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**POLITICAL AND SECURITY DIMENSIONS ON
SETTLING KOSOVO-NORTH MACEDONIAN
BORDER DEMARCATION**

Abstract: *Drawing borders in post-conflict situations is a challenging undertaking between two or more actors that often ends up in arbitration. In some cases, it produces a political confrontation that may turn into a cycle of violence. This article sheds light on the dynamics of political and security challenges, the interaction of the foreign actors and the role of the local government and civic activism in resolving disputes related to the Kosovo-Macedonia border. This article focuses on the obstacles that came from the non-definition of the status of Kosovo and the popular and institutional dissatisfaction regarding the agreement on the border between the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) and Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), bypassing Kosovo and UNMIK from decisionmaking. Secondly, it asks whether these two sovereign countries have had the right to decide on the part of the border that separates Kosovo and Macedonia and was it an appropriate moment to reach an agreement on the border in tense situation between Kosovo, Serbia, and Macedonia? If so, why was Kosovo not included in the final stage of implementation of the agreement? Third, in unclear situation with Kosovo political status, which of the parties to the agreement would be able undertake practical ground activity, that of placing the border stones and which kind of writings will take place on them: „Serbia” and „Macedonia”, or „Kosovo” and „Macedonia”? Could the implementation of the agreement be postponed, at least for the part that divided Kosovo and Macedonia, and completed instead after the final status of Kosovo was determined?*

We argue that political momentum between Kosovo-Macedonia-Serbia triangle did not favor achieve such sensitive agreement between newly created states of Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and FYROM. Excluding Kosovo provisional institutions and UN civil administration from the border agreement was a mistake that produced instability, hostility and additional bitterness in

interethnic relations at the early stages, followed by the status quo. And, finally, including Kosovo as a partner in implementing the border issue paved the way for interstate cooperation that led to Macedonia's recognition of Kosovo, which erupt a short wave of anti-Macedonian rhetoric by both, Serbian political leadership and people protests. The evidence used for the arguments presented were positivists qualitative methods such as social survey and official statistics. The principle of uti possidetis was applied on the border disputes in the period after the breakup of Yugoslavia, and also in the case of the demarcation of the border between Kosovo and the states of Macedonia, Montenegro and Albania, as the best solution because it lies in „its primary aim of securing respect for the territorial boundaries at the moment when independence is achieved”.

In drawing conclusions related to the article topic, I used a combined methodology of literature research, comparative analyses and positivist qualitative methods such as social surveys through structured questionnaires, official statistics, interviewing the bearers of the institutions of the time and members of the technical commission for border demarcation. Archive of Kosovo Parliament and personal files also became important sources.

Key words: *Border demarcation, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Serbia, UNMIK.*

POLITIČKE I BEZBJEDOSNE DIMENZIJE U RJEŠAVANJU KOSOVSKO-SJEVERNOMAKEDONSKE DEMARKACIJE GRANICE

Apstrakt: *Povlačenje granica u postkonfliktnim situacijama je izazovan poduhvat između dva ili više aktera koji često završava arbitražom. U nekim slučajevima to proizvodi političku konfrontaciju koja se može pretvoriti u ciklus nasilja. Ovaj članak rasvjetljava dinamiku političkih i bezbednosnih izazova, interakciju stranih aktera i ulogu lokalne vlasti i građanskog aktivizma u rješavanju sporova u vezi sa granicom Kosova i Makedonije. Ovaj članak se fokusira na prepreke koje su proizašle iz nedefinisanja statusa Kosova i narodnog i institucionalnog nezadovoljstva u vezi sa sporazumom o granici između Savezne Republike Jugoslavije (SRJ) i Bivše Jugoslovenske Republike Makedonije (BJRM), zaobilazeći Kosovo i UNMIK od donošenja odluka. Drugo, postavlja se pitanje da li su ove dvije suverene zemlje imale pravo da odlučuju o dijelu granice koji razdvaja Kosovo i Makedoniju i da li je bio odgovarajući trenutak za postizanje sporazuma o granici u napetoj situaciji između Kosova, Srbije i Makedonije? Ako jeste, zašto Kosovo nije uključeno u završnu fazu implementacije sporazuma? Treće, u nejasnoj situaciji sa političkim statusom Kosova, koja od strana u sporazumu bi mogla da preduzme praktičnu kopnenu aktivnost, onu postavljanja graničnog kamena i koja vrsta pisanja će se na njima odvijati: „Srbija” i „Makedonija”, ili „Kosovo” i*

„Makedonija”? Da li bi primjena sporazuma mogla da se odloži, barem za dio koji je podijelio Kosovo i Makedoniju, i da se umjesto toga završi nakon određivanja konačnog statusa Kosova? Tvrdimo da politički momentum između trougla Kosovo-Makedonija-Srbija nije pogodio postizanju ovako osjetljivog sporazuma između novostvorenih država Savezne Republike Jugoslavije i BJRM. Isključivanje kosovskih privremenih institucija i civilne administracije UN iz sporazuma o granici bila je greška koja je u ranim fazama proizvela nestabilnost, neprijateljstvo i dodatnu gorčinu u međuetničkim odnosima, praćeno statusom *quo. I*, konačno, uključivanje Kosova kao partnera u implementaciji graničnog pitanja otvorilo je put međudržavnoj saradnji koja je dovela do priznanja Kosova od strane Makedonije, što je izazvalo kratak talas antimakedonske retorike i srpskog političkog rukovodstva i narodnih protesta. Dokazi korišteni za iznesene argumente bili su pozitivističke kvalitativne metode kao što su društvena anketa i zvanična statistika. Princip *uti possidetis* je primenjen na granične sporove u periodu nakon raspada Jugoslavije, kao i u slučaju demarkacije granice između Kosova i država Makedonije, Crne Gore i Albanije, kao najbolje rešenje jer leži u „svom primarnom cilju da osigura poštovanje teritorijalnih granica u trenutku kada se postigne nezavisnost”. U donošenju zaključaka vezanih za temu članka koristio sam kombinovanu metodologiju istraživanja literature, komparativne analize i pozitivističke kvalitativne metode kao što su društvena istraživanja kroz strukturirane upitnike, zvanične statistike, intervjuisanje nosilaca tadašnjih institucija i članova tehničke komisije za demarkaciju granice, Arhiv Skupštine Kosova i lični dosijei su takođe postali važni izvori.

Ključne riječi: Demarkacija granice, Kosovo, Sjeverna Makedonija, Srbija, UNMIK.

Introduction

„Territorial issues seem to be the ones most associated with the wars...”¹ Analyzing the wars fought in the past three centuries up until the World War Two (WWII), W. Mark Zacher concluded that, „about 80% of all interstate territorial wars led to territorial redistributions,” which decreased by 30% from the years 1946 to 2000.² The declining percentage of wars related to interstate border disputes is attributed to the role of international, global and regional organizations built after WWII to prevent or even resolve disputes that entered the conflict phase, based on the principle of accepting the administrative lines that existed before secession. As politically and security

¹ John A. Vasquez, *The War Puzzle*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, (1993), 151.

² Mark, W. Zacher. The Territorial Integrity Norm: International Boundaries and the Use of Force. *International Organization* 55, 2, 234-235. (Spring 2001). <https://library.fes.de/libalt/journals/swetsfulltext/10676368.pdf> (Accessed: 9/26/2022).

sensitive, border disputes often had to be resolved diplomatically or by the arbitral tribunal. For overcoming the traditional sensitivity of borders as a division of state jurisdictions, Beth A. Simmons encourages a move „toward a view of borders as institutions of governance”³, and as „vital functions in a globalizing world, . . . ports of entry for physical transshipment of the goods and services that feed the global economy”⁴.

There are two views of the importance of the borders between states: „debordering” and „rebordering.” Debordering, as the physical elimination of borders, tends to occur where states or international organizations cooperate between each other in peaceful circumstances, such as EU as a territory without barriers. In cases of conflicts, such as the one between Ukraine and Russia, and terrorist attacks as in the 9/11 in the United States, the need for reinforcing the borders or rebordering appears necessary to preserve the territorial integrity of the states.⁵ In the post-conflict cases and the emerging new states, establishing the borders appears to be imperative.

The breakup of Yugoslavia produced seven new states, transforming about 5,000 kilometers of administrative borders into state borders. Administrative internal borders between ex-Yugoslav republics became state international borders based on legal advice by the Yugoslavia Arbitration Commission, known as Badinter Arbitration Committee, that „the former boundaries become frontiers protected by international law”⁶ following the principle of *uti possidetis* („As you possess, so shall you possess”)⁷. The advice helped delineate the borders, but disputes still remained in the region. Most of the border disagreements included Serbia, with five cases, followed by Croatia (four), Bosnia and Herzegovina (four), Kosovo (one), Montenegro (one), North Macedonia (one) and Slovenia (one).⁸

The principle used during the 1980s in the case of Burkina Faso became the norm in post-communist emerged states. In 1986, the Chamber of the International Court of Justice in *Burkina Faso v. Mali* stated that the principle of *uti possidetis* lies in „its primary aim of securing respect for the territorial boundaries at the moment when independence is achieved... the

³ Beth A. Simmons. *Borders Rulers*, *International Studies Review*, 1–28, 2. (2019). doi:10.1093/isr/viz013. (Accessed: 9/24/2022).

⁴ Herzog, A. Lawrence. Globalisation, Place and Twenty-First-Century International Border Regions: An Introduction to the Special Issue, *Global Society*, 28:4, 391-397, p.392. (2014).doi:10.1080/13600826.2014.948542 (Accessed: 10/26/2022).

⁵ Herzog, 2014, 393.

⁶ Pellet, Alain. 1992. The Opinions of the Badinter Arbitration Committee a Second Breath for the Determination of Peoples. Borders principle in Opinion N3 of Arbitration Commission, Badinter commission. (January 1992.178). *European Journal of International Law*.

⁷ The principle was developed initially in the 19th century to prevent recolonization of the Spanish Empire by other European states, to be followed by Upper Volta (Burkina Faso) and Mali during 1980s dispute.

⁸ Blerim Reka. Border conflicts in the Balkans. *Politics*. (2018). <https://www.gisreportsonline.com/r/balkans-borders/>. (Accessed: 10/26/2022).

application of the principle of *uti possidetis* resulted in administrative boundaries being transformed into international frontiers in the full sense of the term.”⁹

The same principle was also implemented in Europe, in the peaceful breakup of Czechoslovakia and the USSR, and the bloody Yugoslav disintegration. As Zacher stated: „The United States and the European powers went to tremendous lengths to preserve the former internal administrative boundaries of Croatia and Bosnia as their new international boundaries”¹⁰. And according to MacFarlane: „The West is committed to the attempt to address problems relating to minority rights within the context of acceptance of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the new states”.¹¹ The International Court of Justice (ICJ) based its decisions on several territorial conflicts on the principle of *uti possidetis*, which means that states have rights to territories legally ceded to them by prior governing states and, of course, that other states do not have the right to take those territories by force.

Unresolved border issues will challenge EU integration of Western Balkan countries, especially Serbia and Kosovo, with 382 kilometers of borderline, as the most difficult case, making that a major challenge for sustainable peace in the fragile Balkans. Serbia claims that Kosovo is part of its territory, supported by countries with similar internal territorial or ethnic disputes, as are five EU countries, Russia, India and China - all of them pretending to offer a solution in accordance with Serbia’s stance. The Kosovo-Serbia border issue remains contested until a legally binding agreement is reached between two countries - which would include mutual recognition - as part of ongoing negotiations facilitated by the EU and supported by the United States and Great Britain.

Due to the mixture of people who live in a small space in the Balkan Peninsula, the borders weren’t drawn along lines of common culture, nationality or relief characteristics. Many of them have also been established by the interest of great powers. Border incongruence in Balkans mostly affected Albanian territories, which were distributed among their neighbors after the Balkan Wars among Serbia, Montenegro and Greece, among Yugoslavia and Greece after WWI, and among Serbia, Macedonia and Montenegro after WWII. Despite division of the Albanians into many states, and Albania are among the most ethnically homogenous countries, with more than 90% of the Albanian

⁹ Summaries of Judgments, Advisory Opinions and Orders of the International Court of Justice (Not an official document), Case Concerning the Frontier Dispute Burkina Faso/Republic of Mali), Judgment of 22 December 1986, 172, (September 22, 2022). <https://www.icj-cij.org/public/files/case-related/69/6449.pdf> (Accessed: 9/29/2022).

¹⁰ Zacher, W. Mark. The Territorial Integrity Norm: International Boundaries and the Use of Force. *International Organization* 55, 2, 234-235. (Spring 2001). <https://library.fes.de/libalt/journals/swetsfulltext/10676368.pdf> (Accessed: 9/26/2022).

¹¹ Macfarlane, S. N. (1999). Humanitarian Action and Conflict. *International Journal*, 54(4), 537–561. <https://doi.org/10.1177/002070209905400401> (Accessed 9/26/2022).

population, while Albanian population also represent the majority of citizens in south of Serbia, western North Macedonia and southeast Montenegro.

The breakup of the former Yugoslavia produced new state borders. The borders between Yugoslav republics and those of two ex-Yugoslav/Serbian provinces existed, were known, measured in the field and verified by geo-information data. The border demarcation between Kosovo and Macedonia was particularly difficult to establish, both politically and practically. It was specific, since it included the part of the border with Kosovo, the territory under international protection, with the pending status. The same principle was used by Kosovo neighbors to delineate the new interstate borders. The only unresolved border issues in the Balkans are between Kosovo and Serbia, but with exact border data archived.

This article focuses on the obstacles that came from the non-definition of the status of Kosovo and the popular and institutional dissatisfaction regarding the agreement on the border between the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) and Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM)¹², bypassing Kosovo and UNMIK from decision-making. Secondly, the research question for this article asks whether these two sovereign countries have had the right to decide on the part of the border that separates Kosovo and Macedonia. If so, why was Kosovo not included in the final stage of implementation of the agreement?

In drawing conclusions related to these issues, I used a combined methodology of literature research, comparative analyses and positivist qualitative methods such as social surveys through structured questionnaires, interviewing the bearers of the institutions of the time and members of the technical commission for border demarcation and official statistics. Archives and personal files also became important sources. With the aim of objective reflection about the demarcation process, several individuals were interviewed¹³ for their views on the political context of that time and which represent different institutional and academic backgrounds. They were asked three questions:

1. Has the inclusion of Kosovo in the border demarcation process produced stability?

¹² In this article we will refer to the same state, actually Northern Macedonia with different names based on the timeframe and legal arrangements. Official constitutional name after the independence was Republic of Macedonia. This name was disputed by Greece therefore in international relations unit 2017. it was referred as Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM). After Prespa Agreement in 2017. between Macedonia and Greece, official name of the state is Northern Macedonia. Sometime we refer to Northern Macedonia only as Macedonia.

¹³ Interviewees were officials in Kosovo institutions: dr. sc. Fatmir Sejdiu, ex Kosovo President, Lutfi Haziri, Vice-Premier, dr.sc. Bekim Qollaku, Chef of staff of Kosovo Premier and Head of Kosovo Commission for demarcation, dr. sc. Avni Alidemaj, professor of Law at Universum College, Valon Murati, professor of political Science at Universum College, and Jakup Jahiri, ex Chief Executive Officer in Viti Municipality. Interviews were held during the October 2022.

2. How much has it influenced the relations between Kosovo and Macedonia?
3. If Kosovo was not included, what would the course of the demarcation process be?

Demarcation started with „Serbia in and Kosovo out”

After FRY recognized FYROM, the two independent states started preparations for border demarcation on April 6, 1996, including the Kosovo's part of border, and appointed a team of experts, the Joint Diplomatic Expert Commission, „to prepare a draft for an international agreement” to complete the action. Serbia's involvement in the border issue with Kosovo was made indirectly through the 173 kilometer-long border demarcation with Macedonia.¹⁴ The work was completed by February 2001 and revealed to the public on February 23, 2001, in Skopje, at an event attended by leaders of both countries. Macedonian's president Boris Trajkovski and his Yugoslav counterpart Vojislav Kostunica formalized the Agreement between the Republic of Macedonia and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia on Delineation of the State Border. At that time, Albanian uprisings were taking place in the south of Serbia and in Macedonia, aimed at improving the rights and position of the Albanians in the two countries. Therefore, it is legitimate question to ask whether it was the right moment to raise for solution such a delicate border issue? I consider it was wrong timing for several reasons. First, Kosovo's political status was unresolved and since June of 1999 it was under international administration. Second, tensions between Serbs, Albanians and Macedonians were very high and even aggravating. And third, it was unclear which of the parties to the agreement would be able to place the border stones and on which sides of them would be written „Serbia” and „Macedonia.”

Was it able that implementation of the agreement be postponed, at least for the part that affected Kosovo and Macedonia, and completed instead after the final status of Kosovo was determined? I consider that it would be the best outcome. Furthermore, the Albanians considered the act of signing the agreement „as a coalition between FRY and FYROM against the Albanians living in ex-Yugoslav territories, creating hostility and producing additional bitterness in interethnic relations”.¹⁵ When the border agreement was reached,

¹⁴ Meha, Murat and Selimi, Behar. The challenges of the border demarcation Kosovo-Macedonia, *FIG Congress 2010 Facing the Challenges – Building the Capacity*. Sydney p.5. (April 11-16, 2010). In another article by the same authors the Kosovo-N.Macedonian border line is 167.5 km, that with Albania is 113.6 km, with Serbia is 382.6 km, and with Montenegro is 77.9 km long. See Meha, Murat Kufiri Kosovë – Serbi i dokumentuar dhe i aprovuar në nivel vendor e ndërkombëtar, Epoka e Re, At: <https://www.epokaere.com/kufiri-kosove-serbi-i-dokumentuar-dhe-i-aprovuar-ne-nivel-vendor-e-nderkombetar/> (Accessed: 9/3/2022).

¹⁵ Interview with Jakup Jahiri, ex Chef Executive Officer in Viti Municipality.

the UN Civil Administration, UNMIK, as the mechanism governing Kosovo, the suspended territory from the Yugoslav sovereignty under UNSC Resolution 1244 (1999), was not involved. This raised the question of the legality of the Serb-Macedonian agreement on the border without the involvement of the ground actors for the part of the border between Macedonia and Kosovo, UNMIK and the Kosovo institutions.¹⁶

Both countries, FRY and then FYROM, considered Kosovo as part of FRY, and not legally subject to the border demarcation with Macedonia, so it was left out of the process. Kosovo's voice under international administration went unheard. UNMIK consequently refused the agreement, because, as Hans Hakkerup, administrator of the UNMIK, wrote regarding concerns of the Viti Assembly President: „The territorial area of Kosovo cannot, therefore, be affected by any state or by agreements between states, until the Security Council authorizes a final political settlement for Kosovo.”¹⁷ This unfavorable approach toward the demarcation agreement by this international peacekeeping mechanism will change with the inclusion of coercive diplomacy by the great powers with the aim of not allowing the escalation of the situation in this part of the Balkans, recognizing the agreement between the two states: FRY and FYROM.

Aggressive approach by FRY and FYROM: Exclusion of Kosovo

The Yugoslav and Macedonian stance to the border demarcation, related to the part bordering Kosovo, was to eliminate Kosovo and UNMIK from the process, convinced that Kosovo was not an entity with international subjectivity, that it was part of Yugoslavia, whose sovereignty over the territory of Kosovo was just temporarily suspended and that in the future this sovereignty would be restored accordingly. Accordingly the Macedonian government could negotiate only with Belgrade given the existence of UN Resolution 1244, which clearly defines Kosovo as part of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.¹⁸

¹⁶ After the declaration of independence of the Socialist Republic of Macedonia, as named within the ex-Yugoslav federation, Greece complained about the name “Republic of Macedonia” because it was considered to be an encroachment on the territories of Greece, Albania and Bulgaria. The name “FYROM” became the temporary name. After a period of friction with Greece regarding the name, following the Prespa agreement of June 2018, the state was renamed the “Republic of North Macedonia.”

¹⁷ The letter by Hans Hakkerup, Special Representative of the Secretary-General, sent to Municipal UNMIK officials, delivered to Samet Dalipi, President, Municipal Assembly Viti, on November 30, 2001. The letter is in Dalipi's archive.

¹⁸ Mile Milenkoski, Jove Talevski, Delineation of the State Border between the Republic of Macedonia and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, *IBRU Boundary and Security Bulletin*. p.96 (Summer 2001). <https://www.durham.ac.uk/media/durham-university/research-/research->

The treatment of Albanians as second-class citizens, including the structural and physical violence inflicted by both regimes, triggered the radical voices among the Albanians living in Kosovo, Macedonia and Serbia - creating a tense climate in this triangle. Excluding Kosovo from the process fueled rumors in the international community that these two regimes were establishing borderlines in lands inhabited exclusively by the Albanians.

After the initial perception that the international community was with the victims, in this case Kosovo Albanians, the acceptance of the agreement between Skopje and Belgrade by the international community and the lack of initiatives on the horizon for resolving the final status of Kosovo, left the residents of Kosovo dissatisfied and distrustful „due to problems of legitimacy”.¹⁹ In such circumstances, the guerrilla activities of ethnic Albanians from the Presheva Valley (a region of southern Serbia), and Western Macedonia, were intensified - including the killing of some members of Serbian and Macedonian security forces and Albanian fighters during the spring of 2001. In such tense political and security circumstances, Macedonian leaders and academics openly favored ethnic divisions between Albanians and Macedonians as a solution for ongoing conflict.²⁰

The reaching of the agreement on the demarcation of the border between Yugoslavia and Macedonia, at the eve of interethnic conflicts in the region, as two countries that emerged from the breakup of the communist Yugoslavia, was a Serbian strategy with multiple purposes: to postpone the final status of Kosovo which was to be taken within two years; would worsen relations between Kosovo and Macedonia; Kosovo would be presented as a place of distribution of the conflict; the status of Kosovo as part of Yugoslavia would be prejudiced.

centres/ibru-centre-for-borders-research/maps-and-databases/publications-database/boundary-amp-security-bulletins/bsb9-2_milenkoski.pdf (Accessed: 10/26/2022).

¹⁹ Nicolas Lemay-Hébert (2009) Statebuilding without Nation-building? Legitimacy, State Failure and the Limits of the Institutional Approach, *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, 3:1, 21-45, DOI: 10.1080/17502970802608159.

²⁰ Ljubco Georgievski, Macedonian ex-Prime-Minister published an article in the Macedonian daily *Dnevnik*, on April 18, 2003, “The thesis for surviving of the Macedonian state and people.” In this article, he (paraphrasing, S.D. and V.M.) proposes that if the aim of the Albanians is to create a “Greater Albania,” we have to do territorial divisions based on ethnicity, even though this will create divisions between the two societies. Some members of the Macedonian Academy of Science and Arts also went in this direction. This thesis was supported by Arber Xhaferi, one of Albanian leaders in Macedonia. Both of them signed the Ohrid Framework Agreement, but after resigning from the government, they were against a multiethnic society in Macedonia. See Florian Bieber, Ed. 2008: *Ndarja e pushtetit dhe implementimi i Marrëveshjes kornizë të Ohrit*, FES, Shkup. p.46. Eben Friedman, “The Specter of Territorial Division and the Ohrid Agreement,” ECMI Brief, 9, 2003, 2-3.

Some aggressive activities by Macedonia affected the population in the border area with Kosovo.²¹ Based on the events there near the village of Debolldë, in Kosovo, the mayor of the municipality of Viti called an extraordinary session of the Assembly on January 19, 2001, informing the members about the events at the border. He also informed the international and local mechanisms in Kosovo, the Interim Administrative Council (IAC), KFOR, OSCE and UNMIK about the situation, inviting them to intervene and create safe conditions for the citizens of that area.

After the agreement between Belgrade and Skopje on the demarcation of the border became public, it was shown that the border had been moved within the Kosovo administrative border and the land owned by residents of the border area, including the village Mjak, had been placed within Macedonia. The Mjak's residents were taxpayers of Kosovo and belonged to the Viti Municipality. The new border made them part of Macedonia. Unofficially, it was said that the agreement for giving the territories of Kosovo, which belonged mainly to the municipalities of Viti and Gjilan, was to compensate for the territory of the Prohor Pećinski monastery given to Serbia.²² Even today, this territory remains a disputed area between the two countries, probably because the acquisition of the territory from Kosovo was not implemented according to the agreement, and because after Kosovo declared independence, Kosovo commission was also involved in the process and influenced the change of the borderline between Kosovo and Macedonia.

After the agreement was reached between FRY and FYROM, the residents were not allowed to cross the border to work on their properties and to provide food for their animals. The situation was the same with the part of the border that stretched between the Municipality of Gjilan and Macedonia. To improve the situation, the leadership of the municipality of Viti met several times with the leadership of Kosovo, including the Special Representative of the Secretary General, as an Administrator in Kosovo, and Kosovar political leaders. In a letter addressed to the UNMIK Administrator Hans Hakkerup, on August 27, 2001, the President of the Assembly of Viti invited him and the Kosovo Police Corps (KPC) to increase their engagement in protecting the borders of Kosovo imposed by the governments of Belgrade and Skopje, in order to soften tensions in this part of Kosovo. A similar letter, sent on that same day, was addressed to the American Office in Prishtina. Several protests were organized in Viti regarding the border changes that affected municipal territory, in particular property of citizens.

²¹ The case of confiscation of 10 animals, property of Xhymshit, Liman and Xhavit Ismajli from the Village Debolldëh, Municipality of Viti, and mistreatment and shooting of Sherif Ilazi from the same village, were signs that something was happening on the border with Macedonia.

²² Interview with Lutfi Haziri, ex Deputy-Prime-Minister of Kosovo.

Reaction by international institutions

UNMIK Administrator Hans Hakkerup, after receiving the information on the ground and the data from the border agreement, wrote to the United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations Jean-Marie Guehenno, informing him about the situation regarding the Kosovo-Macedonia border. Hakkerup expressed concern about „decisions being taken regarding the Kosovo stretch of the FRY/FYROM border without informing the UN authorities administering Kosovo in accordance with the UN SCR 1244 (1999). He added: „A number of recent incidents indicate that FYROM is attempting to establish control over territory that was so far regarded as being part of Kosovo and under UNMIK control. On October 5, three FYROM soldiers attempted to arrest some K-Albanian woodcutters and had to be sent back by KFOR [the Kosovo Force]. There are complaints by the Municipal President of Viti (Gnjilane/Gjilan Region) about efforts by FYROM to take possession of several villages and land that are part of the municipality.”²³

Hakkerup also informed the UN Headquarter officials in New York that: „Both FRY nor FYROM ever informed UNMIK about the negotiations and the agreement reached concerning their border. According to the written description of the border in our possession, that forms an attachment to the agreement concluded between the two governments, significant changes of the border appear to have been agreed, mostly to the detriment of Kosovo. We shall send a map by pouch. According to the „agreement on the state border stretching and demarcation” that FRY and FYROM concluded on 23 March 2001, both sides have set up a Joint Commission „to demarcate and mark the borderline in the field. We are not aware that this commission has begun its work. It is therefore our impression that FYROM might be acting unilaterally to implement the border agreement. The issue is very sensitive and raises concern as this could further destabilize the situation in an area that was one of hotspots of the recent armed conflict in FYROM.”²⁴

And finally, Hakkerup requested that the Permanent Representatives of FRY and FYROM „provide information and explanation on the government signed between the two states, and on the current activities on the Kosovo stretch of the FRY/FYROM border. FYROM should further be requested not to proceed with any actions relating to changes in the border, and to refrain from destabilizing the status quo. It is imperative that consultations with the UN should take place on these issues.”²⁵

Hakkerup, responding to the letter sent by Viti's Municipal President, informed him about activities that UNMIK had undertaken. He wrote that they

²³ The letter of the UNMIK SRSB Hans Hakkerup to United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations Jean-Marie Guehenno, October 12, 2001. This letter is in Dalipi's archive.

²⁴ *Ibidem.*

²⁵ *Ibidem.*

brought the matter to the attention of the Secretary General of the United Nations and summarized it as follows: „UN Security Council Resolution 1244 (1999) established the international civil presence (UNMIK) in the territory of Kosovo, as it was defined at the time of the adoption of the resolution on 10 June 1999. The resolution binds all states under Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter. The territorial area of Kosovo cannot, therefore, be affected by any state or by agreements between states, until the Security Council authorizes a final political settlement for Kosovo. No state is authorized unilaterally or by agreement with another state, to alter the territory of Kosovo, as it was on 10 June 1999”.²⁶

Brigadier General Keith Huber, the KFOR Commander of the Multinational Brigade East, who was in charge and aware of all developments in the terrain of Viti and Gjilan, where border incidents occurred daily, stated at the press conference in Gjilan that „the agreement between Skopje and Belgrade for correction and redefining of the border jeopardized the rights of Kosovo farmers near the border zone, who might lose easy access to their farm land, is ‘illegal’ . . . and that he „will send his troops to secure the agriculturists.”²⁷ Macedonian diplomats Tihomir Ilievski and Nano Ruzin at a meeting in Brussels with Daniel Spechard, NATO's Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, filed a protest against Huber's statement.²⁸ U.S. Ambassador in Skopje, Lawrence Butler, opined that „the US Embassy in Macedonia is not competent to say whether the bilateral agreement is valid. Macedonian Minister of Foreign Affairs Slobodan Casule justified the statements of UNMIK and KFOR officials on the alleged invalidity of the agreement with the UN bureaucratic procedure „as the Security Council did not inform the UNMIK officials on time that they would have to respect the border and all documents signed by the two sovereign countries.” He added that: „An agreement should be reached with the UN on defining of participation and representatives in the process”.²⁹ European Parliament, and EU Presidency through the resolution on the situation on the border between FRY/Kosovo and Macedonia, called all parts to cooperate „to defuse tension, encourage inter-ethnic dialogue and facilitate the return of refugees” consider the agreement as „a sign of the willingness of the new FRY authorities to find peaceful solutions

²⁶ See footnote 14.

²⁷ Pravda, 2002. “KFOR and UNMIK: We Do Not Like Your Border!!!” 2002. See at: <https://english.pravda.ru/news/russia/35587-n/>. (Accessed: December 12, 2022).

²⁸ Saso Ordanoski, Svetlana Jovanovska. Macedonia: UN defuses border dispute, (February 22, 2002). <https://reliefweb.int/report/serbia/macedonia-un-defuses-border-dispute>. (Accessed: 9/26/2022).

²⁹ Government of FYROM. “Macedonia-UN: Unanimous support to border delineation agreement”, (26 Feb 2002). In <https://reliefweb.int/report/serbia/macedonia-un-unanimous-support-border-delineation-agreement>, (Accessed: 10/2/2022).

to regional disputes inherited from the previous regime.”³⁰ Appeals by international organizations pushed KFOR to intensify its activities „to prevent the ethnic Albanian armed extremists in FYROM from drawing support from inside Kosovo,“ said Lt. Gen. Carlo Cavigliosi.³¹

Macedonia was concerned about the refusal by Kosovo's prime minister, Bajram Rexhepi, to recognize a treaty between Belgrade and Skopje as „extremely dangerous“ and as „declaration of war.“ Kosovo's President, Ibrahim Rugova, declared that „We will be very decisive about this issue, but we don't want to aggravate the situation now...called on the Macedonian government not to provoke the situation and to allow people access to their property across the border.”³² On March 18, 2002, Michael Steiner, the new Special Representative of the Secretary-General to Kosovo, met with President Trajkovski in Skopje and agreed on the establishment of a Joint Expert Committee to address the practical situation on the ground resulting from the border demarcation agreement between the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.³³

After Steiner's agreement with the decision, citizens of Viti demonstrated against the FRY-FYROM border agreement in April 2002, and a petition with 20,000 signatures was delivered to the UNMIK Administrator, who said that the „agreement had to be respected”.³⁴ As a reaction to the UN administration statement and public pressure, the Kosovo Assembly on May 23, 2002, adopted the Resolution on Protection of the Territorial Integrity of Kosovo. Steiner rejected the Kosovo Assembly Resolution, declaring it „null and void”, and insisting that „the legislative body had exceeded its powers by passing a measure on a border accord,”³⁵ ignoring the voice of the people of Kosovo.

Serbia, through a letter written by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, Goran Svilanovic, addressed the President

³⁰ Brussels, 23 February 2001 6297101(Presse 57) P 3sl01 Declaration by the Presidency on behalf of the European Union on the border demarcation agreement between the FRY and the FYROM, In cpr_678.pdf (pitt.edu) (Accessed 10/2/2022).

³¹ Ian Davis. “Small arms and light weapons in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia The nature of the problem”, *Saferworld*, 16 (2002).

³² Jolyon Naegele, Yugoslavia/Macedonia: Year-Old Border Treaty Still Rankles, *RFE*. (March 07, 2002) <https://www.rferl.org/a/1099018.html> (Accessed: 10/12/2022).

³³ UN SC, S/2002/436, p.9. (October 21, 2022). file:///C:/Users/AD/Downloads/S_2002_436-EN.pdf. (Accessed: 10/12/2022).

³⁴ Camilla Algarheim. Albanian villagers say a border agreement hatched between Yugoslavia and Macedonia has deprived them of their farms. *IWPR*, (21 February, 2005). (Accessed: 10/27/2022).

³⁵ PRESS STATEMENT ON KOSOVO BY PRESIDENT OF SECURITY COUNCIL | UN Press. 23/05/2002 Press Release SC/7412. +UN News, Security Council backs UN envoy veto of Kosovo Assembly's measure on border pact, 23 May 2002. At: <https://news.un.org/en/story/2002/05/35992> (Accessed: 10/23/2022).

of the Security Council (UN SC, S/2002/585)³⁶ and Macedonia through the Assembly Declaration stating that: „The Assembly reaffirms that the borders of the Republic of Macedonia with all neighboring countries are clearly defined, confirmed by valid bilateral agreements, and that there are no disputable matters raised by any of the neighboring states in that regard.” Security Council reacted in that direction stating that Border Agreement must be respected,³⁷ as NATO did,³⁸ which on August 22, gave final approval for the deployment of Operation „Essential Harvest” comprising about 4,500 troops in total.³⁹ Such developments created a *status quo* that lasted four years.

Macedonia-Kosovo political alignment and practical steps forward

Albanians in Macedonia were included in the institutional life of that country since 1991, waiting for benefits to come from the establishment of democracy. Those benefits did not appear during the 1990s. The inequality and mistrust between the Macedonian majority and the Albanians (comprising around one-third of population of the country), was reflected in every aspect of social life.⁴⁰ The experience showed that the Macedonian leadership response to the demands of Albanians for equality was inappropriate. The best example of such behavior is a highly volatile situation occurred with the opening of the public University of Tetova at the beginning of 1990s. It was not legally licensed, and several Albanians lost their lives in street protests.⁴¹ It operated illegally for a decade until 2003 after the Ohrid Agreement. The use of Albanian language met with the same treatment in FYROM.

However, the country’s cooperation with the international community managed to avoid an all-out war similar to the wars in Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo. Facilitated by EU envoy Francois Léotard and U.S. envoy Ambassador James Pardew, The Framework Agreement reached in Ohrid on August 13, 2001, created a social climate promoting peace and

³⁶ Letter dated 24 May 2002 from the Permanent Representative of Yugoslavia to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council, S/2002/585, Letter dated 24 May 2002 from the Permanent Representative of Yugoslavia to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council (Accessed: 15/12/2022).

³⁷ Press Statement on Kosovo by President of Security Council | UN Press.

³⁸ NATO Speech: Press Point NATO SecGen - MFA FYROM - 19 March 2001.

³⁹ “Macedonia: Country Background and Recent Conflict”, Macedonia: Country Background and Recent Conflict - EveryCRSReport.com (Accessed: 24/12/2022).

⁴⁰ About the recent ethnic structure of the population in Northern Macedonia see RNMSSO. Census of Population, Households and Dwellings in the Republic of North Macedonia, 2021 - first dataset, (2022). https://www.stat.gov.mk/PrethodniSoopstenijaOblast_en.aspx?id=146&rbrObl=31 (Accessed: 11/26/2022).

⁴¹ Abdylselam Emimi was killed, Rector of the University Dr. Fadil Sylejmani and professors, were bitten and sent in prison protecting university functioning. See: Universiteti i Tetovës e shënoi 25 – vjetorin e ligjëratave të para – Europort.mk (Accessed 3/12/2022).

respecting the ethnic identity of Albanians who constitute around 30% of the Macedonian population.⁴² The agreement put Macedonia toward „peace waters” and the political empowerment of Albanians in the country, gradually improving also their civil, political and national collective rights. Macedonia will avoid the communist inertia of majority dominance and enter the phase of a semi-consociational democracy system that will have to be improved with new elements, such as consensual democracy, which empower the democratic baggage of Albanians in Macedonia and create a lasting peace in the country.

The period of 2001-2006 showed no changes in the border issue. An attempt to discuss the matter, organized by UNMIK in early 2006 with participation of the two delegations, produced no results since the Kosovo delegation requested that the issue be addressed after the final status of Kosovo was resolved.⁴³ The fragile political situation between Kosovo and Macedonia was softened by the visit. of the Prime Minister of Kosovo, Agim Çeku, in Skopje, on May 10, 2006, when he was officially received by his counterpart Vlado Buckovski. Both agreed that the border issue was of a technical nature which „the line of the administrative border from former Yugoslavia will be the border which we will demarcate when on the other side there will be a partner with international legitimacy to have this done“ said Buckovski, and „we will resolve in a friendly manner, when the time is right as as Çeku said.“⁴⁴ But FRY Foreign Minister Vuk Draskovic voiced: „Only Belgrade is in charge of any changes of Serbia's borders and the agreement with Macedonia is in force and deposited in the UN“.⁴⁵ This was contrary to the official policy of the Albanian state that only Kosovo can be a partner to discuss the issue.

Kosovo-FYROM new era of cooperation: the interviewees' opinions

At the conclusion of the „standards before status” policy set by the international community as a condition for addressing the final status for Kosovo, in November 2005, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan appointed Martti Ahtisaari as Special Envoy of the Secretary-General of the United Nations to lead the process to determine Kosovo's future status. The UN envoy on Kosovo's status, in April 2007, came to the conclusion that „independence is the only option.” The Comprehensive Proposal for the Kosovo Status

⁴² RNMSO. Census of Population 2021.

⁴³ Two delegations, from Governments of Kosovo and Macedonian met in 2005 at UNMIK building in Prishtina, with participation of UNMIK, KFOR and OSCE.

⁴⁴ Risto Karajkov. Macedonia's Border with Kosovo, 2006. At: Macedonia's Border with Kosovo / North Macedonia / Areas / Homepage - Osservatorio Balcani e Caucaso Transeuropa (balcanicaucaso.org). (Accessed: 26/11/2022).

⁴⁵ Risto Karajkov. Macedonia's Border with Kosovo. (2006). <https://www.cci.tn.it/eng/Areas/North-Macedonia/Macedonia-s-Border-with-Kosovo-33357>. (Accessed: 26/11/2022).

Settlement⁴⁶, known as Ahtisaari Plan, was a key document on which Kosovo proclaimed independence and built up its own state institutions.

As foreseen in the Ahtisaari Plan for Kosovo, Skopje and Prishtina formed a joint technical commission, marking the border between the two countries according to the Agreement on the Physical Separation of the Border. „The inclusion of Kosovo in the process was a solution, since in the opposite case, distrust would continue, for which there was no interest from any party. Relations between Kosovo and Macedonia continued with increased intensity in all areas”, ex-President of Kosovo Fatmir Sejdiu said.

On the eve of Kosovo's independence, efforts were made to include Kosovo in the demarcation process, to reach an additional agreement between the FYROM of Kosovo and to implement it on the ground—an action that was not well received by Serbia but facilitated FYROM's recognition of Kosovo. „Macedonia requested that for the recognition of the independence of the Republic of Kosovo, the demarcated border agreed with Serbia without Kosovo be recognized, respectively, and Macedonia to be recognized with the official state name, at that time”, said Mr.Lutfi Haziri. This was done after Kosovo's independence was declared, changing the Macedonian approach to its status from being part of Serbia to an independent one, recognizing the new state as a matter of fact on the ground. Kosovo's status as an independent legal subject in international relations was recognized from more than half of the world's countries, and the resolution of the border problem with Macedonia paved the way for neighboring countries to recognize its independence as well. Macedonia's decision to bypass the agreement with Serbia related to the Kosovo-Macedonian part of border was a rational one. The recognition of Kosovo by Macedonia and Montenegro, on the same day, isolated Serbia as the only neighboring country of Kosovo that does not recognize its independence. „Without a doubt, addressing and correcting these mistakes during the demarcation process has produced stability not only among the residents affected by this process, but has also produced interstate stability”, said Mr Bekim Çollaku. The mixed commission of two states has continued working, according to the protocol signed on April 18, 2008 in Skopje.⁴⁷ The first meeting of the mixed commission was held in the International Civil Office (ICO) in Prishtina on July 3,2008. There were organized protests in front of the Macedonian Embassy in Beograd once Serbia learned that the Kosovo-Macedonian team had started work. The Serbian Foreign Ministry stated that „this (activity, S.D.) is a complete violation of the 2001 border demarcation agreement between Serbia and Macedonia, and any agreements made and actions taken by the Macedonian side in cooperation with unauthorized bodies

⁴⁶ See The Comprehensive Proposal for the Kosovo Status Settlement, 2007, Microsoft Word - 00.doc (kentlaw.edu).

⁴⁷ Murat Meha & Behar Selimi., The challenges of the border demarcation Kosovo-Macedonia, *FIG Congress 2010 Facing the Challenges – Building the Capacity*. Sydney, 5. (April 11-16, 2010).

in Kosovo are invalid for Serbia.” He added that: „Macedonia has shown that it does not respect Serbia's sovereignty and territorial integrity and does not recognize Serbia as party to the agreement”.⁴⁸

Based on the Protocol for the Process of the Joint Technical Commission signed on April 18, 2008, bearing in mind the readiness and mutual commitment to contribute to the development of good neighborly relations, security, stability and cooperation in the wider region—in particular by taking into account the respect of the principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity, political independence and peaceful settlement of disputes—the two governments signed the agreement on October 16, 2009. The next day, the Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo approved the demarcation of the border between the two countries.

Annex 1 (1a, 1b and 1c describes the parts where the border differs from the previous version) includes the changes in three positions, Debëllde/Kodra e Furrës, Restelicë and Stanëq/Topan.⁴⁹

The decision by Macedonian and Kosovar leadership to cooperate was a rational political and diplomatic move for future interstate relations and oriented toward similar views on the EU integration process. Contrary to Serbia, which has an ambiguous approach to West democracies, both countries see the EU as an umbrella of their interests in political matters and security fluidity in the Balkans.

After more than a year of intensive work by the joint team, starting in April 2008, the demarcation order concluded on October 16, 2009. On the same day, diplomatic relations between the new countries, the Republic of Macedonia and Republic of Kosovo, were established. This movement was welcomed by democratic countries, including the United States and EU, but not by the Serbian government, which was displeased. Serbian Foreign Minister Vuk Jeremic condemned that, „the so-called border agreement is the result of an arbitrary decision of the institutions in Pristina and the government in Skopje and it is totally unacceptable to us”.⁵⁰ Russia's statement was that without Serbia's acceptance, the agreement was not acceptable for Russia. The new international Kosovo borders correspond to the old provincial borders within Serbia proper and are not the same as the borders established by force from Russia within Georgia in regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia or actually in

⁴⁸ Government of Serbia. Protest conveyed to Macedonian embassy over border demarcation with Kosovo, (July 3, 2008). <https://reliefweb.int/report/serbia/protest-conveyed-macedonian-embassy-over-border-demarcation-kosovo>. (Accessed: 12/3/2022).

⁴⁹Kuvendi i Republikës së Kosovës, Vendosi, Ratifikohet Marrëveshja për demarkacionin fizik të Kufirit ndërmjet Republikës së Kosovës dhe Republikës së Maqedonisë, Nr.03-V-203, më 17 tetor 2009. Albanian version of Ratification the Agreement for Technical Demarcation of the Border between Republic of Kosovo and Republic of Macedonia, No.03-V-203, on 17 October 2009.

⁵⁰ Marusic, S. Jakov. Serbia Slams Macedonia over Kosovo, *Balkan insight*, (October 22, 2009), <https://balkaninsight.com/2009/10/22/serbia-slams-macedonia-over-kosovo>. (Accessed: 10/8/2022).

Ukraine in four provinces.⁵¹ Professor Avni H. Alidema agreed that, „the participation of the Kosovar side in the demarcation of the border with Macedonia was decisive and meritorious in interstate stability and bilateral relations overall, . . . paved the way for the facilitation of the movement of people, services and goods... All this took a turn for the better after participating in the demarcation process, resulting in stability and prosperity through the soft administration of interstate borders.” Reflected impact of joint work between Kosovo and Macedonia agreement professor Valon Murati concluded that: „the demarcation of the border with Northern Macedonia has certainly produced stability despite the dissatisfaction that the residents of the area, especially in the Kosovo part, have had about the process. The involvement of Kosovo in this process has proven that Kosovo as a new state, although at that time still under international supervision, has begun to exercise the prerogatives of a sovereign state.

Summary

Interstate borders can be both opportunities and obstacles for state cooperation, or sources of conflict, as it was in both cases of Kosovo and Macedonia. The reaching of the agreement on the demarcation of the border between Yugoslavia and Macedonia, as two countries that emerged from the breakup of the communist Yugoslavia in 2001, an act of haste and diplomatically move by the Serbia for certain purposes: firstly, would strengthen the relations between the two countries; secondly, put Kosovo in a doubly unfavorable position: would further aggravate Kosovo-Macedonia relations to an open conflict, presenting Kosovo as a destabilizing factor in the Balkans and prejudice the final status of Kosovo of being part of the FRY. This article argues that ignoring the ground actor authorities in the decision making process of border demarcation, whether with a suspended status or under international supervision, is a mistake that will produce uncertainty and destabilization in the region and beyond. Leaving Kosovo aside in decision making regarding its border politicized the process, fueling the interethnic, Albanian-Macedonian conflict in Macedonia during 2001. Initial ignorance about Kosovo among the actors of the border agreement started shifting after the international community realized that Kosovo's independence was the only hope for peace in the Balkans. Recognizing this move toward final status of Kosovo, the Macedonia took the side of the international community, at the same time using the moment to condition the recognition of the border agreement, with some exceptions, by Kosovo on its recognition by Macedonia.

⁵¹ Carter, B. David. & Goemans, H.E. The Making of the Territorial Order: New Borders and the Emergence of Interstate Conflict. *International Organization*, 65, 275-309. (2011).Doi:10.1017/S0020818311000051. (Accessed: 9/26/2022).

Involving Kosovo in the later phase of the border process produced temporarily diplomatic anger within Serbian political leaders and citizens against Macedonia. Political attendance between the leaders of the two countries, facilitated by international factor, resulted in softening and improving relations up to the level of Macedonia's recognition of Kosovo. It was the declaration of independence and recognition by world democracies and not public pressure by the local and central institutions of Kosovo under the UNMIK administration that succeeded in bringing in Kosovo as a decisive element in the finalizing process of border demarcation.

Because of uncertainty of administrative borders, it can never be determined that one or the other side gained or lost territory with the process of demarcation. It is known that only in the part of the territory of the village of Debolde and Mjak, part of the municipality of Viti, the demarcation line has been moved easily into the Macedonian territory compared to the initial proposal according to the Yugoslav-Macedonian agreement. The residents of the border area were the ones who suffered because of the new borders. Facilitating the two-way access of the population of these areas was the duty of the respective states. Rational decision making by the two countries, with international facilitation, ended the problem of territorial limitation, which paved the way for friendly relations between Kosovo and Macedonia. Kosovo and Serbia are waiting for a difficult process of demarcation of the border which will be done after the mutual recognition between the two countries.

Zaključak

Međudržavne granice mogu biti i prilike i prepreke za državnu saradnju, ili izvori sukoba, kao što je to bilo u oba slučaja na Kosovu i u Makedoniji. Postizanje sporazuma o demarkaciji granice između Jugoslavije i Makedonije, kao dvije zemlje nastale raspadom komunističke Jugoslavije 2001. godine, čin žurbe i diplomatski potez Srbije u određene svrhe: prvo, ojačao bi odnosi između dvije zemlje; drugo, doveo bi Kosovo u dvostruko nepovoljan položaj: dodatno bi pogoršao odnose Kosova i Makedonije do otvorenog sukoba, predstavljajući Kosovo kao destabilizujući faktor na Balkanu i prejudicirao konačni status Kosova kao deo SRJ. U ovom članku se tvrdi da je ignoriranje temeljnih aktera vlasti u procesu donošenja odluka o demarkaciji granice, bilo sa suspendiranim statusom ili pod međunarodnim nadzorom, greška koja će proizvesti neizvjesnost i destabilizaciju u regionu i šire. Ostavljanje Kosova po strani u donošenju odluka u vezi sa njegovom granicom politizovalo je proces, podstaklo međuetnički, albansko-makedonski sukob u Makedoniji tokom 2001. Prvobitno neznanje o Kosovu među akterima graničnog sporazuma počelo je da se mijenja nakon što je međunarodna zajednica shvatila da je nezavisnost Kosova jedina nada miru na Balkanu.

Priznajući ovaj korak ka konačnom statusu Kosova, Makedonija je stala na stranu međunarodne zajednice, istovremeno iskoristivši trenutak da priznavanje sporazuma o granici, uz neke izuzetke, od strane Kosova uslovljava njegovim priznanjem od strane Makedonije. Uključivanje Kosova u kasniju fazu graničnog procesa izazvalo je privremeni diplomatski gnev među srpskim političkim liderima i građanima protiv Makedonije. Političko učesće lidera dvije zemlje, uz posredovanje međunarodnog faktora, rezultiralo je omekšavanjem i unapređenjem odnosa do nivoa makedonskog priznanja Kosova. Upravo je proglašenje nezavisnosti i priznanja od strane svijetskih demokratija, a ne pritisak javnosti od strane lokalnih i centralnih institucija Kosova pod administracijom UNMIK-a, uspjelo da Kosovo uvede kao odlučujući element u finaliziranju procesa demarkacije granice.

Zbog neizvjesnosti administrativnih granica, nikada se ne može utvrditi da je jedna ili druga strana procesom demarkacije dobila ili izgubila teritoriju. Poznato je da je samo na dijelu teritorije sela Debolle i Mjak, u sklopu opštine Vitina, linija razgraničenja lako pomjerena na teritoriju Makedonije u odnosu na prvobitni prijedlog po jugoslovensko-makedonskom sporazumu. Zbog novih granica stradali su stanovnici pograničnog područja. Omogućavanje dvosmjernog pristupa stanovništvu ovih područja bila je dužnost odgovarajućih država. Racionalno donošenje odluka dvije zemlje, uz međunarodnu olakšicu, okončalo je problem teritorijalnog ograničenja, što je otvorilo put prijateljskim odnosima između Kosova i Makedonije. Kosovo i Srbiju čeka težak proces demarkacije granice koji će biti obavljen nakon međusobnog priznanja dvije zemlje.

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