

## The crimes of Serbian Forces in the Municipality of Gjakova (1998-1999)

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**Abstract.** The city of Gjakova, which at the time of the events of 1998-1999 was located on the territory of the Autonomous Province of Kosovo (actually the Republic of Kosovo), became the scene of violent clashes during the break-up of the former Yugoslavia. Therefore, the relevance of the article lies in the need to analyse the crimes committed by Serbian military groups in the area of Gjakova from 1998 to 1999. The aim of the study is to reveal the nature, scale, and consequences of these crimes and to establish the connection between the events in Gjakova and the overall course of the conflict in the former Yugoslavia. To achieve this goal, the following methods were used: analytical, comparative, case study, synthetic, induction and deduction, abstraction and generalization. In particular, through the analysis of archival documents, eyewitness accounts, international reports and other sources, the motives, tactics, and strategy of military groups in committing crimes were revealed. Thus, the role of these crimes is clarified in the context of a balanced understanding of the Yugoslav wars and their impact on subsequent events and processes in regional stability and law and order. Various aspects of the crimes are analysed in detail, including massacres, ethnic cleansing, violence and human rights abuses. Particular attention is paid to the role of the Serbian military in these events, its organizational structure and interaction with other groups. The study also examines the international response to these crimes, including the actions of international organizations and attempts to bring perpetrators to justice under international law. In addition, the role of these events as part of the historical context and their impact on the further development of the region was examined. The practical significance of the article is to find new facts confirming the crimes committed and which can be used in court proceedings

**Keywords:** war in the Balkans; human rights violations; ethnic conflicts; mass murders; ethnic cleansing

### Introduction

The analysis of crimes committed by Serbian military groups in Gjakova between 1998-1999 remains an important research area due to the immense human suffering these events caused and their role in shaping the course of the Kosovo conflict. Thousands of innocent civilians lost their lives or livelihoods, and the trauma from violence and ethnic tensions continues to impact communities today. Understanding the motives, methods and consequences of the crimes in Gjakova can provide meaningful insights into the dynamics of the wider Balkan conflicts. Uncovering the truth through further investigation can support reconciliation efforts and help prevent history from repeating in this region. Analysing international responses and accountability for such war crimes carries valuable lessons for improving global legal and political systems.

The people of Kosovo have been victims of systematic human rights violations throughout their history, culminating in ethnic cleansing in the late twentieth century (Hoti, 2020). This conflict, known as the Kosovo War, had serious geopolitical, cultural and legal consequences. During

1998-99, around 13,500 people died in the region. These figures have been provided by various institutions in Kosovo, including the Humanitarian Rights Foundation (FDH), and are presented in the Kosovo Book of Remembrance (LKK), which lists all victims of the Kosovo War from all ethnic groups (The first indictments..., 2023). Although the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia has worked to resolve some cases and hand down verdicts, not all cases have been completed and not all perpetrators have been brought to justice (Aliu, 2020).

According to S. Gashi (2018), in 1981, Kosovo witnessed numerous demonstrations, first among students and then among the general population. The first of them took place in the capital of Kosovo, Pristina, and then spread to all other cities in the region. The creation of the Republic of Kosovo dominated among the numerous slogans. These demonstrations were the first in Yugoslavia since the events of 1968. Continuous injustice, oppression of the Albanian people, economic pressure and social exclusion were the main reasons for their occurrence. In general, S. Gashi (2018) considers

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in his work the historical context, various aspects of social, political and cultural interrelations, as well as the role of international factors and the consequences for modern society. At the same time, the work lacks a detailed analysis of the role of specific social groups in the protests.

Researcher A. Sopaj (2020) calls the demonstrations a key part of the history of the region and Yugoslavia as a whole. According to him, these events were a reaction to a nationwide movement and the desire of the Albanian population of Kosovo to preserve their cultural and national identity, as well as to gain greater autonomy and rights. The demonstrations began among students in Pristina in mid-March and quickly spread to other cities and villages in Kosovo. The main slogan was the demand for the establishment of the Republic of Kosovo, reflecting the desire for political autonomy and independence from Yugoslavia (Hunko, 2023). Young people were key actors, expressing their determination and desire for change. The article also notes that young people acted as an important catalyst, defining their role in expressing national outrage and seeking political and social change. The aftermath of the demonstrations included political repression and attempts to quell discontent, but they also defined the Albanian people's spiritual and national connection to Kosovo and their unquenchable desire for freedom and independence.

The conflict in the Balkans in the 1990s, particularly in Kosovo, involved many grave violations of international law and human rights, even by the Allies, as K. Ristić and E. Satjukow (2022) affirmed. Crimes attributed to Serbian military organizations in Gjakova in 1998-1999 have been the subject of investigations and trials. The conflict in Kosovo involved numerous military operations, repression, and violence against the civilian population. The Court of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) tried cases related to crimes against humanity, war crimes and other serious violations of international humanitarian law (Spytska, 2023). The specific crimes that were considered in these cases included massacres, ethnic cleansing, torture, sexual violence and other forms of systematic oppression of the civilian population. In particular, the events in Gjakova were part of a wider pattern of actions in violation of international law. The trials of military leaders and other responsible individuals, such as Slobodan Milošević, demonstrate the importance of justice and accountability for crimes committed.

Slobodan Milošević (1941-2006) was a Serbian politician and leader who influenced many events in the former Yugoslavia, including Kosovo in 1998-1999. He was one of the key players in the events that led to the breakup of Yugoslavia. In 1999, a humanitarian crisis arose in Kosovo, marked by massive human rights violations. The conflict was resolved by joint efforts of the international community, and Milosevic was in opposition to international organizations. In 2001, Milosevic was handed over to the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, where he was charged with crimes against humanity and war crimes. The trial lasted several years. However, in March 2006, before receiving the final verdict, Slobodan Milosevic died in prison in the Hague (Lika, 2023).

However, throughout the history of the conflicts in the Balkans and the break-up of the former Yugoslavia, many crimes have remained unsolved and perpetrators have not been held accountable for their actions (Kopotun & Murzo, 2023). International court processes have faced various

difficulties, such as challenges in gathering evidence, political interference and unfavourable conditions for witnesses. This often makes it difficult for those responsible for crimes to be sentenced fairly and fully. It is important that international and national organizations continue working to ensure justice and accountability for perpetrators of crimes against humanity and war crimes. However, this process can be time-consuming, and in many cases, it is still ongoing.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to analyse the Kosovo conflict and its consequences, including genocide, and its impact on the current civilian population, taking into account newly collected evidence.

## Materials and methods

This study used a set of methods that allowed for a comprehensive study of the crimes committed by Serbian military organizations in the city of Gjakova (1998-1999): analytical, comparative, case study, synthetic, induction and deduction, abstraction and generalization.

In particular, to understand the context of the events and further investigate the crimes, literary accounts and recorded eyewitness testimonies were analysed. In addition, to obtain specific data on the crimes and accused persons, the sources from the State Archives Agency of Kosovo related to the events under study were analysed. Geospatial data and maps were used to identify the locations of the conflict and to reconstruct the events. Photographs and videos taken during the events were analysed to document the crimes and identify the accused. Medical records containing information on injuries and deaths that occurred during the conflict were also analysed. For the same purpose, court decisions on charges were studied, as well as information on the legal assessment of the events under investigation. After analysing the above aspects, a comparative method was used to compare the events in Gjakova with similar events in other regions.

Five people were interviewed: Bute Komani (a teacher in the village of Guske, about 58 years old, interviewed on 14.12.2022 in Gjakova), Lulzim Sefa (a resident of the village, about 58 years old, interviewed on 14.12.2022 in Deve, Gjakova), Mal Haziraj (teacher and artist, around 67 years old, interviewed on 14.12.2022 in Skivjan), Setki Krasniqi (school principal in the Shehu district of Damjan, around 46 years old, interviewed on 14.12.2022 in the Shehu-Damjan neighbourhood) and Shkendije Hoda, "War Crimes Association Gjakova 98-99". Interview given to the author on May 30, 2022 in Gjakova. Their stories about the events in Gjakova, including information about victims and the military, important findings and additional information for the study are analysed. In addition, the case study method was used to analyse in detail the existing sociological surveys and questionnaires. Studying the opinions and views of citizens helped to determine the impact of events on society and to include public opinion in the research. It should be noted that the possibility of errors or inaccuracies in the testimonies was taken into account, and the data was thoroughly checked for accuracy. This allowed getting a complete and more objective picture of what happened during the events in Gjakova.

Among other methods, the synthetic method was useful for comparing different approaches to understanding the Kosovo conflict and combining data from different sources. The method of induction was used to draw conclusions about specific facts and events related to the Kosovo conflict, while the method of deduction was used to formulate a

general understanding of international relations in the context of conflict analysis. The method of abstraction allowed identifying objective factors that influenced the Kosovo conflict and its consequences. Finally, the method of synthesis helped to present the results of the study, as well as trends in the impact of the Kosovo conflict on international relations.

### Results

In the context of the Kosovo conflict, the city of Gjakova served as a vivid example of media influence and its consequences for the international community. Thus, during the conflict in Kosovo, which lasted from 1998 to 1999, numerous human rights violations and crimes against civilians, ethnic cleansing, violence, destruction of property and other war crimes were committed.

Most scholars agree that war crimes are violations of international humanitarian law committed during hostilities, including any hostile acts committed against civilians, prisoners of war, the wounded and sick, and objects protected by international humanitarian law, with intent to cause disproportionate harm to such objects, murder, torture, violence, destruction of property, pillage, forced displacement, use of nuclear weapons, prohibition of humanitarian aid, etc.

Crimes against humanity are systematic acts of violence and terror against civilians. According to the Statute of the International Military Tribunal for the Trial and Punishment, crimes against humanity include: murder, violence, forced displacement, forced deprivation of liberty, torture, rape, violence against children, genocide, slavery and other forms of violence committed by security forces (Human Rights Watch, 1993).

The city of Gjakova, located in the south-west of Kosovo, was one of the hotspots of the conflict. The federal centre's policy towards the Serbian autonomies in the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was led by J.B. Tito and aimed at maintaining a balance between the peoples of the federation. However, given the constant interethnic flare-ups in multi-ethnic Kosovo, the autonomous rights of Kosovo Albanians became a subject of debate in Serbian society. According to the 1990 Serbian Constitution, they were significantly limited, so in the 1990s, a struggle broke out between the political leaders of the Albanian minority and the Serbian leadership over the status of Kosovo. In 1998-1999, the conflict escalated into a complex crisis, which the international community was involved in resolving (Bilyi, 2022). It is especially important to study the crimes that took place in the city of Gjakova, as this period was crucial for the region and had serious geopolitical and humanitarian consequences.

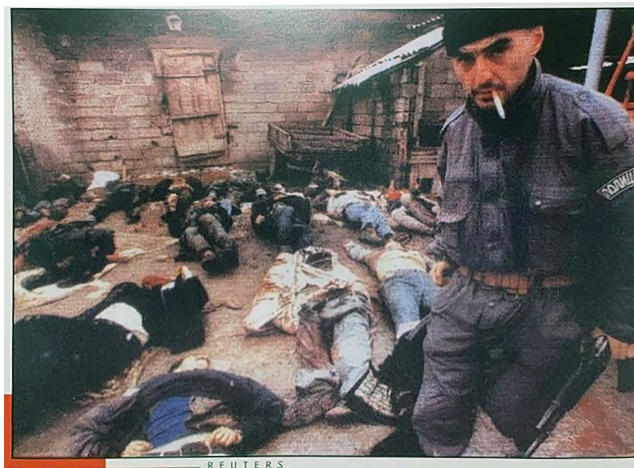
In the "Dictionary of Modern Albanian Language", the word "crimes" means destruction and other inhumane acts committed by anti-people regimes, occupation armies, etc. A crime is an act committed in violation of the current legislation, which has caused harmful and dangerous consequences for the state, society or any of its members and is punishable in accordance with the criminal code (Kostallari, 1984).

Serbia committed about 400 massacres of civilians in Kosovo during 1998-1999. During the most recent war in Kosovo (1998-1999), around 13,500 people died. These figures are provided by various institutions in Kosovo, including the Humanitarian Rights Foundation (FDH), and are presented in the Kosovo Book of Remembrance (LKK), which lists all victims of the war in Kosovo from all ethnic

groups. According to this organization, a total of 13,535 people were killed or disappeared during the war in Kosovo.

Based on empirical data collected during a comprehensive research study and information provided by the Gjakova Municipal Assembly, it was found that between 1 January 1988 and 12 June 1999, 930 residents (832 men and 98 women) were killed in the municipality, an additional 92 people (82 men and 10 women) were reported missing, and 220 deaths were recorded (Ball, 2011). The majority of ethnic Albanians have been subjected to systematic repression by Serbian law enforcement and military forces. During NATO's first operations in the region, Serbian military and police forces launched massive acts of violence in Gjakova, including the burning of the area and the killing of civilians. Modern-day Gjakova has undergone significant destructive changes, becoming a symbol of sacrifice and loss (Osmani, 2012). A total of six cases of rape by Serb forces were documented during 1998, although evidence collected by Human Rights Watch, doctors and local human rights groups suggests that the actual number was much higher. Official state propaganda in Yugoslavia in the decade leading up to the war served to dehumanize and stereotype Kosovo Albanians. Serbian propaganda contrasted Serbian women, who were seen as "cultured, strong and worthy of motherhood", with Albanian women, who were portrayed as "indiscriminately fertile" (Mertus, 1999). In the late 1980s, there was a huge amount of propaganda against Albanian women, portraying them as stupid, uneducated women "with open legs, ready for sex".

In this context, attention should be drawn to the tragic incident that occurred due to the actions of Serbian military units in the house of Mehdi Vejse and the Hagjija family in Gjakova on the night of 1 and 2 April 1999. According to documented data, there were 21 people inside the house: one elderly man, 7 women aged 30-73, and 13 children aged 2-15 (Beka, 2020; Beqiri, 2021). They were killed by automatic fire and subsequently set on fire. 9-year-old Dren Ali Chaka, who was wounded, managed to escape. In particular, 6 members of the Hagjija family were killed. The family of Januz Kana, which included him, his wife, daughter and son, also fell victim to the aggression and was subjected to violence before their house was burnt down. Other victims, such as Aferdita Deda-Demjaha and her son Ylber, were subjected to brutal violence that ended in their deaths (Fig. 1).



**Figure 1.** From the massacre of Rogovo of Hasi-Gjakova  
Source: A. Beqiri (2021)

In Goden, on 25 March 1999, 20 Albanians aged 18 to 45 were killed, and their corpses were burned (Ramosaj, 2005). On 25 March 1999, 21 people were killed in the Qyl neighbourhood of Gjakova. On 26 March 1999, 6 members of the religious community were killed in the Gec neighbourhood. On 27 March 1999, 8 people were killed in the Novi Quarter. In the village of Deve, on 27 March 1999, 10 people were killed and executed with 222 bullets. On 31 March 1999, 6 people were killed in Bllokun e ri. On 1 April 1999, 27 people were taken hostage and executed near the tile factory in Gjakova. On 2-4 April 1999, a massacre took place in the village of Kralan, during which 87 young people were executed and many of the corpses were burned. These Albanians were from the municipalities of: Klinë, Malishevë and Gjakova. On Qabrati Street, 300 men were separated and captured, 145 of them were taken hostage. In this case, 143 people were sentenced to 1632 years in prison. 119 people were killed on Qabrati Street on 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 and 12 April (American newspaper: A report..., 2020).

In the villages of Deçan and Peja, on 6 April 1999, there was a massacre and burning of 7 corpses in the house of Rustem Tahir in the villages of Bardhaniq, Dushkajë and Gjakova. During the offensive by Serbian military and police forces

that took place on those days, the lives of the wounded and sick in the KLA military hospital in Zhebel were also threatened. As a result, several patients from the hospital in Žabela were evacuated to the village of Bardhaniq. Many sick civilians fell into the hands of Serbian troops. They were killed, and their bodies burned in the Barja-e-Madhe area, now the Hajdaraj district, in particular in the house of Bardhaniqas Rustem Tahir Hajdaraj, a resident of the village of Bardhaniq.

On 12 April 1999, in the village of Luginishte of Hasi, at a place called “Del Ujë”, 16 residents of Hasi were killed, including 13 residents of Luginishte and 3 residents from Demjani. Avdullah Shaban Krasniqi and brothers Shyqeri and Qazim Sejde Krasniqi were from the Shehu neighbourhood in Demjan. They were all separated from their women and children before being killed nearby. On 18 April 1999, 7 members of a family were killed in the town of Deve (Gjakova): Bobi, Rustemi (1926), Aliu (1944), son of Ali, Nexhdeti (1969), Halili (1952), Nura (1952), Ismeti (1978). Kenan Avdija (1981) and Hajdar Aslani (1970) (The list of names..., 2020). All of these men were expelled from their homes and killed in the vicinity of Ura in the village of Duzhnje. Xhevdet Bobi (1967), detained in Mejë on 27 April 1999, was executed by Serb-Slavic forces (Fig. 2).



**Figure 2.** Seven members of Bobi’s family from Deve of Gjakova and two brothers of Bobi from Deve of Gjakova, killed by Serbian police and paramilitary forces

**Source:** The list of names... (2020)

On 27 April 1999, 25 Albanians were killed in Guskë in Gjakova. The residents of Guske had been forcibly expelled from their homes about a month earlier. 21 people were shot dead by Serb paramilitaries and police in the village of Korenica. 4 men from Guska, Nikollë Komoni, brothers Pashk, Fran Komani and Anton Lleshi, who were staying in Meje, were executed.

During a meeting of the leadership of the military and police structures in Gjakova, which included Momir Stojanović, the head of the security sector of the Pristina Corps, it was decided that at least 100 people should be killed and houses burned in the villages of Meje and Korenica in response to the murder of Inspector Prashqević and three police officers. Operation Reka was led by the Pristina Corps, with the participation of several military units, the NJSP, SPB police officers in Gjakova, the Red Berets, and other paramilitary units. The main slogan of the operation was “No corpses – no crime!”, and the tactic of silence, “A closed

mouth does not speak” was also used. The 549th motorcycle brigade of the Ukrainian Armed Forces and the 73rd unit of the National Guard of Ukraine also took part in the attacks on the residents of Korenytsia (Pllana, 2015).

General Vladimir Lazarević, commander of the Pristina Corps, systematically informed his immediate superior, General Nebojsa Pavković, commander of the Third Army, about the events during Operation Reka. Pavković, in turn, appealed to General Dragoljub Ojdanić, the Chief of the General Staff. Ojdanić coordinated actions based on instructions from the supreme commander, who also received information about the situation. Summing up the information, they concluded that the operation had killed more than 350 people identified as “terrorists”, displaced more than 4,000 local residents and deported them to Albania. Most of the buildings in the villages of the operational zone were burned down.

According to the Association “War Crimes of Gjakova 98-99”, 8 schools were completely destroyed, 10 schools were

damaged, and 28 schools were destroyed. In the Old Bazaar in Gjakova, 341 two-storey buildings were destroyed, 55 two-storey houses, 13 two-storey houses with residential buildings on the ground floor, 14 half-burnt two-storey houses, 25 two-storey

houses and commercial premises were burned. burned in other parts of the city. 12 objects under the protection of the Department of Monument Protection were burned, 1 was shelled, 1 was destroyed, and 6 objects were damaged (Fig. 3).



**Figure 3.** On April 27, 1999, 25 Albanians were killed in Guskë in Gjakova

Source: N. Pllana (2015)

The archives contain a significant number of photographic documents attesting to military violations committed by Serbian military formations in the town of Gjakova and the surrounding area. These documents include images of individuals who, according to preliminary data, may be direct participants in these crimes. The photographs allow for the identification of some individuals, including their faces and names, and indicate the involvement of both members of the military and police forces and individual Serbian citizens in the Gjakova region. In Gjakova and surrounding

villages, police and Serbo-Slavic paramilitaries, aided by the so-called local police, committed numerous acts of violence against Albanian women and girls. This is also confirmed by artefacts found during and after the war in Gjakova and the surrounding area. A typical example is the testimony in Figure 4, which shows the violence found in the house of Mush (Mushk-Muse) Jakupi, a local policeman from Osek Hylë Gjakova, taken from the exhibition opened by the Association “War Crimes of Gjakova 1998/1999”, Art Gallery of the Palace of Culture “Asim Vokshi”, Gjakova, 11 May 2022.



**Figure 4.** Evidence of violence against Albanian girls and women found in and around Gjakova

Source: J. Mertus (1999)

Summarizing the above facts, it is possible to draw up the following chronological list of events and crimes in Gjakova (1998-1999):

1. Spring 1998: escalation of the conflict in the Kosovo province, where Serb military organizations began operations in the Gjakova region.

2. July 1998: the first large-scale incursion of Serb military organizations into Gjakova and its surroundings.

3. November 1998: large-scale searches, arrests, and disappearances of Albanian residents of the city as a result of the actions of the Serb military organizations.

4. January 1999: further deterioration of the situation and escalation of violence in Gjakova, including crimes against the Albanian population.

5. March 1999: NATO military intervention in Kosovo under Operation Allied Force.

6. April 1999: end of hostilities, retreat of Serb military organizations from Gjakova.

7. May 1999: mass liberation of the Albanian population and the establishment of international control in Gjakova.

After the establishment of international control, investigations into war crimes, including those committed by the forces of the Serb military organizations, were carried out. Many perpetrators were also arrested and put on trial in The Hague before the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY). In the 2000s and 2010s, many perpetrators were sentenced to prison terms or received other types of punishment. However, some perpetrators may remain at large or avoid prosecution for various reasons, including political amnesty. Therefore, the search for the perpetrators involved in the above-mentioned events is still ongoing.

The events in Gjakova highlight several important aspects in the global history of law enforcement and criminal justice. In particular, it concerns the international control and investigation of war crimes. After the end of the conflict in the former Yugoslavia, international control was established and war crimes investigations were launched. This underscores the importance of delivering justice and punishing those responsible for serious violations of international law. Another aspect is the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia. The establishment of the ICTY and its work have become an example of an international legal system aimed at prosecuting and punishing those accused of war crimes. This is an important step in the development of international justice. An important fact was the use of criminal profiles and physical evidence. The investigation of the Gjakova murders opened up new opportunities for solving crimes, taking into account the criminal profile and physical evidence. This influenced the development of modern methods of forensic science and statistical analysis in criminal investigations, and improved the effectiveness of law enforcement agencies in detecting and solving crimes.

Based on the analysis of these events, the following conclusion can be drawn: in post-conflict situations, it is critical to adhere to the principles of justice and reconciliation. Therefore, there is a constant need for additional study, analysis, and improvement of existing methods of international justice and criminal justice. The purpose of such improvement is not only to guarantee the effective administration of justice, but also to create mechanisms to prevent similar crimes in the future.

## Discussion

These events, which became decisive for the course of the conflict in Kosovo, are the subject of research by many scholars. Particular attention is drawn to media coverage of these crimes, as it can help or hinder an objective assessment of their consequences.

In particular, A. Vanchoski (2021) analyses the Washington Post's position on the war in Kosovo in the spring of 1999 and the way these events were presented during Operation Allied Force, NATO's war against Yugoslavia. The analysis looks at several key aspects, including the presentation of events: how events were reported, how the parties to the conflict were portrayed, and how key moments in the war were covered. It also examines how the newspaper's reporters fit into the narrative of the war. This includes approaches to choosing topics, facts, and supporting or criticizing a particular point of view in the reports. In addition, the author examines specific language structures, evaluative phrases, and the ways in which participants in the events were included or excluded from the narrative. This can indicate the extent to which the newspaper aligns its discourse with the general line of the government or official positions. It is important, according to the researcher, to determine what topics were emphasized in the articles – whether there was demonization of Serbs, whether there was selective coverage of events and what aspects of the conflict remained unreported. It also analyses in detail whether the Washington Post actively shaped the dominant national discourse or was in line with the official positions of the NATO and US governments. This indicates the degree of independence or dependence in media coverage. Such a comprehensive approach allows determining the influence of the newspaper on the formation of public opinion, understanding of events and public reaction during the war, and also highlights the degree of objectivity and independence of journalism in this context. The author concludes that the Washington Post did not act as a counterweight to the dominant national discourse during the Kosovo conflict. On the contrary, the newspaper interacted with the official positions of the NATO and US governments. This suggests that the media landscape of the time reflected alignment with official political positions, which can influence the public's overall understanding and reaction to military events and crimes (Vozniuk & Hryha, 2023).

A.A. Fleischer (2023) work explores important aspects of Western intervention in the study of events in Kosovo and Gjakova and the transformation of Kosovo into an object of international attention and security. The author uses eyewitness accounts, NATO archives, and media content to examine how attention to Kosovo has shifted from the periphery to the centre of Western attention. Important issues highlighted in the article include the role of humanitarian interventions and Western interests, the dynamics of the international response to the Kosovo crisis, and the influence of political elites on conflict management. The author emphasizes that the humanitarian military intervention in Kosovo was justified not only by geopolitical interests, but also by a change in the perception of the conflict, which contributed to the active involvement of the West in the institutional resolution of the crisis. The article offers a new perspective on the interaction between the perception of events and state intervention in international conflicts, and considers Kosovo as an example that may have important implications for understanding other global crises. In the context of the study of war crimes in Kosovo and Gjakova, the article provides important conclusions about the legitimacy of international intervention in military conflicts and its impact on the dynamics of events.

The peculiarities of the geographical and demographic situation in Kosovo are also evidenced by S. Kushi (2023).

These peculiarities have been studied in the context of complex political and social processes, such as political conflicts, NATO bombing in 1999, ethnic cleansing and persecution. The author emphasizes that these events had a significant impact on the ethnic structure of the region. As a result of the above-mentioned events, about 220,000 people have been displaced from Kosovo since June 1999. The majority of the displaced were Serbs, but also other non-Albanian groups such as Montenegrins, Gorani, Roma and Ashkali. Previously ethnically diverse settlements have become ethnically homogeneous, with a predominant Albanian population. It is noted that Albanians currently account for 93% of the population, while other ethnic communities make up only 7%. These demographic and ethnic shifts have had an important impact on the nature and extent of the conflict in Gjakova.

S. Milosavljević *et al.* (2023) analyse the role and dynamics of US and European Union external intervention in the Balkans after the breakup of the former Yugoslavia, particularly in the context of competition and possible changes in light of China's growing influence in the region. The author notes that in the recent history of the Balkan region, especially after the collapse of the former Yugoslavia, the United States has emerged as a key external actor. It has used NATO as a strategic tool and provided security in the region by initiating important international missions and operations, such as SFOR and IFOR in Bosnia and KFOR in Kosovo. However, over the past two decades, the European Union has become the main external actor in the Balkans (Shahini *et al.*, 2024). It has taken an active role in ensuring stability and peaceful resolution of conflicts, particularly in Kosovo, Bosnia, and North Macedonia. The EU initiated the establishment of various international missions and made important decisions for the region. The author points out that the rise of China and its growth in the international arena could disrupt the EU's dominant role in the Balkans. China is actively developing an economic partnership with the region, with investments in infrastructure and police cooperation, especially in Serbia (Aryn *et al.*, 2021). This may trigger a rethinking of the EU's regional role, which is marked by the lack of a clear strategy on this issue. With the growing interest of other countries (including the US, Russia and Turkey) in the region, the author highlights the possible shift in regional forces and power structures. Taking a realist approach, the author analyses the situation in terms of great power competition and spheres of influence, examining the strengths and weaknesses of different theoretical approaches and using the Serbian case as an example to understand the relationship between Europe and China. In the context of the Gjakova war crimes trial, the article focuses on the analysis of the external role of the United States and the European Union in the region after the breakup of the former Yugoslavia. It points to the transitional nature of the influence of both actors, ranging from the active involvement of the US through NATO in conflict resolution, particularly in Kosovo, to the growing role of the EU, which may be challenged by China and other external actors, which could affect regional power relations and conflict outcomes.

Covering the period from 1998/99 to 2019, M. Lišanin (2023) analyses the discourse on sexual violence and examines the actors involved, paying attention to the phenomena of silence and "refusal". In the years 1998-1999, international actors, including NATO member states, included

sexual violence in their narrative to justify military intervention. It was only in 2012, after more than a decade of silence, that conflict-related sexual violence began to be included in the narrative of heroism and victory in Kosovo. The researcher highlights the key points of disclosure of sexual violence in war when it is used for political purposes as a threat to national security. In the end, the author shows that aspects of gender hierarchy were disguised, contributing to the repeated concealment of facts about individual victims of sexual violence.

In her article, K. Zeidler (2022) emphasizes that at the current stage of politics in Kosovo and Serbia, as well as international actors such as the UN, NATO, and the EU, have developed political communication strategies. According to them, external intervention in the processes of state-building and consolidation in South-Eastern Europe should have a major impact. On the basis of theoretical critical studies in the field of security, the researcher illustrates the phenomenon of "securitized state building" with the help of regulations that exclude interethnic violence. Such a measure, according to the scholar, may affect regional processes of de- and re-territorialisation in the future. The author also emphasizes that the study of crimes against humanity is important not only for ensuring justice, but also for preventing similar events in the future, promoting international stability and strengthening human rights as generally accepted moral and legal principles. According to him, international experience of war crimes trials shows that there is no statute of limitations for such crimes. Thus, as long as the principles and goals of the United Nations and international humanitarian law are in force, human rights will be protected by the international community, and all acts of disrespect for human rights will be punished. It is important that countries learn from their mistakes and continue to work on improving the international legal system, as this is the only way the UN can achieve its goals. All of these aspects are essential to ensuring peace, justice, and stability in the region and can serve as a basis for further research and action in this area.

## Conclusions

Overall, the crimes committed by Serb military groups in Gjakova have caused a huge humanitarian problem: thousands of people have been killed and many more have been forced to flee their homes to escape the violence. These incidents demonstrate the need for the international community to take action to stop these heinous crimes and ensure accountability.

An investigation into the crimes committed by Serb military groups in the Gjakova region could make an important contribution to understanding these events and their implications for the entire region. It can help to uncover the truth about crimes against humanity, bring them to justice, and facilitate the process of justice. Such research can also contribute to peace, reconciliation, and building understanding between national and ethnic groups. In this regard, the relevance of the work remains important, and researchers, historians, human rights defenders and other stakeholders can continue to study this topic to uncover the truth and prevent similar tragedies in the future. Between 1998 and 1999, the town of Gjakova witnessed horrific crimes committed by military groups affiliated with the Serbian army. This time was crucial for the course of the conflict in Kosovo, where fighting and ethnic tensions caused thousands of people to

suffer. During this period, many innocent civilians, mostly of Albanian origin, fell victim to the brutal human rights violations committed by Gjakova. These crimes include massacres, assaults, destruction of property and forced evictions. This behaviour targets the victim's intimate and ethnic identity, causing severe pain and trauma.

One of the most high-profile incidents was the massacre in the village of Maidan, where 17 Albanian civilians were killed by Serbian security forces in August 1998. This tragic incident only increased tensions and violence in the region. Overall, the crimes committed by Serbian military groups in Gjakova caused a huge humanitarian problem: thousands of people were killed and many more were forced to flee their homes to escape the violence. These incidents demonstrate the need for the international community to take action to stop these heinous crimes and ensure accountability. This study is therefore an important tool for achieving peace and stability in Kosovo and can serve as a basis for further actions and initiatives aimed at resolving the conflict and ensuring peace in the world. Detailed locality-specific case

studies on additional towns and villages impacted could uncover fuller extent of atrocities and add more individual testimonies to the historical record. Examining command structures and internal communications within Serbian military and police could provide further confirmation of superior orders directing local forces. Forensic analysis at crime scenes and mass graves may offer scientific evidence linking remains to locations and methods of killings. Focused study on groups like paramilitaries acting alongside official forces could show wider participation in ethnic violence. Cross-referencing military archives with records of refugee flows may also indicate premeditation in displacement. Broader research questions could explore long-term psychosocial effects of trauma within families and communities.

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### Conflict of interest

None.

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## Злочини сербських сил у муніципалітеті Джяковиця (1998-1999)

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**Анотація.** Місто Джяковиця, яке на момент подій 1998-1999 років було територією автономного краю Косово (фактично Республіки Косово), під час розпаду колишньої Югославії стало ареною жорстоких зіткнень. Тому актуальність статті полягає в необхідності проаналізувати злочини, учинені сербськими військовими угрупованнями в районі Джяковиці з 1998 по 1999 рр. Мета дослідження – виявити характер, масштаби та наслідки цих злочинів та встановити зв'язок між подіями в Джяковиці та загальним перебігом конфлікту в колишній Югославії. Для досягнення поставленої мети використано такі методи: аналітичний, порівняльний, тематичний, синтетичний, індукції та дедукції, абстрагування та узагальнення. Шляхом аналізу архівних документів, свідчень очевидців, міжнародних звітів та інших джерел виявлено мотиви, тактику та стратегію вчинення злочинів військовими формуваннями. З'ясовано роль цих злочинів у контексті виваженого розуміння югославських війн та їхнього впливу на подальші події і процеси в регіональній стабільності та правопорядку. Детально аналізуються різні аспекти злочинів, зокрема масові вбивства, етнічні чистки, насильство та порушення прав людини. Особливу увагу приділено ролі сербської армії в цих подіях, її організаційній структурі та взаємодії з іншими угрупованнями. Дослідження також вивчає міжнародну реакцію на ці злочини, включаючи дії міжнародних організацій і спроби притягнути винних до відповідальності згідно з міжнародним правом. Крім того, розглянуто роль цих подій в історичному контексті та їх вплив на подальший розвиток регіону. Практичне значення статті полягає у виявленні нових фактів, що підтверджують вчинені злочини та які можуть бути використані в судовому розгляді

**Ключові слова:** війна на Балканах; порушення прав людини; етнічні конфлікти; масові вбивства; етнічні чистки