Nationalities Papers, 2014
Vol. 42, No. 5, 867–889, http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00905992.2014.937683

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Ending the impasse in Kosovo: partition, decentralization, or consociationalism?

Michael Rossi*

Department of Political Science, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ, USA

(*Received 29 June 2013; accepted 9 June 2014*)

This paper argues that current Western-backed approaches to conflict resolution in Kosovo have failed to alter Serbia's policy toward the region and have contributed to the exacerbation of political tensions between Belgrade and Brussels, while deepening ethnic cleavages between Serb and Albanian communities. While there is no possibility of Kosovo returning to Serbia's control, there is an equal unlikelihood that Serbian-populated regions of Kosovo, especially the north, will submit to Pristina's authority. Most importantly, there is little hope that Kosovo can gain full international recognition and membership in international organizations without a compromise settlement with Serbia. While territorial partition has long been a suggested option, I conclude that the best possible solution for Kosovo, given the positions of all parties involved, is a process of significant decentralization beyond the internationally supported measures in the Ahtisaari Plan. A model of consociational power sharing is one in which Serbian and Albanian municipalities are granted high levels of autonomy similar to arrangements made for Bosnia. While this solution may not be ideal and further weakens central authority, I argue that consociationalism reduces the problems of ethnic conflict, encourages local self-government, and preserves the overall territorial integrity of Kosovo.

Keywords: Serbia; Kosovo; consociationalism; power sharing; conflict resolution

Negotiated solutions to ethnic conflict rarely, if ever, produce mutually acceptable settlements. More often than not, the demands of one side challenge the interests and security of the other, making post-conflict arrangements tenuous at best and the possibility of renewed violence at some point in the future still likely. When ethnic violence involves civil war, conflict resolution is even more herculean. What might previously be remedied with enhanced border control, population transfers, and/or separating the sides with inevitable and never-ending international peacekeeping missions between two states are now faced with the additional task of (re)constructing a state where people who had recently been killing each other must now live and exist as neighbors (Licklider, 1993, 1995; Walter 1997; Downes, 2004; Roeder and Rothchild 2005).

As most of these ethnic civil conflicts involve some combination of contestation of territory and self-determination, two strategies are popular among both policymakers and academics. The first strategy is territorial partition, and the second is granting some form

*Email: mrossi1@rci.rutgers.edu

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https://doi.org/10.1080/00905992.2014.937683 Published online by Cambridge University Press

of regional autonomy coupled with power-sharing arrangements to the contested area and ethnic group, respectively.[1] Both are not without their side effects. Whereas the first option risks further regional instability because it redefines borders and, at least in theory, encourages would-be irredentist movements elsewhere, the paradox of the second is that it ends existing conflict by producing complicated peace settlements that risk weakening long-term state cohesiveness and future prospects of a shared community; conditions which at best indefinitely prolong fragile state sovereignty and at worst perpetuate ethnic security dilemmas. In these situations, central authority is all but absent, as in Bosnia, or involves fulfilling ethnic quotas to determine the composition of regional self-government, as in Macedonia or Lebanon.[2] In states like Cyprus, Serbia, Moldova, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Iraq, and most recently Ukraine, intractable conflicts with one or more politicized ethnic groups comprising a compact area of territory have metastasized into frozen conflicts where the territory in question largely, if not entirely, functions as a separate entity, especially if said region maintains support from transnational groups and foreign governments.

In the case of Serbia's southern/former province of Kosovo, which remains a partially sovereign entity six years after its ethnic Albanian majority unilaterally declared independence, the residual problems stemming from conflict and conflict resolution remain fundamental obstacles to stability and peace. As Kosovo was effectively partitioned from Serbia, the redrawing of borders has reinforced the lucrative strategy of ethnocentrism as a political tool for self-interest not only for its ethnic Albanian majority, who since 1981 contained nationalist movements that sought to break away from Serbia, but also for the newly created minority of Serbs who largely refuse to recognize Kosovo's authority, and have supported, especially in the Serb-dominant region north of the Ibar River, an additional partition to rejoin Serbia Proper.[3] Kosovo thus has the unique situation of being a breakaway region with its own breakaway regions, as protracted conflict exists in a tit-for-tat fashion between the two communities. Whereas Serbia may have had to deal with threats of secession from a nationally conscious, politically active, and highly rebellious Albanian community prior to the civil war in 1999, it is now Kosovo that has been granted some form of independence – itself a bold move considering peace agreements traditionally uphold the territorial integrity of states – but within a cumbersome framework that includes significant degrees of decentralization, minority rights, and other local competencies designed for the Serbian minority that allows it to maintain strong ties with Serbia Proper.

Far from Kosovo's separation from Serbia producing the peace-in-our-time scenario many political leaders in the West had hoped and expected, the vague, interpretive, and ad hoc power-sharing arrangements coupled with Kosovo's contested sovereignty and inexperienced government in Pristina have left the territory in a precarious position. In addition to empowering local Serb communities with institutional competencies that limit Pristina's reach, internationally supported conditions for Kosovo's decentralization have failed to prevent various hardline elements in Kosovo's Albanian society from targeting Serb communities into leaving and keeping Serb refugees from returning. Even within Kosovo's comparatively moderate political society, tempered as it is by international pressure to compromise, invitations to Kosovo Serbs to participate in the new government come with little understanding of Serb interests and almost no sensitivity to Serb fears of a state dominated by political actors who fought for secession, encouraged and participated in Albanian ethnocentrism, and are now calling for integration with significantly limited amounts of self-management.[4] This in turn has increased Serb demands to clearly identify decentralization for the areas they inhabit as functional autonomy with comprehensive links to Belgrade, if not advocate its outright territorial partition.

https://doi.org/10.1080/00905992.2014.937683 Published online by Cambridge University Press

This article agrees with previously held positions that negotiated settlements to ethnic civil wars create new challenges while solving old ones (McGarry and O'Leary 1993; Posen 1993; Rose 2000; Cornell 2002; Lustick, Miodownik, and Eidelson 2004; Roeder 2009). In Kosovo's case, solutions of decentralization for the Serb community continue to exacerbate Serb–Albanian relations as well as reinforce cleavages between moderates and hardliners on both sides. However, I depart from previous arguments that favor granting greater duties to central authority, and believe that it is not decentralization that has contributed to the security dilemma in Kosovo so much as it is the limited scope of that decentralization which stops short of granting the Serbs full and formal autonomy in an entity they did not choose to live in and from a newly established government they have had little reason to recognize, let alone trust.[5] More than five years after it gained some form of sovereignty, Kosovo's Serbs largely, though not always favorably, look to Belgrade for legitimacy and authority; an association Kosovo's government has not only failed to break but whose actions in imposing its presence over the last decade have actually helped to reinforce and entrench. The insistence of Kosovo's Albanian leadership to exert authority and influence over the Kosovo Serb municipalities and communities has been a major obstacle in reaching an optimal peace agreement with Belgrade. Additionally, the inability to reach a definitive compromise between a sovereign state and what is still a legally contested breakaway entity has been a contributing factor to Kosovo remaining a partially sovereign and diplomatically disputed parastate, as nearly half of all United Nations (UN) member states at the time of this writing still refuse to recognize its independence; many of which have been dealing with threats of regional autonomy and secessionism by contentious ethnic minorities of their own.[6] In short, Kosovo's disputed statehood and ambiguous sovereignty extends discussions of consociational power sharing described below to consider functional autonomy for the Serbian minority on the grounds that central authority in Pristina was itself a separatist movement and has never enjoyed legitimate authority over the regions and ethnic group it seeks to call its own citizens.

Noting the international community's proclivity to find as much of a middle ground as possible in conflict resolutions and understanding the primary objectives of both Serb and Albanian sides, I conclude that current arrangements in Kosovo seem to be ultimately leading to either some type of arrangement for Kosovo Serbs similar to ethnofederal models like Bosnia or Belgium, or, more likely, highly autonomous regions like Catalonia, South Tyrol, or Iraqi Kurdistan.[7] The likelihood of Kosovo returning to Serbia, functioning as a unitary state, or being partitioned is unrealistic. Power-sharing arrangements greatly weaken the cohesiveness of a state, and autonomy keeps the proverbial door open for possibly more concessions in the future; however, I believe there are no viable alternative solutions. Since the architects of Kosovo's independence already envisioned it to be a highly decentralized state, some type of formal power sharing between Serbs and Albanians seems to be the most likely outcome for two reasons. The first is that the nature of conflict resolution in Kosovo has already empowered the Kosovo Serbs to a degree that they exercise a significant amount of *de facto* autonomy and independent decision-making even before formal rights and duties are made *de jure*. As stated above, this has been especially acute in the north where efforts by the international community to "integrate" Belgrade-backed institutions within Pristina's authority have largely preserved decision-making to local municipal authorities. The second is that power sharing is a compromise both sides can make, which maximizes their immediate interests while working to achieve long-term objectives. In Kosovo's case, the primary objective of seeking full sovereign recognition and legitimacy means gaining membership to the UN, the EU, and other international organizations where a number of member states will not recognize its sovereignty outside a

https://doi.org/10.1080/00905992.2014.937683 Published online by Cambridge University Press

final agreement with Serbia. This may very well require the Kosovo government to extend the provisions of the Ahtisaari Plan that shaped its independence by agreeing to full and complete autonomy for its Serbian-controlled areas as a concession to Belgrade. In Serbia's case, eventual membership in the EU is predicated on Belgrade establishing some type of "normalization of relations" with its wayward province. While this does not mean that Serbia is required to recognize Kosovo, guarantees of functional autonomy for the Kosovo Serbs that are similar to arrangements made elsewhere might be enough for Belgrade to acquiesce and cease to block Kosovo's road to internationally recognized sovereignty.

The nature of Kosovo's disputed sovereignty

After a series of internationally mediated talks between Serb and ethnic Albanian officials in Vienna in 2006, the ensuing comprehensive proposal drafted the following year by Maarti Ahtisaari, the UN Special Envoy for Kosovo, effectively envisioned a sovereign Kosovo operating within a framework of "supervised independence" that would embody principles of civic-based democracy, the rule of law, significant protections of human rights, cultural freedoms, and civil liberties.[8] In addition, extensive minority rights were provided for Kosovo's Serb communities, along with guarantees for legislative representation, protection of Serbian Orthodox monasteries and other cultural landmarks, special links with Belgrade, and local competencies for regional self-administration. In effect, Kosovo's independence, a long-term goal for much of its Albanian majority, would be granted at a significant cost in terms of internal sovereignty and unitary government, with decentralization as the defining structure and a major concession to the Serbian camp. While the "Ahtisaari Plan" is highly thorough and boldly realistic in envisioning Kosovo's long-term stability and functionality as an ongoing responsibility of the international community, even Ahtisaari himself acknowledged the solution was far from optimal and would disappoint both sides which, "after more than one year of direct talks, bilateral negotiations and expert consultations … have reaffirmed [Serbs' and Albanians'] categorical, diametrically opposed positions" and in which "no amount of additional talks, whatever the format, will overcome this impasse" (2007, 2).[9] Thus the nature and scope proposed for an independent Kosovo was neither the realization of long-desired Albanian irredentism, nor was it meant to be a punishment to Serbia for Slobodan Milošević's brutality against the Albanian population in 1999.[10] Rather it was understood to be the best of a series of bad options for a detached and increasingly unstable region that could not be strategically reincorporated back into its parent country. In other words, independence, which Albanians long desired, would be designed, structured, administered, and defined as an international initiative that would be considerably different from what Albanians actually envisioned and desired (Weller 2009).

The leadership in Pristina accepted the Proposal's heavy conditions, realizing the weak state it would create, but also understanding this was the price for internationally supported independence. Though these new agreements also guaranteed much, if not more, of the provisions for local self-government to Serbian municipalities than Belgrade initially favored, or even considered, at the Vienna conferences the previous year, Serbian communities in Kosovo as well as much of Belgrade's leadership rejected the Proposal largely on account of it violating the framework of UN Security Council Resolution 1244, which affirms the territorial integrity of Serbia with Kosovo as an autonomous region (ICG 2007, 23).[11] Since February 2008 when Kosovo declared independence, successive governments in Belgrade remain determined to retain as much direct authority and influence in the

https://doi.org/10.1080/00905992.2014.937683 Published online by Cambridge University Press

region as possible, and have specifically pursued an active role in supporting what officials in Pristina regard as "parallel institutions" and local authorities in the Serb-dominant area.

Kosovo's stability and sustainability will remain significantly weak so long as the current status quo endures. Knowing this, momentum has been growing to consider additional measures and strategies to end the impasse. One option that has always been lurking beneath the diplomatic surface is to allow for territorial partition at the Ibar River. Ideas of partitioning Kosovo between Serb and Albanian spheres of control have been considered for more than 20 years, and are still opined by policymakers and even some political leaders in Europe as a last-resort solution to ending the diplomatic deadlock.[12] Yet partition is formally rejected by all parties for different reasons. For Belgrade, accepting partition effectively means having to recognize the loss of the rest of Kosovo, which is a nullification not only of decades of political and cultural symbolism of Kosovo being the "heart" of Serbia, but also a violation of the new Serbian Constitution ratified in 2006, which explicitly identifies Kosovo as an integral part of the Serbian state. More importantly, it is the 60% of Kosovo's Serbian communities south of the Ibar that risk losing the most, as partition would effectively leave them adrift within a rump Kosovo where the pressure to leave would come from both Belgrade and Albanian hardliners. Albanians also reject ideas of partition on account that Kosovo's borders cannot be compromised, and the north remains an inalienable, if currently uncontrolled, part of its territory. While popular Albanian sentiment might favor getting rid of an unruly north, officials in Pristina agree with the position of many Western policymakers that a partition of Kosovo would open a proverbial "Pandora's Box" in the region that would encourage Serbs in Bosnia and Albanians in both Macedonia and the southern Serbian region of Preševo to seek similar arrangements of territorial secession and unification with their ethnic kin.[13]

Additionally, the loss of northern Kosovo would destroy years of work by the US and key Western European powers that have provided a carefully crafted image of Kosovo as a multiethnic society as well as efforts in convincing Serb and Albanian elites to live together. While ruminations of a "territorial swap" between northern Kosovo and the Albanian-majority Preševo Valley have been seen by some as a last resort, the remaining Serbs of Gračanica, Štrpce, and other communities who have struggled to have their grievances heard by Belgrade for years would be an even smaller minority with the absence of the strong institutions of the north and the addition of at least 40,000 additional Albanians from the Preševo Valley. Albanian leadership in Pristina might also feel less inclined to support elements of minority rights codified in the Ahtisaari Plan and turn instead to alternative ideas of supporting other irredentist movements in Macedonia and even possible union with Albania, which is openly called for by members of the increasingly popular radical national movement *Vetëvendosje!* (Self-Determination). Were this to happen, the international community would be forced to intervene in the Balkans to halt yet another pan-ethnic project. In short, partition benefits no one except extremists and short-sighted elites on both sides who seek to abolish unpopular conditions of the Ahtisaari Plan.

Second and third options utilize different degrees of consociationalism that build on provisions already encapsulated in the Ahtisaari Plan: either to extend decentralization to special devolution of powers to the Serb municipalities or to approve full and formal autonomy similar to the Dayton Accords reached in Bosnia. Something between these two options seems to be the approach that Belgrade has adopted in some capacity as a new platform for "normalizing" relations with Pristina. An initial agreement between the two sides was finally reached in April 2013, with most of Belgrade's proposals being accepted including the creation of an Association of Serbian Municipalities, whose structure and

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competencies remain undefined at the time of this writing but have the potential to function as a subnational political body in the future. However, while this certainly has the potential to empower the Serb minority and maintain Belgrade's presence in the region, the continued assurance that Serbia is not obligated to recognize Kosovo's independence in return leaves Pristina, at least for the foreseeable future, with an open-ended promise of distant EU integration, while still stuck without any agreement on status of sovereignty.[14]

Models of consociationalism have been a part of the literature on democracy and state theory since Arend Lijphart examined power-sharing arrangements of plural societies in Western Europe more than 40 years ago. They also comprise an essential part of minority protection policies in various EU accession agreements, and have formed the foundation for post-conflict resolution in multiple war-torn regions in the last 25 years (Lijphart 1968, 1969, 1977, 2004; Ghai 2000; Wolff 2005; Weller 2009; Wolff 2010). The basic tenets of consociationalism argue that conventional practices of democracy by majoritarian rule tend to place subnational groups with identities distinct from the larger population at a comparative disadvantage. To safeguard against this, "politics of accommodation" are utilized to provide opportunities for the minority to participate in government through a wide range of asymmetrical compromises and consensus-building measures (Lijphart 1968, 104). Whether these are reached through grand coalitions, reserving a number of seats in the legislature for the minority group, guaranteeing a top executive post for one of its members, or being given local autonomy in language, education, and economic development, consociationalism is a form of "government by elite cartel designed to turn a democracy with a fragmented political culture into a stable democracy" (Lijphart 1969, 216). It is also a fail-safe in diffusing the threat of separatism, especially in areas where the central government has either been unable to exert any authority previously, or has been forced to settle for externally imposed conditions that end long-running and costly conflicts. In Kosovo's case, this primarily pertains to the Belgrade-controlled northern regions, but is also highly applicable to other Serb-inhabited towns and municipalities throughout Kosovo that have established some tacit social contract with Pristina that, while workable, remain less than optimal.

Critics of Lijphart's model have since noted the many assumptions consociational models have when compared with stable, multiethnic, democratic states (Lustick 1979, 1997; Steiner 1981). Even Lijphart acknowledged that successful consociational democracy requires elites to have the ability to accommodate divergent needs of the minority group as well as have "the ability to transcend cleavages and to join in a common effort with the elites of the rival subculture" (1969, 216). If elites fail to reach an agreement on national cohesion or use their powers and political influence to exacerbate socio-political cleavages, as often tends to happen in post-conflict regions, the state resembles what he classifies as a "centrifugal democracy" (1977, 114–119), or what others have regarded as "corporate consociationalism," where societies remain fragmented by social, ethnic, religious, and linguistic cleavages. The state may function, and some nominal form of democracy can exist, but the state operates within a system of "political feudalism" that maintains sectarian strife, encourages ethnocentric mobilization, and facilitates cross-border assistance from like-minded groups (Salamey 2009).

Kosovo resembles this type of "centrifugal democracy" as evidenced not only through deep political, cultural, and historical differences between Albanians and Serbs, but also due to internationally supported policies of decentralization that empower the Kosovo Serb minority to maintain a functional distance away from Pristina and toward Belgrade. For all practical purposes, this has resulted in ethnofederal arrangements similar to Bosnia. To be sure, elements of cross-ethnic cooperation exist at the communal level, but they are minimal in comparison to socio-political mobilization designed around

https://doi.org/10.1080/00905992.2014.937683 Published online by Cambridge University Press

prewar identities that have become institutionally embedded. In what follows are brief overviews of additional options on consociationalism stemming from the Ahtisaari Plan. Because the EU has no fixed strategy for implementation of minority protection, power-sharing arrangements are designed ad hoc depending on the severity of conflict between ethnic groups (Brusis 2003).[15] My tentative conclusion is that some form of power sharing in Kosovo not only seems an inevitable scenario, but maximizes the interests of both sides. Under any arrangement, it is highly probable the Kosovo Serb minority will be either given additional devolution of powers to the municipal level within an enveloping political framework with Pristina, or formal autonomy that empowers the Serbs to function in a confederal entity and maintain close links to Belgrade within a weak, yet independent, Kosovo. As officials in the EU have championed the recent agreements reached between Belgrade and Pristina, the granting of additional rights to the Kosovo Serb minority as a compromise may very well be steps officials in Pristina have to take to unblock their diplomatic stalemate. Should variants of either option be eventually reached in the coming years, Kosovo should be able to achieve full sovereignty and eventual membership in the UN and the EU.

Further decentralization within the Ahtisaari Plan

Decentralization of authority to the municipal level has long been the preferred strategy for Kosovo's future by the international community even before independence was recommended. In particular, the policies of decentralization recognize the grim reality that Kosovo's multiethnic character cannot survive unless Serb-majority municipalities are created and empowered with "enhanced competencies in areas such as the police, justice, education, culture, the media and the economy, including the appointment of key officials" (Eide 2005, 17). These arrangements for Serbs, while part of a larger package designed for the whole of Kosovo, would be "special competencies going beyond those given to all other municipalities" (Eide 2005, 17) which addressed a fundamental Serbian fear of Kosovo Albanian leadership since 1999 being "seemingly unable or unwilling to protect neighbors, minorities, or even itself from its own extremists and criminals" (ICG 2004, 32). Such moves were welcomed by Serbs in Belgrade and in Kosovo, but "decentralization" was understood as a byword for "cantonization" or even "functional separation" in which Serb enclaves remain firmly attached to Serbian law and order that runs parallel to an internationally regulated government for the rest of Kosovo. This was acutely noted by Albanian officials, who feared these municipalities would represent residual footholds of the Serbian government that could undermine their own efforts at state-building, lay competing claims to property, industries, and business licenses, and potentially serve as safe havens for (rival) organized crime syndicates to operate. For Belgrade, decentralization meant maintaining a diminished yet visible presence in its (very autonomous) southern province. For Albanians, decentralization was feared to be the slippery slope to a Bosnia-like scenario in which parallel Serb entities with competing agendas dotted the landscape. Decentralization could only be accepted by Albanians within a larger package of independence where these municipalities were clearly demarcated as part of a new state.

The provisions of decentralization encapsulated in the 2007 Ahtisaari Plan represent a series of executive decisions reflective of an international community seeking to find some optimal balance between Albanian demands for independence and Serb demands for maximum self-administration. Along with earlier recommendations originally put forth in 2005 by UN Special Envoy Kai Eide which recommended "enhanced competencies" of Serbian municipalities, the Ahtisaari Plan also recognized the presence of

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Belgrade-based health centers, institutions of higher learning, financial centers, and other structures that had endured since 2003 and before, rationalizing it was better to incorporate them within the envisioned framework of municipal responsibilities instead of abolishing them altogether. Serbs were thus able to continue to receive funding, salaries, and pensions from Belgrade, maintain their Serbian citizenship, and vote in Serbian elections. Further provisions also allowed for "inter-municipal partnerships and cross-border cooperation with Serbian institutions" in Belgrade. Finally, the Ahtisaari Plan recognized the *de facto* division of Kosovska Mitrovica, a city straddling both sides of the Ibar River, into its Serb-dominant northern and Albanian-dominant southern entities, and essentially gerrymandered significant parts of eastern Kosovo to allow for the creation of a new Serbian municipality of Gračanica and additional ones in and around the districts of Gnjilane and Kosovska Kamenica.[16]

For Kosovo's Serb community south of the Ibar, decentralization is, at least in theory, a critical necessity for staying and developing some quality of life. Believing they were largely ignored, and in some cases even discarded, by Belgrade as plans for directly controlling the north intensified, Ahtisaari envisioned a Kosovo in which its local Serb community finally had the ability of controlling their own affairs. If nothing else, the formation of new municipalities represents the greatest opportunity for local Serbs to build their own political institutions and have the space to develop their own civic organizations while enjoying funding from Belgrade, Pristina, and, if planned, Brussels. The idea was not to drive a wedge between them and Belgrade, but rather to break the asymmetrical dependency.

Additionally, comprehensive rights and privileges were provided to the Serbian Orthodox Church for absolute control over their cultural and religious sites. In view of continued attacks by Albanian extremists since 1999 that witnessed the destruction of over 100 churches and monasteries, many of which dated to the fifteenth century and earlier, the Ahtisaari Plan called for a series of "Protective Zones" that, in addition to "providing for the peaceful existence and functioning" of these churches, also called for zoning laws around them that prohibited any development of new structures, including housing and commercial construction. In other words, the Serbian Church was given access to both its places of worship and cultural heritage as well as an area of land around it, which in some cases included many strategic locations in town centers and villages.[17] Thus, along with empowering Kosovo Serbs with institutional guarantees of administrative self-rule and limited influence of Pristina in day-to-day affairs, the Ahtisaari Plan guaranteed the Serbian Church as a virtually independent body within Kosovo that maintains formal ties with international bodies and its Patriarchal seat in Belgrade.

Yet for all its foresight in envisioning a Kosovo which empowers local communities with authority, the Ahtisaari Plan has two critical weaknesses. The first is the contradictory nature and scope of decentralization which is predicated on the basis of irreconcilable Serb–Albanian differences yet still gives Pristina the ability to regulate the affairs of Serb municipalities. The Plan empowers Pristina with certain rights of administrative review and audit in the fields of education and financial assistance in order to ensure all interactions with Belgrade are within permitted municipal competencies.[18] In addition, the city of Kosovska Mitrovica is granted two mayors and two municipalities north and south of the Ibar, yet is still considered to work as a unified urban center in terms of coordinating law and order headed by Albanian officials in the southern half. While this can be understood as both a fail-safe in preventing the eventual partition of Kosovo and an incentive to encourage inter-ethnic cooperation, the very need for decentralization, based as it was on Serb fears of Albanian domination and a Serb desire to maintain links with Belgrade as close as possible,

https://doi.org/10.1080/00905992.2014.937683 Published online by Cambridge University Press

questions the logic of both denying the Serbs local legislative powers and giving Pristina executive authority.

The second weakness is that it assumes Kosovo can function as a multiethnic state beyond the institutional provisions granted to it by its external architects. Public sentiment among Kosovo Albanians is largely resentful of the notion that the independence they struggled for ironically gives the Serb minority greater powers and protections than their own; powers that in many ways allow them to forge closer links with Belgrade than Pristina. Thus, when they witness Serbs protesting against the offered concessions, and continue to exercise power through institutions under Belgrade's authority that circumvents and blockades Kosovo-based political bodies, patience that is already strained with having to work within Ahtisaari's framework wears even thinner. Calls by Pristina to abolish these perceived "parallel institutions," particularly in the north, have been growing since Serbia's EU candidacy talks began, and reached a critical point in July 2011 with the failed attempt by Kosovo authorities to forcibly control the administrative crossings with central Serbia. Many in government view decentralization as a reward, not as a right, and expect Kosovo Serbs to be "loyal" citizens of the new country they live in. Not surprisingly, repeated calls to Serbs by officials in Pristina to recognize its authority ring hollow and have gone unanswered.

The problem with current arrangements of decentralization is that it provides for a multiethnic Kosovo in name only. By designing asymmetrical privileges for Serbian municipalities in which its inhabitants can effectively manage their own economic, educational, cultural, and political affairs while maintaining functional ties with Belgrade where all of these affairs remain strongly linked, actual connections with Pristina remain minimal, and where it has never existed as in the north, it raises the question of why they should be considered at all (Gjoni, Wetterberg, and Dunbar 2010). In other words, in order to maintain Kosovo's multiethnic society, the plans for decentralization under the Ahtisaari Proposal designed around ethnic identification effectively eliminate any prospect of a united multiethnic community yet still treat Kosovo as a unitary state in regard to matters of taxation, energy supply, mining, housing, and other issues of public works and urban planning. This is ironically reinforced by democratization in multiethnic societies where preexisting ethnonational political parties and civic movements often prevent the creation of any effective cross-national socio-political movement from forming if none existed prior to conflict (McGarry and O'Leary 1994; Snyder 2000). That the understanding in the Ahtisaari Plan and by its international supporters holds to the belief that independence coupled with significant degrees of "ethnic enclavization" would eventually produce a harmonious society where nationalism ebbs and civic democracy flourishes under an interim EU-administered framework in one of the most ethnically stratified regions of the Balkans reflects patterns of international assistance over the past two decades which provide immediate First World solutions to embedded Third World problems (Dahlman and Williams 2010).

These lingering issues, particularly those regarding the north, have raised concern among officials in international circles that perhaps the Ahtisaari Plan does not go far enough and should be amended to extend provisions of decentralization to devolution of public authority, whereby Serb municipalities act as executive agencies of the central government, even if it has some leeway in determining how best to implement directives from Pristina. If the goal is to preserve Kosovo's multiethnic character, growing consensus among elites in Europe believe it can only be done through empowering the Serbian minority in exchange for maintaining Kosovo as a single entity. Pressure from the EU has seemingly convinced Pristina to acquiesce in letting northern Kosovo function as a semi-autonomous region, but under the assumption that local

https://doi.org/10.1080/00905992.2014.937683 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Serbian officials would execute and implement Kosovan law, cut direct ties to Belgrade, and accept formally demarcated state borders between it and Serbia. While Serbs would most likely be in favor of further rights, Albanian officials have dismissed any notions of "special autonomy" for the north, and have also voiced grumblings that the patchwork of Serbian municipalities throughout the rest of Kosovo have already been granted enough competencies to counter, or at the very least redirect, Pristina's interests while working with the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX), the international administrative authority in the territory which officially operates under a "status neutral" mandate that treats these municipalities with asymmetrical preference. Further, decentralization may very well happen before Kosovo reaches a final settlement with Serbia, but without formal structures of self-government, the expectations that Kosovo Serb municipalities will cooperate with Pristina rest little beyond good faith and pressure from EULEX, whose mandate is not indeterminate. Moreover, even under the provisions of the Ahtisaari Plan and the status-neutral coordination of EULEX, these municipalities allow elites to maintain closer-than-desired links with Belgrade, which in turn uses its influence in these areas to stymie projects for economic development and international investment.[19]

Consociationalism – Somewhere between Dayton and Ohrid

With the undefined power-sharing arrangements designed for Kosovo Serbs and Albanians, a question that rises is whether the international community should grant Kosovo Serbs rights to formal autonomy and self-governance as a logical and natural culmination to rights already delegated and in an entity that was the product of ethnic self-determination itself.[20] Not only does this deepen the provisions of the Ahtisaari Plan reserved for Serbs, but it also widens it to facilitate additional municipalities with enhanced competencies for Serbs and other non-Albanian minorities such as the Roma and Gorani. Both scenarios might address many open-ended issues, particularly those of security by Kosovo Serbs but likely further the divide with Albanians. The idea that the Serb-dominant northern region will not "integrate" into the rest of Kosovo as its supporters had hoped is quietly being accepted as an inconvenient truth, and has led to a series of suggested "models" that might be offered in future negotiations. Whatever the model, proposed ideas for northern Kosovo's projected autonomy envision maintaining all measures of "enhanced competencies" as codified in the Ahtisaari Plan, but seek to replace the roles that were previously delegated to Pristina with the presence of international administration to instead act as a central executive in matters of finance, courts, and ties with Belgrade.[21]

Significant problems since 2008 continued for other regions in Kosovo's center and south as Serbs continue to cite lack of security, frequent attacks on returnees and their property, and an overall dearth of economic development as primary problems in everyday life. To reassure Kosovo Serbs south of the Ibar that Belgrade has not forgotten them, and to diffuse fears of partition because strategies focused only on Kosovo's north, former Serbian President Boris Tadić proposed a "Four Point Plan" in September 2011, which supported negotiated solutions

> for the best option for north Kosovo; guarantees for the security of Serbs who live in enclaves in other parts of Kosovo; clarity for the status of the most important Serbian religious and cultural monuments; and the issue of property of the Serbian state and Serbs in Kosovo. (ICG 2012)

This appeared to have been the first attempt by Belgrade both in accepting its functional loss over most of its southern province and also in offering pragmatic steps toward maintaining

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close, albeit nominally indirect, ties with all Serb-dominant municipalities and communities. International officials have been amenable to these ideas, provided they fall within the existing framework of the Ahtisaari Plan and that Kosovo's borders do not change (see B92 2012f).

In January 2013, the Serbian parliament, led for the first time by the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) in a coalition with the Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS), approved a policy platform that it says serves as the first officially codified position on Kosovo to be used for all subsequent negotiations with officials in Brussels and Pristina. Based on previous declarations that all agreements must be made in accordance with both UNSCR 1244 and the Constitution of Serbia, and stemming from general understandings of providing assistance to all Kosovo Serb communities in the "Tadić Plan," the "Platform," as it is known, envisions the highest level of institutional autonomy for nearly all Serb communities within a Kosovo that is, for all intents and purposes, a functionally detached entity (Vaseljenska 2012; B92 2013d). Though much, if not most, of the proposed ideas for the Serbian communities and other areas of interest in Kosovo parallel many of the provisions already codified in the Ahtisaari Plan, it is the first time that Serbia implicitly acknowledges that Kosovo, as a territorial whole, is no longer under its control. A key difference from previous positions is that Belgrade abandons plans to maintain direct control over Kosovo Serb communities, but instead intends to support key Serbian enclaves and religious and cultural sites with institutional powers that are specifically modeled after highly autonomous regions in Europe like Catalonia or South Tyrol. In effect, the degrees of autonomy previously promised by Serbia to Kosovo are now transferred to Serb municipalities within a functionally separate Kosovo.

A primary element of the Platform envisions the establishment of an "Autonomous Community of Serbian Municipalities in Kosovo and Metohija" (ZSO KiM) comprising the four northern municipalities of Leposavić, Zvečan, Zubin Potok, and northern Kosovska Mitrovica, and at least the central and southern municipalities of Gračanica and Štrpce, though the proverbial window is open to include additional areas where Serbs and other minorities such as the Gorani live.[22] The ZSO is also envisioned to function as an inter-municipal association with its own assembly and government, which would function as both a coordinated body of all Kosovo Serb communities and as a direct link to governments and municipalities in other parts of Serbia. Autonomy within these municipalities is envisioned to cover an array of duties including education, health care, sports, cultural heritage, environmental protection, urban planning, internal affairs and law enforcement, energy, telecommunications, trade and economic policy, political symbols, and council assembly. More importantly, the Platform proposes enhanced competencies in control over security and judicial sectors with the ability to choose local judges and police chiefs.

After a series of mediated talks in Brussels between prime ministers Ivica Dačić and Hashim Thaçi of Serbia and Kosovo, an initial agreement in "normalizing relations" was finally reached in April 2013 under the supervision of the EU's Office of Foreign Affairs and Security. In effect, the formation of an association of Serbian municipalities was accepted and will have "full overview of the areas of economic development, education, health, urban and rural planning." Northern Kosovo Serbs would also be able to appoint their own regional police commander who would work within a unified Kosovo police force, and have their own regional judicial court system which would nominally operate within Kosovo's legal framework, though a final agreement on judicial competencies and jurisdictions have yet to be reached. Municipal elections were scheduled for November 2013 under the supervision of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

https://doi.org/10.1080/00905992.2014.937683 Published online by Cambridge University Press

(B92 2013a). In a separate agreement reached with NATO, the Kosovo Security Force (KSF) and any other Kosovo military unit excluding the NATO-led Kosovo Force (KFOR) would be prevented from entering the north unless invited by local Serbian authorities (B92 2013b). Finally, while Serbia is still not required to recognize Kosovo, the April Agreements stipulate that "neither side will block, or encourage others to block, the other side's progress in their respective EU paths." This specific clause was a last minute compromise from an earlier demand Thaçi made calling for Serbia to not block Kosovo's accession to the UN.

While the April Agreements do not grant everything proposed in the Platform, and try at least in theory to integrate the north with the rest of Kosovo via some loosely defined chain of command from Pristina, the agreements reached sanction the establishment of a unified institution for Kosovo's Serb communities and are an endorsement, however implicitly, of the pattern of consociational power-sharing international mediators take in supporting increased levels of institutional autonomy for one politicized ethnic group in a post-conflict area in exchange for peace and stability. At the time of this writing, it is still uncertain how elements of the agreement will be implemented, especially parts that suggest integrating justice and law enforcement within a framework of Kosovo's constitution. It is also unclear what specific duties and functions this assembly will actually have, as Belgrade is pushing for a legislative body with some executive powers while Pristina is seeking to limit it to little more than a coordinating body that implements decisions already made in Kosovo's parliament. Somewhere in the middle is EULEX trying to figure out how the laws of the Constitution of Kosovo are to be extended to incorporate these agreements within a framework that empowers an ethnic community with some degree of autonomy (Malazogu et al. 2014).[23]

While proponents might argue that these policies can work within a framework of status-neutral decentralization, critics warn that further concessions to both the Kosovo Serbs and Belgrade open the door to establishing a parallel entity with executive powers similar to that of Republika Srpska (RS) in Bosnia.[24] Long have elites in Pristina feared that an autonomous community of Kosovo Serbs would simply serve as a back door for Belgrade's policies and have pushed the international community to pressure Serbia to relinquish its influence while stressing that all competencies must work within a framework of Kosovan law and jurisprudence. "Belgrade is trying for Dayton; we are trying for Ohrid," remarked the moderate Kosovo Albanian politician Veton Surroi as early as 2006 as plans for Kosovo's decentralization were taking shape (ICG 2006, 17).

Despite the internal cleavages it might create, a consociational model that facilitates subnational autonomy might be the only approach. In one light, power sharing need not necessarily mean the establishment of an RS entity in Kosovo as many fear and seek to prevent because of its veto powers. Rather, power sharing provides local government via formal administrative autonomy within an enhanced Ahtisaari Plan similar to other functionally autonomous regions in Europe with executive powers limited to their own areas, such as Catalonia, South Tyrol, or the Åland Islands (see ICG 2012, 17 fn 119). In fact, by extending comprehensive autonomy to all Serb municipalities and linking them in one coordinating assembly, the fear of eventual partition at the Ibar River and secession back into Serbia is significantly reduced. A few rationales may help to clarify.

First, the call by certain leaders in the international community for Serbia to dismantle all "parallel institutions" in the north was a prime requisite for the country to get a date of accession into the EU. Yet as discussed above, these "parallel" institutions have been overwhelmingly regarded as legitimate by the local Serb population and no efforts by Pristina have proven effective in changing that perception.[25] Since 2008, the mayors of the four Serbian

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municipalities in the north have attained something close to hero status for having resisted pressure from all sides to stand down, especially in repelling Pristina's failed incursion in July 2011 and in preventing EULEX's attempts at establishing Pristina-based courthouses and transporting Kosovo Albanian customs officials to the checkpoints with any official duties.[26] Whatever criticism may be laid against them by Pristina and its international supporters, the power, influence, and legitimacy of northern Kosovo Serb authority, cultivated as it has for over a decade by patronage from Belgrade and the inability (or unwillingness) of the international community to penetrate the network of political elites, paramilitary units, and organized crime associations, have enabled them to run the north as their own veritable fiefdom. Incorporating them into a comprehensive agreement on Kosovo instead of uprooting and dismantling them is far more practical and prudent, and resembles patterns of accommodation similar to other consociational models such as Iraqi Kurdistan. The easiest way to make these "parallel" structures "legitimate" is simply for the international community and the Pristina government to recognize them as such. This had been the approach used by KFOR since July 2011 and has largely been accomplished in the November 2013 elections where participating elements of the previous leadership were essentially reelected into the seats they already held, having reorganized themselves into the Belgrade-backed Civic Initiative Srpska (Građanska Inicijativa Srbija) list. This concession not only avoids the costly endeavor of uprooting popularly supported institutions but greatly diffuses future threats of secessionism.[27]

Second, similar plans for ethnic autonomy within the framework of the Association of Serbian Municipalities could be provided for the other Serbian enclaves south of the Ibar, with additional extensions to Serb communities in Velika Hoča in Orahovac,[28] in Goraždevac near Peć, in Žač near Istok, and villages in and around Vučitrn and Suva Reka; all of which had been left out of the original Ahtisaari Plan. Additionally, considerations should be given to providing similar degrees of "enhanced competencies" to the municipality of Dragaš where the Gorani minority form a significant plurality and still tacitly look to Belgrade for authority. Many of these communities may have been overlooked by Ahtisaari due to their scattered locations and small population, but the lack of any solid institutional protection in these regions provides little incentive for community sustainability and growth, let alone any desire for refugee return.

Third, autonomy need not be associated with undermining Kosovo's sovereignty or territorial integrity. Whatever functional links currently exist between Kosovo's Serbs and Belgrade have already been encapsulated in the Ahtisaari Plan which itself recognized most of what had *de facto* existed for years. If anything, strong degrees of regionalism eliminates the need for border redrawing because it protects and encourages the free movement of people, goods, services, and capital. Especially in regard to northern Kosovo which maintains close links with the rest of south-central Serbia, autonomy preserves the strong institutions established after 1999 and has the potential of transforming the region into a hub of economic and social capital (Danspeckgruber 2005, 34–36). As far as fears that giving too much autonomy to the Serbs would create another RS, none of the proposals for Kosovo Serbs have ever included policies of veto power that resemble that of the Dayton Accords. Whereas Serbs comprise nearly 40% of the population of Bosnia, of which more than 90% lives in the compact territory of RS, Kosovo Serbs make up roughly 7% of the population and live in scattered areas. They would hardly be in any position to obstruct the business of Kosovo's 92% Albanian majority. Policies are designed for internal administration and inter-municipal cooperation. Ahtisaari did not design these municipalities to overrule Pristina, but largely to bypass it, thus making the likelihood for separate entities highly probable in the first place.

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Finally, those who point to the negative aspects of power-sharing arrangements like the Dayton Accords often miss its one crucial strength: autonomy pacified the country to allow its constituent groups to pursue their own affairs without the threat of interference of anyone else. It is true that current RS President Milorad Dodik has made frequent statements alluding to eventual secession, but statements like these are empty threats. Rarely, if ever, does autonomy lead to independence. No international support exists for such an idea for RS, and Serbia, the most likely beneficiary of such an arrangement, is committed to its own territorial integrity and is certainly not going to encourage such ideas. Additionally, Bosnia is an internationally recognized state with full membership at the UN and has a clear chance at becoming a member of the EU; two things Kosovo currently does not enjoy. It is true the Dayton Accords eliminated the prospects of a shared Bosnian identity, but since there is little to no shared Kosovo identity between Serbs and Albanians, and since the Ahtissari Plan already provides for large degrees of parallel development, a "Dayton model" has already taken rudimentary shape. Additional measures are only building on a solution the Albanians already accepted in 2008 and the international community had been supporting since 2002. The road to functional autonomy seems well on its internationally sponsored way to completion.

Having reviewed the potential benefits that could result if autonomy for Kosovo Serbs were considered, the question arises as to what the Albanians get from such concessions. Since part of the April agreement stipulated that neither side will prevent the other from integrating into the EU, Serbia is already obliged in some implicit way to recognize Kosovo as a separate functioning entity. Leaders in Pristina have long sought to achieve full sovereignty by receiving formal international recognition and membership in the UN. This should be the formal concession to Kosovo for agreeing to Serbian autonomy and power sharing. Even if Serbia refuses to recognize Kosovo's independence, it should not object to other countries recognizing Kosovo, which currently hold out over consideration of Belgrade's final decision, such as Russia and China. Pristina will rightfully want this concession in return for making a number of additional ones of its own. In one viewpoint, it can be seen as a win–win for all sides. Belgrade achieves its long-term goal of maximizing as much autonomy for Kosovo's Serbs as possible and finally receiving the all clear for EU accession; Pristina receives guarantees of its territorial integrity, promises of unobstructed paths to full international integration and economic investment, and a coveted UN membership; Kosovo Serbs, especially the north, retain their own locally accepted institutions and along with the rest of the Serbian enclaves govern their own affairs largely free of Pristina's authority; and the international community can claim a negotiated solution was finally reached and regional stability was maintained.

Conclusion: Toward a definitive and stable agreement

This article has argued that consociational power sharing, while hardly free from obstacles and shortcomings in reaching a consolidated democratic system of government and a shared community of citizens, is the best solution for a peace settlement in Kosovo and a normalization of relations between Serbs and Albanians. While solutions can range from explicitly codified minority rights to regional self-government, consociationalism offers solutions to problems of cooperation in deeply divided societies. Although current policies of decentralization have already helped alleviate some problems of co-existence between Kosovo's Albanian and Serb communities such as in the area of community self-management, the lack of a clear agreement on political authority, particularly in light of Pristina's absence of legitimacy in Serb-held areas since 1999, has continuously stymied international

https://doi.org/10.1080/00905992.2014.937683 Published online by Cambridge University Press

efforts in reaching a final agreement between the two sides. The seemingly intractable positions of Serbs and Albanians are certainly connected to competing memories prior to and following NATO's military campaign in 1999, but are also associated with years of post-conflict conditions which forced, and in many cases encouraged, communities to segregate themselves into ethno-political institutions. Kosovo's situation is similar to a number of other cases in Southeastern Europe, the Caucasus, the Eastern Mediterranean, and the Middle East, where wartime associations solidified into post-conflict civic and political societies that forced international mediators to frame the future composition of the state or territory along these ethno-political fault lines. Thus, to reiterate one of the main premises of this article, the paradox of conflict resolution in multiethnic societies is that in order to preserve the territorial integrity of the state, ethnically stratified societies are granted ethnocentric institutions as a peace deal, which in turn risks undermining the credibility of a shared community that can only be facilitated through power-sharing arrangements with significantly autonomous ethno-political entities.

This article has also argued that Kosovo, which alongside seeking some arrangement with the Serbian community, is also striving for international recognition as a newly established state. While it has yet to be offered, this article concludes that some form of consociational power sharing that provides institutional autonomy to Kosovo's Serb minority seems the most likely solution to ending the political and diplomatic stalemate. Not only do the Ahtisaari Plan and the April 2013 agreements provide much of the conditions to frame regional and institutional autonomy for the Kosovo Serbs, but this type of arrangement has long been the preferred solution to interethnic accommodation in the region, both in former Yugoslav states and in Yugoslavia itself, which by the death of Tito was designed around "an extensive system of rights and of overlapping sovereignties," and where national identity and rights were institutionalized through both political and cultural structures (Woodward 1995, 45). It is, ironically, these structures that first gave Kosovo extensive rights of autonomy from Belgrade in 1974 and subsequently empowered the Albanian community to push for even greater rights and freedoms as early as 1981; a struggle which by the end of that decade and beginning of the next had evolved into full self-determination in response to repeated attempts by authorities in Belgrade to (re)assert control.[29] The roles have now been almost completely reversed. Whatever shape a future "Ahtisaari Plus" initiative takes, Albanian authorities in Pristina will most likely continue to reject any proposals beyond what they have already accepted, and in their eyes greatly conceded to as the price for their sovereignty in 2007; at least not without Belgrade agreeing either to recognize Kosovo's independence, or at the absolute least withdrawing any diplomatic obstacles in the way of UN membership. Autonomy for the Kosovo Serb municipalities appears to be the logical endpoint that successive agreements and compromises are producing, and as long as some sort of consociational power sharing takes place in a unified Kosovo, the international community seems to regard this as an acceptable and unavoidable solution. The question therefore is how much each side is willing to concede in order to get what it wants.

An optimal compromise requires active involvement and guidance by the international community that treats the matter fairly and objectively. Pressure from the EU continues to influence Serbia's decision-making toward its wayward southern province to be pragmatic and to "normalize" relations if it wishes to gain full EU membership. Empowering Kosovo's Serb communities via an enhanced Ahtisaari Plan to function as a stand-alone body within a separate but cooperative Kosovo entity that maintains strong and comprehensive ties to Belgrade might be the only option.[30] Serbia may not choose to recognize Kosovo's independence, but it must "recognize" that Kosovo is a separately functioning unit. For Kosovo itself, EU membership seems indeterminably distant. Five member

https://doi.org/10.1080/00905992.2014.937683 Published online by Cambridge University Press

states refusing to recognize its independence notwithstanding, Kosovo suffers from chronic levels of corruption, unemployment, economic underdevelopment, and restrictions on international travel. Reaching an agreement with Serbia alleviates none of these problems but it does eliminate a diversionary tool elites in Pristina frequently use to obfuscate more pressing issues for the people that *do* identify as Kosovar citizens; many of whom are becoming disillusioned with their government's inability to address day-to-day affairs and are turning to political parties with more populist ideologies. International pressure is also growing on its leadership to consider alternative plans for the north and reach some sort of agreement with Belgrade over the rest of the Serb enclaves and cultural heritage sites. If this is met with guarantees of international recognition and a clear path toward UN membership and EU integration, the obsessive desire by Pristina to control small and scattered Serb areas in Kosovo may very well abate.

This raises the optimistic prospect that both the EU and the USA can, with time and patience, convince the two sides that compromise, flexibility, and creativity are needed for Kosovo's stability and growth. If Kosovo is to have a fair chance at emerging out of its diplomatic impasse where its citizens can finally enjoy the same rights of travel, employment, and better standards of life as other Europeans, consociational power sharing seems to be the optimal solution.

Acknowledgements

This article is a revised version of a paper presented at the Association for the Study of Nationalities (ASN) conference, hosted at Columbia University, April 19, 2012. I would like to thank my fellow ASN panelists and especially the two anonymous reviewers for their insightful comments and editorial suggestions throughout the past year that helped me clarify many of the theoretical aspects of this manuscript.

Notes

1. For sources on partition, see Tullberg and Tullberg (1997), Kaufmann (1998), and Toft (2002/2003). For sources on power sharing and autonomy, see Lijphart (1977), Horowitz (2000, 563–600), Lapidoth (1996), and Sambanis (2000).
2. For sources on Bosnia, see Chivvis (2010), Bieber (2006), and Hayden (2005). For works on Macedonia, see ICG (2011a), Brunnbauer (2002), Engström (2003), and Risteka (2013). For studies on Lebanon, see Salloukh (2006) and Salamey (2009).
3. Northern Kosovo comprises three municipalities and the northern part of the city of Kosovska Mitrovica of which the Ibar River bisects, has never come under Pristina's control, is populated by a majority of Serbs that overwhelmingly identify as citizens of Serbia, and is a region where Belgrade has retained significant political, economic, and infrastructural influence. For studies on the political utility of partition and secession, see Fearon and Laitin (2003). On the situation in northern Kosovo, see ICG (2011b).
4. To be fair, this critique of Kosovo Albanian leadership acknowledges the rudimentary and immature foundations of a political society that is little more than 20 years old and largely forged as resistance movements to the Milošević regime. The two most prominent political parties in Kosovo are the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) and the Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK). While the former was established in 1990 from the previous Communist Party and represents the more intellectual side of Kosovar Albanian society, the PDK was founded in 1999 as the political wing of the Kosovo Liberation Army, represents a political culture focused on resistance and liberation, and is currently Kosovo's governing party. A major challenge for PDK's leadership, especially Hachim Thaçi Kosovo's current Prime Minister, both in accepting the internationally sponsored framework for Kosovo's independence and in negotiating an agreement with Serbia over normalizing relations, has been finding a middle ground between pragmatic

https://doi.org/10.1080/00905992.2014.937683 Published online by Cambridge University Press

concessions to Belgrade and maintaining the premise that it is doing so in the name of Kosovo's sovereignty and stability.

5. In this, I differ from previous arguments cited above cautioning against the creation of autonomous, federal, or otherwise decentralized institutions of self-government on the grounds of renewed conflict and erosion of state unity. Whereas existing studies focus on weak states in Africa, Asia, or the Middle East, all states and statelets in the Balkans enjoy external guarantees of security (NATO) and, arguably, stability (the EU) that make discussions of internal power arrangements advocated in this article viable and plausible.
6. This work will consider Kosovo as part of Serbia prior to its unilateral declaration of independence in February 2008, and a semi-sovereign parastate under international administration afterward. I cannot regard Kosovo as an independent state because numerous conditions at the time of this writing impede it from meeting basic requisites for any sovereign authority on par with its European neighbors. It does not have complete control over its borders, it primarily relies on external organizations to provide administrative audit, and it is unable to obtain membership in most international organizations, such as the UN and the European Union (EU). I understand a "parastate" to be a partially independent territorial entity whose sovereignty is both functionally incomplete and internationally disputed. On the usage of the word "parastate," see Liotta (2001, 187–216). For a critical study of Kosovo's limited sovereignty, see Džihić and Kramer (2009). For a general study on unrecognized "quasi-states," see Kolstø (2006).
7. For sources on each of the mentioned cases, see Conversi (2000), Wolff (2005, 2010), McGarry and O'Leary (2007), and Bieber (2013). For a comparative study in favor of autonomy for Kosovo Serbs, see Economides, Ker-Lindsay, and Papadimitroiu (2010).
8. The Vienna conferences were largely responsible for providing much of the ideas that would eventually be codified in Ahtisaari's Comprehensive Proposal. Ironically, most of the provisions for empowering the Kosovo Serb minority through decentralization and protection of religious and cultural heritage came from members of the Contact Group that mediated between the Serb and Albanian contingents. While Belgrade was mainly interested in ensuring territorial integrity and argued that ethnic Serbs would only be safe under Serbian control, it offered no specific proposals for the protection and maintenance of local community life. For an excellent review of the Vienna conferences and its relation to the Ahtisaari Proposal, see Weller (2009, 191–219).
9. In addition, see King and Mason (2006) who argue that neither Serbs nor Albanians were ever interested in governing Kosovo as a multiethnic region with minority rights, but rather sought to maximize their own authority and privilege while controlling the other. Plans for an institutionally functioning multiethnic system of government in Kosovo were almost entirely an internationally brokered endeavor, and became a goal in shaping and determining Kosovo's future in the wake of the outburst of ethnic violence in March 2004 in which partially coordinated Albanian mobs attacked Serb civilians, property, and churches. The Vienna conferences and subsequent Ahtisaari Plan were direct responses by the international community to these riots in taking a more pro-active policy in finding a solution to a highly volatile region.
10. On this second issue, see Fearon (2004) who argues that international responses to wars of separatism should not reward territorial partition to instigators of violence unless there is either a consensual agreement between the conflicting groups, or unless there is extensive evidence to prove a state's unwillingness to observe and uphold some degree of internationally recognized standards of human and minority rights.
11. United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244 (UNSCR 1244) (1999) reaffirmed the "sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia" while simultaneously "promoting the establishment, pending final settlement, of substantial autonomy and self-government in Kosovo" through the establishment of the UN Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK). "Serbia" is recognized as the legal inheritor of Yugoslavia and argues it is represented in UNSCR 1244 through all references to "Yugoslavia," which after 2003 was designated the Union of Serbia and Montenegro. With Montenegro's negotiated secession in 2006, the Serbian parliament voted to inherit all rights and claims to both the Union and the earlier Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Serbia argues that Kosovo existed as an autonomous province of the Socialist Republic of Serbia, and a region of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and the Kingdom of Serbia. Therefore, the dissolution of Yugoslavia has no bearing on the status of Kosovo since it is part of the Serbian entity.
12. On literature supporting the theoretical advantages of territorial partition as a solution to protracted ethnic conflict, see Posen (1993), Kaufmann (1996, 1998), and Downes (2001). On

https://doi.org/10.1080/00905992.2014.937683 Published online by Cambridge University Press

specific arguments in favor of partition of Kosovo and other former Yugoslav territories, see Mearscheimer and Van Evera (1999), Carpenter (2011), Ker-Lindsay (2011), Parish (2011), and Hamilton (2012).

13. On the potential security dilemmas related to territorial partition, see Kumar (1997) and Sambanis (2000). On the potentiality of Kosovo creating momentum for other separatist movements, see Buchanan (1992) and Berg (2009).
14. See in particular Ker-Lindsay (2009) who argues that the lack of consensus on Kosovo's sovereignty stems directly from conflicting and divergent positions of various international governments and interests in reaching a final agreement on its status.
15. Whereas Bulgaria, Romania, Slovakia, and Croatia have ethnic-based minority parties operating without constitutionally defined status, Bosnia, Spain, and Italy have a constitutional framework that either recognizes at least one ethnic minority as a constituent group, or establishes regional autonomy for areas said group predominates. Similar arrangements exist for Lebanon and Iraq.
16. See Ahtisaari, "Attachment to Annex III: Delineation of New Municipalities," in "Report." The new Serbian municipalities would be Gračanica, Ranilug, Parteš, and Klokot/Vrbovac. The existing municipality of Novo Brdo would be expanded to include a number of cadastral zones in Gnjilane. An additional new municipality would be created out of the area of the city of Kosovska Mitrovica north of the Ibar, but would be under a Joint Board to facilitate functional cooperation with southern Mitrovica. See Annex III Article 13.
17. The Ahtisaari Plan specifically cited the village of Velika Hoča in Orahovac and the Historic Center of Prizren that fell under the jurisdiction of Protective Zones. See Annex V: Religious and Cultural Heritage, Article 4.1.7 and Article 4.2. While accepted by Kosovo's Albanian leadership, its implementation has not been without controversy as debates surrounding the actual extent of Serbian Orthodox protective zones, including unresolved disputes over property claims with local Albanian tenants and businesses since the 1990s, have sparked opposition and in some cases organized protest against rulings that have decided in favor of the Church, either in the form of property restitution, or in giving it authority of executive decision in local urban planning (see Aliu 2012; Peci 2013).
18. This affirms earlier suggestions for decentralization in Kosovo by Kai Eide who emphasized Serb municipalities "should not endanger central institutions in Kosovo or weaken Pristina's authority." Not only would they "be under the authority of Pristina," but such arrangements would "facilitate the absorption of parallel structures into legitimate entities" (2012, 17).
19. In Štrpce, where Serb–Albanian relations have traditionally remained good, outside encroachment from Pristina has threatened to upset this cooperation first by neglecting to revitalize the Brezovica ski resort, which could serve as a major economic resource, and second in the illegal construction of houses and villas of key Pristina elites in the so-called Weekend Zone. The Brezovica ski resort is tied to a number of other issues too, one of which is Belgrade's efforts to retain ownership of as many enterprises in Kosovo as possible. The legal ambiguities of Brezovica, as well as other industries like the Trepča mines, have all been instrumental in preventing any meaningful foreign investment in Kosovo. As in other areas of Kosovo, Belgrade-based institutions operate alongside Pristina-based; both of which carry self-interested agendas. For a while, both local governments of Štrpce operated out of the same municipal building! See ICG (2009, 8–12).
20. I am specifically referring to autonomy, as opposed to "self-governance." Whereas self-governance is understood to allow for "local administration of daily communal or regional affairs and offer more freedom for creativity to adapt local institutions, organs, laws, and regulations to the specific needs of the community" (Danspeckgruber 2005, 37), autonomy is a more definitive set of legally entrenched power with the ability to "exercise public policy functions (legislative, executive and adjudicative) independently of other sources of the state, but [still] subject to the legal order of that state" (Wolff and Weller 2005, 13).
21. To date, the most comprehensive model for an autonomous northern Kosovo is outlined by former UNMIK Regional Representative in Kosovska Mitrovica Gerard Gallucci, who suggests expanding the Ahtisaari Plan's provisions on the north to include issues relating to the function and regulation of customs, telecoms, energy, and the Trepča mining complex as a package deal of joint maintenance between Belgrade and, via international intermediaries, Pristina. While remaining a part of Kosovo, institutional and economic autonomy would be nearly absolute, and the north would operate under Serbian law via UNSCR 1244. Municipal budgets would be reported to Pristina, but the latter would have neither the authority for review nor audit and revenue

https://doi.org/10.1080/00905992.2014.937683 Published online by Cambridge University Press

generated in the north would be reinvested into the region for future economic development (see Gallucci 2011).

22. It is likely the proposal would also include the recently established Serbian municipalities of Ranilug, Klokot, and Parteš. The Gorani are a Slavic Muslim population living in an area in the extreme southern tip of Kosovo and neighboring areas of Albania. While their relationship with Serbs and the Serbian government has historically not been completely cooperative, they have been subjected to discrimination and insensitive administration by the Kosovo Albanian authorities since 1999. Representatives of the Gorani community have announced interest in provisions of local self-administration similar to those given to Serbs and have expressed an interest in participating in a future Assembly of Serbian Municipalities in Kosovo (see B92 2013c).
23. While it is mostly overshadowed by more immediate concerns of executive political authority, a major fear in Pristina is that the assembly could assume political and economic control over key resources in the north such as the Trepča mining complex, and the Gazivoda Lake, which is both a major source of water for the territory and provider of energy through its dam and hydroelectric power station.
24. For a good review of initial reactions to Belgrade's Platform, see Bieber (2012). For current concerns in Kosovo, see Bajrami (2013). See also Jenne (2009) on the parallels with Bosnia.
25. A public referendum in 2012 which asked for a "yes" or "no" response to the question "do you accept the institutions of the so-called Republic of Kosovo?" resulted in an overwhelming 99.74% of voters voting "no" (B92 2012e). While the outcome was hardly a surprise and carried no legal implications, it was a clear refutation of the long-held assumption among Kosovo's supporters that opposition to the supposed "benefits" of rule from Pristina comes from a small but powerful group of Serbian "criminals" and "extremists" that "hold hostage" the rest of a population who would otherwise accept Pristina's rule (Gallucci 2012). Additionally, the referendum makes undeniably clear that an introduction of Pristina-based institutions can only be forcibly imposed upon the people, which in itself would generate further violence and undermine the entire process of establishing Kosovo as a multiethnic state; notwithstanding the additional problem of applying a double standard of rewarding Albanian self-determination in 1999 against aggression while ignoring efforts at Serbian self-determination afterward.
26. Kosovo customs officials are present at the administrative crossings, as per previous agreements reached between Belgrade and Pristina, but have little to no formal duties as they would at more officially recognized "borders" with Macedonia, Montenegro, and Albania. Due to special situations at the two official crossings in northern Kosovo, they are flown by helicopter to and from the crossings every day on account of land passage being blocked by local Serbs.
27. This has not, however, reduced tension, as the planned municipal elections for 3 November 2013 met with severe resistance in northern Kosovo from Serb hardliners and other nationalist agitators who not only intimidated local Serbs from voting, but shut down a number of polling stations and destroyed ballots. The second round of elections on 1 December passed peacefully in the north but only after involvement from Belgrade officials who actively campaigned in the north for the Srpska Party.
28. Velika Hoča is designated as part of a Protected Zone in the Ahtisaari Plan, though it is unclear whether this contains the same set of provisions of self-government as would a formal Kosovo Serb municipality.
29. On the relationship of national identity and state federalism, see Ramet (1992, especially 187–201).
30. A survey conducted by the ICO (2012) with over 100 Serbs of northern Kosovo in late 2011 revealed many of the respondents were amenable to provisions for self-government encapsulated in the Ahtisaari Plan and would accept its policies if concrete guarantees were ensured that kept Pristina at a distance (ICO). The primary issue among all Kosovo Serbs continues to be low levels of trust in the Kosovo Albanian government, particularly in terms of institutional transparency and judicial objectivity.

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