

KOSOVO – UKRAINE TALKING POINTS

The following notes are not intended to be read out in order, clubbing Ukrainian interlocutors over the head with a long diatribe, but are proposed to shape Kosovo representatives' knowledge on what needs to be covered in re-orientating Ukraine's understanding of the Kosovo question, and be dropped in selectively, as appropriate to the conversation. Accurate knowledge of Kosovo's history is lacking in Ukraine and any opportunities to inform, enlighten and correct should be taken.

Ukrainians' default position on Kosovo has been to avoid it, seeing the precedent of Kosovo as dangerous for their own territory. Some Ukrainian MPs, some media are revising this view in the light of the current war, but so far Ukraine's Presidential Administration and its foreign policy establishment are sticking with Serbia (Serbian weapons supplies to Ukraine via third parties, though denied by Vucic, are a factor). What Kosovo needs to convince Ukraine of is:

- a) the similarity of the two countries' predicaments, shared interests and values,
- b) the falsehood of Russian and Serbian narratives that have kept Kosovo a toxic subject for Ukraine,
- c) practical advantage to Ukraine of recognising Kosovo: specifically securing the Western Balkans against Russian disruption and unlocking more support for Ukraine.

- You will have heard about Kosovo very often through the megaphones of Putin and Vucic and hardly at all from Kosovo itself and from the West. Putin indiscriminately compares Kosovo to every Russian-sponsored enclave: Transnistria, Luhansk Peoples Republic, Donetsk Peoples Republic, Crimea, Abkhazia, South Ossetia – everywhere that comes into his head; while Vucic has threatened Ukraine can kiss goodbye to its own territorial integrity if it recognises Kosovo. Unsurprisingly this has had the desired effect for Russia and Serbia of conditioning Ukrainians to see Kosovo as toxic.
- But Kosovo should not be toxic for Ukraine; Kosovan statehood is legal, widely recognised, supported by Ukraine's friends, opposed by Ukraine's enemies, and the Kosovan people and government are totally behind Ukraine. Compare the Ukraine flag you'll see dominating Prishtina's central square (on the side of the Grand Hotel) with the pro-Putin murals you will see in Belgrade and north Mitrovica.
- Since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine Kosovo has joined all sanctions against Russia, in spring 2022 financed a program to shelter Ukrainian journalists and Prishtina hosted the summer 2022 Odesa International Film Festival. A few weeks ago, in August Kosovo held a public celebration of Ukraine's independence day, 24 August.

- Kosovo's independence is regular and legal. Independence was declared in 2008 with strong Transatlantic support within Kosovo's Yugoslav borders, the borders of a constitutive unit of the Yugoslav Federation, and under a constitution guaranteeing multi-ethnicity – both Albanian and Serbian are the official languages - and with the benefit of international supervisory presences. This was a conservative, necessary, stabilising outcome - it completed the jigsaw of Yugoslav successor states and helped settle the region's other multi-ethnic states. The International Court of Justice was asked to rule on the legality of Kosovo's independence declaration and in 2010 deemed it valid in international law.
- For all President Vucic's protestations about territorial integrity it is precisely Serbia that positions itself to redraw borders, to break away territory from Kosovo, to set off an endless chain reaction of further instability, just as Russia has attempted in Ukraine. Neither Serbia nor Russia have anything to offer to the majority populations of our respective countries, and do not even pretend to.
- For all that Putin tries to compare Kosovo with the territories that he broke away from Ukrainian control in 2014, it is not Crimea, Luhansk or Donetsk that Kosovo's experience most closely matches, but that of Ukraine itself. This is the comparison Putin and Vucic are most desperate to hide from Ukraine.
- Both Ukraine and Kosovo emerged from a splintering multinational socialist federation in the 1990s – Ukraine from a big one, the USSR, Kosovo from a smaller one, Yugoslavia. Both were dragged into the respective federation in the first place by violent conquest in the 1910s, by each federation's dominant republic. Serbia invaded and subjugated Kosovo and surrounding Ottoman territories in 1912. Russia reconquered Ukraine in 1919 (and everyone should surely now stop calling that "The Russian Civil War").
- Russia and Serbia each manufactured self-serving myths to justify their violent repression of Ukraine and Kosovo respectively. Serbia built the idea that Kosovo was its Jerusalem, using highly stylised legends of a medieval battle it lost in 1389. Kosovans are continually astonished at how successful Serbia has been in getting this nonsense, about a disputable event 600 years ago, accepted internationally. Russia has meanwhile pushed the fiction that Ukrainians do not exist, were invented by Lenin in the 1920s; that Ukrainians are all Russians.
- Despite being dragged into the two federations at the barrel of the gun, over decades both Ukraine and Kosovo gained the status of constitutive federal units – a status that the egos and revanchism of the respective largest republics, Russia and Serbia, ultimately refused to reconcile to when each federation broke up. Ukraine became a Soviet republic and from 1945 even a UN member while under Yugoslavia's 1974 constitution Kosovo along with Vojvodina acquired a dual status, as a) autonomous provinces within Serbia with their own constitutions, executives, parliaments and

other institutions – identical to Yugoslavia’s republics, and as b) constitutive federal units contributing a member to Yugoslavia’s collective presidency, which after 1980 became a rotating presidency – Kosovo held Yugoslavia’s presidency [twice](#), in 1986-7 and (briefly) in 1991.

- In 1989 Serbia revoked Kosovo’s autonomy [illegally](#), in contravention of the 1974 constitution, using force (Kosovan Albanian MPs refused to take part in the revocation vote, rendering the Kosovo parliament inquorate), then expelled the majority population from the entire state sector including schools, implementing a racial apartheid policy in the middle of Europe.
- Serbia followed that up with actual genocide – not the fake, illusory genocide Russia claimed Ukraine was carrying out against Russian speakers in the Donbas. In 1998 and 1999 Serbia destroyed dozens of villages, massacred male populations, raped female populations, robbed and looted, expelled hundreds of thousands of people into neighbouring countries. And they expect Kosovo to return to their rule after that? What Serbia did to Kosovo in the 1990s echoes current Russian actions and stances in Ukraine.
- Ukrainian and Kosovo Albanian borders are treated by our respective adversaries as artificial, temporary, our territory divisible, to be parcelled up among neighbours. National identity is portrayed as fake, degenerate and pathological – a dangerous othering and that has facilitated genocide in both Ukraine’s and Kosovo’s cases. Ukrainian nationalism is painted by Russia both as inauthentic and inherently Fascist. Serbia strives to portray Kosovo Albanians as Islamic terrorists or drug dealers.
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- Both Kosovo and Ukraine suffered decades of cultural and linguistic repression from Serbia and Russia in the 20th century. Just as in the USSR Khrushchev’s cultural thaw of the 1960s was for Russians and did not extend to Ukrainian writers and artists, who continued to be repressed, Kosovo got very scant taste of Yugoslavia’s liberalism; from the 1980s a generation of Kosovo Albanian men was decimated by political imprisonment. We understand that under Stalin whole generations of modern Ukrainian culture were wiped out: “The Executed Renaissance”, and Russia is continuing that campaign today – Victoria Amelina, a talented young Ukrainian novelist – who wrote eloquently about the Executed Renaissance [herself](#) - was killed in a missile attack this year (on a restaurant in Kramatorsk), the orchestral conductor Yurii Kerpatenko [was shot](#) dead in Kherson (in his apartment) for refusing to collaborate last year. Serbia went for our intellectual elites too – assassinating figures like Jusuf Gervalla, Fehmi Agani, Bajram Kelmendi.
- Even in the details there are uncanny parallels between what Serbia and Russia have done to Kosovo and Ukraine in wartime. In 1999 the fleeing Serbian forces took with them our national museum’s exhibits, our cadastral records and much more. In Kherson a year ago we saw the Russian forces dismantling and making off with

monuments, cultural treasures, as well as looting hospitals, even raccoons from the zoo. During the Kosovo war in 1999 Serbian forces massacred prisoners in the Dubrava prison, trying to disguise it under the cloak of the NATO bombing. Last autumn in the [Olenivka prison](#) camp in eastern Ukraine the Russians detonated a bomb that killed over 50 Ukrainian prisoners of war, trying to blame it on a Ukrainian missile.

- Serbia is ruled by politicians who were members and spokesmen of Milosevic's genocidal government in the 1990s, like Vucic and Dacic, who feed an anti-Western, pro-Russian, anti-Kosovo public mood. The EU and the US push us to trust and do deals with them, despite their open agenda of destroying our statehood, military sabre-rattling, and their paramilitary structures in north Kosovo wounding 93 NATO soldiers on 29 May. It is as if Ukraine were being pushed in 20 years' time to compromise with a revanchist Russian government headed by (notorious Russian TV propagandists) Vladimir Solovyov and Margarita Simonyan.
- The dilemmas Kosovo's EU and US partners are placing us in over creation of the so-called Association of Serb-majority Municipalities within Kosovo, which Serbia demands while refusing to recognise Kosovo, may remind Ukrainians of the destructive pressures exerted upon Ukraine for implementation of the Minsk Agreements (frameworks for legitimization of the Russian-created Donetsk and Luhansk 'peoples' republics' within Ukraine that Kyiv was forced to sign at moments of extreme Russian military pressure in 2014 and 2015).
- Both Kosovo and Ukraine have had similar difficulty projecting our case to the Global South as the capitals of our respective adversaries use and abuse the legacy respectively of the USSR's support for anti-colonial struggles and Tito's leadership of the Non-Aligned Movement, and have retained the networks, while both Kosovo and Ukraine are viewed through the prism of our Western supporters, which include the former colonial powers, and not in our own right, and as undergoing our own anticolonial struggle.
- There is a strong geopolitical case for Ukraine's recognition of Kosovo. Serbia and Russia have a shared interest in disrupting the Western Balkans – NATO's backyard. Serbia because of its still unsated territorial ambitions, and Russia because conflict in the Western Balkans will distract and weaken NATO support for Ukraine. Ukraine's recognition of Kosovo can help put a stop to that. That will help put pressure on the 5 EU holdouts (Greece, Slovakia, Romania, Spain, Cyprus) who have not yet recognised Kosovo and it will force Serbia at last to fall into line with the West. Ukraine can play a role in shaping a Western Balkans that consolidates in its support rather than undermines it. Ukraine has the opportunity to play that shaping role, just as it successfully shaped the battlefield for its Kharkiv and Kherson counter-offensives a year ago.

- Appeasing Vucic's Serbia, giving it free passes and failing to call it out on its hostility is a dead end - an invitation to be endlessly strung along. It only allows Vucic to continue stoking regional conflict, to continue cultivating a Russia-friendly line. But Serbia can be different: the hundreds of thousands of ordinary Serbs who have protested in recent months against the Vucic regime's cultivation of violence and ties with organized crime demonstrate that. Russia has no essential hold on the country – popular support there for Russia is mostly generated and maintained by Serbia's own present regime and media outlets; Serbia's economy is vastly more linked to the EU than to Russia. If put on the spot, and its stale dreams of resuming colonial domination of Kosovo are given no more road, Serbia has nowhere else to go but into the Western camp. Recognition of Kosovo is a vital component of that necessary forcing strategy.

Alex Anderson, 18 September 2023