

Dark Side of the Moon: Negative Implications of the Brussels Agreement for the North of Kosovo

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This paper explores what does The Brussels Dialogue between the Serbian and the Kosovo authorities mean for the Serbs in the North of Kosovo. As argued by many, the EU-brokered dialogue, which led to the signing of the Brussels agreement (2013), is to be regarded as “success” of the EU peacebuilding. However, such positive assessments usually overlook the consequences for the locals and their understanding of “success”. By linking the theory on the EU as a normative power with the academic literature on the local aspects of peacebuilding, this paper argues that despite the supposed success, these concrete EU peacebuilding efforts had, among the other, certain negative social psychological implications for the Serbs in the North of Kosovo and also contributed to the worsening of intra-ethnic relations within this community. These processes, in turn, question the EU peacebuilding” success”, and the overall perception of the EU as a normative power.

Key words: the EU, peacebuilding, normative power, the North of Kosovo, the Brussels agreement, social psychological implications

Introduction

In April 2013, when the agreement on the normalization of relations between Kosovo and Serbia was reached in Brussels, many hailed the agreement as a “great success”, meaning “a

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step closer to Europe” (EEAS, 2013; Licht as cited in Dempsey, 2013). Undisputedly, the signature of the agreement raised high hopes not only for the stabilization of relations between Serbia and Kosovo, but also widely for the region of Southeast Europe (Prelec, 2013; Novosti, 2013). By claiming that the EU finally managed to show its power to mediate and “shape conceptions of normal” in its neighbourhood – which is according to Manners (2002), a characteristic of normative power actor – some went even further by claiming that “the EU is now indisputably in the lead on the Balkans” (Lehne, 2013).

However, not everyone has been persuaded by this “success”. The condemning discourse that pervaded the right-wing political spectrum in Serbia contained some strong words, depicting the agreement as “an act of treason” that would deteriorate the well-being of the Serbs living there (Večerne novosti, 2013; Ivošević, 2014). This agreement was received cold-heartedly also by the majority of local Serbs, who predominantly populate the North of Kosovo – the part of the country that constantly challenges or even rejects the authority of the Kosovo government over the territory. The Serbs of northern Kosovo, confronted by the changed attitude of their kin-state, were thus faced by a difficult choice: to follow the new advice of the authorities in Belgrade and start the process of “integration”, to keep boycotting the Kosovo institutions, or simply to leave Kosovo.

Faced by the difficult choice, the tensions between those who decided for the integration and those who insisted on boycotting the Kosovo institutions further arose. The “boycotters” quickly accused “the integrationists” of collaboration or even treason, while the latter labelled the former as the people living in the past and ignoring the changed circumstances. As a result, the intra-ethnic conflict between the two groups emerged – a type of conflict that remains relatively understudied in the academic literature (Warren & Troy, 2015; Jinadu, 2007; Hislope, 1997). The EU, whose strategy of normalization of relations between Pristina

and Belgrade was built on the participation of Serbs in the public life of Kosovo, openly favoured “the integrationists”.

The methodological approach of the paper builds on the analysis of interviews and focus group discussion. By linking the theory on the EU as a normative power actor with the academic literature on the local aspects of peacebuilding, this paper argues that despite the supposed ‘success’, the EU’s peacebuilding engagement in Kosovo intensified the intra-ethnic split within the Serbs in northern Kosovo and had negative, often invisible implications for this community. These processes, in turn, question the peacebuilding ‘success’ of the EU, and the overall perception of the EU as a normative power actor.

By examining local perceptions of ‘EU success’ and its negative implications for a particular local community, this paper focuses on the second theme of this Special Issue – that of effectiveness – and sheds light on a topic which is often neglected in analyses of the EU’s normative power and EU peacebuilding. Yet, this paper also engages with the concept of resistance vis-à-vis the peacebuilding attempts of the EU, which is, as set by the editors of this special issue (Ejdus and Juncos, forthcoming), the third conceptual theme relevant to theorizing the role of the “local”. In particular, the study is being informed by the insights of Richmond (2010) in that this paper aims at exploring the hidden ways of resistance and the reasons behind.

The paper proceeds as follows: the introduction is followed by literature review and the theoretical framework. The explanation of methodology follows. The next section outlines methodology. A short overview of the specifics of the (intra-ethnic) conflict in northern Kosovo is presented afterwards. The next section is the cornerstone on the paper, as it brings

forward the results of the fieldwork in the North of Kosovo. The concluding section discusses the implications of this study for the theory and practice of EU peacebuilding.

Local perceptions of the EU normative power through the lens of peacebuilding:

theoretical framework

The central argument of the paper revolves around the assumption that EU peacebuilding in the North of Kosovo, which should be understood in the wider framework of the Brussels dialogue, has had certain social psychological implications for the Serb community in northern Kosovo and intra-ethnic relations there.¹ Building on the assumption that the intra-ethnic split emerged between those who opted for integration into Kosovo and those who kept boycotting it and the theoretical framework proposed by guest editors (Ejdus & Juncos, forthcoming), this paper takes the editors' framework a step further by merging it also with the theoretical insights on (local understanding of) the EU normative power in post-conflict societies where peacebuilding is taking place.

One of the oldest assumptions of the liberal theory of peacebuilding is that the democratization of conflict- and post-conflict societies reduces the likelihood of a renewal of violence between the groups in conflict (Doyle, 2005). Also the EU's approach to peacebuilding stems from this notion (Ashton, 2011) despite the fact that "the democratization-stabilization assumption" as the most appropriate form of peacebuilding has been contested several times (Gleditsch, 1992; Rosato, 2003; MacGinty, 2012 and 2014, 551; Tschirgi, 2013). By relying on hard, soft and normative power, the EU argues that it is trying to promote democratic processes in its neighbourhood – the regions, which are on the "demand side of the equation" (Bassuener & Ferhatović in Ejdus & Juncos, forthcoming).

According to Manners (2006), the following nine norms can be found in the key documents of the EU and have been underpinning the ideational structure of the EU itself: peace, liberty, democracy, human rights, rule of law, equality, social solidarity, sustainable development and good governance. As seen from the speeches of the key EU officials engaged in peacebuilding in Kosovo, these “buzzwords” dominate their speeches (Ashton, 2011; EEAS, 2013; EEAS, 2016) and also the projects funded by the EU (Fagan, 2015).

Given the fact that the EU attempts not only at building peace in post-conflict societies but also projects its normative power through its engagement and so shape “conceptions of normal” (Manners, 2002), it is worth considering to shed light on the implications that the projection of the EU normative power has on post-conflict societies. Björkdahl *et al* (2015) suggest that the normative power of the EU shall be assessed through the lens how does ‘a targeted country’ respond to the projection of the EU’s norms. Basically, the norms can be *adopted, adapted, resisted or completely rejected* by the recipients. The theory has it that the normative power may serve as an attractive power for an international actor to possess, as it is inherently unaggressive (contrary to hard power). However, even this assumption does not remain undisputed, as certain authors argue that the normative power occasionally entail assertive and aggressive character (Sjursen, 2006; Staeger, 2016). In the circumstances, where people living in post-conflict societies understand the activities of a peacebuilding actor differently and also differently perceive the security and safety of their environment, they must – in the words of Mac Ginty (2014, 553) – find appropriate “practices and norms [...] to avoid and minimize conflict and awkward situations at both inter- and intra-group level.”

Building on the work of Warren and Troy (2015, 485) in order to bring the intra-ethnic relations in post-conflict societies into the debate, it is necessary to explore the intra-ethnic

character of conflicts to understand the dynamics of such societies. Particularly worth-exploring in this regard are the social psychological implications for the locals (“beneficiaries” of peacebuilding engagement), which have only rarely been analysed in peacebuilding research. Namely, it is sometimes the intra-ethnic tensions within a particular ethnic group that have a great impact or even define external orientation (inter-ethnic relations) of the ethnic group vis-à-vis its geopolitical environment, including a peacebuilding actor, which is a part of it. This can lead to the changed relations within the ethnic group and can also impact the perception of security and safety in a local environment.

Thus, the relevant question of this paper is whether the EU as a peacebuilding actor can contribute to the widening of the intra-ethnic split within a particular ethnic community by applying certain strategies in its peacebuilding. In particular, can a peacebuilding actor, who favours those locals in a post-conflict society that support its peacebuilding engagement, cause the undesired consequences at the local level? Furthermore, how do the processes that followed “the success” of the EU relate to the perceptions of security and safety in northern Kosovo on the local level and what are the social psychological implications for the locals? Did the EU contribute to the changed patterns of intra-ethnic dynamics and, eventually, intra-ethnic conflict? Has this resulted in the emergence of innovative forms of what Mac Ginty (2014) calls “everyday peace”?

Methodology

The methodological framework primarily builds on the analysis of interviews and the analysis of focus group discussion.² The field research in northern Kosovo was completed in March 2017. It employed the snow-balling sampling for selecting interlocutors. Such an approach was needed in order to overcome what Cohen & Arieli (2011) describe as “common attitudes

of distrust and suspicion” within a local community, which hamper the quality research in conflict or post-conflict environments. Although this sampling technique is usually used for studying “the hidden populations” that are difficult to access, the author decided to rely on this method due to the fact that the locals in post-conflict societies might be reluctant to discuss the sensitive issues openly, especially with a foreigner. Namely, discussing the “insecurities” the people experience in everyday life might lead to the aggravation of their safety and security, as ‘the insecurities’ do not occur in vacuum, but are rather caused or produced by certain people. Although relying on snow-balling might be rightfully criticized for not conforming fully to the scientific principles of systematicity, as the selection of interviewees depends on several criteria, including the luck, the author confers with Cohen and Arieli (2011, pp. 423) who argue that this is the choice between research under constrained conditions and research not being conducted at all. The author of this paper believes that the first option is better.

The specifics of (intra-ethnic) conflict in northern Kosovo

The main aim of this section is to posit the specifics of intra-ethnic conflict in northern Kosovo (a territory, which has been functioning in a political vacuum since 1999) in the framework of relations between the state of Kosovo and the state of Serbia. Furthermore, the role of the EU as a mediator in this conflict will be discussed only briefly with a view to understand the basic contours of the EU peacebuilding approach to Kosovo-Serbia relations, which resulted in the signature of the Brussels agreement in 2013.

The origins of the conflict in Kosovo between the Serbs and the Albanians have been analysed many times by several authors (Banac, 1988; Magas, 1993; Ismajli, 1994; Malcom, 1999). This paper, however, does not aim to contribute to the literature in this respect. The common feature of these analyses – which sometimes serve for the legitimization of certain

policies – is that they mostly focus on the inter-ethnic nature of conflict. This inter-ethnic character of the conflict in Kosovo was undoubtedly a prevalent one, and this paper does not challenge this. This approach also shaped the general discourse on “the Kosovo problem” not only in Kosovo, but wider (Reuter, 1987). The lowest point of this “inter-ethnicism” was reached in 1998–99, when Kosovo suffered from a full-fledged war between the armed forces of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) and Serbian paramilitary groups on the one side, and the Kosovo Liberation Army on the other (Mulaj, 2008; Kubo, 2010).

The NATO military operation against FRY (March–June 1999), which was a direct consequence of Serbian non-compliance with the demands of the international community for ending the bloodshed, resulted in the withdrawal of all the institutions of FRY. Revenge attacks of the Kosovo Albanians and its paramilitary forces against the remaining Serbs in Kosovo followed; the reality for the Serbs changed completely, as they *de facto* lost the protectors (Hehir, 2009; Pllana, 2011). As the territory of Kosovo, with the exception of the north, was no longer a safe environment for the Serbs, this ethnic community started leaving their dwellings scattered around central and southern Kosovo, where the likelihood of being targeted by the revenge-seeking Kosovo Albanians was high. Thus, in 1999 and the years that followed more than 150.000 Serbs fled to central Serbia and elsewhere, where their physical safety was not threatened; some of them sought refuge in the territory north of the river Ibar, as northern Kosovo has been a relatively ethnically homogenous area, populated mostly by the Serbs. From June 1999 on, the area was also protected by NATO KFOR troops, which became relatively credible guarantor of physical safety for the Serb communities (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 1999; Nikolić, 2015).

While the few remaining Serbs who opted to stay in the NATO-protected enclaves of central and southern Kosovo could not act as a decisive actor in the conflict environment of Kosovo,

the reality was different for the Serbs in northern Kosovo. As a relatively big and then unified ethnic group enjoying a continuous and vigorous support from Belgrade, they developed a special sort of what we can call *modus operandi* of survival and resistance in a non-welcoming environment (Björkdahl & Gusic, 2013). After large-scale inter-ethnic violence in Kosovo ceased in late 1999 as a result of international presence (UNMIK, KFOR, OSCE, and EU) and became limited to sporadic incidents, the political elites in northern Kosovo strongly relied on the political and economic support from Belgrade. Although it would be oversimplified to argue that the Serbs in northern Kosovo were at that time united in their political opinion and in this way worked as a unitary actor vis-à-vis Pristina and the international organizations operating in Kosovo, there was one thing in particular they did have in common: the understanding that Kosovo is not their “state”, and that Serbia is the subject that should be protecting their rights. Unsurprisingly, this antagonizing attitude was well-received also by the political authorities in Serbia (Ministarstvo spoljnih poslova Republike Srbije, 2004).

The non-cooperation of the local Serbs’ political elites and the Serbs of northern Kosovo with the institutions of the Kosovo government was made possible due to the fact that Serbia financed the so called parallel institutions that existed in a legal vacuum. In other words, the Serbs working for these institutions (judiciary, civil protection, health institutions, schools etc.) were receiving salaries from the budget of Serbia, often with a decent additional financial remuneration for working in challenging environment. This remuneration sometimes even doubled their monthly income (OSCE Office in Kosovo, 2007, pp. 37). Furthermore, as some of the Serbia-financed public institutions in northern Kosovo operated at the same time in the framework of the so called Institutions of self-government (*Privremene institucije samouprave*, PIS), this meant the employees were financially benefiting also from the budget of the government of Kosovo (PIS were financed directly from Pristina). In practice this

meant that a person working in such an institution was receiving two salaries – one from the Serbian budget, and another one from the Kosovar budget (OSCE Office in Kosovo, 2007).

Following the elections in 2012 in Serbia and the victory of the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS, *Srpska napredna stranka*), the political landscape changed, affecting Serbia-Kosovo relations. Aleksandar Vučić, who later became its leader and the new prime minister of Serbia, realized that it might be politically wise for him and his party to engage in the EU-mediated talks between the governments in Pristina and Belgrade more energetically (Bieber, 2015, p. 303). With Serbia choosing the so called “European path”, the EU got a significant leverage to push the country’s leadership into a certain level of cooperation over the Kosovo issue. However, the EU-mediated talks between Belgrade and Pristina, which took place in the atmosphere of what Bieber (2015) calls “creative ambiguity”, excluded the northern Kosovo Serbs from the political process. This contributed to their alienation from both “their kin-state” Serbia and, as many of them have called it, “the fake state” of Kosovo (Jakšić, 2017). Despite the government of Serbia encouraged the Kosovo Serbs to participate in the Kosovo elections in 2013 in order to ensure the implementation of the Brussels agreement, the turnout in the Serbian municipalities was low.³ The legitimacy of the elected politicians of the Srpska lista – the Belgrade protégés that won the elections – has thus been questionable since the election days.

The strengthened pro-EU stance of the Serbian ruling elites that were prepared to negotiate with the Kosovo government at the highest political level meant a dramatic shift for the Kosovo Serbs.⁴ If the previous policy of the Serbian government and its local “extensions” in Kosovo was that any kind of collaboration with Pristina was rejected, a new reality pushed the Serbs into what Serbian nationalist leaders called “the mercy of Pristina authorities” (Jakšić, 2017). The new official strategy of “fighting for rights of the Serbs in Kosovo” was that of a

cooperative nature. This was something they emotionally never wanted, but were forced into (Interview 1–7, 2017; Focus group, 2017; Ivanović, 2017). The explanation for turning the strategy upside down was claiming *rebus sic stantibus*, saying that it has then become necessary to struggle for the rights of the Serbs within the existing political reality. The prominent Kosovo Serb leaders, who have been at the forefront of resistance to both the authorities in Pristina and the international community since 1999 and have politically established them as resistance-leaders, consequently lost the support of Belgrade⁵ (Tanjug, 2016).

The local people basically had two ways to cope with this changed, pro-cooperation reality. They could have insisted on the old mantra “Kosovo is Serbia”. This, in other words, meant they would not have bowed to the institutions of the Kosovo government and have not “integrated”. An alternative to that was accepting a new reality and starting their integration into a state they did not emotionally feel as theirs. The latter option was strongly promoted also by the EU and its institutions in Kosovo (UNMIK Division of Public Information, 2012), as it was considered to be an important piece in the puzzle of stabilization of the axis Belgrade-Pristina. Unsurprisingly, the tensions between the two groups arose. For the local Serbs, who did not have some other means – financial in particular – to continue “behaving patriotically and rejecting the Kosovo institutions (Jakšić, 2017)”, saying yes to the integration was not an easy choice.

On the contrary, accepting integration was considered something they and their political leaders have been fighting against since 1999. Many of those who took a first step towards the integration (for example, by applying for a Kosovar identity card, which was often a precondition to get a job in Kosovo) have been thus labelled as traitors by the others (Radio KIM, 2016). In some cases, they have even been exposed to verbal insults or physical

violence due to their cooperative stance (Radulović, 2010; Bytyci, 2014). This would most probably not have happened, had the EU – through the use of economic and political incentives – not made the Serbian ruling elite become more cooperative over the issue of Kosovo.

Living (in) the aftermath of the EU peacebuilding: social psychological implications for the Serbs in the North of Kosovo

Physical violence and threats to life

The first immediate consequence of the signature of the Brussels agreement, which, according to the views of the locals, gave the local Serbs no other alternative but getting integrated in Kosovo institutions was the emergence of imminent threats for psychological safety (Interview 1, 3, 4, 7, 2017; Focus group, 2017). Namely, back in 2013, the groups of Serbs who rejected any kind of collaboration with Kosovo institutions were still strong. Those who agreed to accept the Pristina authorities, though reluctantly, by simple acts (e. g. applying for Kosovo identity card) were not only confronted with verbal insults, but also suffered from direct attacks. The typical example was the burning of cars, the bombs planted under the cars of “collaborators” that usually went off during the night, or the bombs that exploded in the vicinity of certain buildings, in which the dwellers that did not boycott the Kosovo institutions lived or worked (Policija: Na terasu Djerica bacena bomba M-75, 2013; Leskovar, 2013).

Such, or even more serious, attacks on ‘collaborators’ that resulted in deaths or serious injuries were not isolated incidents (Radulović, 2010; Bytyci, 2014). According to the interviewees, the violence created a feeling of constant pressure and contributed to mutual distrust within the Serbian community; for many of them it was not the Albanians once should be afraid of, but the fellow compatriots. The feeling of being threatened dominated the

atmosphere and, with the time passing and the continuation of bomb attacks, ‘this kind of situation became normal’ (Interview 2, 2017; Focus group, 2017).

On the other hand, the leaders of boycott of the Kosovo institutions, which had been stripped of power after the Brussels agreement and became persona *non grata* in Belgrade, as they had not been in line with the Serbian government, later themselves experienced intimidation and attacks, allegedly because of criticizing the government in Serbia and their “puppets” in northern Kosovo for “*de facto* recognizing the state of Kosovo” (Jakšić, 2017). Marko Jakšić, who was the political leader of boycotting Serbs, experienced several incidents; burning the car and the offices of his political movement being the most serious. Only a handful of local media reported about these events (Zapaljen automobil Marka Jakšića – DSS, 2012; Kosovska Mitrovica: Izgorele prostorije pokreta "Otadžbina" i društva srpsko-ruskog prijateljstva, 2017). Jakšić’s interpretation (2017) of such media approach to him, which has been confirmed also by some of the interviewees, is that local journalists preferred not to report about these events as an act of self-censorship in order not to evoke reactions of “the structures in Belgrade” (Interview 4 and 5, 2017).

How does this relate to the role of the EU as a peacebuilding actor and why is this important for understanding the intra-ethnic tensions? The EU approach vis-à-vis northern Kosovo has been primarily based on economic instruments, which paved the way also for the application of other sorts of instruments that were in strategic or stability terms less important, e. g. the projects for development of non-governmental sector. Given the complexity of the EU’s policy on Kosovo (see Grilj and Zupančič, 2017), the EU engagement after 2013 focused mostly on the stabilization and eventual integration of northern Kosovo into the Kosovo institutions and the rule of law in general, within the overall framework of generous economic and political initiatives. With regard to the intra-ethnic violence mentioned in the previous

paragraph, only in a very few examples the cases were properly investigated, so that the perpetrators were identified and brought to justice. As argued by the interviewees (Interview 1, 2, 5, 6, 2017), EU officials both in Brussels and Kosovo did not react in other ways than by expressing the condemnation of attacks (Bytyci, 2014). This created a perception of the EU as a rich, but incapable and shy actor that does not want or does not have capacity to engage or solve the most sensitive issues (Interview 6 and 8, 2017).

Psychological pressure and harassment

The second aspect of the changed dynamics on intra-ethnic level among the Serbs of northern Kosovo that is linked to bringing the conflicting parties together and the final signature of the Brussels agreement is physical and psychological harassment of those who have been cooperating with the institutions of Kosovo government. In the years prior to 2013 and around it, the official stance of the government of Serbia and its political deputies in northern Kosovo regarding the negotiations with the authorities in Pristina has still been predominantly negative. Thus, it is not surprising that those Serbs who have chosen not to follow the official stance were soon labelled as collaborators, “who have sold themselves to the fake state” (Jakšić, 2017). Receiving such a label is never pleasant, especially not in small communities, whose official history and mythology have always strongly condemned the traitors of the nation (Ćorović, 1993; Ruvarac, 1992).

In what forms has been the negative labelling performed? The most common was verbal insulting; a high majority of our interviewees have themselves experienced verbal harassment and are aware of examples, when their friends or relatives have been insulted (Focus group, 2017; Interview 1 and 6, 2017). But the harassment often went further and got institutionalized. A case in point is the group of the so called “bridge-watchers”. This was a diverse group of Serbs, whose primary task in 1999 and the years that followed was to protect

the bridge in Kosovska Mitrovica – an entry point to northern Kosovo – from the Kosovo Albanians. Immediately after the war, when the Serbs were persecuted by revenge-seeking Kosovo Albanians, this group`s function was considered to be as a vital means of self-defence (Janssens, 2015). With the years passing, and the international troops getting a firmer hold of Mitrovica and Kosovo in general, physical protection became less of an issue, although sporadic incidents have still taken place.⁶ However, the bridge watchers did not cease to exist with the decreased likelihood of Albanian invasion to the north, but have rather been instrumentalized by the Serbian government and its local allies. Many of the bridge watchers have been on payrolls of the then-existing Serbian institutions still operating in Kosovo – the Civil Protection (*Civilna zaštita* in particular), which in practice meant that they have not been doing anything concrete, but have still been receiving salaries (OSCE, 2007; Popham, 2008; Interview 1 and 2 2017; Focus group, 2017).

The task of the bridge watchers was to observe the main bridge connecting northern and southern parts of Mitrovica and report, who were the Serbs crossing the bridge and going to the southern, Albanian-populated part of town. There were also reports that people got beaten because they had crossed the bridge (Popham, 2008; Janssens, 2015). However, beatings were not as widespread as negative labelling was. This produced “the feeling of being observed at all times” (Interview 1, 2017). According to one of the participants in this research, there were also cameras placed around the bridge in order to monitor the crossings (Focus group, 2017). Although this was widely known, the EU did have neither the means nor willingness to act (Interview 2, 2017; Focus Group, 2017). Such “panopticon” and the unwritten rules of pointing the finger caused certain level of anxiety among those Serbs who had accepted that they will either have to live with the existing reality, or leave Kosovo for good. Last, but not least, it has to be noted that the bridge watchers naturally ceased to exist, when the political elites in Serbia changed the official stance with regard to integration of the Serbs; thus,

nowadays the bridge watchers do not present any kind of nuisance.⁷ As noted by a vast majority of interviewees, some of Serbian businessmen who used to be the most ardent bridge watchers until 2013, nowadays cooperate excellently with Kosovo Albanian businessmen (Interview 1, 2, 5, 6, 2017; Jakšić, 2017; Focus group, 2017).

Avoiding the “integration topics” in conversation: the strategy of everyday peace

One of the strategies to navigate through life in a deeply divided society mentioned by Mac Ginty (2014, 554) is avoiding contentious topics in everyday conversations. In our study, all sorts of integration moves labelled as “collaboration” by those who are rejecting it, serve as examples about which it is better not to talk with your fellow compatriots: e.g. applying for Kosovo identity card or passport; taking Kosovo car plates; applying for a job in the Kosovar institutions etc.

A first illustrative case is the example of a young adult, who decided to apply for a Kosovo identity card in order to register his company as a Kosovar institution, which would allow him to work in Kosovo. To obtain the Kosovar identity card, in 2013 he opted to go to an Albanian village Çabër/Čabra next to his town Zubin Potok, which he had not visited since 1999, although this Albanian village is only 500 metres from his home (Interview 6, 2017). According to him, he had been personally struggling with his decision, given the fact that he comes from a family, which is, as he put it, “very traditional, patriotic, and patriarchal.” His father did not approve his decision despite the fact that he had known that this was the only way for his son to work legally in Kosovo in these new circumstances. Last, but not least, he was the first from the family who applied for the Kosovar ID. The most difficult thing for him was, as he said, to come to terms with himself that he was not “a traitor of his nation” and that there is no other way for him to navigate around.

Another interesting example that illustrates the burden of intra-ethnic tensions also comes from this man. When he finally went to that small Albanian village in northern Kosovo to apply for the ID, he encountered some of his Serbian acquaintances there. He mentioned the big embarrassment that filled the air when they all met. “None of us asked the other, hey, what are you doing here – as it would be the case anywhere else. But not there. None of us said why he came. But we all knew what the reason for our visit was. I cannot describe the situation. Everyone was silent. You felt the shame in the air” (Interview 6, 2017). When he nowadays recalls these events, they seem “comic” to him, which was not the case a few years ago. “Being a proud, but not nationalistic patriot,” he argues, “now I do see things differently. Prior to the Brussels agreement, I openly despised all “collaborators”. Now, being one of “them”, I understand that this was the only way forward for every young person, who does not want to emigrate to central Serbia and look for a job there or does not come from a rich family, which would give him comfort to insist on rejecting the Kosovo institutions” (*ibid.*).⁸ He also added that he knows a local Serb, who still rejects collaboration, but the difference between him and that man is that “it is easy for him “Serbing around” [“srbovati”],⁹ because he works for Serbian Telekom and earns a decent salary” (*ibid.*).

Another person mentioned a similar strategy of avoidance, when it comes to his family and friends. He said that his father, who is a locally well-known businessman, did not want to apply for Kosovar ID not so much because of pride, but because he did not know how his Serbian friends would react. Hence, he asked his son (the interviewee), who did not live in Kosovo at the time, but was returning only for short visits, to apply for Kosovar ID and then to register the father’s company on the son’s name. After the Kosovar ID was received by the son and the company got registered on his name under the Kosovar law, they have not mentioned this issue for couple of years. His explanation is that “the father did not want that the people in our town would know that the *pater familias* has a Kosovar ID card” (Interview

4, 2017). Linked to this strategy of avoidance, a few interviewees also noted that some people who needed the Kosovar ID cards for different purposes (not for personal travels, but, for example, for business) asked the local poor men or even alcoholics to apply for IDs so that they were able to serve as middle men. For a modest financial remuneration to the middle men, some people were thus able to have “clean name” and do business in Kosovo at the same time (Interview 1, 5 and 6, 2017).

Last, but not least, another interesting aspect has to do with intra-ethnic and family pressure. One interviewee noted that his mother used to work in a public institution, which was financed from the Serbian budget. After the 2013 Brussels agreement, it was decided at the highest political level that this institution would become a part of the Kosovar system. For his family, this would mean that the mother would be receiving two salaries, one from Serbia, and another one from Kosovo. However, the father of the interviewee did not allow his wife to subscribe to a Kosovar payroll, which meant that his family “missed some 30.000 euro” (Interview 5, 2017).

Many of the interviewees perceive the EU as an actor, which pushed them into integration, and tried to buy them with money. A young lady working for a local non-governmental organization explains that one day she and her co-workers were told that they will only be able to receive their next salary, if they submit their Kosovar ID, which most of them did not have at that time. The explanation was that the rules had changed (Focus group, 2017).

Another interviewee, whose father also resorted to the use of a middle man’s Kosovar identity card to be able to do business in Kosovo says that he was not so much angry with his father, who chose this way of “everyday peace”, but rather with “all those on the top levels, who literally threw us here in Kosovo in the water. Now I am a little bit more reconciled with

myself, because everyone is doing this, but back then I felt so much anger and bitterness. And also shame” (Interview 5, 2017).

Distrust in public institutions and development of parallel (in)security structures

One of the main reasons for resisting the integration is the fact that a big majority of Serbs in northern Kosovo have significantly higher trust in Serbian institutions (education, health care, social security), as the Kosovo institutions providing for these services are in a poor state (Percival & Sondorp, 2010). As the interviewees noted (Interview 1, 5, 6, 2017; Focus group, 2017; Jakšić, 2017) and some other analyses confirm (Prelec & Rashiti, 2015), the question of unwillingness to accept the Kosovar institutions goes far beyond the issue of national identity and pride and has rather more to do with economic and quality reasons. Many Serbs in northern Kosovo believe that the EU’s approach in this regard was too aggressive, forcing the Serbs into integration without leaving any other option (Interview 1, 6, 2017; Focus group, 2017).

For democratic societies to prosper, the state institutions should be trusted. While the trust in Kosovo police is relatively high among the Kosovo Albanians (Kosova Press, 2017), the Kosovo Serbs do not share this opinion; more than half of them do not trust it. In this respect it should be noted that less than 4 % of Kosovo Serbs trust EULEX (Radio Slobodna Evropa, 2016). All these observations are to be put in a perspective due to the fact that one of the core pillars of the EU’s approach to Kosovo with regard to peacebuilding is building capable and trusted police forces, and establishment of the rule of law in general. Last, but not least, the mission EULEX that is engaged also in the reform of police sector is the most ambitious civilian CSDP mission so far (Malešič, 2015; Grilj and Zupančič, 2017).

However, as our analysis revealed, the development of complete distrust in the Kosovo police and the emergence of as we call them parallel (in)security structures is a phenomenon that has emerged in the shadow of all the activities of the EU in northern Kosovo. However, these parallel (in)security structures are at the same time the main guarantors of security and producers of insecurity in northern Kosovo, which emerged in the wake of the EU's inability there (Interviews 1–8, 2016; Focus group, 2016).

“The structures”, which is the word used by most of the interviewees and appears also in the comments section of news webpages or blogs (Nešović, 2016), allegedly control not only the Kosovo police in the northern Kosovo, but also the current Serbian political nomenclature in Kosovo. According to the interviewees, the (in)security structures are controlled by a local businessman that allegedly runs the most serious criminal activities in Kosovo and Serbia. In this regard, the interviewees believe, Kosovo is still a part of Serbia, as all the public tenders are won by those “structures”, who are close to political elites from Belgrade. An interesting illustration of how strong these “structures” work is a story that happened in the centre of Kosovska Mitrovica in 2016 during the day and almost lives as an urban myth. The Mayor of Kosovska Mitrovica Goran Rakić was allegedly slapped by one of high ranking members of the “(in)security structures” a few metres away from the Kosovo policemen in 2016. The policemen that tried to intervene approached the fight cautiously, and only asking the perpetrator to stop slapping the Mayor. He did not stop beating the Mayor, but rather advised the policemen to stay away. The policemen did not meddle any further, but rather waited that they finished slapping the Mayor (Zupančič, 2017). Several interviewees are aware of this story; according to them, the reason of the incident was the fact that the Mayor did not consult “the structures” with regard to one of his business moves. With this, “the structures” showed the local people and the Kosovo police, who actually controls the North of Kosovo. A very

similar story, again with the mayor being slapped in the centre of Kosovska Mitrovica by “the structures”, took place in April 2017 (Webconversation, 2017).

Another interesting illustration of the state of (in)security in Kosovska Mitrovica is a story that happened, when the author of this paper had a chat with one of the employees at one of the Mitrovica institutions. When the talk came to the sensitive issues of who has a real power in Kosovska Mitrovica, the employee was, surprisingly, willing to talk on the conditions of anonymity and without giving any names of the people belonging to “the structures”. In the midst of the silent conversation, two people came by. All of a sudden, the employee immediately started talking about a completely different issue. When the two men passed by and left the place, the employee just nodded, and rolled the eyes into the direction the two men went to. By this gesture, he signalled to the author of this paper that these are “the structures” and that it is better not to discuss this issue any further, as they were around (Zupančič, 2017).

These are only a few examples showing the public safety and security institutions do not have any real power, or are rather left to handling petty crime and traffic violations. In these circumstances, the people are left to their own strategies of “everyday peace”, which take place with silent approval of the EU officials operating in Kosovo. These stories are nothing new neither to the EU representatives nor to the people living in northern Kosovo, however, EU officials keep arguing that their hands are tied in such cases and the only thing they can do is to try to award projects to those people that allegedly do not have any ties to “the structures”. For the EU – a supposed normative power actor – the reliance on economic instruments in conducting peacebuilding, and ignoring the problems everyone is aware of, is a rather ambiguous policy.

Conclusion

Studying a post-conflict society through the lens of intra-ethnic conflict provides with a new set of insights in the dynamics of post-conflict societies. The findings on the case of Kosovo have implications for both policy-makers and academics. First, the alleged success of a peacebuilding actor might not be a positive thing for some of the locals, in particular if their political orientation is in contrast with the official policy of promoted by that peacebuilding actor and its “extension” in the form of newly-emerged local political elites; on the contrary, many people who are not in line with a new policy are often confronted with serious security and safety issues or are verbally and psychologically intimidated (not necessarily by their ethnic compatriots, but also by their personal and intimate struggles). Because of this, they have to develop their own ways of “everyday peace” to be able to navigate their lives not that much in inter-ethnic respect, but rather intra-ethnic.

Second, when it comes to the EU as a peacebuilding actor in Kosovo and elsewhere, it is questionable whether the EU’s focus on strategic issues, such as the stabilization of relations between Serbia and Kosovo in this case, contributes to the image of the EU as a normative power actor that follows and promotes a norm-based policy. This is especially relevant in cases such as this one in northern Kosovo where the EU despite being one of the strongest actors, allowed the development of various forms of insecurities, including those posed by “the structures”, by remaining silent and inactive. In addition to this, should the EU rather omit the prioritization of stability as the most important element of its peacebuilding endeavours or rather combine it with the approach that focuses on the local dynamics and the local people, who are the end-users of EU initiatives? The stability-above-all approach is problematic in this case because stability can also be provided by the elites and “the structures” that do not necessarily respect human rights and do not contribute to the

democratization of a post-conflict zone in real sense, but rather rely on authoritarian or semi-legal methods.

Third, it is questionable whether EU peacebuilding in Kosovo would have had any success, if the EU did not have for both Serbia and Kosovo a strong magnet in the form of the EU perspective and big economic stimulus for northern Kosovo.

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Endnotes

¹ This, of course, does not mean that the EU peacebuilding attempts did not have security, political and economic implications for the locals. However, as these topics have often been analyzed in the theory of peacebuilding, this paper does not aim at exploring them in detail.

² All in all, the author interviewed 12 relevant people (inclusive with focus group): the people who experienced intra-ethnic harassment in one way or another, journalists who are reporting on the society of northern Kosovo, and two local politicians.

³ The 2013 elections in the Serbian municipalities in northern Kosovo were organized twice, as the first time they did not succeed due to the violence at two polling stations. On the first election day on November 3 only 7,9 % of the voters registered in northern municipalities casted their vote until 3 PM (later data is not known, as the elections were canceled). On the second election day the turnout was a bit higher, but still low; 22,3 % of the registered voters casted the ballots (Petrov, 2013, pp. 3).

⁴ Although pro-Western Boris Tadić, who served as the president of Serbia until 2012, also supported the European path of Serbia, he was not ready to negotiate with the Kosovo officials at the highest level. In addition, he did not push for the dissolution of the parallel institutions during his presidency (Tanjug, 2011).

⁵ Two of the most recognized leaders of the Serbian "resistance" in Kosovo were Marko Jakšić, a former high-ranking politician of the Democratic Party of Serbia (Demokratska stranka Srbije, DSS) and also a member in the National Assembly of Serbia, and Slaviša Ristić, a former mayor of Zubin Potok and also a DSS deputy in the National Assembly of Serbia. They both left DSS due to the fact that the party leadership did not do enough for Kosovo Serbs.

⁶ The worst incident happened on 17 March 2004, when hundreds of Kosovo Albanians took arms and triggered mass violence that has been stopped only after three days. 19 people were killed, more than 900 were wounded, and a lot of Serbian houses around Kosovo and Serbian Orthodox heritage has been demolished (Ristic, 2014).

⁷ Many members of the bridge watchers used to be members of the Civil Protection Service (Civilna zastita), which has operated in Kosovo as a parallel institution, financed from the budget of Serbia. Civil Protection Service has been dissolved in the period 2013-2015, in line with the agreement between Kosovo and Serbia. According to the plan of the EU, many of them received jobs in the institutions of the Kosovo government. Many of them were unqualified, but have received the jobs just because of their ethnicity in order to provide

incentives for the Serbian community to integrate (Integracija civilne zaštite u kosovskim institucijama u završnoj fazi, 2015; Interview 1, 2017).

⁸ By »comfort« the young man meant financial resources received by his family, which would enable him not to work, stay at home and »act patriotically«.

⁹ „Srbovati“ is a Serbian expression used for verbal activities, in which one speaks very patriotically or nationalistically about or for the Serbs.