

# Lest We Forget, 20 Years Since the NATO Aggression Against Yugoslavia

Stop the tide of madness: Interview with Zivadin Jovanovic

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Interview with Zivadin Jovanovic, Former Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia

*Enrico Vigna: Twenty years after the NATO 1999 bombing of the FRY, the real geopolitical and geostrategic reasons (military, political, economic) of the aggression are being revealed. What is your opinion?*

Zivadin Jovanovic: Now, 20 years after the so called "humanitarian intervention" or "merciful angel" it is clear that it was an illegal, blatant aggression with geopolitical objectives. First, to get justification for the deployment of the USA's troops closer to the Russian borders. Kosovo's plains became a land carrier of US troops. After Bondsteel the USA established a chain of bases in Bulgaria (4), Romania (4), and so on up to the Baltic Sea. Second, the objective was to create a precedent for the future illegal interventions all over the globe – Afghanistan 2001, Iraq 2003, Libya, the "Arab spring", the Ukraine, Syria and so on. Using the same pattern, now they are openly threatening Venezuela, Nicaragua, Cuba, Iran... So, we can say that the bombs and missiles thrown in 1999 on Yugoslavia have torn into pieces the agreements of Potsdam, Teheran, Yalta, the UN Charter, and the Helsinki Final Document. Generally, their *target* has been the global world order based on the outcome of the Second World War. Is that sane?

EV: What is the political, social, economic situation in Serbia?

ZJ: In spite of the opposition presently boycotting the Parliament and weekly demonstrations, I would say that the Government is legitimate and still stable. Whether there will be early elections soon does not depend on the strength of the opposition but

mainly on the tactical needs of the ruling SPP (SNS) party related to the Kosovo negotiations. Economically Serbia is moderately recovering with about a 4% GDP rise in 2018. However, unemployment of the youth, the brain drain towards Germany, Austria and Switzerland, poverty, the deepening of social differences, high corruption, remain great problems which the present neo-liberal corporative system favoring the richest by all means, seems unable to resolve. Serbia democratized by NED standards is still below the living standard of the 80's of the last century.

EV: I know well the situation in Kosovo Metohija (Kosmet), directly and through continuous communication with our partners, such as SOS Kosovo Metohija and SOS YU. We are the only Italian Association operating in the Serbian Province. The situation there is very tense, with a risk of new violence and conflicts. In your new book "1244 Key to Peace in Europe" (we introduced it on [www.civg.it](http://www.civg.it)) you advocate implementation of the UN Security Council's resolution 1244 as the only basis for a peaceful and sustainable solution. What is the real future of Kosovo and Metohija?

ZJ: NATO's 1999 aggression ended by the UN SC resolution 1244 (June 10<sup>th</sup>, 1999) which guaranteed, among other things, the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Yugoslavia (Serbia) and wide autonomy for Kosovo and Metohija within Serbia. This is the legal, universally binding document agreed upon by all permanent members of the UN SC. To have lasting, sustainable peace it is necessary to fully implement this document. Not only the parts binding Serbia but all of it. Not because of Serbia but because of global governance and peace in Europe. This resolution is a consolidated compromise of the interests of the Serbian and Albanian peoples but at the same time a compromise of the interests of all relevant international factors. If in the meantime there has been a change of circumstances, it would be difficult to prove that such a change has favored the privileges, or exceptionality of any particular power, or a unipolar concept of domination.

Offering Serbia "a deal" to recognize the theft of her state territory in exchange for EU membership offers quite a gloomy perspective, which would definitely lead to a further accumulating of conflict potential, regionally and globally. Have we already forgotten the example of how the leading western powers were "saving peace" in Munich 1938? Destruction of the SFR of Yugoslavia 1992-1995 was the price of keeping the unity of the EEC. Would Serbia with all her experiences of the past decades accept now her own dissolution for the sake of the unity of the EU? It is strange and worrisome indeed that anybody might believe Serbia can be persuaded to join NATO while it takes a leading role in war games near the Russian borders, or accept USA made EU sanctions!

EV: How do you see the future of Kosovo Metohija and that of the Serbian people living there?

ZJ: In my opinion, Kosovo and Metohija should enjoy wide autonomy within Serbia, as envisaged by the UN SC resolution 1244. Albanians there should have the widest self governance in all spheres of their life from culture and education to the economy and finance. This excludes secession, recognition of independence or unification with any other state. All provisions of the UN SC resolution have to be fully implemented, including the right of about 230.000 displaced Serbs and other non-Albanians to freely return to their homes and properties in safety and dignity. Together with about 130.000 Serbs who now live in the Province, they should enjoy self governance within Provincial autonomy. The Community of Serbian districts within the Province may be the framework providing them executive power.

EV: What is the situation of the NATO and EU integration process in Serbia?

ZJ: I believe that neutrality is in the best interests of Serbia. NATO is an offensive military alliance intervening all over the world for the interests of multinational corporations and U.S. imperial domination. On the other side, Serbia is a small, peace loving country with a quite different tradition. It has never belonged to any blocs. Finally, Serbia cannot forget the crimes of the NATO aggression, human victims, use of depleted uranium and economic damage of over 100 billion US dollars. What NATO did to Serbia in 1999 is a historic mistake, an unforgettable, shameful act disgracing Europe and western democracy. They even bombed the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade killing three Chinese citizens. Who would believe this was a mistake as Washington claimed?



After the NATO aggression against Yugoslavia in 1999 Europe and the global governance have become militarized. At the recent Munich Security Conference nobody opposed the opinion that global mistrust and tensions have never after the end of the Cold War been so deep and worrisome as today? As regards all military arsenals on the planet, particularly the nuclear ones and the spreading of disregard and even annihilation of the basic international norms and treaties, the question arises as to whether the tide of madness could be stopped, by whom and how?

Concerning Serbia's EU integration, I think we should be cautious to see first what happens with the EU itself. The EU has demonstrated a biased approach in negotiations about the future of the Province of Kosovo and Metohija persistently favoring the secessionist aims of Prishtina and the geopolitical interests of the USA and NATO. This is dead-end way and very dangerous for the future of Europe. Catalonia is just one reminder. The whole process should be returned to the track of the UN enabling the active participation of Russia and China along with the western powers. Only this framework can guarantee a balanced and unbiased approach and sustainable solution.

EV: After Putin's recent visit to Belgrade, do you think that Serbia's position in defending national independence and sovereignty is stronger?

ZJ: President Putin's visit to Serbia provided concrete substance to the long term strategic partnership and co-operation between the two countries. About 20 different agreements have been signed covering many fields of cooperation from gas supply and modernization of the infrastructure to the transfer of nuclear technology for peaceful purposes and culture. President Putin has reaffirmed Russia's steady principled position supporting the sovereignty and integrity of Serbia and a peaceful solution of the Kosovo and Metohija issue based on international law and Serbia's legal system. If Russia's role was decisive in stopping the NATO aggression in 1999 and in the passing of resolution 1244 in the UN SC, who really can claim today, 20 years later, that the lasting solution can be reached keeping

Russia (and China) at a distance! Was the Russia of president Boris Yeltsin more relevant in 1999 for the shaping of the world's relations, than the Russia of president Vladimir Putin in 2019?

EV: What is your opinion about the political situation in Serbia today? And what do you think about the weekly protests in Belgrade, are they spontaneous or initiated by external interests?



ZJ: The present Serbian opposition is mainly composed of the remnants of the former DOS (Democratic Opposition of Serbia) which in October 2000 overturned the then President Slobodan Milosevic and in 2001 unconstitutionally handed him to the Hague Tribunal with the decisive help of western secret services. The Serbian opposition today is fragmented, devoid of any serious ideas about socio-economic progress, about a just and sustainable solution for the Kosovo and Metohija issue, or regarding an independent foreign policy. All pressures on the Serbian government now, be they from within or outside of the country, are designed to weaken its negotiating position on Kosovo and Metohija, to compel the Government to accept "a deal" – and recognize the independence of Kosovo and Metohija immediately – for the vague promise of EU membership! The outgoing neoliberal EU elite confronted with the tide of nationalist and so called populist forces badly needs at least some success. So, they want Serbia to pay for their futile policy by surrendering part of her state territory and national identity in order to falsely say: – the Kosovo issue is resolved, peace preserved! For this they are even seeking collaborators inside Serbia.

EV: You established in Serbia the think tank "Silk Road Connectivity Research Center" and supported the establishment of an Italian branch known as the "Belt and Road Observatory". How would you assess the progress of this global Project?

ZJ: In the present day divisions, global tensions and rising protectionism, the positive impact of China's "Belt and Road Initiative" (BRI) is growing and promising. Only five years after this Initiative was announced by the President Xi Jinping in Astana, Kazakhstan, BRI has attracted about 100 countries from Asia, Europe, Africa and other continents that are directly involved in practical implementation. Major regional economic integrations and groupings of countries are seeking ways how to coordinate their own infrastructure and other projects with the BRI in order to provide synergy for more efficient development. Close to 100 industrial parks have been established along the Belt and Road providing over one million new working places. The BRI has contributed immensely for people to people

connectivity bringing closer civilizations, cultures, youths, thus strengthening mutual understanding and trust. China+16 CEEC cooperation under BRI has become an important bridge for Euro-Asia and especially between China and the European Union. The *Win Win* spirit has become a trade-mark of BRI cooperation.

The slowing down of the growth of the global economy, instability of the financial markets, globalization of poverty, protectionism, weakening of multilateral institutions such as WTO, power politics and geopolitical approaches to economic cooperation, are some of the challenges ahead. The general answer to all of them is doubling the efforts to create a new global governance based on partnership, multi-polarity and equality, reforms and strengthening of the international institutions, better coordination. The Second BRI Forum Summit in China in April this year will summarize great achievements of the Initiative and open new perspectives for the strengthening of cooperation which is strategically important for the stability and growth of the global economy. Serbia is actively participating in the BRI cooperation, especially within the China+16 CEE countries. Chinese investments in Serbia have reached about 6 billion US dollars mainly in modern infrastructure, industry and the energy sector. The Serbian section of the high speed railway Belgrade – Budapest is progressing as one of the largest investment projects.

EV: The NATO aggression of 20 years ago has been justified by the Kosovo humanitarian situation. Every time when I visit Kosovo and Metohija Serbs living there keep complaining about their dramatic security situation and fear of terror in the future. Based on your knowledge and experience, what would you have to say to the Italian and international public?

ZJ: The real problems in the Province of Kosovo and Metohija have been provoked by Albanian separatism and terrorism continuously supported by some western powers. This support was motivated by their geopolitical interests: weakening and fragmenting Serbia has always meant for them weakening Russia's presence and influence in the Balkans. In the late 90's of the last century, as confirmed by British sources, Clinton's administration decided to topple President Slobodan Milosevic by encouraging the terrorist UCK to provoke wide scale terrorism. In the summer of 1998 the Serbian Government reacted with legitimate anti terrorist actions against which NATO orchestrated propaganda presenting them as a "massive violation of human rights" as a prelude to premeditated military aggression. Many lies were launched such as the hypothetical "horse shoe plan", "the Rachak massacre" etc. In fact, the real humanitarian catastrophe and exodus of refugees started only after first NATO bombs fell in Kosovo and Metohija and Yugoslavia.

EV: Like the SOS Kosovo and Metohija Association many years ago we have decided to concentrate our solidarity concept and information work on Serbian enclaves in Kosmet, because we think that this is the nodal point of the contradictions that will involve the entire Balkans in the future. And the resistance of the people in Kosmet is fundamental also for the future in Serbia. What is your opinion?

ZJ: First of all, we are grateful to your associations for their continuous support and help to Serbs in Kosovo and Metohija over the past decades. Your contacts, humanitarian assistance and especially your role in exchanges of children's visits are extremely important for the feelings of the Serbs there – that they are not forgotten, nor abandoned, that they have friends who understand their problems. And those are really unbelievable problems. The Serbs in the enclaves live today like they were in ghettos, sometimes fenced by barbed wires. Their movement is not secure, their households have been constantly robbed, their



churches, graveyards, religious symbols destroyed. They live in a state of uncertainty and fear of a new ethnic cleansing and pogroms similar to the previous ones which led to the exodus of 230.000 Serbs and other non-Albanians, the destruction of 150 Christian medieval monasteries and churches. EU, USA, UNMIK, KFOR, EULEX have done little or nothing to punish the perpetrators of the crimes against the Serbs, to investigate human organs trafficking, generally, to guarantee equal human rights for the Serbs in Kosovo and Metohija.

EV: Thank you. Good bye in Belgrade on 22 March, for the International Meeting for the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the NATO aggression, organized by Belgrade Forum.

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