understood relative to previous tragic events and human suffering.

Initially UNMIK Police was the main law-enforcement agency in Kosovo, relying on wide international participation and headed by a police commissioner. By November 2007, however, UNMIK managed to create a sizeable local police force, with a total number of officers at around 7000; it remained under the command of the international police commissioner until the proclamation of independence in 2008. Despite many successes, one important weakness of the new police force was its ability to combat organized crime that often had good political connections and enjoyed much power (Judah, Kosovo What Everyone Needs to Know 2008, 95).

In May 2001, a constitutional framework for the provisional self-government was adopted. It established local temporary administrative bodies – provisional institutions of
self-government (PISG). With the creation of these bodies, UNMIK began a steady process of transferring powers to the PISG. The provisional institutions consisted of the elected Assembly, an elected Government, and the judicial system (UNMIK 2001).

On the other hand, not all parts of Kosovo were subjected to the same degree of international administration. UNMIK (in contrast to KFOR) never gained strong ground in the north of Kosovo. The northern parts of the region had traditionally been populated by Kosovo’s Serbian minority and therefore continued to have strong ties with Belgrade. With the assistance of organizations like “Serbian National Council” and “Serbian Government’s Coordination Center”, Belgrade maintained a certain degree of control over northern Kosovo (Judah, Kosovo What Everyone Needs to Know 2008, 101).

UNMIK, in spite of its administrative accomplishments, was unsuccessful in helping Kosovo build a sound economy. Early post-war indications were positive. Substantial economic growth began quickly after the end of the bombing campaign. The economy devastated by the war was showing double-digit growth due to finances that were pumped into it by international donors and remittances sent home by a sizeable worldwide Albanian diaspora. Another important factor for a quick growth was the everyday expenditures made by a large international personnel (UNMIK, KFOR and other NGO’s staff), who by Kosovo’s standards had very high salaries and were spending those salaries inside Kosovo. Nevertheless, the structural condition of Kosovo’s economy remained poor.

Even after 6 years of UNMIK efforts, Kosovo’s manufacturing did not recover. This led to a situation in which Kosovo’s exports were very small in comparison to its
imports. From year to year the region ran one of the highest trade deficits in the world; in
2004 its exports covered only 5.3% of its imports, further worsening to 4.1% in 2005, and
growing slightly to 6.2% in 2006 (UNMIK 2007, 6). It is now evident that the short-lived
post-1999 growth was transitory and did not improve the structure of Kosovo’s backward
rural economy. The post-war economic boom was short-lived and after very high postwar
growth, the economy showed negative growth in 2002 and 2003 which was followed by
negligible growth since (UNICEF 2008, 20). Kosovo’s economy remains defenseless
against external economic shocks and excessively reliant on outside sources of financing
- donors and remittances (UNICEF 2008, 20). For example, in 2005 development aid
from various donors constituted 22.4% of Kosovo’s GDP, along with 14.4% of GDP sent
to Kosovo as remittances (World Bank 2006). Kosovo lacks its own currency: after 1999
the Yugoslav Dinar was first replaced with the Deutsch Mark and then with the Euro.
Therefore, it is a subject of the EU’s monetary policies.

The social makeup of Kosovo continues to be plagued by endemic poverty. In fact
its rural, agriculturally-oriented structure did not change for sixty years: five decades
within Yugoslavia, with subsidies from central government and a decade of international
governance financed from a variety of international sources (UNICEF 2008, 20). Kosovo
suffers from the highest unemployment rate in Europe. Its official unemployment rate is
42%, of which 90% are long-term unemployed without a potential of getting a job in the
near future. The employment situation is further aggravated by an annual increase in the
labor force of roughly 30,000 people, due to the decades of continuously high birth rates
(UNICEF 2008, 21). Therefore, one can conclude that the slow pattern of development in
the past decades and poor economic conditions in which Kosovo currently finds itself are likely to continue as well as its heavy reliance on outside donors.

Politics and Corruption

The politics of Kosovo since 1999 have been largely shaped by former KLA leaders who formed multiple political parties and assumed or were elected into a variety of central positions in the leadership of Kosovo. Hashim Thaci is the current prime minister and leader of the Democratic party of Kosovo; Agim Ceku is a former prime minister and a member of the Social Democratic party of Kosovo; Fatmir Limaj is one of the founders of the Democratic party of Kosovo and the right hand to Hashim Thaci; and Ramush Haradinaj is the founder of the Alliance for Future of Kosovo and former prime minister of the province. All of these men were indicted on the charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity in the aftermath of the post-1999 investigations by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY), at The Hague. None of them, however, was prosecuted. Observers and various human rights groups have suggested that, due to political pressure and witness intimidation, few ethnic Albanians were prosecuted in comparison with the Serbs (Tosh 2010). During the trials there were frequent reports of threats to and deaths of witnesses who were supposed to testify against Thaci, Haradinaj, and Limaj. One of such trials was very well described in the New York Times:

The commander, Ramush Haradinaj, who also briefly served as prime minister of Kosovo three years ago, was found not guilty of murder, persecution, rape and torture of Kosovo Serb civilians... The men who were acquitted may return home
as early as Friday, and they are expected to be given a hero’s welcome. But in court, in summarizing their verdict, the judges said that the case presented had many flaws. They cited vague evidence and widespread fear among witnesses, suggesting that the full version of events had not been told … The judges said that they had serious difficulties in getting many of almost 100 witnesses to testify freely. They said that they had to permit 34 witnesses to hide their identities from the public, that 18 were subpoenaed because they refused to testify and that others said they dared not talk once they were in court… Western diplomats tried to dissuade Carla Del Ponte, who was the chief prosecutor, from indicting Mr. Haradinaj, arguing that he was a respected political leader who played an important role in stabilizing Kosovo… At least three designated witnesses were killed before the trial, prosecutors said… For Serbs, the acquittal of two of the former rebel commanders, whose forces were backed and supported by the West, was likely to be viewed as one more insult (Simmons 2008).

Those concerned about the integrity of these trials would be relieved to find out that in July 2010 The Hague court ordered a retrial of Ramush Haradinaj, stating that his previous acquittal was a “miscarriage of justice,” as it failed to counter witness intimidation (The Telegraph 2010). Then on December 16, 2010, the Council of Europe adopted Dick Marty’s report containing allegations that the ex-KLA leader and current Kosovo PM, Hashim Thaci, for years had led an international crime ring. This mafia group specialized in trafficking of human organs from kidnapped Serbs, as well as international heroin and weapons trade (The Economist 2011). Similar claims were made in 2008 by the former Chief Prosecutor of ICTY Carla de Ponte in her book “The Hunt.” The Council of Europe charged EULEX (The European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo), the EU’s 2000 strong police force, with the task of investigating the report (The Economist 2011). In addition to that, just over a month later, a British newspaper published an article in which it claims to have received leaked “western intelligence
reports” regarding Kosovo’s criminal networks. In this article the Guardian asserts that the KFOR intelligence assessments from 2004 describe Hashim Thaci as “one of the ‘biggest fish’ in organized crime in his country” (Lewis 2011).

Negotiations on the Status of Kosovo, Ahtisaari Plan and Independence

After 1999 when governance over Kosovo was gradually transferred to the new energetic and ambitious leadership, it became apparent that they were not ready to agree to any type of autonomy within Serbia – full independence became their goal. The West has been on the side of all ex-Yugoslav secessionists since the beginning of break-up of Yugoslavia, and Kosovo’s leadership could potentially expect the same treatment of their problem. They rejected whatever amount of autonomy Belgrade proposed as well as any other arrangement which kept Kosovo within Serbia. At the same time, the Serbs were ready to offer any degree of autonomy, but refused to even discuss independence under any circumstances. During negotiations they backed their arguments by citing the UNSC Resolution 1244 and the Helsinki Agreements Final Act, both of which reinforced sovereignty and territorial integrity. The Serbs also counted, and rightly so, on Russia’s support in case of a UNSC vote on the issue of independence. Eventually, all talks about the future status of Kosovo fell through because the parties lacked a common ground.

Marti Ahtisaari, the former Finnish president, was appointed Special Envoy of the Secretary-General of the U.N. in November 2005. Essentially he became the UN mediator for Kosovo. In his view the situation at hand was a zero-sum game in which the Serbs and the Albanians had mutually exclusive principal demands, which inhibited any
progress in the negotiations. "No amount of additional talks, whatever the format, will overcome this impasse,” he said (Nichols 2007). He, therefore, proposed his own plan for the future of Kosovo. This plan stipulated that Kosovo would receive “supervised independence” while the Serbian enclaves, as well as Orthodox churches and monasteries, would have a certain degree of autonomy and special links with Serbia (Judah, Kosovo What Everyone Needs to Know 2008, 111-113). The idea of “supervised independence” presumed that Kosovo would receive independence from Serbia, but continue to be “supervised and supported for an initial period by international civilian and military presences” (Nichols 2007). Such a design would allow Kosovars to run the state independently, but at the same time much power was given to the international community. The United States, the EU, and Pristina all accepted the Ahtisaari plan. Belgrade, however, quickly made it clear that such an arrangement was utterly unacceptable for Serbia. “The Serbian Prime Minister underlined that Ahtisaari with his proposal redraws Serbia's internationally recognized borders and that the final result of his proposal is to snatch away 15% of Serbia's territory (Government of Serbia 2007).”

As anticipated, the Ahtisaari Plan was blocked by Russia in the UNSC on March 27, 2007.

When the Ahtisaari plan failed to get approval from the UNSC, Kosovo Albanians began to draw up a declaration of independence that would incorporate the provisions made in the Ahtisaari plan. This would allow them to receive bilateral recognition from many states that initially supported the Ahtisaari plan, without necessarily being recognized by the UN. Thus on February 17, 2008, members of the
Assembly of Kosovo declared the independence of Kosovo from Serbia. Within hours the region was recognized by a number of states, including the US and multiple members of the EU.

South Ossetia after the 1992 Sochi Agreement

Unlike the Kosovars, Ossetians experienced two Georgian military operations conducted in order to bring South Ossetia back under the control of Tbilisi. The first one took place in 1991 under Gamsakhurdia and the second in 2008 under Saakashvili. In the period between 1992 and 2008 South Ossetia experienced the development of a \textit{de facto} independent governance structure. The new structures were built on the basis of pre-existing Soviet institutions; which was impossible in Kosovo, where most authority structures and organizations ceased to exist after Serbian administration left in 1999. During this time the South Ossetian authorities developed close ties with the Russian government and were able to receive notable financial as well as diplomatic support. Similarly to Kosovo where the western powers stepped in to halt the Serbian campaign, in Ossetia Russia was the force that stepped in both times to terminate Georgian operations. In 1992, however, it was achieved diplomatically, while in 2008 Russia stepped in with full-fledged force.

The Russian-brokered Sochi ceasefire signed by Boris Yeltsin and Eduard Shevardnadze mandated the creation of the Joint Peacekeeping Forces (JPKF) in South Ossetia. The JPKF was meant to be up to 500 men strong and include Russians, Georgians and Ossetians, all of whom would be commanded by a Russian officer. An
OSCE mission was also established, to monitor the JPKF and facilitate a peaceful political settlement between the parties. These arrangements brought relative peace and stability to the region for over a decade.

During this time, an independent government infrastructure was created to manage the region and its people. The Republic’s first constitution was adopted on November 2, 1993, by a popular referendum (Community "For Democracy and People's Rights" 2006). The current Constitution was adopted through a popular referendum on April 8, 2001 (European Commission's Delegation to Georgia and Armenia 2008). The model of separation of power into executive, legislative, and judicial was adopted in South Ossetia. The highest executive power lies in the hands of the president who plays the role of the head of state. A unicameral Parliament is the core of the legislative branch and consists of 34 seats. Both the parliament and the president are elected for 5-year terms in popular elections (Community "For Democracy and People's Rights" 2006).

Since its inception in 1992 the South Ossetian government established a governance system of charging and collecting taxes, ensuring provision of adequate social services: healthcare, pensions, education, and transportation. The structures necessary for an effective operation of an independent state were also created during this time: the army, a police force, and security services were created. Symbolic attributes of an independent state such as the flag and the national anthem were adopted on January 13, 1992, and on May 5, 1995 (Cahoon 2000). Since August 15, 2006, South Ossetia started issuing its own passports. It is interesting to note, however, that by that time the majority of South Ossetian population was also granted Russian citizenship and held
Russian passports (Корреспондент.net 2006). The region also uses the Russian ruble as its main currency, thus depending on the Russian central bank in its monetary policy.

During the 1990s and early 2000’s, the Georgian leadership was preoccupied with post-independence issues in Georgia proper, paying less attention to the developments in the secessionist regions. During that period a number of presidential and parliamentary elections were held, and peaceful and relatively democratic succession of the South Ossetia’s leadership was achieved. Thus, the first President Lyudvig Chibirov, elected in 1996 elections, was replaced by Eduard Kokoity after losing the elections of 2001. Similarly, the region holds regular parliamentary elections, the latest of which took place in 2009, the ruling Unity party won 46% of the votes, securing 17 seats in the Parliament (The Central Election Commission of South Ossetia 2009). The integrity of these elections was questioned by the United States and the EU (Wood 2009, Leivev-Sawyer 2009). The group of international observers from Italy, Germany, Poland, and Russia present at the elections, however, claimed that elections met international democratic standards. The Italian member of the European Parliament from the group regarded them as “model of democracy”, especially in comparison to other states that recently went through a war (RIA Novosti 2009).

The region’s economy was devastated by the 1992 war. As was noted previously, most of its economy revolves around the Roki tunnel transit, either in the form of tolls or contraband. The main sources of income for the people of South Ossetia are subsistence farming and remittances sent by family members who work in neighboring Russia. A significant portion of the Republic’s budget is also subsidized by Russia (Brovtsev 2009).
Therefore, similarly to Kosovo, the South Ossetian economy is in many ways reliant on external financial aid and remittances, and also has a large underground economy revolving around the Roki tunnel.

The stability brought by the Sochi Agreement gradually evaporated after Eduard Shevardnadze was replaced by Mikhail Saakashvili as Georgia’s President. Saakashvili expressed a determined wish to bring the breakaway regions, South Ossetia, Abkhazia, and Adjaria back under the control of Tbilisi, making it the focal point of his electoral promises. Renewed interest and assertive policy of Georgia’s new leader was not welcomed by the South Ossetian authorities. This conflict of interests soon led to the escalation of tensions, a gradual increase in violence and ultimately to a war in the August 2008.

South Ossetia: The “Five-day War” and Independence

Since the beginning of his presidency, Saakashvili was determined to bring all secessionist regions under the control of Tbilisi, and he successfully, as well as peacefully, did that with the Adjara province shortly after becoming president. The situation with South Ossetia, however, was more complicated. The region was protected by the Sochi agreements and also had much closer ties with Russia, especially through the Russian republic of North Ossetia. Months of ever-increasing hostility preceded the August War. The period included periodic bombings, explosions, and erratic mortar and artillery fire by both Georgian and South Ossetian forces (Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Conflict in Georgia 2009, 10-22).
The tensions reached their zenith on the night of August 7, 2008, when Georgian armed forces undertook massive artillery attacks on the capital of South Ossetia – the city of Tskhinvali – and its suburbs. Shortly the assault on the city by Georgian tanks and infantry followed (Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Conflict in Georgia 2009, 10). The use of heavy artillery and Grad MLRS’ by Georgian forces during the initial attack on Tskhinvali caused numerous civilian casualties: “GRAD multiple rocket launching systems and cluster munitions are the two types of weaponry considered particularly dangerous for non-combatants because of their indiscriminate deadly effects” (Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Conflict in Georgia 2009, 23, 29). It is also important to note that immediately after the attack Russia reported that its peacekeeping units deployed in South Ossetia were also attacked by Georgian forces and suffered losses. Although Georgians denied such an attack, the EU mission concluded that despite not having independent reports which would prove or disprove these allegations: “… taking into account the existing dangerous conditions on the ground, casualties among the Russian PKF personnel were likely” (Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Conflict in Georgia 2009, 22).

In the early morning of August 8, some hours after the Georgian attack on South Ossetia, Russia demanded the immediate convocation of special session of Security Council of the United Nations for development of joint actions on the violence termination. However, the Security Council was not able to move beyond mere discussion of the situation on the ground and did not pass any resolutions (UNSC 2008). Then, on the same day, without the authorization of the UNSC, Russia introduced its
forces into South Ossetia. It launched a large scale counteroffensive against the Georgian forces. The Russian leadership argued that it was a necessary measure to take a “…series of urgent measures to stop the violence in South Ossetia, and to protect the civilian population and Russian citizens in the conflict zone, considering that Russian peacekeepers have a mandate there” (Kremlin Press Service 2008).

Russian ground forces enjoyed full air support as well as naval support from the Black Sea Fleet. Reportedly, there was also a large number of armed groups who did not belong to regular army units; these included South and North Ossetian militias as well as volunteers from throughout the North Caucasus region (Nichol 2008). Russian ground forces pushed the Georgians out of South Ossetia very quickly; the fighting, nevertheless, did not end at that point. Russian ground forces, air forces, and the Black Sea fleet went on to hit targets outside South Ossetia deep into Georgian territory. Thus Georgian military bases in Gori, Senaki, and the port of Poti also came under attack, along with dual purpose objects such as

…the Tbilisi airport radar, railroad tracks and other infrastructure and communication facilities. There are conflicting reports over whether in some instances civilian objects were hit deliberately or in terms of so-called collateral damage. The Mission found no conclusive evidence for either version (Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Conflict in Georgia 2009, 21).

On August 12, Russia officially declared the successful termination of the operation.

Quick diplomatic efforts, aimed at the immediate halt of military action, were taken by the French President Nicolas Sarkozy. He acted as a mediator between Moscow and Tbilisi, and it was in large part due to his efforts that the ceasefire agreement was
signed just days after the outset of the conflict. At that time many feared that Moscow
would go as far as taking Tbilisi and deposing Saakashvili were taken off the table.
Between August 14 and August 16, both Medvedev and Saakashvili signed a ceasefire
agreement brokered by Sarkozy. Ten days later on August 26, the Russian President
Dmitry Medvedev announced the recognition of South Ossetia and Abkhazia as
independent states. Medvedev was quoted saying:

Ignoring Russia's warnings, western countries rushed to recognize Kosovo's
illegal declaration of independence from Serbia. We argued consistently that it
would be impossible, after that, to tell the Abkhazians and Ossetians (and dozens
of other groups around the world) that what was good for the Kosovo Albanians
was not good for them. In international relations, you cannot have one rule for
some and another rule for others (Reuters 2008).

In the aftermath of the conflict, the Council of the European Union established
an Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Conflict in Georgia
(IIFFMCG). The mission’s work on the ground proved to be very helpful and informative
of the events that occurred between August 7 and 12 of 2008 in South Ossetia and
Georgia. The following are some of the most important findings of the commission
(summarized from Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Conflict in
Georgia 2009, 23-25):

- The initial large-scale Georgian military operation against the town of Tskhinvali
  and the surrounding areas is not justifiable under international law.
- South Ossetian action was defensive in nature and directed against an illegal
  Georgian assault; thus it conformed to international law as legitimate self-defense.
- South Ossetian operations outside the purpose of repelling Georgian attack and
directed against ethnic Georgians is considered to have violated International
  Humanitarian Law and in many cases also Human Rights Law.
• Georgian use of force against Russian peacekeeping forces was contrary to international law, as there is no evidence that these forces were in breach of their obligations.

• The Russian military campaign against Georgia can be divided in two phases: the immediate reaction and the invasion of Georgia.
  o The Russian use of force for defensive purposes during the first stage can be considered legal if was done to protect the contingent of peacekeepers. But in terms of a humanitarian intervention to protect South Ossetian civilians it cannot be recognized as legal, due to widespread controversy among legal experts on the issue of humanitarian intervention.
  o The Russian military campaign that penetrated deep into Georgia violated international law because it went beyond the reasonable limits of self-defense and was not proportionate to the Georgian threat. While Georgian forces at this stage acted in legitimate self-defense.

In regard to the violations of human rights, of which all participants of the conflict accused each other, the mission concluded the following:

As for the conflict in South Ossetia and adjacent parts of the territory of Georgia, the Mission established that all sides to the conflict - Georgian forces, Russian forces and South Ossetian forces - committed violations of International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights Law. Numerous violations were committed by South Ossetian irregular armed groups, by volunteers or mercenaries or by armed individuals. It is, however, difficult to identify the responsibilities for and the perpetrators of these crimes. The fact that both Georgian and Russian forces in many cases used similar armament further complicates the attribution of certain acts. If it were not for the difficulties of identification and attribution, many of these acts have features which might be described as war crimes (Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Conflict in Georgia 2009, 27).

One can thus see that human rights violations were not uncommon during the conflict, and just like any other armed hostility it resulted in tragic consequences for many people.

Both NATO and Russia claimed that their operations, in Kosovo and in South Ossetia respectively, were humanitarian interventions. And the disagreements which
arose as a result of these operations provide a vivid example of geopolitical divisions that still exist between the West and Russia. Due to the fact that there is no coherent opinion among the experts of international law on humanitarian interventions (as noted in the EU report on the 2008 conflict in Georgia) the world’s big powers enjoy the discretion to begin such operations despite the lack of the UNSC authorization. Both interventions prove that the consequences faced by instigators of such operations will be limited to post-intervention diplomatic wrangles, and will lack any kind of joint decision by the international community. Furthermore, as the year 2008 has proven, the independence recognition process and creation of sovereign states from secessionist regions lies outside the realm of UN’s soft power; as both Kosovo and South Ossetia were recognized in spite of protests of one or more members of the UNSC.
CHAPTER VII: CONCLUSION

Both conflicts, in Kosovo and South Ossetia, have raised heated debates in the international arena over many years, since tensions first evolved in each region. In these debates intricate questions of state sovereignty, territorial integrity, and inviolability of borders blended with notions of humanitarian intervention, human rights, and peacemaking. Only time will be able to tell what will be the real-life implications of the events that took place in Kosovo and South Ossetia in 2008. However, certain conclusions can already be drawn now, particularly concerning the validity of the argument about the “uniqueness” of Kosovo’s independence.

The “sui generis” Argument

The opponents of Kosovo’s independence repeatedly pointed out that the recognition of the region’s statehood by the members of the international community without Serbia’s consent would set a dangerous precedent for other secessionist movements. The proponents of Kosovo’s independence, however, denied that Kosovo could be used as a possible precedent elsewhere in the world. They argued that the Kosovar people deserved independence and their circumstances were *sui generis*, a unique case, and so could not be used as a model elsewhere in the world. None of the advocates of this argument, however, gave clear and detailed explanations as to what makes Kosovo unique and distinguishes it from other regions and peoples seeking
independence worldwide. The dangers of precedent setting were brought to life just six months after Kosovo declared its independence. As a result of the “five-day war” Russia recognized South Ossetian and Abkhazian independence from Georgia, making clear parallels to the recognition of Kosovo.

This thesis considers many factors that led to the secessions of Kosovo and South Ossetia. It asks whether Kosovo’s arguments for independence can rightly be considered unique, or whether it is instead largely similar to South Ossetia. Likewise, it investigates whether Kosovo’s independence indeed provided a model for the independence of South Ossetia.

While it is undoubtedly true that every conflict is one of a kind, in many respects there are structural similarities that allow analysts, government officials, and the secessionists themselves to draw parallels between them. The results of the comparative analysis of both regions give ground to argue that there are major similarities between Kosovo’s and South Ossetian claims for independence.

The antagonisms between the majority and minority groups in both regions are ancient. Each side in both regions has different interpretations and understanding of its history and presents strong historic claims to the land in question. Both minorities, Albanians and Ossetians, have lived in those lands for centuries. At the same time these regions were also parts of Serbia and Georgia for centuries.

Both regions have a record of recurring instances of oppression of the Albanians and Ossetians by central governments. In the case of Kosovo, Albanians argue that intermittent instances of such oppression can be seen in the period starting with the
liberation from Ottoman rule through the Balkan Wars and well into the creation of the Yugoslav state. For South Ossetians, the most vivid examples of early repressions by the Georgians are the brutal suppressions of the South Ossetian uprisings by the Georgian People’s Guard in 1919 and 1920. These oppressions were interrupted by a relatively peaceful existence within the Soviet Union, but revived when USSR crumbled.

Both Kosovo and South Ossetia held equivalent legal status in constitutions of Yugoslavia and the USSR and interestingly enough virtually identical titles: Autonomous Province of Kosovo and South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast. Furthermore, both regions enjoyed a relatively equal degree of self-government rights within the complex ethnic quilt of the Soviet and Yugoslav state structures, including the rights for their own assembly and native language education.

When the socialist bloc began to crumble, the leaders of both Serbia and Georgia began to exhibit higher degrees of nationalism. In both cases, there was evident tightening of central control over the autonomous regions by Milosevic in Serbia and Gamsakhurdia in Georgia. This resulted in the limitation of minority’s autonomous rights, including education, language and political representation on the republican level. This ultimately proved to be the central cause for the emergence of strong and widespread secessionist sentiments among the populations of both regions.

Furthermore, both Kosovo and South Ossetia plunged into violent hostilities between the minority and majority ethnic groups. In the case of Kosovo, the Serbian central government introduced its armed forces for the period of 1998-1999 in order to bring the region back under Belgrade’s control. Georgia made two attempts to bring
South Ossetia back under Tbilisi’s rule by means of armed force, first in 1990 under Gamsakhurdia and then in 2008 under Saakashvili.

Although many in the West may not see it this way, the role of the international community in coercing the Serbs and Georgians to end their military operations in the region were also strikingly similar. Neither the 1999 NATO involvement in Kosovo nor the Russian operation in the North Caucasus in 2008 was sanctioned by the UN Security Council, and both were conducted against the clearly expressed will of some UNSC members. In case of the bombing of Serbia, NATO acted against the Russian arguments in the UNSC, and in the case of the “five-day war” Russia acted contrary to the explicit position of the United States voiced in the UNSC. Both NATO and Russia also presented similar reasons for their involvement in Serbia and Georgia, claiming that they are reestablishing peace and preventing ethnic cleansing by the means of a necessary humanitarian operation. The Russian actions in Georgia were often branded as disproportional by western diplomats and media, due to the fact that Russian forces went beyond the South Ossetian borders into actual Georgian territory in repelling the Georgian military and also because the Russian air force attacked Georgian non-military infrastructure. NATO forces, however, likewise went far into Serbian territory during their 1999 campaign and bombed Serbian civilian infrastructure throughout the country, including Belgrade.

In terms of their existence today, both Kosovo and South Ossetia present a high degree of similarity in many fundamental respects. Currently, neither of the two regions is capable of a truly independent existence. Both Kosovo and South Ossetia are heavily
reliant on outside financial support of their patrons from abroad and lack the economic base for a self-sufficient survival. In addition, neither of the two has a chance to become a member of the United Nations in the near foreseeable future—each has permanent members of the UNSC opposing its statehood, which will prevent both from joining the UN.

In conclusion, the central finding of the thesis is that neither region can make a strong claim to uniqueness in terms of its right to independence. Either both of them deserve it, or neither of them does. The claims that Kosovo’s independence is unique are unsubstantiated. Consequently, the recognition of South Ossetia and Abkhazia by Russia in the August of 2008, for better or worse, seems as justifiable as the West’s recognition of Kosovo that same year.

This finding provides troubling support for the notion that double standards are easily applied by the geopolitical heavyweights in the pursuit of their individual interests, even as they try to persuade other international actors of their impartiality and the sincerity of their motives. Hypocrisy, of course, is not a new phenomenon in politics, but this particular instance of hypocrisy on the part of world’s major powers does not simply influence one isolated event. Rather, it provides an incentive for other secessionist movements to step-up their efforts, as they witnessed the success achieved by the Kosovar separatists. This can ultimately lead to the destabilization of security and escalation of conflict in numerous volatile regions with ethnic and/or religious divisions worldwide.
Real-life Implications

In terms of immediate implications, Kosovo’s independence may perhaps become a quick solution for a long-standing conflict in the south-east of Europe. Currently there are high hopes among the experts that that promises of eventual accession to the EU will be an incentive strong enough to keep the Serbs from excessive actions of regaining control over Kosovo. The accession of both Serbia and Kosovo itself, if it occurs, is prone to eradicate any likelihood of hostilities, as it was the case with the Romanians and Hungarians over Transylvania (Ambrosio 2010). On the other hand if the nationalist forces prevail in Serbia, the dispute over Kosovo might transform into a continuous crisis, eventually becoming the Israeli-Palestinian conflict of Europe.

However, another important conclusion that experts should draw from Kosovo’s independence proclamation is the divided nature of the reaction among individual members of the EU. The way in which European Union members recognized Kosovo exposed a notable internal difficulty: profound disagreements between the members of the EU on critical issues of foreign policy. This places a big question mark on the prospect of further integration into the domain of a common European foreign policy. A lack of common foreign policy consequently threatens the likelihood of creating common defense policy, as it becomes obvious that countries with different visions and approaches to international problems are less likely to agree on setting up common defense.
Despite the fact that they are very similar in nature, the realities of international politics dictate different consequences for events in South Ossetia and Kosovo. Thus, the South-Ossetian independence is much more limited in its effects. First of all, the “five-day war” was in a sense a message from the Russian leadership to the Russian near-abroad. The message can be interpreted in the sense that Russian interests cannot be neglected anymore, as was the case during the bombings of Yugoslavia. By actively engaging in the campaign against the Georgian military, Russia also hindered Georgian aspirations of joining NATO. Prior to the conflict the Columbia University graduate Mikhail Saakashvili was very active in his flirtations with the West, actively bidding to join the alliance. The attempt of taking South Ossetia by force, however, significantly discredited him, creating an image of an opportunistic leader. On the other hand, Russia could face complications of its own internal problems with separatist movements. The Chechen terrorists have long pushed for independence from Russia and creation of an Islamic state. After all, Russia is a highly multinational country, with an abundance of cultures, ethnicities and religions; consequently the matter of territorial integrity is always on the priority list for Russian leaders.

As for the future of the regions themselves, without UN membership they are likely to exist as pseudo-states, at least in short-term perspective. The freedom of traveling for their citizens will be restricted by self-issued passports, only accepted in the countries that recognize them. Diplomatic relations with a limited number of nations will hinder their economic development. Lastly, it is not the proclamation in itself that truly matters for both Kosovars and Ossetians, but rather the recognition of their independence
is their ultimate goal. Hence, their biggest achievement so far is the fact that they are recognized by their immediate supporters, for Kosovo it is the United States and big EU members, for South Ossetia it is Russia.

The contemporary situation in both Kosovo and South Ossetia presents a highly complicated blend of historic quarrels, political interests, and ethnic conflicts. These conflicts evolved over decades, if not centuries, and it will be a challenging task to placate all parties. In cases where hostilities developed along ethnic lines, memories of suffering at the hands of the “foe” can live in the stories that people tell their children and thus, resentment can often be passed from one generation to the next one. Consequently, a candid reconciliation between Serbs and Albanians on one hand, and Georgians and Ossetians on the other can become the most successful peace strategy.
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