

## Final Report on the Research Activities at the Open Society Archives in quality of Visegrad Fund Fellow

- **Introduction**

- Thanks to the Visegrad Fund fellowship, I had the excellent opportunity to conduct my research at the OSA during the months of February and March 2023. The object of my research concerns some historical aspects of the **Kosovo War** (1998-1999). The primary goal is to study the **NATO intervention against Yugoslavia** (1999) as an historical event with its context, causes, and developments, essentially from a political point of view.
- In the months leading up to the Visegrad Fund fellowship, I conducted the first phase of my research as a fellow at the Center for Advanced Studies, South Eastern Europe (CAS SEE), at the University of Rijeka (Croatia).

- **The topic**

- What prompted me to conduct research into the causes of NATO's intervention against Yugoslavia is the fact that there are still today, 24 years after historical events, substantial differences of interpretation within the academic community. At the same time, online access to new declassified political, diplomatic, or military sources by some archives, such as the archives of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and those of the W. Clinton Presidential Library, has offered excellent research opportunities. Moreover, before accessing the OSA, my research was considerably enriched by a period of bibliographic research in Belgrade thanks to the fellowship of the CAS SEE of the University of Rijeka (Autumn/Winter 2022).
- In addition to the purely historical dimension of my research on the causes of NATO intervention, I have begun to outline some hypotheses on how I can develop my future research agenda in new directions. Among them, the research field that presents the greatest potential concerns the current politics of memory in Serbia and how NATO's intervention is commemorated.
- The research at the OSA, considering the historical nature of the available sources, was therefore aimed at exploring the various relevant fonds in order to be able to compare and integrate the political, diplomatic, and military sources of the other online archives previously consulted with the OSA sources, which instead consist, for the purposes of my research, essentially in newspapers, magazines, and TV sources.
- In fact, although archival sources concerning, for example, the transcripts of meetings of political leaders of countries involved in the Kosovo War are a priority for my research, the sources of the OSA fonds are essential to being able to complete, integrate, and enrich the historical context of the period under consideration. The OSA represent an extremely important archive, both for my specific research as well as for all those who deal with the history of socialist Yugoslavia and the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s.

- **Objectives**

- The objectives of my research with the OSA were therefore to better understand the historical context that led to NATO's intervention against Yugoslavia in 1999, as well as to examine the flow of information in the Western and Yugoslav media about a potential military intervention against Yugoslavia before this event actually took place. Secondly, my objectives included consulting information material on human rights violations in Kosovo between 1998 and 1999, i.e., during the Kosovo War and before and during the NATO intervention. A further objective concerned the acquisition of Serbian/Yugoslav television sources, and in particular the news of Serbian state TV, both in the period immediately preceding the Kosovo War and during the NATO intervention. In fact, this audiovisual material appears to be of great importance to obtain historical information on the Serbian political regime of the time and also to be able to gain vivid access to the propaganda of the time. The ambitious goal is to be able to reconstruct as accurately as possible, from a

historical point of view, the causes that led to NATO's intervention, based on the sources and information available to date. Subsequently, based on a more mature and updated historiographical framework on the causes of the Kosovo War and NATO intervention, it would be relevant to consider the politics of memory regarding these historical events in today's Serbia. In this sense, my intent is to connect the past with the present, trying to understand why the current political leadership in Serbia has chosen to change the politics of memory on NATO's intervention (that is called "NATO aggression" in Serbia) and what the possible repercussions for the stability of the region may be.

- **Methods**

- On a methodological level, my research can be defined as multidisciplinary because it includes historiography, studies on nationalism, foreign languages, Balkan history, partly also Cultural Studies, Strategic Studies, Human Rights, and other disciplines.

- **My research at the OSA** has essentially developed in two directions. Firstly, by consulting printed material, such as articles from various American, European, and Yugoslav newspapers and periodicals, news from news agencies, OMRI reports, and other material from some NGOs. Secondly, by viewing audiovisual sources from Serbia (in Serbian) and some Western countries (in English).

- **Considerations** about the work done.

- Preliminary results of the research.

- While it would be premature to talk about definitive results, my work at the OSA gave me the opportunity to test some of my working hypotheses. Here I'll mention two of them, those that are, in my opinion, most relevant and of scientific importance.

- **The first case** concerns the reasons that led NATO to intervene against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 1999. Before consulting the OSA documents, I was testing the following working hypothesis: The USA, after Milošević supported the Serb separatists in Bosnia and Herzegovina, causing in Spring 1992 a new war in former Yugoslavia (after Croatia in 1991), wanted to avoid a new major Balkan war. More precisely, the USA considered Kosovo strategically important to the national security of their country. According to this interpretation, a war in Kosovo could have had a spillover effect in the region. During my research at the OSA, I was able to identify numerous sources that would substantially corroborate, cross-referencing historical sources from other archives, this working hypothesis. In particular, the fonds HU OSA 205-4 Information Services Department (Kosovo Subject file) and HU OSA 318-0-5 Country Files offered me several pieces of evidence that indeed, since the second half of 1992, Kosovo has been formally a "vital interest" of the US in the Balkans. The preliminary results of the research help us to understand that the NATO intervention in March 1999 was related to US security interests in the Balkans, i.e., to prevent a major war in the region. This research contributes to clarifying the hierarchy of the strategic reasons for the military intervention against Yugoslavia without obviously ignoring other factors, such as those related to the humanitarian crisis.

- **The second case**, or working hypothesis, tries to answer why Milošević was prepared to accept NATO intervention against Yugoslavia. Cross-referencing different historical sources (HU OSA 308-0-2; ICTY archives; Serbian newspaper *Politika*), I came to an interesting preliminary result: Milošević was ready to accept (possibly a few days of) the NATO bombing of Serbia. Indeed, on October 4, 1998, the Supreme Defense Council of Yugoslavia, chaired by President Slobodan Milošević, was (also) attended by Milo Đukanović, the President of Montenegro, who was already in conflict with Milošević due to his Western orientation. Media coverage of the meeting in Serbia focused on the message that Yugoslavia wanted peace but was ready to defend itself against NATO. Milošević, however, believed that limited NATO bombing could be politically advantageous. He thought that after such a bombing, Kosovo Albanians would be pressured by the USA and the Contact Group (of which the USA were members) to abandon their idea of independence from Serbia/Yugoslavia. Kosovo would then be formally part of Serbia/Yugoslavia, which was a political goal of Milošević, although incomplete as it would cede some control of Kosovo to Pristina. The USA/Contact Group (as mediators) would then give autonomy back to Kosovo,

which would partially achieve the goal of the Kosovo Albanians. Milošević was willing to sacrifice the lives of Yugoslav citizens to stay in power, despite the propaganda of his regime claiming to desire peace and, at the same time, psychologically preparing the population for a potential NATO attack through "patriotic" videos praising the defense of the nation. Milošević's populist movement started in the late 1980s, exploiting the issue of Kosovo Serbs, and he removed Kosovo's autonomy in 1989. Giving back that autonomy in 1998 would have been politically unpopular for him.

- **The research** has progressed beyond its initial stages but still requires a considerable amount of time to be completed. This involves consulting various sources, such as scholarly literature and archival material, and organizing the vast amount of information obtained. Additionally, the results of the research will be disseminated to a wider audience through the publication of articles and conference papers.
- **Opportunities**
  - The quality and quantity of sources contained in the OSA make them unique because it is possible to access news from the countries of former Yugoslavia and Western news about former Yugoslavia. This is an undeniable merit of the OSA and a clear advantage for those who conduct their research there, if compared to other archives in Europe.
  - Moreover, having had two months, I was also able to start reading (or watching, depending on the sources) a part of the archival material, thus being able to form a more precise idea about the contents of my research.
  - The OSA fond HU OSA 308 Monitoring of the Yugoslav Television offers a unique insight into the propaganda of the Yugoslav regime in the 1990s, including the Kosovo War. Moreover, many of the audio-visual sources are digitized. It is important because those videos offer a vivid image of the public narrative shaped by Milošević's regime.
  - Another key aspect of the Visegrad Fund fellowship concerns the opportunity to have interacted, dialogued, exchanged ideas, and above all, learned from my colleagues and other researchers I had the opportunity to meet during my stay in Budapest. I am very grateful for their generously offering me feedback on my research; their comments have been a source of inspiration.
- **Support**
  - My work at OSA has been greatly facilitated by many people. Here I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor, Csaba Szilagyi, for guiding me in identifying fonds and sources whenever necessary, as well as for intellectual exchange. In the same way, I express a special thanks to the reference archivist Robert Parnica for guiding me not only in accessing the OSA catalog and the various fonds but also for the intellectual exchange and for helping me to question some research hypotheses. A heartfelt thanks goes to all OSA staff members, and especially to Katalin Gadoros, Bianka Horvat, and Nora Ungarn. Finally, I would like to warmly thank all the other OSA members who have had the patience to offer me feedback and suggestions regarding my research activities.
- **CEU Library**
  - Without forgetting the fact that the OSA also have a rich library, I must add that a further positive element of my research period in Budapest concerns the excellent opportunity to have been able to access the CEU library. In fact, for those interested in Balkan history, the CEU library is extremely useful.
- **Challenges and ideas for future research**
  - I found more material than I had anticipated. The consultation of printed material during the research at the OSA was time-consuming. Moreover, although the viewing of the audiovisual material did not take place while being in the archive, it was even more time-consuming and would require much longer working times. In addition, at the CEU library as well as at the OSA, I was able to see printed (and audiovisual at the OSA) sources on the Kosovo War in Albanian language that were potentially interesting; however, my language skills, at the present stage, do not include the Albanian language.

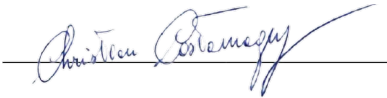
- However, the wealth of material consulted at the OSA can be adopted in my current research on the Kosovo War, which is still being developed. At the same time, I was able to formulate some ideas about other possible research directions that could be developed in the future, for example, on some aspects of the political history of Yugoslavia during the 1980s related to the themes of my doctoral dissertation on Milošević's rise to power. Finally, a further possible direction of research in the future concerns the politics of memory about the Kosovo war in today's Serbia.
  - **Suggestions**
    - The OSA are extremely well structured and rich in information and support for researchers. What could possibly be considered concerns two areas: Firstly, I might suggest creating and adding to the online OSA catalog a list, at folder level, of the contents (not just the general topic), if possible. Secondly, I suggest completing the digitization of audiovisual material. Regarding the audiovisual sources, it would be interesting to evaluate whether it is possible, through Artificial Intelligence software, to extract the texts of the dialogues from the digitized videos and make them available at the OSA to researchers. In this way, through a keyword search, the search work could be greatly sped up.
    - As for the Visegrad Fund fellowship I would suggest, where possible, being able to cover, at least in part, the travel and accommodation expenses, as it would be a great help for the researchers.
- **The OSA Fonds that has been consulted**
  - HU OSA 205 Records of the Open Media Research Institute
    - HU OSA 205-4 Information Services Department
      - HU OSA 205-4-120 Serbian Subject Files, archival boxes 5, 7, 8, 9 and 10
        - Printed sources
          - Clips of news articles
            - Western and Yugoslav
          - Internal Reports
        - HU OSA 205-4-121 Kosovo Subject file, archival boxes 1, 2, 3 and 4
          - Printed sources
            - Clips of news articles
              - Western and Yugoslav
            - Internal Reports
      - HU OSA 307 "VIN" Programs Broadcast at Studio B Television – Belgrade
        - Digitized videos
          - TV news and TV reportage of Studio B Television (anti-regime broadcast)
      - HU OSA 308 Monitoring of the Yugoslav Television
        - Digitized videos
          - TV news and TV reportage of Radio Television of Serbia (state-run television broadcasts)
      - HU OSA 318 Records of the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights
        - HU OSA 318-0-5 Country Files, archival boxes 75, 76, 79
          - Printed sources
            - NGOs Reports
            - Western and Yugoslav news
      - HU OSA 350 Records of the International Monitor Institute
        - HU OSA 350-1 Europe
          - HU OSA 350-1-1 Balkan Archive
            - Digitized videos
              - TV news and TV reportage of Western and Yugoslav TV channels

- HU OSA 363 Records of the American Refugee Committee's Balkan Programs
  - HU OSA 363-0-5 Digital Video Recordings
    - Digitized videos
      - TV reporting about Kosovar refugees
- HU OSA 392 Video recordings of WITNESS
  - HU OSA 392-1 Activist films of Witness
    - HU OSA 392-1-1 Documentary films and promotional videos of Witness
      - Digitized videos
        - Documentary of Kosovo massacre sites and interviews to eyewitnesses
  - HU OSA 392-2 WITNESS partners' raw footage
    - HU OSA 392-2-13 WITNESS Kosovo Project
      - Digitized videos
        - Footage of Kosovo massacre sites and interviews to eyewitnesses

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A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Christian Costamagna", is written over a horizontal line.