

Independence for Kosovo

Lesson for high school World History or Language Arts classes

Written by Karolina Damentko, San Francisco State University

& Kelly Korenak, World Savvy

TIME	PROCESS & STRATEGIES	LEARNING OBJECTIVES	STUDENT EVALUATION
5min	Ask students the following questions: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What is the most relevant political issue happening in Europe this month? 2. What is the reason Kosovo has been in the news so much recently? Did they hear about Kosovo declaration of independence? 3. Do they know where Kosovo is? 4. Do they know a little about the history of Kosovo? 5. What are the biggest controversies about Kosovo's independence? 	Brainstorming: To find out how much students know from News or other sources about what has just happened in Kosovo. Try to evaluate students' knowledge about Kosovo location and Kosovo War in 1999.	The answers they gave
20min	Teacher's lecture on: (see next page) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -The timeline of the conflict in Kosovo in 1999 -The UN operations in Kosovo -The Kosovo declaration of independence -What the Kosovo future would look like 	To broaden students' knowledge about a political event currently unfolding in the news. To combine the historical picture with the present political context.	
15min	<i>Ambassadors Table Game:</i> Form students into groups of six and have them count off from 1 to 6 within their groups. Give students the role cards for each country. Students with numbers 1,2,3 (France, Great Britain, U.S.) are asked to defend the position of the governments supporting Kosovo independence and students with numbers 4,5,6 – to be against it (Spain, Russia, Serbia). Each student would be an ambassador who explains his country statement on Kosovo's case.	Foster students' critical thinking and debating skills. Make them see politics as an arena where mediating skills are required for approaching complex international issues.	The homework assignment is a follow-up to this activity, and students must formulate their answers in writing.
5min	Debrief the role play with the whole class. Give time for student questions and observations, sharing with others what their group arguments were.	Let students process what they've just heard	Students' voices

HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENT: Choose one country from the list (Spain, Russia, Serbia, Great Britain, France, U.S.) and as its ambassador write a letter to the first Kosovo president explaining why he/she supports or does not support Kosovo's independence.

LECTURE CONTENTS:

1. Kosovo Background
2. Conflict in Kosovo – 1999
3. The UN/KFOR/OSCE operations in Kosovo – 1999-2008
4. The Kosovo declaration of independence – Feb 17th, 2008
5. What the future of Kosovo will look like – 2008 and on

1. Kosovo Background:

Kosovo is in Central Europe and is bordered by the following countries: Albania, Greece, Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary and Serbia (and Montenegro). It is mostly rural with over half of its population living in poverty, making it the most impoverished of all the former seven republics of Yugoslavia (Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Macedonia). The capital is Pristina. Ethnic Albanians number about 2 million - about 90% of the population. The Serbian minority, some 120,000, live in separate areas watched over by NATO peacekeepers.

In early history, control over the Kosovo region has shifted back and forth from the Serbians to the Albanians. The region was controlled by the Serbian Empire, then was part of the Ottoman Empire until 1912. During the Balkan Wars in 1912, Serbia took over the land, and during World War I was occupied by the Austro-Hungarian Empire. After WWI, the country of Yugoslavia was formed by combining many different regions and almost 20 different ethnic groups, and during this time, a number of Serbs began settling in the region of Kosovo. After WWII, Kosovo was set up as an autonomous area within Yugoslavia, but without any real autonomous power. In the second half of the 20th century, ethnic tensions grew throughout the Republic of Yugoslavia, including Kosovo, threatening to break up the country.



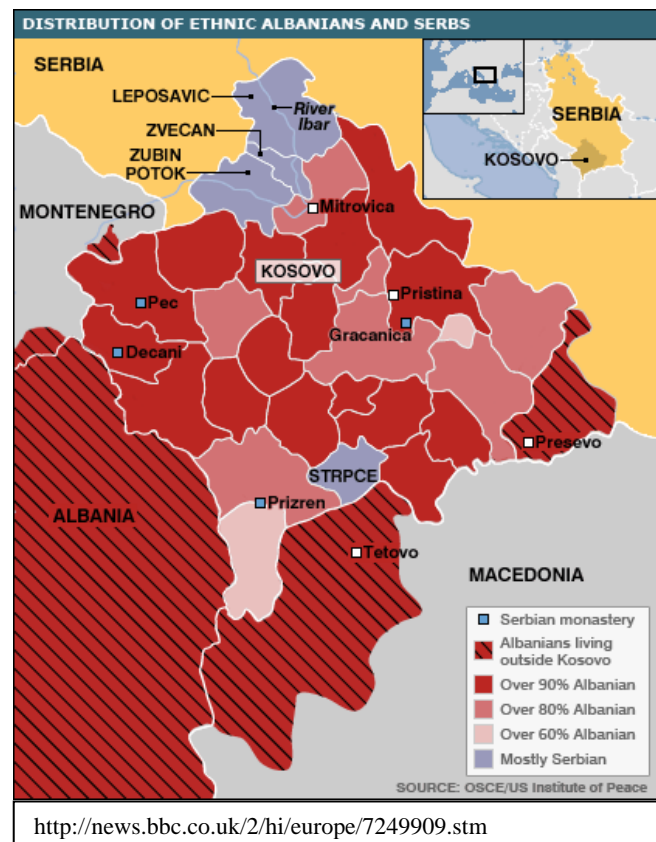
2. Conflict in Kosovo – 1999:

Things got worse for Albanians in Kosovo when Serb leader Slobodan Milosevic became the Yugoslavian president in 1989. Milosevic came to power with a message of Serbian nationalism and proceeded to strip Kosovo of its autonomy. When the Albanians didn't succeed in restoring autonomy with passive resistance, the guerrilla movement (the Kosovo Liberation Army) responded with attacks on Serbian targets. That eventually stirred up a brutal Yugoslavian military crackdown in the mid-1990s. The Milosevic hatred campaign, aimed at Albanian ethnic group cleansing, resulted in the exodus of hundreds of thousands of Albanian refugees. Thousands of innocent civilians were killed in village massacres and buried in mass graves scattered across the entire province. Serbian crimes against other ethnic groups went as far as setting up concentration camps where Albanians were tortured and faced starvation. The response to the Serb cruelty against Kosovo Albanians and president Milosevic's firm refusal to oversee peaceful conflict resolutions forced a NATO air strike that continued from March to June 1999. Finally, after six months of the NATO intervention, Serbian forces withdrew, and the UN seized administrative control of the province, putting an end to Albanian annihilation in Kosovo.

3. The UN/KFOR/OSCE operations in Kosovo – 1999-2008:

The role of UN and NATO forces in Kosovo was to prevent further ethnic clashes and protect Serbian enclaves from possible revenge attacks. In the year 2003, although Serbian and Kosovo Albanian leaders started direct talks about the future shape of the province and its final status, ethnic clashes continued and attacks on UN and NATO forces occurred as well. The sporadic attacks for the Serbian minority (the most serious in 2004 when 19 people were killed), confirmed the tension that still existed between the two ethnic groups and the need for mediation by international forces. However, the prolonged presence of foreign forces and vanishing prospects for final independence also caused frustration for Albanians.

In 2005, the UN, OSCE and the Kosovo parliament buildings in Pristina were targeted with bomb explosions and this time the staff was forced to call for KFOR army protection. The growing impatience of Kosovos' Albanians began to spur the international community to action, and former Finnish President Martti Ahtisaar drafted a plan for Kosovo's supervised independence. There was resistance to this plan from Russia, and talks between Kosovo and Serbia, which



officially began in 2006, to come to a compromise without independence were pushed to continue. With no resolution from talks, the parliament of Kosovo finally announces independence in February 2008.

During the ten years of the UN's presence in the Kosovo region, a number of problems created challenges for citizens and the UN:

- High unemployment rate (60%), most people lived on remittances sent by their relatives living in Western European countries (mostly Germany)
- High birth rate and large family size,
- Very young population (60% of the entire population under 35 years old),
- Main drug trafficking route,
- UN passports were unrecognized outside Kosovo, so as a result some people were unable to leave Kosovo for almost 10 years.

4. The Kosovo declaration of independence – Feb 17th 2008:

On February 17th 2008, Kosovo declared the independence that had once been promised and for which it had been hoping for more than 30 years. That day, the Kosovo parliament, in a historic session, unanimously proclaimed the country's independence, which was welcomed by crowds' rejoicing in the Pristina streets. Tens of thousands of people celebrated all day long with fireworks, and gunshots expressed the joy of all Albanians and their long-awaited "dream come true".

"Albanians have gone through horror to come to this point. We thank everyone who supported us. We thank United States of America, United Kingdom, Europe and everyone," said Teuta Bokshi, a housewife from Pristina.

Immediately, the United States and a majority of the European Union countries approved and recognized the new country, Kosovo. However, disapproval was expressed not only by Serbia but also by seven other countries: Russia, China, Spain, Romania, Slovakia, Greece and Cyprus, primarily because these countries are all worried that regions within their own countries will try to break away and declare independence. Most of the European diplomats agreed that "The alienation of Kosovo from Serbia has gone too far and the status quo is no longer sustainable or acceptable." However, diplomats representing the latter governments have expressed concern about breakaway movements in their own countries and have said that Kosovo's declaration of independence without bilateral agreement sets a dangerous precedence. As of now, Serbian unrest takes the form of massive protests in Serbia, violent Serb attacks on U.S. and some EU countries embassies in Montenegro and Macedonia, and riots in Serbian enclaves in Kosovo.

5. What the future of Kosovo will look like – 2008 and on:

Kosovo has agreed to follow the path to independence laid out in Ahtisaar's UN plan. According to this plan, independence goes into effect within 120 days after the parliament's declaration, Kosovo cannot join any other country, and its armed forces need to be limited. One of the biggest changes for Kosovo will be determining how to take charge of their own government, instead of having it administered by the United Nations. After the declaration, the

EU is due to take over from the UN with a 2,000-strong staff made up of police officers, judges, prosecutors and customs officials. But 16,000 NATO troops will remain responsible for Kosovo's security. Kosovo's parliament needs to concentrate on issues involving its country's constitution, new laws and symbols.

Kosovo's Prime Minister, Hashim Thaci, in his independence speech, promised to uphold the principles of a tolerant and open society and to protect the rights of the 120,000 strong Serbian minority living in Kosovo. There have been several protests in Belgrade over the independence of Kosovo, but for the most part security has been maintained, and it remains to be seen whether peace can hold in the long term.

Lecture Resources:

BBC: To recognise or not to recognise? <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/7250764.stm>

BBC: Kosovo MPs proclaim independence:
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/7249034.stm>

BBC Q&A: Kosovo's Future: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/6386467.stm>

BBC Timeline: Kosovo: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/country_profiles/3550401.stm

BBC: Kosovo Profile: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/country_profiles/3524092.stm

Newsweek: Another Failed State? <http://www.newsweek.com/id/112945>

Guardian UK: Serb Protestors Set U.S. Embassy Ablaze in Belgrade
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2008/feb/21/kosovo.serbia1>

Human Rights Watch: A Village Destroyed – War Crimes in Kosovo
http://www.hrw.org/reports/1999/kosovo3/#_1_1

UN: Security Council condemns attacks against embassies in Serbian capital
<http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=25708&Cr=kosovo&Cr1=>

Additional Resources

Mead, Alice, *Girl of Kosovo*, Farrar Straus Giroux: 2001

A child's perspective on war. Based on true story of 11-year-old Zana, an Albanian Kosovar. An affecting novel about a place and conflict Mead knows well will help young readers understand the war in Kosovo.

BBC Education: Maps and Timelines of Changing Status of Yugoslavia in 20th century
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/static/map/yugoslavia/>

International Herald Tribune: EU proposal lays out steps on Kosovo independence
<http://www.iht.com/articles/2007/12/12/news/kosovo.php>

Country Role Cards

France: France was one of the first countries to recognize Kosovo as an independent country, and maintained that there was no other option for Kosovo. Attempts to reunite or come to compromise had not worked, and independence is now the only path toward peace. Another reason that France was eager to support Kosovo's independence is in part to make up for what many people thought was a lack of action and concern from European countries during the atrocities in Yugoslavia during the 90s.

United States: After Kosovo declared independence, President George Bush said that independence would be the right move for the region, and said that "it presents an opportunity to move beyond the conflicts of the past and toward a future of freedom and stability and peace." The United States was one of the main supporters of the NATO intervention into the war in Kosovo in 1999, and has pushed for peace in the region.

Great Britain: Great Britain was also one of the major proponents of the NATO intervention in Kosovo, and has stood firm as a supporter of Kosovo since then. Britain, along with several other European Union countries, recognized Kosovo's independence right away, and the EU will be providing officials to Kosovo to help administer the independence and to push Kosovo to create a state that will be just and democratic.

Spain: One of the main reasons Spain has refused to recognize Kosovo's independence, even though many European countries are supporting Kosovo, is because they are concerned about a separatist movement in their own country. The Basques region is an autonomous area within Spain, and the Basques people have their own language and culture. Basque nationalists have fought for rights within Spain, and a Basque separatist group, the ETA, have resorted to terrorist acts to fight for their cause, killing hundreds of people in Spain over the years.

Russia: Russia has refused to recognize Kosovo's independence, saying that independence should be jointly agreed upon with Serbia first, and without this, the current claim to independence is in violation of international law. Russian officials also say they are worried about the general security of Europe and the chain reaction of events this could cause. In addition, Russia is concerned about separatist movements in Russia, namely Chechnya.

Serbia: Since the breakup of Yugoslavia, Kosovo has been an autonomous region of Serbia. Over the centuries, Kosovo has sometimes been controlled by the Serbian Empire, and many Serbs have long lived in this region, though they are a minority of the current population. Many Serbs see Kosovo as an important symbol for their country because of several crucial cultural and religious sites in Kosovo. In addition, Serbs are also angry about atrocities committed against Serbs by Albanians during the 90s, and worry about what will happen to Serbs still living in Kosovo.

Sources for Country Role Cards:

<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=19357315>

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/7249909.stm>

http://ap.google.com/article/ALeqM5jaetUyuHV7jY_ybwes7CHqMb4DqQD8UTBFJO1

<http://www.iht.com/articles/2007/12/12/news/kosovo.php>

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/7250764.stm>