

25.08.2024.

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Review of the PhD thesis

“Party Politics in Post-Independence Kosovo: Implications for Peacebuilding and Statebuilding”

by Bardh Lipa

under the supervision of dr hab. Łukasz Zweifel

Mr Bardh Lipa was a doctoral student at the Pedagogical University in Kraków (currently UKEN). At his ORCID account, he presents also other affiliations, such as Leuphana University of Lüneburg, the University of Prishtina, University of Tartu.

Mr. Bardh Lipa has presented for the review the PhD thesis “Party Politics in Post-Independence Kosovo: Implications for Peacebuilding and Statebuilding”, prepared under the supervision of dr hab.Łukasz Zweifel. The thesis consists of six chapters and a Reference list. The whole text, including references, has 251 pages.

Chapter 1 has a clear introductory character. In this chapter, the reader may find brief information about independent Kosovo whose emergence was the result of the long and complex conflict connected with the breakup of Yugoslavia. Kosovo presents the case of a post-conflict state and society, that undergoes the process of peace and state-building, in which international actors also play a significant role. Those processes are the main subject of research in the presented thesis and are outlined in Chapter 1. The particular elements of the studied situation are also briefly described i.e. the political party Vetëvendosje which as a governmental party functioned as a local actor confronting the international actors involved in the peacebuilding in Kosovo, as well as two particular cases chosen by the Author to analyze: the implementation of the Serb Majority Municipalities (ASM) and the crisis in Northern Kosovo. The process of case selection is well described and justified. In this Chapter, the Author also included important information about the theoretical and methodological framework of the dissertation, research questions, and hypotheses. Particularly interesting is hypothesis 5, which concerns the contribution that may be brought into the theory of peacebuilding by the study of the Kosovo case. Mr Lipa specifically mentions Mac Ginty’s hybrid peace model, which may

be refined as a result of the presented study. In paragraph 1.9 Mr Lipa identifies the lacunae in the existing research, pointing to the contribution of his dissertation to the existing knowledge and in paragraph 1.11 mentions the limitations of his study. This is worth emphasizing because it's evidence of the high academic skills of the doctoral student.

In Chapter 2 the reader finds a detailed description of the conflict connected with Yugoslavia's breakup which finally led to the emergence of the independent Kosovo. Mr Lipa included also within his description the complicated and highly controversial NATO intervention in 1999. He discusses it within the wider context of how international actors framed the conflict mostly in terms of humanitarian crisis, which seriously limited its proper understanding and proposed solutions. Those remarks introduce the reader to one of the most important questions discussed in the whole study i.e. the limitations of the liberal perspective of peacebuilding. Showing the context of Kosovo's declaration of independence the Author also points out the more general challenges and dilemmas of establishing new states within the contemporary framework of the international system. Reading this chapter I appreciated Mr. Lipa's ability to build the description of the situation including the more general and even theoretical problems, connected with it, which once more proves his good preparation for academic work.

Chapter 3 focuses on the problems of different approaches to peace and state-building. The Author discusses the liberal and hybrid approaches, showing their strong points and weaknesses. Mr. Lipa starts with the liberal peacebuilding approach, being the dominant one in the practice of peacebuilding not only in Kosovo but also in other cases around the world. He explains it, showing its roots in philosophy and the theory of law. Mr. Lipa emphasizes its shortcomings, particularly the fact that such an approach tends to neglect the local contexts for the sake of promoting "universal" solutions such as democratic governance, free market, individual human rights, and institutions that are supposed to serve as guarantees of the viability of those solutions. The reader gets the impression that Mr Lipa is convinced about the necessity to revise the liberal approach and prefers hybrid approaches, however, discussing the latter he also points out their weaknesses and shortcomings, balancing the pros and cons of various solutions. I share Mr. Lipa's reservations about the liberal approach because this way of thinking about solving conflicts reminds me of the approach toward the process of democratization after the demise of communist rule in 1989. It is obvious that both situations happened in different contexts. The process of peacebuilding concerns conditions much more tense and complicated, however as it turned out several decades after the democratic transition in East and Central Europe, the approach based on the faith in universal value of the free market and liberal democracy should certainly be revised. What I particularly have in mind is the

economic aspect and the priority put on economic growth and privatization, without paying enough attention to the social costs of such reforms. Mr Lipa also mentions those problems in the context of post-conflict environments discussing the liberal peacebuilding in Kosovo in paragraph 3.16.

Chapter 3 shows Mr Lipa's excellent knowledge of the literature. He is certainly familiar with the wide range of theories concerning peace and state-building, and what is really worth emphasizing in the review, he is not only able to quote and describe them but also to discuss and show not only positive sides but also possible risks and challenges connected with each approach. However, reading the chapter I got the impression of unnecessary repetitions, both concerning the liberal as well as hybrid approaches. Mr Lipa quotes many authors, and many concepts, and discusses them, however, there is a moment when the reader feels that he does not say anything new but just shows his competence in literature. This is understandable in a doctoral thesis, however, I am sure that cutting down some examples would make a better impression and the reception of the text would be easier and less tiresome.

Chapter 4 is focused on research methodology. It is very well-written, and detailed, the argumentation is clear and well-structured. Mr Lipa explains his choice of mostly qualitative methods, especially in the context of the contemporary academic mainstream, which favors more quantitative approaches. However, the qualitative methods are more justified for the case studied, and I agree with Mr Lipa's choice. His sources are rich and differentiated. One of the paragraphs is dedicated to the ethical considerations. In this paragraph, Mr Lipa particularly refers to his Kosovo background and the possible bias that may arise in this context. I appreciate Mr. Lipa's consciousness of those risks, however, I am sure that in cases like this i.e. a particular country study, the personal background is valuable, providing in-depth knowledge that is difficult to attain otherwise.

A deep understanding of what we research along with the knowledge we gain researching the subject contributes to the diversity of social sciences. We should not deny personal connections to our topics, instead we should embrace the fact that the diversity of researchers mirrors the diversity of research. In social sciences, this richness is an asset rather than a liability. Unlike physical sciences where objectivity is the only measure of value social sciences can maintain rigor and scientific weight while admitting non-objective inspirations behind research choices and subjects. As long as the presented methodology maintains the validity and reliability necessary to answer the research questions the personal connection with the chosen subject can only strengthen the project.

Chapter 5 is entitled “ Results and Discussion” and is the longest one in the whole thesis. In this chapter, Mr Lipa presents Vetëvendosje as a local political actor, its emergence, political and ideological image while in opposition, and later on as a governing party. The importance of this party and the reason why Mr Lipa focused his attention on its activity was the fact, that Vetëvendosje challenged the role of international actors in Kosovo’s peace and state-building processes and then was quite successful in navigating the relations with them as a governing party. In Chapter 5 also two chosen cases are presented in details i.e. The Association of Serb-Majority Municipalities (ASP) and the crisis in Northern Kosovo. The discussion and findings of each case as well as the activity of Vetëvendosje connected with them are then related to hypotheses 1-4 formulated in the beginning. There is also a separate paragraph related to hypothesis 5, concerning the refinement of the Mc Ginty’s model. The last part of the chapter is dedicated to the discussion and conclusions. The Chapter is very interesting. Mr Lipa presents the problem of the relationship between the international and local actors, particularly Vetëvendosje, in great detail. In the same time he presents it in the context created by the theoretical concepts chosen for the study. I appreciate also the way Mr. Lipa related his findings to his hypotheses. However, I have also some critical remarks concerning this chapter. As I have already mentioned above it is the longest one in the whole thesis, which creates an imbalance in the whole structure. In my opinion, it would be much more advantageous for the reception of the problem if the chapter was divided into at least two or even three, with the discussion of the theoretical refinement of McGinty’s model put in a separate one. Additionally, the chapter is not free from the weaknesses already present in previous parts of the thesis i.e. the tiresome repetitions, particularly in the section Discussion.

The thesis ends with the Chapter 6- Conclusion. This is the weakest part of the whole work. First of all it is not a chapter- it is only 2.5 pages long. Secondly, instead of the conclusions and reference to the hypotheses, which are already included in Chapter 5, the Conclusion is dedicated to the Author’s own appraisal. Mr. Lipa really approves of his own work, his contribution to the “field of political science in the areas of peacebuilding, state-building and post-conflict reconstruction”. It looks like in the last paragraph Mr Lipa works as his own reviewer, and the very enthusiastic one. Unfortunately, it does not make a good impression, and it is a pity that Mr Lipa decided to include it in his otherwise really good and interesting work. Before the conclusion I would like to point out the last problem which I consider a weakness of the dissertation. As it was already mentioned it is a very interesting study of the problems of post-conflict peace and state building, put in a very well chosen theoretical context. There is a significant role in the process of a political party Vetëvendosje, a local actor facing the

challenges and pressure coming from the international ones. However, considering the title “Party Politics in Post-Independence Kosovo: Implications for Peacebuilding and Statebuilding”, the potential reader might expect a little more analysis of party politics, perhaps some electoral competition or the relations within the frame of the party system. What I have in mind is just a little more balance between the problems of peace and state building and party politics. Should Mr Lipa consider the publication of his thesis, I would advise the modification of the title.

Concluding my remarks I want once more to emphasize the fact that the thesis is very interesting, the Author is able not only to show the problem of the peculiar situation of a recently independent state, but also discuss it, both in practical and theoretical terms. So despite the weaknesses, also pointed out in the review, **in conclusion, I state that the presented work satisfies the requirements placed for the PhD thesis.**

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Kujtim Sulaj". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.