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Review of the doctoral thesis of Bardh Lipa, M.A., titled "Party politics in Post-Independence Kosovo: implications for Peacebuilding and Statebuilding", Krakow 2024, Pedagogical University named after the Commission of National Education in Krakow, pp. 251 (supervisor Dr. Łukasz Zweifel prof. PSW, assistant supervisor Dr. Adem Beha)

At first it should be noted that the subject matter of the reviewed doctoral dissertation, which analyzes the role of local political actors, in particular the Vetëvendosje party, in shaping peace and state-building processes in Kosovo, is fully within the discipline of political science and administration.

The purpose of the dissertation is to explore the complex dynamics of peace-building and statehood in Kosovo, where the ruling Vetëvendosje party is forced to reconcile correct interactions with international actors with the expectations of a society that is still in conflict and awaiting effective solutions. The author of the dissertation, following Newman (2009) and van Willigen (2013), in the introductory chapter rightly states that post-conflict landscapes create a paradox in which the urgent need for peace and state reconstruction operates in parallel with the profound challenge of the need to reconcile an externally imposed framework with the complex realities of local experience, while liberal peace-building models aimed at fostering lasting peace in post-conflict societies by promoting democracy, the free market, the rule of law and human rights, often reflecting Western ideals, at the place of action they confront the complex realities found.

Evaluating the preliminary assumptions of the work, it is necessary to point out clearly delineated research questions and hypotheses regarding the uneasy relationship and interaction

between international actors and the Vetëvendosje Party in the complex processes aimed at building a lasting peace in Kosovo.

Particularly noteworthy is the detailed analysis of the existing state of research, evidenced by an extensive bibliographic index of more than 500 items, consisting of both source documents (among them official documents of the Vetëvendosje Party), as well as scholarly thematic studies, press materials, government and NGO reports; published mostly in English and Albanian.

The rationale for the choice of methodology and research techniques also deserves a positive evaluation. The choice of a qualitative two-case study was deemed expedient: in order to study the impact of the Vetëvendosje party on peacebuilding processes in the unique context of post-independence Kosovo, it was decided to choose two critical cases: the circumstances of the implementation of the Association of Serb-Majority Municipalities (ASM) agreement and the ongoing crisis in northern Kosovo. The choice of Mac Ginty's (2011) hybrid peacebuilding model technique is also justified. The study thus uses a combination of qualitative techniques, including structured, focused comparisons in carefully selected case studies with in-depth analysis of the literature and parallel tracking of the course and evolution of the analyzed processes, their participants and decision-makers.

The submitted dissertation consists of separate chapters with a chronological and problem arrangement, as well as a sixth chapter in the nature of a summary. The dissertation also includes an abstract, an expansion of the abbreviations used, and an extensive bibliographical index.

The first chapter (*From Conflict to Ambiguous Statehood*) is introductory, presenting the period of the struggle for Kosovo's autonomy and independence, the political scene of the newly formed state and the genesis of the formation of the movement and then the Vetëvendosje party. It indicates the internal transformation and the reasons for the party's rise in popularity and its electoral success in 2021. The chapter also indicates the chronological scope of the dissertation were presented selected case studies, discusses the goals, questions and directly related research hypotheses (5), and indicates the theoretical framework, methodology and anticipated relevance of the dissertation for future research on the reconstruction processes of post-conflict states and societies. In it, the author also points out the research limitations

(related, among other things, to the need to maintain research objectivity in relation to one's own experience), as well as ethical requirements (i.e., adherence to intellectual property standards), the scrupulous observance of which was a basic premise of the research work conducted.

In the second chapter (*From Conflict to Fragility: Kosovo's Pursuit of Peace*), after a brief presentation of basic encyclopedic information on Kosovo, the author analyzes the historical background of the conflict in the Balkans in the 1990s, its course, causes and consequences of international intervention. Subsequently, the analysis covered the beginning and course of the post-war reconstruction processes of the country, which followed independence in 2008. It also presented information on the constitutional foundations of modern Kosovo, highlighting the provisions of the Declaration of Independence and the 2008 Constitution on minority rights. It was the author's intention that the contents of this chapter provide an indispensable basis for understanding the specifics of the problems of Kosovo's post-conflict reconstruction - both the solutions to modern state structures and the involvement of local communities and their leaders in finding solutions tailored to local political and social realities. Also included in this theme is a presentation of the most important negotiations and agreements concluded between Kosovo and Serbia until April 2023.

In the third chapter (*Evolution of Peacebuilding: from Liberal Frameworks to Hybrid Approaches*), the author critically addresses the existing thematic literature, presenting a comprehensive overview of the evolution of peacebuilding approaches, which have evolved from the foundational work of Johan Galtung (1969, 1976, 1990) emphasizing structural transformation to address the root causes of conflict, through the promotion of liberal solutions (democratization and free market), to hybrid models emphasizing the importance of local agency and the need to choose solutions tailored to local realities. Presenting Mac Ginty's (2011) hybrid peace model, the author locates his research in the space of scholarly debates on state reconstruction, choosing to use this model as a theoretical framework to study the role of the Vetëvendosje Party in shaping the trajectory of peacebuilding in post-conflict Kosovo. The chapter also examines the interplay between peacebuilding and state-building processes, presenting the concept of hybrid peacebuilding, recognizing the dynamic interaction between international norms and local realities. The chapter is of great scholarly value, demonstrating the author's erudition and in-depth knowledge of the literature on the subject; it certifies that the final bibliographic index was not automatically done on the basis of library catalogs,

highlights the gaps in the existing literature addressed in this dissertation, and lays the theoretical foundation for the analysis being prepared.

Chapter four (*Research Methodology*) presents and discusses in detail the methodology of the research conducted; including the data collection methods and analytical framework used to examine specific case studies and answer the research questions posed. While justifying their choice, the author also presents a clear explanation of the research process. Both the choice of Mac Ginty's (2011) four-dimensional model to account for the complex dynamics of peacebuilding processes; and the justification for the selection of specific case studies deserve emphasis. Also of positive note is the presentation of the evolution of originally adopted research concepts that took place in parallel with the course of the research process, the constraints of the research design and data selection methods, and the challenges of an ethical nature (protection of the individuals and communities included in the research), as well as those related to the need to maintain objectivity in the analysis and interpretation of the data to ensure the reliability and validity of the results.

Chapter five (Results and Discussion), forming the most important part of the study, is a proper analysis of the hybrid peace in Kosovo, which is unfolding today in the specific context of a newly independent state struggling to consolidate its sovereignty and its institutions. Focusing on Vetëvendosje's role as the ruling party and its interaction with external decision-makers and the liberal peace framework they impose, the author presents the multifaceted dynamics shaping Kosovo's unique form of hybrid peace; its impact on the course of events in the two case studies examined: (1) Association of Serb-Majority Municipalities (ASM), and (2) ongoing crisis in northern Kosovo. Applying Mac Ginty's (2011) hybrid peace model, the author obtains a multifaceted picture of the complexity of the interplay between international and local actors in shaping the processes of peacebuilding and post-conflict state reconstruction.

The six chapter (*Conclusion - Transforming Peacebuilding through Local Agency and Hybrid Approaches*) is a kind of short summary. Presenting the key findings, the author states, the pervasive influence of international actors in shaping peacebuilding and state-building processes in Kosovo, who use their economic, political and diplomatic resources to pressure local actors to conform to their preferred vision of post-conflict reconstruction. The study underscored the need for international actors to prioritize dialogue and partnership with local stakeholders, recognizing capacities of local communities in driving their own post-conflict transformations. The dissertation emphasized the crucial role of local political parties like

Vetëvendosje in articulating and advancing alternative visions of peace and development, grounded in the specific realities and aspirations of their societies.

Fully aware of the complexity of the issues under study, the author of the dissertation hopes to make a significant contribution to a better understanding of contemporary peacebuilding dynamics in post-conflict environments, offering valuable insights for both the theory and practice of the processes analyzed.

The dissertation critically examines the limitations of the liberal peacebuilding paradigm in addressing the specific needs and aspirations of post-conflict societies, challenging the view that peacebuilding can be effectively imposed from the outside, while emphasizing the need to take into account local perspectives, knowledge and experiences. It makes a valuable contribution to the ongoing debate on the adaptability of existing peacebuilding models. Analyzing the involvement of the Vetëvendosje party through the lens of Mac Ginty's hybrid peace model, he assesses the applicability of this model to the case of Kosovo, but also to the cases of other countries struggling with similar challenges of post-conflict state reconstruction, both internally and internationally. The results obtained have the potential to become a valuable contribution to further research on developing context-specific alternatives that reflect local needs and aspirations. The author rightly points out that the growing emphasis on local responsibility in post-conflict peacebuilding reflects a paradigm shift in academic studies and policy circles, emphasizing the key role of local actors and institutions in ensuring the sustainability, effectiveness and legitimacy of international interventions, for sustainable conflict resolution and peace/state-building in the modern world.

In the reviewed work, it is important to appreciate the objectivity of the researcher, who, when embarking on the planned research, approached it with the difficult baggage of personal experience of growing up in post-war Kosovo; despite this, he managed to conduct it while maintaining the highest standards of objectivity, carefully selecting source materials (Human Rights Watch reports, UNHCR) and formulating conclusions devoid of bias; aware of the divergent perspectives of the parties to the conflict, the complex contexts of its genesis and contemporary flashbacks to the unresolved historical wrongs.

The internal structure of the work is correct, although the lack of a separate introduction and an elaborate summary is notable. The role of summary is performed by the sixth chapter, consisting of two and a half pages, which, in the reviewer's opinion, is disproportionately short

in relation to the others. If this chapter had been replaced with a clearly titled summary - the accusation of its shortness would be unfounded.

The temporal caesura (the breakup of Yugoslavia and the annulment of Kosovo's autonomy should be considered the starting point following the author, p. 13) and the relevant goals of the dissertation are also poorly articulated. While the latter are mentioned repeatedly in various parts of the work, separately listing them in the introductory section of the dissertation would have improved its readability.

The inclusion of a subsection on the key findings of the dissertation (1.10. Key Findings; p. 24) in the introductory section of the dissertation is also questionable to the reviewer.

The remaining objections are editorial in nature. The list of abbreviations would look better if it maintained alphabetical order. Minor editorial errors are noticed in the table of contents (numbering subsections 1.8, 1.10.; in fact, subsection 1.9 appears in the main text as *Significance of the Research*).

However, the minor shortcomings indicated above do not affect the very high evaluation of the dissertation.

Attention is also drawn to the mature research objectivity of the doctoral student, present both in the definition of the studied phenomenon and in the attempts to solve the perceived research challenges.

It is also noteworthy that almost the entire research process took place in the reality of the Covid-19 pandemic. Despite the constraints, the doctoral student was able to carry out the entire planned research.

The reviewed thesis is certainly a significant scientific achievement, a reliable scientific dissertation, meeting the requirements for doctoral theses and conduct lively scientific activities, as evidenced by participation in conferences and scientific publications.

Taking into account the above statements, I conclude that the author of the dissertation has demonstrated theoretical knowledge in the discipline of political science and administration, as well as from the disciplines of related social sciences, and has the ability to conduct scientific work independently. The submitted dissertation is an original solution to a research problem based on the application of the results of his own scientific research.

The post-doctoral dissertation authored by Bardh Lipa titled "Party politics in Post-Independence Kosovo: implications for Peacebuilding and Statebuilding" therefore meets the conditions of the law and I recommend its admission for further proceedings in this regard.

Jeanne Be