Scientific Journal of Silesian University of Technology. Series Transport
Zeszyty Naukowe Politechniki Śląskiej. Seria Transport

Volume 94 **2017**

p-ISSN: 0209-3324

e-ISSN: 2450-1549

DOI: https://doi.org/10.20858/sjsutst.2017.94.22

Journal homepage: http://sjsutst.polsl.pl

Article citation information:
Żukiewicz, P., Domagała, K. Problems with transport policy in Kosovo after 2008. *Scientific Journal of Silesian University of Technology. Series Transport*. 2017, **94**, 249-256. ISSN: 0209-3324. DOI: https://doi.org/10.20858/sjsutst.2017.94.22.

Przemysław ŻUKIEWICZ[1], Katarzyna DOMAGAŁA[2]

PROBLEMS WITH TRANSPORT POLICY IN KOSOVO AFTER 2008

Summary. The aim of this article is to present the main problems of public transportation in Kosovo after 2008 when the province's parliament announced the declaration of independence. We focus on the plans and documents that were signed between 2008 and 2010 in an attempt to compare them with the real impact of investments made in the last five years. We show how the conflict between Belgrade and Prishtina has influenced public transportation and examine the prospects for problem-solving in this sector. To do this, we employ a neo-institutional approach to the document analysis as the main research method.

Keywords: transport policy, Kosovo, Serbia, Western Balkans

1. INTRODUCTION

Kosovo is a disputed territory in South-eastern Europe. The Kosovo Conflict is based on the fact that this area is inhabited by Albanians and Serbs. Despite the fact that Kosovo Albanians (Kosovars) declared it an independent state in February 2008, according to the Serbian Constitution of 2006, this territory is still within the Republic of Serbia.

[1] Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Wroclaw, Koszarowa 3 Street, 51-148 Wrocław, Poland. Email: przemyslaw.zukiewicz@uwr.edu.pl.
[2] Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Wroclaw, Koszarowa 3 Street, 51-148 Wrocław, Poland. Email: katarzyna.domagala@uwr.edu.pl.

To analyse the consequences of this conflict, one needs to appreciate Kosovo's troubled history [1]. Currently, its population amounts to 1,739,825[3]. The largest ethnic group comprises Albanians (92.9% of the total population), while 7% of the population consists of ethnic and national minorities, 1.5% of which are Serb [2]. Historically, it has been a part of the Serbian Kingdom. For several centuries it was under the rule of the Ottoman Empire, after which it belonged to the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. Following World War II, communist rule in Yugoslavia inaugurated 34 years of *modus vivendi* among Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo under the central government [3]. Kosovo has a land area of 10,908 km^2, which equates to only 4.3% of the territory of former Yugoslavia; indeed, it was the poorest area within communist Yugoslavia.

The described territory has been an administrative region since 1946, known as the Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija. In 1989, in a referendum held throughout Serbia, the authorities largely reduced the autonomy of Kosovo. At the end of 1990s, the conflict between Kosovo Albanians and Serbs became a humanitarian problem and drew the attention of the international community, such that, in March 1999, NATO launched a range of air bombardments against Serbia [4]. Despite numerous attempts to resolve the Serb-Albanian conflict, the situation in Kosovo remained very tense. Prepared in 2007 by Martti Ahtisaari, the Comprehensive Proposal for the Kosovo Status Settlement [5] was negatively received by the Serbs, who were afraid of losing part of their territory. As such, in February 2008, Kosovo unilaterally proclaimed its independence from the Republic of Serbia [6].

2. PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION IN KOSOVO

The transport sector in Kosovo offers reasonable potential, but the region still suffers from the effects of the last financial crisis. Furthermore, the state budget is based on external measures, especially loans and EU funds, while the unemployment rate in Kosovo is over 30% [7]. Kosovo is a member of the South East Europe Transport Observatory (SEETO), which is a regional transport organization established by the Memorandum of Understanding for the Development of the Core Regional Transport Network, which was signed in 2004 by representatives from the governments of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia, as well as representatives of the UN Mission in Kosovo and the European Commission. The aim of the SEETO is "to promote cooperation on the development of the main and ancillary infrastructure on the multimodal Indicative Extension of TEN-T Comprehensive Network to the Western Balkans and to enhance local capacity for the implementation of investment programmes" [8].

Shortly after the announcement of Kosovo's declaration of independence, the European Commission and the Ministry of Transport and Communications of Kosovo commissioned an action plan, whose main points were concerned with the development of the railway network in Kosovo. In Table 1 and Figure 1, we present all the new investments that were planned by the then government, which were to lead to increasing numbers of trains operating in the region.

[3] Data based on the 2011 census conducted by the Kosovo Agency of Statistics (KAS). This was the first internationally recognized census in Kosovo since 1981, but was boycotted by some of the Serbian minority communities.

Tab. 1

Overview of Kosovo's railway projects in 2009 [9]

Project	Type	Value in EUR
Fushë Kosovë- Hani i Elezit	Double-track electrification 160 km/h	145,089,000
Fushë Kosovë-Prishtinë	Double-track electrification 160 km/h	29,042,800
Fushë Kosovë-Leshak	Single-track electrification 160 km/h	105,233,900
Fushë Kosovë-Airport	Single-track electrification 160 km/h	16,209,600
Bardh-Pejë	Single-track 160 km/h	77,889,000
Klinë-Prizren	Single-track 160 km/h	58,121,400
Prishtinë-Podujevë	Single-track 160 km/h	39,710,200
Prizren-Vrbnica	New line single-track 160 km/h	13,391,100
Prishtinë Railway Station	New intermodal station: rail section	10,000,000
Total cost		494,687,000

Fig. 1. Overview of Kosovo's railway project in 2009 [10]

The plan stipulated that transport should be organized in respect of the following relationships:

- Hani i Elezit-Fushë Kosovë - one train in both directions every two hours (in total: 16 trains)
- Hani i Elezit-Leshak - one train in both directions every two hours (in total: 16 trains)
- Prishtinë-Leshak - one train in both directions every two hours (in total: 16 trains)
- Hani i Elezit-Prishtinë - one train in both directions every 1.3 hours (in total: 24 trains)
- Prishtinë-Pejë - one train in both directions every 1.3 hours (in total: 24 trains)
- Prishtinë-Prizren - one train in both directions every 2.5 hours (in total: 12 trains)
- Airport-Prishtinë - one train in both directions every 1.5 hours (in total: 24 trains)
- Prishtinë-Podujevë - one train in both directions every 2.5 hours (in total: 12 trains)
- Prishtinë-Vermice - one train in both directions every 2.5 hours (in total: 12 trains)

Eight years after the plan was established, there has been no progress regarding its implementation. In 2016, passenger rail traffic was organized only for the following domestic routes: Prishtinë-Pejë (two trains in both directions per day) and Hani i Elezit-Fushë Kosovë (two trains in both directions per day). There is also one international railway connection between the capital of Kosovo and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (Prishtinë-Skopje). It operates once every 24 hours [11]. The number of passengers in the period 2008-2016 declined steadily, which is not surprising in the context of a poor offer.

The main airport of Kosovo is now Pristina International Airport, which currently serves 19 destinations. This number is much lower if we only include state destinations; currently, these are: Albania, Turkey, Croatia, Slovenia, Hungary, Italy, France, Austria, Germany, Belgium, Sweden and Norway (in total: 12 countries). An important problem to be solved by the Kosovan Ministry of Transportation and Communication is the lack of public transportation (any buses and trains) between the airport and city centre. This explains why passengers have to take a taxi or rent a car. Hence, there is still an obvious need to establish a new train connection on the Airport-Prishtina route.

In recent years, little has changed regarding road traffic in Kosovo as well [12, 26]. Table 2 shows the level of development on the road network in the region between 2008 and 2015. For the last seven years, the number of routes has increased by only 4.5%. This was mainly due to the construction of a strategic section of the Ibrahim Rugova Motorway, which connects the capital of Kosovo and the Kosovo-Albania border. While there are plans to extend this motorway to the Serbian border in Merdare, at this moment, works are not continuing due to political reasons.

Tab. 2

Roads in Kosovo between 2008 and 2015 [12]

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Motorway	0	0	0	38.0	60.4	78.0	78.0	78.0
National	629.0	629.0	629.0	629.0	629.0	629.0	629.0	629.0
Regional	1,294.7	1,294.7	1,294.7	1,294.7	1,294.7	1,294.7	1,294.7	1,305.0
TOTAL	1,923.7	1,923.7	1,923.7	1,961.7	1,984.1	2,001.7	2,001.7	2,012.0

3. CONSEQUENCES OF THE CONFLICT FOR THE EVERYDAY TRANSPORTATION

The number of negative consequences of the conflict over Kosovo is significant. First of all, the Republic of Kosovo has still not been recognized by all UN member states (109 out of a total of 193 UN member states have recognized Kosovo's independence). While Kosovo I regarded as an institution of a "de facto state" in international law [13], one can observe a huge divide between the de jure status of land and the de facto reality on the ground [14]: in short, the situation in Kosovo is still unstable. The widely understood "human damage of the conflict" primarily relates to the young generation because of high unemployment rates and the lack of proper access to education. Secondly, systematic corruption in public procurement procedures and high rates of poverty in society [15] result in frequent protests by both the Albanian and Serbian communities.

Moreover, Kosovo remains a lower-middle-income country. The unresolved status issue is a main obstacle to attaining the country's objectives of political integration and socio-economic development [15]. Another important consequence caused by the conflict and separation from Serbia is underdeveloped infrastructure and the transport problem between two territories. It is worth mentioning that infrastructure networks suffered from a decade of without maintenance, with 40% out of almost 1,700 km of road found to be in "poor condition". Railway lines and many bridges are in a disrepair as the state budget is not able to afford the necessary reconstruction and repair work.

There is also political gridlock between Kosovo and Serbia, which affects the daily life of citizens. Freedom of movement between these countries has been limited since the war, as well as after Kosovo's independence. It is thought that this freedom is particularly restricted at the Kosovo-Serbia border because Kosovo's travel documents are not recognized by Serbian services [16]. One can distinguish two approaches to this problem, along with two different perspectives. On the one side, citizens of Kosovo are not able to travel to Serbia, which means they are concerned not only about the obstacles to the free movement of people, but also the free movement of goods, the difficulty in accessing their private property and the lack of convenient border crossings. Kosovars blame their authorities for failing to take into account their needs [16]. Serbs also consider themselves as victims. Most of all, their family relations have been hampered as Serbian authorities refuse to accept documents issued by authorities in Pristina.

Although Prishtina officials argue that Belgrade should be obliged to grant entry to vehicles from Kosovo with licence plates labelled with RKS (Republic of Kosovo), Serbian politician condemn the use of RKS licence plates, regarding them as illegal and against the "status-neutral" policy [17]. A makeshift solution of the problem is the possibility to drive in Serbia with temporary plates. Unfortunately, it is not the only dispute concerning the recognition of travel documents, as disagreement between vehicle insurance companies have occurred. Owners of vehicles registered in Kosovo were obliged to pay around 120 euros to enter Serbia and a daily fee of five euros for a 15-day stay. The aforementioned fees included the use of temporary licence plates for Kosovo drivers [17]. Drivers of cars registered in Serbia were compelled to pay about 20 euros to be able to drive in Kosovo for a week [18]. Moreover, mutual non-recognition of vehicle insurance has been a key obstacle to cost-efficient travel between the two countries.

Another hotspot in the cross-border relations between Kosovo and Serbia is the Mitrovica Bridge, which divides the city into a Serbian part and an Albanian part. Members of both national groups do not go beyond their part of the city, nor exceed the frontier, which has

been informally established on the bridge [19]. The main formal obstacle concerning the Mitrovica Bridge is the status of former Yugoslav licence plates, given that they carry Kosovo City's initials "KM" (Kosovo Mitrovica); not surprisingly, the Serbian authorities do not recognize these plates.

After Kosovo declared independence in February 2008, it started issuing passport and identification documents for the citizens of the Republic of Kosovo. Continuing the Serbian policy of treating Kosovo as a part of its own territory, the Serbian Government has not stopped issuing documents to residents in Kosovo. These documents are available for Kosovo inhabitants as proof of Serbian citizenship [20].

Another noteworthy issue is free movement in the case of air travel, which also seems to be left up to chance. Formal requirements for travel documents recognized at airports remain similar to those for road traffic. Travellers with documents issued by the Government of Kosovo ought to show their ID card and passport during check-in at the airport[4]. Likewise, travellers with document issued by the Government of Serbia are obliged to have their ID card and passport [20]. Despite this, a study conducted by the Big Deal Agency shows that the system is not foolproof. Kosovo respondents reported that "they have been able to depart from and land in Belgrade airport, though the process takes approximately an extra half an hour because of paperwork" [21]. Moreover, uncomfortable situations occur from time to time when Kosovo citizens are not allowed to board a plane to Belgrade. It seems that airlines operating flights between the two countries are not informed about the latest agreements [22].

4. CONCLUSION – PERSPECTIVES ON THE NORMALIZATION OF THE BELGRADE-PRISHTINA RELATIONSHIP

Normalization of the relations between Kosovo and Serbia became possible thanks to EU commitment. One should know that Serbia already has candidate status to join the EU, while Kosovo is seeking closer integration with Brussels. The EU-facilitated dialogue began in March 2011 [20]. Within five years, under the auspices of the EU institutions, parties were able to negotiate a number of agreements that led to political and technical cooperation [23].

On 2 July 2011, Kosovo and Serbia agreed upon rules and standards concerning the ability to travel. The Freedom of Movement Agreement [24] regulates issues relating to personal documents, license plates and car insurance. Pursuant to the terms of the agreement, residents of each country are able to travel freely within the other's territory. The requirement to purchase boundary insurance should only be seen as an interim solution. Furthermore, parties agreed that all car owners residing in Kosovo could use either RKS or KS vehicle license plates, provided that the issue of KS plates would be reviewed by the parties in the near future.

On 22 June 2013, the authorized entities responsible for the vehicle insurance of each party, that is, the Association of Serbian Insurers and the Kosovo Insurance Bureau, signed the Agreement on Insurance [25]. The document states that "users of motor vehicles registered in one Party who are in possession of a valid insurance for the territory of the other Party may freely travel in that jurisdiction... In case the users do not present a valid insurance, they will be obliged to contract mandatory border insurance" [25]. Although the discussed agreements were warmly welcomed by the EU, the dialogue needs to expand upon the issues of railway transport and air traffic (while Serbia and Kosovo have agreed to establish flights

[4] Until 2010 other travel documents were in circulation: UN Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) documents, Serbian biometric passports and Kosovo biometric passports, as well as older version of these documents.

between their capital cities, due to political difficulties, the plan will be launched in 2017 at the earliest).

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Received 03.11.2016; accepted in revised form 29.12.2016