
THE NATO AIR STRIKES AGAINST THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF YUGOSLAVIA FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE REGION'S AND WORLD MEDIA

Rugova Naser

“Fama” College-Prishtina, Republic of Kosova naserrugova@gmail.com

Mulaj Besim

“Fama” College-Prishtina, Republic of Kosova besim.mulaj@hotmail.com

Abstract: The purpose of this paper is to reflect objectively and neutrally the coverage of media from the region, the European ones as well as the US and Russian media as the two main political centers that had differing attitudes and views on the conflict. From the analysis of the media reports be it from those of the region, the European ones and from the most well-known media in the US and Russia, we have come to the conclusion that the most prestigious media have had a greater independence and neutrality towards the stances of the conflicting parties and also towards the political attitudes and decisions whether be it by the conflicting parties or by the international institutions which were in one way or another part of this intervention that was the main topic and continues to be today as far as international law is concerned on the decision of the military intervention by NATO in an internationally recognized country. Regarding the media in the region, especially those in Serbia, Kosovo, Albania and Montenegro, we have noticed that the vast majority of them have been under direct or indirect influence by the official politics of the countries we mentioned, and a small part of the media have reported or have even had independent or neutral editorial policies. In retrospect now after 18 years we will present with concrete arguments and with source references major media reports of the time regarding one of the most important events of the region which has significantly affected the geostrategic aspect in our region.

Keywords: NATO, media, conflict.

1. INTRODUCTION

The NATO Pact's intervention in the Kosovo conflict from the 24th of March to the 10th of June 1999 was and continues to be the subject of many institutions, political forums, diplomatic and academic circles, analysts and experts dealing with the legitimacy of this intervention of the most powerful military alliance on the planet against a sovereign state for “humanitarian reasons” without a UN Security Council decision. Undoubtedly, this event, which was regarded as a precedent in the international community's approach towards the troubled Balkan region, had taken an important place in the local, regional media and in the most important ones at global level. After the unsuccessful talks between the special emissaries of the United States, the EU and those of NATO, and the rejection of the proposals for a peaceful agreement by the former Serbian President Milosevic, the NATO air strikes against the Serbian forces throughout the territory of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia occur.

2. THE US MEDIA AND THE MEDIA OF THE MAIN EU COUNTRIES ON THE NATO ATTACKS AGAINST THE FRY

We will address the media reporting and analysis approach of a certain number of the most influential media in the region and the world. We are starting this paper with the announcement of the news on the commencement of the bombing of Serbian targets by former Secretary General of NATO, Javier Solana. “I have been informed by SACEUR, General Clark that at this moment NATO Air Operations against targets in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia have commenced. In the last months the international community has spared no efforts to achieve a negotiated solution in Kosovo. But it has not been possible. Clear responsibility for the air strikes lies with President Milosevic who has refused to stop his violent action in Kosovo and has refused to negotiate in good faith. The time has now come for action”.¹⁹⁰ Below we will also quote some prestigious newspapers and media including authoritative citations, analyses and statements of senior officials from relevant international institutions such as the UN and NATO as well as the most powerful states of the planet related to NATO bombings against Serbian forces. “Delivering a scathing condemnation of Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic's “brutal scheme” in Kosovo, President Bill Clinton gave an impassioned speech Thursday justifying U.S. involvement in NATO strikes against Serbian targets as the nation's moral duty and in its strategic interests”.¹⁹¹ The following statement by Secretary-General Kofi Annan was issued today by his Spokesman:

¹⁹⁰ <http://nato.int/docu/pr/1999/index.html> (watched on 12.04.2017).

¹⁹¹ <http://edition.cnn.com/ALLPOLITICS/stories/1999/05/13/clinton.kosovo/> (visited on 21.03.2017).

“Following my visits to the refugee camps in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Albania, I wish to express my deep appreciation for the tireless work of the many civilian staff of United Nations agencies, the Red Cross movement, and non-governmental organizations, in mounting an immediate response to the humanitarian emergency caused by the Kosovo crisis. I also thank the military personnel of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) alliance for their considerable support, without which we could not have coped”.¹⁹²

“By the end of 1998, over 300 000 Kosovar Albanians had fled their homes during conflict between Albanian separatists in Kosovo and Serbian military and police. Following the failure of intense international efforts to resolve the crisis, the Alliance conducted air strikes for 78 days and flew 38 000 sorties with the goal of allowing a multinational peacekeeping force to enter Kosovo and cease ethnic cleansing in the region. On 4 June 1999, NATO suspended its air campaign after confirming that a withdrawal of the Serbian army from Kosovo had begun, and the deployment of the NATO-led Kosovo Force (KFOR) followed shortly thereafter. Today, KFOR troops are still deployed in Kosovo to help maintain a safe and secure environment and freedom of movement for all citizens, irrespective of their ethnic origin”.¹⁹³

“The road to peace in Kosovo may yet run through Moscow. Despite Russia's rhetorical belligerence about the NATO air campaign and Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov's failed diplomatic mission to Belgrade last week, Russia has the credentials and motivation to play a constructive role in ending the conflict. Doing so will require some straight talking by the Russians to their Serbian cousins, and a degree of cooperation with Washington that may be awkward for the Kremlin, but Russia could greatly enhance its international stature by brokering a political settlement”.¹⁹⁴

“Milosevic . . . refused even to discuss key elements of the agreement. The Kosovars said yes to peace. Serbia put 40,000 troops and 300 tanks in and around Kosovo. If you've been watching on the television, you know they've now started rolling from village to village . . . shelling civilians, torching their homes so they can't come back. . . . Serbian police have dragged the male members of Kosovar families from their homes, lined up fathers with sons, and shot them in cold blood”. . . .¹⁹⁵

The Washington Post survey in April 1999 resulted with the following answers of the American public:

“As you may know, strategy in the military action against Serbia has to be approved by the United States and the European countries in the NATO alliance. How well do you think the NATO allies are working together in deciding how to proceed - very well, somewhat well, somewhat badly or very badly?

	-----Well-----			-----Badly-----			No
	NET	Very	Smewht	NET	Very	Smewht	opinion
4/26/99	73	20	53	21	5	16	6. ¹⁹⁶

These were some of the opinions and viewpoints of the prominent US media, on the other hand the prestigious British newspaper “The Guardian” about the NATO attacks and the US-EU-Russia implications wrote: “The United States and Britain yesterday urged Russia to keep trying to resolve the Kosovo crisis as Moscow signaled support for Serbia amid signs that its anger over NATO airstrikes was abating as its diplomatic efforts were acknowledged”.¹⁹⁷

“There is no question that Russia and the US are working together on this problem”, said the US Deputy Secretary of State, Strobe Talbott, after talks with Russia's Balkan envoy, Victor Chernomyrdin. “The problem is extremely complicated. It is important that our urgent work continues, and it will continue”.¹⁹⁸ The prestigious French newspaper “Le Monde Diplomatique” is at the same level with the newspapers quoted above of the other decision-making centers which evaluated that: “The air campaign had been planned several months earlier. Recourse to war had been considered likely, or indeed inevitable, for weeks. And the final decision to act had been taken at least a week earlier, when the Western powers withdrew observers from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) from Kosovo”.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹² <http://www.un.org/press/en/1999/19990526.SGSM7006.html> (visited on 29.03.2017)

¹⁹³ http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/declassified_139339.htm?selectedLocale=en (visited on 30.03.2017).

¹⁹⁴ <http://www.nytimes.com/1999/04/06/opinion/russia-s-role-in-kosovo.html> (visited on 03.04. 2017).

¹⁹⁵ <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/national/daily/march99/excerpt24.htm> (visited on 07.04.2017).

¹⁹⁶ <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/politics/polls/vault/stories/data042899.htm> (visited on 10.04.2017).

¹⁹⁷ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/1999/apr/28/ianblack> (visited on 20.04.2017).

¹⁹⁸ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/1999/apr/28/ianblack> (visited on 20.04.2017).

¹⁹⁹ <http://mondediplo.com/1999/12/04rouleau> (visited on 25.04.2017).

3. THE MEDIA OF KOSOVO ABOUT THE CONFLICT

On the other hand, in Kosovo there was a severe situation, there were fights all over Kosovo, and on the eve of the NATO bombings against the Serb army and police targets, the medium which had communication with the ground and who gathered first-hand daily information was “the Informator” as a body of the Kosovo Information Center (KIC). The day the NATO bombings commenced the KIC wrote about the official position of Kosovo President, Ibrahim Rugova, stated through his adviser for information: PRISHTINA, March 24 (KIC) – “NATO should at last strike Serbian targets”, Xhemal Mustafa, a press adviser to President Ibrahim Rugova of Kosovo, said today. “Further delaying NATO action is becoming pointless”.²⁰⁰ Another communication medium inside of Kosovo did not function, and after the commencement of the bombardments information about Kosovo Albanians was almost completely paralyzed due to the state of war and the massive displacement of Albanians in the neighboring countries like Macedonia, Albania and Montenegro.

The Kosovo war and the suffering of its people were already the topic of all relevant world media and institutions. After the start of the NATO bombings against Serb forces, the mass expulsion of the Albanian population from Kosovo, the taking hostage of Kosovo President Ibrahim Rugova by official Belgrade, the mediation of Rome and the official Vatican for his release, appeal for peace had also been made by religious leaders of the highest levels. From a Maltese newspaper we have also ensured the official receptions of Pope John Paul II made on May 8 and 10, 1999 at the Holy See related to the war in Kosovo. “May 8 - In Bucharest, Romania, the Holy Father met with His Beatitude Teoctist, patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church, and with the Holy Synod. At the end of the meeting, the Pope and Patriarch Teoctist sign a joint declaration for peace in Kosovo. May 10 - John Paul II receives in audience Ibrahim Rugova”.²⁰¹

4. THE RUSSIAN AND SERBIAN MEDIA ABOUT THE NATO BOMBINGS AGAINST THE FORMER FRY

Despite the approach and attitudes, as well as the near-media coverage of the countries of Western Europe and those in the USA, the approach of the Russian state and the Russian media was different, albeit powerless to hinder NATO’s attacks, they tried that for internal consumption to oppose these airstrikes and called for political solutions. “The contact group has set mid-February as a deadline for a settlement in Kosovo. “It is impossible to tackle the Kosovo issue without us,” Primakov told Russian NTV television and the Duma, the lower house of parliament, passed a resolution urging both sides in the Kosovo conflict to show restraint and resume peace talks. Russia is eager to join the Western drive for a negotiated settlement and, in further step to push along the process, sent Deputy Foreign Minister Alexander Avdeyev as a special envoy to Belgrade to deliver a message to Milosevic from President Boris Yeltsin”.²⁰² But even in Russia there have been media that have quoted or even transmitted information received from Western print and electronic media. “Russian state television is echoing the Serb version of events in Kosovo, reflecting Moscow’s official policy and glossing over the human drama of the conflict, including the refugees, highlighted in the West. Only the private NTV channel has attempted to take a more western style approach, including references to “ethnic cleansing” of the province’s ethnic Albanian population by Serb forces, and interviews with NATO generals in Brussels”.²⁰³

The media in Serbia and Montenegro (then the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia), were almost fully influenced by state politics. Written and electronic media had views, reports, and authorships and analyses almost in line with the official policy of the Serbian government. The most active in this regard was the Tanjug State News Agency, from which almost all newspapers of the former FRY which were completely controlled by the government, received the daily news. “NATO began the criminal aggression against our country”, wrote Tanjug on March 25, 1999, (taken from the newspaper Danas).²⁰⁴ “At these times the most important is the defense of the country”,²⁰⁵ writes one of the prestigious Serbian newspapers Politika, and in the same number of this newspaper we have also the title “State

²⁰⁰ <http://www.hri.org/news/balkans/kosova/1999/99-03-24.ksv.html> (visited on 30.04.2017).

²⁰¹ <http://www.timesofmalta.com/articles/view/20050404/local/the-last-14-years-in-john-paul-iis-papacy.94428> (visited on 03.05.2017).

²⁰² <http://www.ipsnews.net/1999/02/politics-russia-kremlin-tries-to-boost-image-over-kosovo/> (visited on 04.05.2017).

²⁰³ <http://olegpanfilov.com/?p=6248> (visited on 07.05.2017).

²⁰⁴ Danas, Thursday, March 25, 1999.

²⁰⁵ Politika, Thursday, March 25, 1999.

of war in the FRY” as well as the full text of the Serbian government’s decision to declare the state of war in the country. Almost the same and close approach to the official politics the media in the former FRY had even after the end of the 78-day bombardment that ended on 10 June 1999 after the achievement of the Technical-Military Agreement between the FRY and NATO, known as the Kumanovo Agreement by which the war in Kosovo comes to an end.

5. CONCLUSIONS

We can conclude that there have been major divergences in field reports, local and international officials’ statements, authorial writings, analyses, and editorial access regarding the event we have dealt with - the NATO bombings against the former FRY according to the media in the USA and the Western European countries as well as the regional and Russian media.

While the US media and those of the EU countries active in this process have justified the NATO bombardments against the former FRY as the last act after the failure of talks and the rejection of the proposal for peaceful solution by Serbian President Milosevic, as a cause for stopping suffering, murder and ethnic cleansing in Kosovo by Serbian forces, known as “ the humanitarian intervention”, on the other hand we have the media of the former FRY and a large part of the Russian media saying that NATO had made aggression against an independent and sovereign state and had started air strikes without the decision of the UN Security Council.

Even now, after 18 years, we still have almost the same divergences be it in the printed or electronic media in these two political poles about legitimacy, international law and political and military justification of NATO’s intervention against the former FRY. But viewed in retrospect, in terms of creating public opinion, political and geopolitical developments, a new reality in the Balkans, changes in dynamics and form of communication globally, the new reality created now in the free and independent state of Kosovo as the will of the people of Kosovo, it results that the media of the western countries have had a more neutral, more realistic and more independent approach in comparison to the regional and Russian media.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- [1] <http://nato.int/docu/pr/1999/index.html>
- [2] <http://edition.cnn.com/ALLPOLITICS/stories/1999/05/13/clinton.kosovo/>
- [3] <http://www.un.org/press/en/1999/19990526.SGSM7006.html>
- [4] http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/declassified_139339.htm?selectedLocale=en
- [5] <http://www.nytimes.com/1999/04/06/opinion/russia-s-role-in-kosovo.html>
- [6] <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/national/daily/march99/excerpt24.htm>
- [7] <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/politics/polls/vault/stories/data042899.htm>
- [8] <https://www.theguardian.com/world/1999/apr/28/ianblack>
- [9] <https://www.theguardian.com/world/1999/apr/28/ianblack>
- [10] <http://mondediplo.com/1999/12/04rouleau>
- [11] <http://www.hri.org/news/balkans/kosova/1999/99-03-24.ksv.html>
- [12] <http://www.timesofmalta.com/articles/view/20050404/local/the-last-14-years-in-john-paul-iis-papacy.94428>
- [13] <http://www.ipsnews.net/1999/02/politics-russia-kremlin-tries-to-boost-image-over-kosovo/>
- [14] <http://olegpanfilov.com/?p=6248>
- [15] Danas, Thursday, March 25, 1999.
- [16] Politika, Thursday, March 25, 1999.