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Security Geographical Analysis of Kosovo

SHORT THESIS
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)

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1. Presentation of the scientific problem, justification of the topicality of the research

The object of the research is Kosovo, the youngest state of Europe, unilaterally declaring its independence from Serbia in 2008. The intention to possess the Kosovo region with a geostrategically, and geopolitically important position in the centre of the Balkans, the “powder keg of Europe”, has ignited several armed conflicts throughout history. The confrontation of the Serbian and Albanian population having different ethnicity, religion and culture has always been present in the history of Kosovo.

Yugoslavia in the Tito era provided relatively favourable conditions for the peaceful coexistence of the peoples living on its territory, but the disintegration of the confederation brought bloody fights. In Kosovo, which counted as an autonomous province of Serbia, the armed conflicts between the Kosovo Albanian majority and the oppressor Serbian minority developed between 1998–1999 paired with systematic ethnic cleansing. The imminent humanitarian disaster prompted the interference of the international community; the thwarted diplomatic attempts were followed by an armed NATO intervention, which terminated the conflict.

Since the end of the war the presence of the international armed force¹ has guaranteed peace, the fragility of which is shown by ethnically rooted conflicts flaring up time and time again. To this day Serbia considers Kosovo as its southern province, and the Serb minority – mainly due to the influence of Belgrade – does not wish or is not able to integrate into the social and economic system of the new state. This is especially true in North Kosovo mainly inhabited by Serbs. To this day the status of Kosovo has not been reassuringly resolved. Many countries² – among them five member states of the European Union (henceforth: EU) – does not recognise its independent statehood.

The global importance of the relatively small crisis district is *partly* due to the fact that some states or minorities, depending on their viewpoints, regularly refer to Kosovo as a dangerous or from other aspects useful precedent³, even though according to the governments and organisations supporting the secession this solution could only apply to this unique situation⁴. *On the other hand*, the region provides an ideal ground for the rivalry of some great powers. This can be seen also in the case of the EU and the United States of America (henceforth: USA) in “mentoring” the peace talks between Serbia and Kosovo, regardless of the fact that both the

¹ The mission of the NATO Kosovo Force (henceforth: KFOR).

² There is no consensus between Serbia and Kosovo on the number of allegedly acknowledging/not acknowledging states.

³ Sui generis concept.

⁴ Berkes Márton: A koszovói államiság dilemmái 2015-ben. *Külügyi Szemle*, Vol. 14, No. 4, 2015. pp. 59–60.

EU and the USA considers the Euro-Atlantic integration the guarantee of lasting peace. Besides, we must consider the influence of several powers – traditionally or recently present in the region – who can intentionally or indirectly weaken the achievements of democracy.⁵

Beside its unresolved status Kosovo is fighting with several other economic and social problems significantly connected to its wartime past: poverty, corruption, organised crime, drug-, arms-, human- and organ trafficking, ethnic and religious conflicts, and the expansion of radical Islam. In view of the above, monitoring the security situation of this crisis district only 330 kms away from the border of Hungary is a very timely and extremely important task, because its deterioration can soon pose evident problems to our country. In case of an armed conflict, we would have to count with the deterioration of the security situation of the Hungarian soldiers, diplomats serving in Kosovo and – similarly to the situation in 1999 – with the crisis response tasks Hungary would have to fulfil as a member of NATO. The long-standing crisis provides perfect ground – among others – for organised crime, which due to its transnational nature, also affects our region. Beside the numerous social and economic challenges, unexpected situations can arise, which can spread to Hungary: for example, in 2014–2015 the exodus of the economic migrants from Kosovo substantially contributed to the migration crisis situation. Consequently, when analysing the events and the security situation in Kosovo, we must keep in mind that only a part of the long lasting and recent problems and the process of solution finding is of military nature.⁶ Therefore the ideal method of analysis must provide a toolbox for both a comprehensive study of the security situation in the region and for exploring the local, regional, and global interrelations.

Systematizing the current information is important partly because it is not easy to get a good understanding of the great number of analyses about Kosovo written on different dates from different viewpoints and for different interests. Substantial disinformation can be detected for example in articles published in the media both on the Serbian and Albanian side. Therefore, it is expedient for those preparing to serve in or to carry out tasks connected to Kosovo to get information from a material which was compiled by an expert with deep knowledge of the region and which offers objective, comprehensive, at the same time practical and up-to-date knowledge, throwing light on the interrelations of the facts. It is also important to show the information in a simple, easy to understand structure, and that the material be updated from time to time.

⁵ Szálkai Kinga – Baranyi Tamás Péter – Szarka E. Luca: *Biztonságpolitikai Corvinák*. Antall József Tudásközpont, Budapest, 2019. pp. 298–303.

⁶ Magyar István: A koszovói válságkezelés katonai tapasztalatai. *Hadtudomány*, Vol. 10, No. 2, 2000. p. 72.

Addressing the scientific problem from the aspect of security geography, in my view, lends itself perfectly to open up the characteristic security situation of the region, the interrelations of the factors determining them, the importance of Kosovo from the point of view of regional and global security, and to provide the basis for assessing future scenarios. Security geography blends the methodology of several disciplines. Military science and security studies need no explanation when analysing the security situation of a region having recently faced an armed conflict and a new state with a contentious status, in the process of integration in the international system, in the interest sphere of competitive powers and international organisations. However, beside these, security geography also integrates the perspective and tools of geography. The name “geography” itself shows the aim to give a comprehensive picture of the world, explain its interrelations while bridging natural science and social science. Its regional and sectorial approach can both be useful to explore important features regarding security. Locating the region in the geographical space, analysing the spatial features of the geostrategic factors and studying their interference can provide the key to understand important interrelations. Thematic maps demonstrate and complement the material and make it easier for the reader to understand the information.

This makes it possible to create a strategic level, topical, analytic material, containing adequately filtered and analysed information, comprehensive, but also focusing on topics and features deemed important from a practical point of view (supporting either political or military decision making) and at the same time answering the requirement of novelty.

2. Research hypotheses

Having organised what I had already learnt and having studied the most important literature, based on the information gathered from these, I set up the following hypotheses at the start of my research:

1. The unfavourable social and economic processes still characterising the region can partly be traced back to its turbulent past and its current unresolved status, but beside these, the war elite that “captured the state” also bears heavy responsibility. Changing the political elite and dismantling the firmly entrenched power structure of the last two decades are important prerequisites of Kosovo becoming a democratic state functioning under the rule of law.
2. The success of the guerrilla war at the end of the 1990s, the unilateral declaration of independence in 2008 and the – still disputed – sovereignty of Kosovo with relative internal peace and stability can be attributed to both the international organisations and to some powers bearing great influence in the region. A new armed conflict is unlikely to erupt due to the present

level of international presence. However, decreasing the number of peacekeepers does not seem to be plausible until a comprehensive agreement is signed, making it possible to normalise the relationship with Serbia and at the same time resolving the status of Kosovo.

3. In order to achieve reconciliation, the inefficiency of the Belgrade–Pristina talks – mentored by the EU and based on the parties’ willingness to compromise – might require or bring with itself stronger and more coordinated pressure from the part of the EU, some European powers and the USA. Without progress the influence of certain foreign actors might counter the democratic processes and bring up undesirable suggestions like ethnically-based border correction/exchange of territories.

4. Based on their individual interests, the independence of Kosovo is regarded as a precedent by several countries in the world, regardless of the fact that – to avoid this – the powers supporting independence emphasized the uniqueness, the “sui generis” nature of the situation from the very beginning. Resolving the situation of the Serbian minority in Kosovo can be the key to reconciliation. In the peace talks it is of utmost importance to keep in mind that peaceful solution can only be achieved by tactfully striving for compromise taking into consideration the individual factors and possibilities; successful practices of other countries are only to be regarded as ideas. Similarly, emerging from the crisis towards a more reassuring direction in the case of Kosovo, cannot present an applicable precedent to other countries’ frozen conflicts.

3. Research objectives

My starting point in defining the objectives of my research was that Kosovo, the subject of my thesis, since the recent war on its territory has been characterised by a complex, multi-layered crisis, stemming from deep in the past, consequently an expansive and complex approach is necessary to understand, manage and to set up future scenarios.

Ferenc Gazdag and Éva Remek places crisis on a five-grade scale – based on the intensity of factors threatening security – after the categories of challenge or risk and tension or threat but before conflict and war. So, tensions accumulate before crisis situations, but there is no military threat yet. However, present “latent conflicts” can intensify if influenced by a definite event, which increases the possibility of applying force. According to the definition of the authors deep crises can evolve when “1. there is an irresolvable conflict regarding the subject of the dispute between two or more parties, 2. if the dispute concerns existential interests or interests deemed existential, 3. if the time available is not enough to resolve the conflict, 4. if the efforts towards managing/preventing the crisis are unsuccessful, or 5. if there is a possibility of war

between the parties”.⁷ In my opinion all the above elements characterise the region of Kosovo more or less.

Resolving crises is mostly possible with international cooperation. To this end, international organisations carry out crisis response, peace support and peace enforcement operations. Scientific, comprehensive, and up-to-date analysis of the crisis regions can serve as an important basis for planning and implementing these activities.⁸ Based on this line of thinking I set the objective of my security geographical research as follows:

1. I explore the natural, social, economic, and military conditions that characterise and characterised the region and in connection with these, the processes and events that led to the evolution of the present crisis. To show the regional and global importance of the crisis area I examine the position of Kosovo in the international system with special regard to the recognition of the state, its relationship with Serbia and Albania, and the influence of foreign powers. Based on this I define the complex security challenges Kosovo is faced with at present, and the known “over the border” implications of these. With the results of my research, I am aiming at providing the target group a comprehensive, easy to update catalogue about the natural, social, economic, and military characteristics and the security situation of the crisis region, and which can also serve as the starting point of a deeper analysis of a definite security issue or event. At the same time finding the appropriate thematic maps and other figures ideal for the analysis of the given topic and using the information gained from them, I also provide the users with their updated and edited version to illustrate and complement the material presented in the thesis.

2. In the course of the above I present “itemized” proof that the social and economic difficulties characterising the crisis region can be traced back to its turbulent past, its unresolved status, and at the same time, to the fact that the Albanian elite of the war in Kosovo “captivated” the state. With this I support my hypothesis, according to which, alongside normalizing the relationship with Serbia, changing the political elite is an important prerequisite for Kosovo to become a democratic state functioning under the rule of law.

3. In connection with the specificity of the military and partly social and economic factors, and Kosovo’s integration in the international system, I analyse the importance of the international intervention, presence, and other foreign influence from the point of view of evolving/forming the security situation of the crisis region. By exploring the problems, I prove,

⁷ Gazdag Ferenc – Remek Éva: *A biztonsági tanulmányok alapjai*. Dialóg Campus, Budapest, 2018. p. 38.

⁸ Dobi József: Válságkörzetek katonaföldrajzi értékelése. *Nemzetvédelmi Egyetemi Közlemények: a Zrínyi Miklós Nemzetvédelmi Egyetem tudományos lapja*, Vol. 8, No. 2, 2004. pp. 131–132.

that in spite of the ambition to create a national army, and also taking into consideration the global security policy events, it is not opportune to decrease the strength of the peacekeeping force before the final and reassuring resolution of Kosovo's status.

4. By analysing the process of Kosovo's integration into the international system and its relationship with its neighbours, I prove that the stagnation of the normalisation talks with Serbia provides the opportunity to foreign powers opposing the democratic transformation to increase their influence in Kosovo. I examine the possibilities for the resolution of the Serbian–Albanian territorial dispute and based on this I explore and analyse the existing scenarios about the future of the region, with special regard to the territorial exchange. I analyse the importance of the cooperation of the EU and the USA for the settlement of Kosovo-issue.

5. I prove that the destiny of the Kosovo crisis region is of global importance on one hand because it is a state at the intersection of the sphere of interest of great powers, on the other hand because of the NATO airstrikes against Yugoslavia and because of the events referred to as “precedent” due to the widely acknowledged unilaterally declared independence of Kosovo. I prove that resolving the situation of the Serbs in Kosovo is of basic importance in the creation of peace. I refute at the same time the possibility of precedent-making that is the application of a resolution elaborated for a specific situation, at a given time, under given circumstances, based on the parties' willingness to compromise, for the resolution of the complex problem of other crisis regions.

Although my aim was a comprehensive security geographical analysis, in the course of my research, due to the length of the study and to rational considerations, I had to narrow down on some parts, while devoting more attention and space to certain exceptionally important topics. In this respect the recent events and experience governed my deliberation. Because as it is pointed out by the concept of “securitisation”⁹ the notion of security, its content keeps changing and is always uncertain to an extent.¹⁰ The COVID 19 pandemic, which started in the spring of 2020 – in the third year of my research – is a perfect example of this: from one minute to another health security gained decisive importance even with regard to several other factors. My research centres about the Republic of Kosovo, which Hungary recognised as a sovereign state on 19th March 2008. In the separate analysis of the security geographical factors I present and rate the characteristics related to the territory of the state, but I reserve the possibility to

⁹ The concept examines how something becomes a security issue, when does a collective entity (a state, nation, ethnic group or social stratum) identify something as a security threat or create a security threat out of it.

¹⁰ Juhász Krisztina: *A biztonságiasítás fogalma és modellje; a biztonságiasítás vizsgálatának módszertana.* (Downloaded: 4th January 2021)

extend the analysis to larger areas and to a comparison with other countries of the region, if I find it necessary to present the interrelations. Issues regarding the regional and global security are in a separate chapter since it is more rational from the point of view of practical use and clarity.

4. Research methods

The antecedents of the research methods applied date back to 25 years. In Hungary the term “security geography” was first used by István Góczé in his highly influential – and due to its novelty, much criticism evoking – study bearing the title: *Some Theoretical Questions of the Complex Military Geography* published in 1997. In his understanding security geography is the field of applied military geography, “which studies military and non-military (economic, ecological and other) hazards threatening the complex security of the geographical environment or a given geographical region, and the evolution, character, extent and the expected development tendencies of these two systems (the geographical environment and the hazards) along with their interrelation.”¹¹ Applied security geography is defined as part of this, with the main task of exploring and analysing the definite hazards threatening the security of the geographical region in question. The analyses extend especially to “the given region’s economy, trade, international cooperation, and the interdependence stemming from this, energy and raw material reserves, infrastructure, demography and physical geography, with special regard to how change(s) in any of these factors influence the structure of security”.¹² Regarding the findings of the security geographical analyses István Góczé states that they are used (or can be used) by the highest level state-, political- and military leaders in analysing the conflict and crisis management.¹³ I regard the latter thought important, because it narrows down the information to be considered during the analysis to what is strategically important for the decision makers. On the other hand – in my understanding – the part in brackets refers to the “supporting nature” of similar analyses, which can mean that the utilisation of a security geographical analysis of a given geographical region – or the part, which is used by the target group, is determined by the requirements arising from the concrete events.

Árpád Gerencsér’s 2016 definition of security geography builds on the above results of István Góczé and on Klára Siposné Kecskeméthy’s theory on the scientific place and subdivisions of

¹¹ Góczé István: A komplex katonaföldrajz néhány elméleti kérdése. *Földrajzi Értesítő*, Vol. 46, No. 3–4, 1997. p. 267.

¹² Góczé (1997): op. cit. p. 268.

¹³ Góczé (1997): op. cit. p. 270.

security geography, and the definition of the geography of crisis regions/districts.¹⁴ According to her definition “security geography, as part of the complex (or modern) regional military geography, examines all geographic, and military geographic factors that influence the security system and environment of a given region, and define its international relations”.¹⁵ The definition of the scientific place and methods of analysis of security geography can be found among the scientific results of Árpád Gerencsér’s *summa cum laude* thesis.

This definition points out that the traditional field of research in military geography has been greatly extended,¹⁶ and it considers security geography as common, interdisciplinary field of military studies, geography and security studies. The definition, beside the regional approach of geography (the analysis of an area limited by the analyst), also includes¹⁷ the sectorial approach.¹⁸ At first the dimensions of security are examined individually, which makes it possible to identify the most important security issues of the region, then to find their connections and to prepare possible scenarios for the future.

In my opinion, applying the methods of geography is exceptionally beneficial because it looks at the space as “an extremely complex system of interactions made up of several sub-systems, where the phenomena and processes being researched appear and take place”, thereby offering the theoretical framework appropriate for analysing the local, regional, and global effects of the security issues.¹⁹

We must note that the methodology of security geography beside the geographical location also distinguishes natural, environmental, economic, and military factors, which – though with a different logic – correspond to the security sectors (military, environmental, economic, social, political) defined by Barry Buzan and his associates in 1998.²⁰ (The political sector is shown among the social factors in the former.)

¹⁴ The geography of crisis regions is part of military geography, which deals with the natural, social, economic and military relations and characteristics of the geographical space, with the geostrategic and geopolitical relations, and their effects on the local, regional and global security. Source: Krajnc (main ed., 2019): *op. cit.* p. 1139. („válságövezetek,/régiónok földrajza” phrase, Siposné Kecskeméthy Klára)

¹⁵ Gerencsér Árpád: *A Kaukázus térség biztonságföldrajzi értékelése*. Doctoral (PhD) thesis. Nemzeti Közzolgálati Egyetem, Hadtudományi és Honvédtisztképző Kar, Hadtudományi Doktori Iskola, Budapest, 2016. p. 22.

¹⁶ The phenomenon of “complex military geography” was introduced by Gőcze István in the mid-1990s.

¹⁷ Security geographical studies (can) comprise both main branches of geography: natural geography and social geography along with their several sub-branches.

¹⁸ Gerencsér (2016): *op. cit.* pp. 21–22.

¹⁹ Pirisi Gábor – Trócsányi András – Hajnal Klára: *Általános társadalom- és gazdaságföldrajz*. (Downloaded: 22nd January 2021)

²⁰ Buzan, Barry – Waeber, Ole – de Wilde, Jaap: *Security. A New Framework for Analysis*. Lynne Rienner Publishers, London, 1998. pp. 49–163.

In my thesis my main research method was proceeding along the line of security geographical factors to explore the information relevant in the security situation of Kosovo. Applying the Gerencsér method for such a small size, quasi-state had several challenges therefore, making use of the “research freedom” I adapted it practically to the situation.

The (absolute) locality and the natural factor change slowly in time, so they provide little possibility for new research results for a strategic analysis especially in the case of a small size crisis area.²¹ As opposed to several “geographic determinism” inclined analyses I do not highlight them, although I include the relevant information about the locality, and the natural relations of the crisis region and the facts that are necessary for the strategical level knowledge of the terrain. (At the same time my “geographic perspective” expediently appears in the case of the economic, social, and military factors as well.) Looking at the relative locality I deliberately only flash the characteristics and possibilities – elaborated on later – that stem from the spread of some religions or from the relationship of the crisis region with the member states of some international organisations. (Maybe this is the part where it is most discernible that the individual factors cannot be categorically separated from each other.) Accordingly, greater attention is devoted to the social, economic, and military factors, which I consider much more substantial in the subject of my thesis.

There are no data regarding the number of certain minorities due to the boycott of the censuses after the start of the Balkan conflicts, furthermore, the conflicting parties distorted their estimates according to their interests. This is another reason why I consider source criticism a basically important principle. Introducing the current economic data and trends was made exceptionally difficult by the corona virus pandemic, the long-term economic consequences of which are hard to predict. Contextualizing the current developments from the perspective of political and military relations (e.g. establishing the army of Kosovo) in my intention, constitutes the really creative part of my thesis.

Furthermore, examining the regional and global importance of the crisis region makes it possible to elaborate on sub-topics like the development of the relationship of Kosovo and some neighbouring countries, the involvement of certain states in Kosovo, and the interests behind their attitudes concerning Kosovo’s independence.

²¹ With a different approach the (absolute) locality and the natural conditions do not provide the field for influencing the security position of the crisis region. In the words of Ferenc Gazdag “geography” – it is evident from the context that the author means locality and natural conditions – “is one of the most static determinators” among the factors of power. Source: Gazdag Ferenc: *Milyen hatalom Franciaország a 21. század elején?* In: Gazdag Ferenc (ed.): *Franciaország a 21. század elején*. Dialóg Campus and Wolters Kluwer, Budapest, 2019. p. 12.

In the last great synthesizing chapter starting from the earlier discussed topics – also pointing out the interrelations of the given security geographical factors – I systematize the current (present both on the internal and international level) complex security issues of the region. In reviewing and analysing the possible scenarios it is inevitable to examine the official and unofficial documents, ideas that have come to life in the topic – see for example the factors that can influence the future of north Kosovo or the notions of the two conflicting parties, other states and international actors, what influence can the settlement of the Kosovo crisis have on the regional and global geopolitical power relations – while the analyses in the earlier phase of research still retain their importance.

During my research depending on the questions under scrutiny and on the given possibilities I applied the methods of induction and deduction, that is, for practical reasons, I either proceeded from the individual characteristics towards the general ones, or at other times from the “general to the “concrete”. I basically preferred the qualitative methods; the document analysis got the greatest emphasis in the first phase. I based my research mainly on Hungarian and English (to complement these German, Serbian, Albanian, Russian and French) language secondary sources (reference books, studies, articles, list of data, maps etc.) endeavouring to understand and confront the different points of view. This method played an important part all through my research. If required by the topic, (typically in economic and demographical analysis) I used the method of statistical and qualitative analysis of raw data. In accordance with the geographic approach in my thesis I paid special attention to support the information with the help of maps. In connection with the sub-topics, I conducted targeted interviews with noted experts of the given topics. Conferences of security policy, talks, workshops offered great opportunities to further my expert knowledge. I participated on these several times either as lecturer or active participant.

To develop a personal perspective, to gather first-hand knowledge and information, I took study trips to Kosovo in the summer of 2018, 2019, 2021 and 2022, and to Belgrade in the autumn of 2019, the opportunity of which was provided by the New National Excellence Programme. During these trips I visited all the emblematic places, memorial sites, and museums connected to the Kosovo crisis, and both the interviews based on questions agreed in advance, and several other spontaneous conversations provided great opportunity for me to draw useful lessons. Although lot of the interviews have a recorded version, in my thesis I do not refer to them as sources, because they were mainly prepared to get a preliminary picture, to clarify some details, to get acquainted with opposing viewpoints; I have no consent of the interviewees to quote them.

In my thesis I paid special attention to avoid bias, in sensitive issues I tried to learn the “truth” of both conflicting parties. The reader can notice this in the especially sensitive cases, like the controversial issue of the foundation of the army of Kosovo.

At their first mention I show the Kosovo geographical names both in Albanian/Serbian²², after that I use the version of the majority living in the given area, which is more widespread.²³

The data collection was finished on 31st May 2022.

5. Short description of the research by chapter

After the introduction, in the first six unnumbered chapters of the thesis I present the scientific problem and I explain its actuality, I delineate my research hypotheses, research objectives, the applied methods, then I summarise the literature of the research topic.

In the following first five numbered chapters I examine the five factors of security geography, concentrating on the present territory of the state of Kosovo as a rule. In the *1. General locality* chapter I define the absolute and relative locality of the crisis region, the security challenges stemming from it; then I describe the border situation from the geographic point of view, also touching upon the border disputes. In the *2. The natural factor* chapter I introduce the relief, hydrographic, and soil conditions, the vegetation cover, and the climate in separate subsections. Following that, I present and analyse the natural hazards which can be the result of some of the above. The *3. The social factor* chapter begins with an overview of the recent history of Kosovo (this is complemented by appx. 2 in which I go back to the roots of the Albanian-Serbian conflict as far as the antiquity). In the next subsection I deal with the government system and the public administration, then – typically looking back till the decades before the war in Kosovo – I present the demographic conditions, migration features, ethnic, religious, and language peculiarities and the political situation. A separate subsection deals with the Albanian culture, which is relevant from the point of view of the topic of my thesis. Finally, I devote three subsections to education, settlement pattern, and health (naturally keeping the focus on the information relevant to security). The *4. The economic factor* chapter starts with a review of economic history (from the start of socialist Yugoslavia to 2008), then I look at the main economic characteristics of the Republic of Kosovo, which declared its independence in 2008. Following this, I review and analyse the economic sectors of Kosovo. This chapter includes the

²² Regarding the names I followed the professional opinion of Imre János Faragó (master teacher, Eötvös Loránd University, Faculty of Informatics, Institute of Cartography and Geoinformatics, author of several reference books).

²³ In case of the capital, I use the Hungarian version, and the Hungarian spelling. I do the same in the case of rivers and other geographical names that have known Hungarian equivalents.

challenges of environmental protection, and a separate one the social-economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. In the 5. *Military factor* chapter I review the recent events in Kosovo, concentrating first on the role of NATO in the crisis management of the country, then on the Kosovo Liberation Army (Ushtria Çlirimtare e Kosovës – UÇK). A separate subsection deals with the process from the demilitarization of UÇK to the decision of setting up a national military force. Finally, I mention other important armed, or – from the point of view of security – relevant official, illegal, Kosovo Albanian, and Kosovo Serb organisations.

In the 6. *Kosovo's role in the international system* chapter I examine the features relevant from the point of view of regional and global security. I look at the recognition of the sovereignty of the state of Kosovo, the relationship with Serbia from 2008 to this day, then I examine the concept of Greater Albania. Finally, I touch upon the features of the foreign power influence and its security implications.

In the synthesizing chapter 7. I examine the complex security challenges of the present (which can characteristically be traced back to several security geographical factors), then I present and examine the scenarios concerning the future of the crisis region. I conclude the chapter by the topic of “Kosovo as precedent”, which has become especially actual due to the Russia–Ukraine war.

Every numbered chapter ends with a part bearing the title “Conclusions” where I summarize and analyse the results of the research in the given topic. In the chapter called *Summarized conclusions and scientific results* I reflect on my hypotheses and research objectives presented at the beginning of the thesis. This is followed by the chapters *Recommendation and possible applications of the research results* and *Literature*. I prepared – with the aim of clarity – six lists, which are: *List of scientific activity*, *List of professional interviews*, *List of figures*, *List of charts*, *List of abbreviations*, *List of appendices*. Beside the earlier mentioned historical retrospection, to illustrate the text, I added an appendix of 72 numbered figures; charts summarising information about public administration, politics, and international agreements; the Hungarian translation (my own) of two determining agreements and a map illustrating the risk factors of regional destabilization.

6. Summary of conclusions and scientific results

1.) With the detailed analysis of the geosecurity factors I proved the fact that by today, more than two decades after the armed conflict of the 1990s, only a few security problems of the Kosovo crisis region can be considered of military nature. Although the war rhetoric and the

increased development of the military (setting it up in case of Kosovo) characterise both Serbia and Kosovo, due to the international military presence, the development of the region, and the potential consequences it would have on the foreign political goals of the parties, the escalation of a new extensive armed conflict is highly improbable. The serious social and economic problems characterising the region can be traced back partly to the turbulent past (see the irreconcilable ethnic conflicts, the abundance of firearms available on the black market) furthermore, the unresolved status issue and the unsuccessful normalization agreements between Serbia and Kosovo (see the energy disputes and the refusal to acknowledge each other's diplomats). Besides, the development was greatly hindered by the fact that the political elite mostly comprising ex-guerrillas – seemingly enjoying the trust of the international community – through extensive corruption, nepotism, patronage, and link with organised crime practically executed “state capture”, thereby creating a serious impediment to democratic transformation. The “mafia state image”, artificially enhanced by states rejecting Kosovo's independence, resulted in evident negative consequences, like deterring potential foreign investors.

The accountability process of some prominent members of the war time elite (their permanent withdrawal from political life) started at the time of my research in the autumn of 2020, then February 2021 saw the start of “political elite change”. By today, these have created the prerequisites of fighting the extensive corruption, nepotism and patronage in Kosovo and the achievements of the new government at this aim (May 2022) can be considered a promising beginning.

2.) By introducing the events of the war, the ensuing period of international administration, the circumstances of the unilateral declaration of independence and the still ongoing involvement of international organisations and individual states in Kosovo, I proved that the issues connected to Kosovo's status, then the retention of the status quo would have been/would be impossible without the international involvement, presence, and influence. The international community – in connection with the growing tensions in the Serbia–Kosovo relations from the autumn 2021 – had a number of opportunities to prove their key role in retaining the security and stability of the region. The influence of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict on the Western Balkan region since February 2022 has also reinforced the necessity of maintaining the international presence.

3.) At the period of my research the EU mentored Belgrade–Pristina talks halted, and the technical type agreements signed earlier have not been fully implemented either. The agreements aiming to create the Association/Community of Serb Majority Municipalities,

which in 2013 and 2015 was heralded to be of historical importance, was also rendered impossible due to different interpretations and the backing down of Kosovo.

My hypotheses concerning the increasing influence of foreign powers having an adverse effect on democratic transformation are supported by my conclusions about the spread of radical Islam in Kosovo, and the increasing Russian influence/supposed hybrid activities in Serbia and North Kosovo. As I expected, the alternative plans for border correction/exchange of territories – though practically unaccomplishable, still having a potentially substantial influence on the security situation even on the rhetorical level – was put on the table several times (in 2018 by the presidents of Serbia and Kosovo, and in 2021 by an alleged “Slovenian non paper”) thereby denying judgements as to the topic being off the agenda, which is also doubted by the author of the present thesis.

Following the Trump era, and due to the Ukrainian situation, the assumption that – having recognised the geopolitical risk of procrastination in the region – the EU and the USA will join forces to accelerate the normalization of the Serbia–Kosovo relationship, and in a wider sense, the process of the Euro-Atlantic integration of the Western Balkans.

4.) I proved that the destiny of the Kosovo crisis region is decisive for the local and regional security, but can have global implications as well. On one hand, the conflict between Serbia, supported by Russia (and China) and Kosovo, often referred to as a US satellite state, map the conflict of the leading powers of the world. On the other hand, some countries, that have not recognised the sovereignty of Kosovo, stick to their rejection referring to the potential precedent, being worried about the ambition for autonomy of their minorities. Kosovo Albanians, Kosovo Serbs as well as Serbian Serbs characteristically look for geopolitical parallels – with the escalation of the Russian–Ukrainian armed conflict – in the present and in the decades of the old Yugoslavian situation. The obvious dangers of these – especially because of the possible, though as yet considered less likely, further escalation of the Ukrainian conflict – I consider my conclusion justified, that in resolving the situation in Kosovo, special attention must be paid to the wider consequences of the possible solutions.

Based on the above, I consider the following as the scientific results of the thesis:

1. I proved that the unfavourable social and economic processes of the Kosovo crisis region stem from its turbulent past, its still unresolved status on the one hand, and from the responsibility of the “war time elite” accused of captivating the state on the other. From the point of view of economic development, changing the political elite and dismantling the earlier

power structures are important prerequisites of Kosovo becoming a democratic state functioning under the rule of law.

2. I confirmed that it is still the international presence that can guarantee the sovereignty, security and stability of Kosovo, therefore decreasing the strength of the peacekeeping forces is not timely.

3. I proved that the inefficiency of the normalisation talks between Belgrade and Pristina can open the door to the undesirable influence of some foreign powers and to alternative solutions like border correction, which can pose a threat for the stability and security of the entire Western Balkan region. Harmonising the efforts of the EU and the USA is of basic importance to resolve the Kosovo issue.

4. I confirmed the global importance of the Kosovo crisis region, on one hand as the theatre of great powers and on the other, because due to the recognition of its independence, it is often referred to as a precedent, which divides the countries of the world. However, normalising the relationship of Belgrade and Pristina cannot serve as a model in the case of other frozen conflicts in the world.

7. Recommendation and possible applications of the research results

I recommend my thesis to the researchers of the area (be it from the field of geography, security studies, military science, or any other disciplines), diplomats, experts, soldiers working or preparing to work in the area, domestic political or military decision makers, in the hope that it provides them authentic, objective and (as yet) up-to-date information about the security situation of Kosovo. As I built on the results of my “predecessors” from different disciplines, I hope that researchers, experts, and others interested in the topic will find my thesis useful.

The Kosovo crisis region is of outstanding importance for Hungary, which is also shown by the more and more committed military involvement. Hungarian soldiers, diplomats, experts visit Kosovo in great numbers, and their well organised preparation and responsible work requires up-to-date, accurate information. Although there are several experts of the region in Hungary, and there is an abundance of excellent materials, studies, articles analysing the issues of the crisis region at different moments of time, from different aspects and with different purposes, no analysis as the present thesis is available, which examines the security issues from such wide range of aspects in such depth in an up-to-date manner in unified structure.

The thesis is useful in the tuition of international relations, international studies, international security and defence policy, both on bachelor and master levels, on the research fields of the Doctoral School of Military Sciences of the National University of Public Service.

Some chapters of the thesis were used right after they were written for teaching/informing purposes which provided perfect reassurance that the invested energy was not in vain. Also, every opportunity for dissemination provided new impulses, marked a new direction of research, and opened “new doors” for me.

It is a commonplace, but in this case, it is true, that research can be stopped, but never finished. Therefore, completing my thesis does not and cannot mean that the research is once and for all came to an end. The collected and synthesised information and the conclusions give an overall picture of the current security situation in Kosovo and about the nature of the main challenges, while later, they can provide a good starting point for a new, updated version. During my doctoral studies I continually updated the material for conferences, where I presented my partial results, and for teaching/informing purposes. I still consider updating – based on current events using the most relevant sources – my task, which can also prove useful.

Relevant parts of the thesis (especially the illustrating figures, maps, and appendices) in themselves can provide useful and fast information when looking for the background of a current security issue. In connection with this, deeper analysis of given topics for definite purposes can provide interesting and useful results to the research of the region or even contribute to creating its peace and stability.

7. List of publications by the author in the topic

1. NATO's Role in the Kosovo Crises Management. *Vojenské Reflexie*, Vol. 13, No. 1, 2018. pp. 56–71.
2. Kosovo: The Heritage of the UÇK. In: Hrnčiar, Michal (ed.): *Zborník príspevkov z 9. medzinárodnej vedeckej konferencie (2018)*. Akadémia ozbrojených síl generála Milana Rastislava Štefánika, Liptovsky Mikulas (Szlovákia), 2018. pp. 220–232.
3. Development of the Belgrade–Pristina Dialogue – Assessment at the End of the Office Term of Federica Mogherini. In: Majchút, Ivan (ed.): *Národná a Medzinárodná Bezpečnosť 2019*. Akadémia ozbrojených síl generála Milana Rastislava Štefánika, Liptovsky Mikulas (Szlovákia), 2019. pp. 336–349.
4. Analysis of the Interest- and Argument-System of the Key Actors Concerning Kosovo's Status, in the Mirror of the Events of the Year 2019. *Vojenské Reflexie*, Vol 15, No. 1, 2020. pp. 6–24.
5. Gerillák a ködben – A Koszovói Felszabadítási Hadsereg története, utóhatásai és emlékezete. *Felderítő Szemle*, Vol. 17, No. 3, 2018. pp. 157–170.
6. *Koszovó 2018 – Biztonságpolitikai körkép*. <https://biztonsagpolitika.hu/egyeb/koszovo-2018-biztonsagpolitikai-korkep> (13th December 2018) [Co-author: Zsolt Csutak]

7. Pandora szelencéje, vagy kiút a patthelyzetből? A szerb-koszovói határ esetleges módosításának kulcskérdései. In: Kozma Klementina–Dolozsek Tünde (szerk.): *A hadtudomány és a 21. század 2019*. Doktoranduszok Országos Szövetsége, Hadtudományi Osztály, Budapest, 2019. pp. 210–228.
8. Arkan Tigrisei a szerb állambiztonság szolgálatában. *Felderítő Szemle*, Vol. 18, No. 4, 2019. pp. 80–94.
9. Lehet-e a Szandzsák a következő Koszovó? *Felderítő Szemle*, Vol. 19, No. 2, 2020. pp. 79–102.
10. *Változni fog-e Hashim Thaçi szerepe Koszovó státuszának alakításában?* <https://biztonsagpolitika.hu/egyeb/valtozni-fog-e-hashim-Thaçi-szerepe-koszovo-statuszanak-alakitasaban> (31st July 2020)
11. Az UÇK-tól a nemzeti haderőig – A Koszovói Fegyveres Erő létrehozása és a folyamat biztonságra gyakorolt sokrétű következményei. *Felderítő Szemle*, Vol. 19, No. 4, 2020. pp. 20–47.
12. Újraírható-e Koszovó történelme? A koszovói Különleges Törvényszék és Különleges Ügyészség felállításának és eddigi működésének tapasztalatai. In: Szelei Ildikó (szerk.): *A hadtudomány és a 21. század 2021*. Doktoranduszok Országos Szövetsége, Hadtudományi Osztály, Budapest, 2021. pp. 251–263.
13. Új állam? Modern államférfi? Hashim Thaçi szerepe Koszovó státuszának alakulásában. In: Ördögh Tibor (szerk.): *Autonómia és önrendelkezés a Balkánon : III. Balkán konferencia*. Ludovika Egyetemi Kiadó, Budapest, 2021. pp. 75–92. ISBN: 789635314157
14. Geográfia. In: Binder Tamás (szerk.): *Bosznia-Hercegovina, a mesélő emberek földje*. Katonai Nemzetbiztonsági Szolgálat, Budapest, 2022. pp. 10–42. ISBN: 978-615-6128-09-6

8. Professional-scientific curriculum vitae of the author

Szidónia Lángné Petruska was born on 17th May 1979 in Debrecen.

She finished her studies in 1997, in Móricz Zsigmond Grammar School in Buda, specialising in history and drama.

She started her university studies in Kossuth Lajos University in Debrecen and continued in Eötvös Loránd University in Budapest, majoring in Geography. She spent the 2000–2001 academic year in Mannheim, Germany. (Beside her studies she worked as a babysitter for a Kosovo Albanian family, which determined her interest in the region.) She got her first degree in 2003 as qualified geographer with the specialisation of environmental geography and hydrology. The topic of her thesis was geocological potential examination.

From 2003 to 2013 she worked in the environmental central administration, and – as a scientific associate – for VITUKI Environmental and Water Management Research Institute. During this time, she had two children. While on maternity leave, between 2006 and 2010 she finished the Central European Analyst specialisation of the Andrásy Gyula German Language University. One of her scientific papers was on the religious implications of the Serbian-Albanian conflict. With her German language thesis on the life and work of Bohumil Hrabal Czech writer, and the analysis of his novel *I Served the King of England* she won the Karl Rath award of the German–Hungarian Association.

From 2013 to 2019 she worked at the Secretariat of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences as a programme officer dealing mainly with science policy and Horizon Europe the EU's framework programme for research, development and innovation.

After the birth of her third child in 2017 she started her studies at the Doctoral School of Military Sciences of the National University of Public Service. Her choice of topic was motivated mostly by her personal interest. Between 2019 and 2023 she worked for the Military National Security Service. Since 2023 she has worked for the National Information Centre.

In her research topic she has had 14 publications, four of them in English. She held several lectures in scientific conferences and at the university. She also worked as opponent, reviewer, and member of the Military Science Department of the Association of Hungarian PhD and DLA Candidates. She participated in organising several scientific-professional conferences. She likes taking part in professional competitions: in 2019 she achieved 3rd place in her section in the Spring Wind Conference organised by the Association of Hungarian PhD and DLA Candidates and 2nd place in the military cartography competition organised by the HDF Geoinformation Service. Her research was sponsored for five months by the New National Excellence Programme, where she achieved excellent rating.

She has C type advanced level language exam in English and German (also learnt some Russian, French, and Serbian).