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SECURITY ASPECTS OF DEMOGRAPHIC TRANSITION: THE CASE OF AP KOSOVO AND METOHIJA

(Translation in *Extenso*)

Abstract

The paper analyzes the process of demographic transition in the Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija, with a special focus on the security and military aspects of the attempt to albanization this part of the Republic of Serbia, which has been actively implemented since the end of the NATO aggression in 1999. Special attention is paid to identifying the role of demographic factors in the escalation of ethnic conflicts, the articulation of separatist aspirations, and the generation of asymmetric security threats, including armed rebellions, institutional violence, and terrorist activities. The paper's theoretical framework assumes that demographic structure, its spatial distribution, and dynamics are long-term security variables of strategic importance, especially in politically unstable and ethnically heterogeneous regions. The paper's methodological approach relies on the application of several complementary scientific methods. The content analysis method was applied in the processing of relevant strategic documents, normative and legal acts, reports of international organizations, and selected scientific literature in the field of security sciences. The

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historical-comparative method was used to examine the continuity and discontinuity of demographic processes over a defined period. The statistical method enabled analysis of available demographic and migration indicators, while the night lights method was applied as a relevant indicator of the spatial concentration of population, economic activity, and infrastructure development in this part of the Republic of Serbia. The research results indicate that the process of demographic transition, in synergy with intensive mechanical population movements, primarily migration, has a decisive influence on the transformation of the ethnic structure of Kosovo and Metohija. Although there is a general trend of demographic decline, the analysis shows that the relative decrease in the number of Kosovo Albanians is increasingly pronounced compared to the Serbian population, further indicating complex, multidimensional, and long-term, unstable demographic dynamics. The research results confirm the importance of demographic processes as a strategic security factor and indicate the necessity of their systematic inclusion in assessments of national and regional security, as well as in the formulation of state strategies.

Keywords: Albanization, demographic transition, ethnic structure, national and regional security.

INTRODUCTION

Periodic trends of growth and decline in birth and death rates result from societal development and the adoption of new patterns of behavior. In the social sciences, the phenomenon of demographic transition is often studied to gain precise insights into the phases of population growth that occur in tandem with a country or region's economic state. Empirically, demographic transition is characteristic of all parts of the world, with a unique common pattern that actually describes a decline in mortality and the beginning of a population boom, followed by a decline in fertility, which causes a decline in the population growth rate (United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division [UNDESA] 2022). On the other hand, the experiences of developed nations differ significantly from those of underdeveloped and underdeveloped countries in terms of

time frame, economy, and security (Sarkar 2025; Rai and Garg 2024; Botev 2024; Srdelić and Dávila-Fernández 2025; Imideeva et al. 2022). Sarah Haddock and other in in a scientific article titled “Population Growth” published in the International Encyclopedia of Public Health, note that during the last three decades of the 20th century, the demographic transition was correlated with a continuous decline in the vulnerability of countries to civil conflict, including ethnic wars, insurgencies, and terrorism (Haddock, Leahy, and Engelman 2008). Progress through the demographic transition gives countries a more mature and less volatile age structure, slower labor force growth, and a slower-growing school-age population. Countries in the early and middle stages of demographic transition were cumulatively significantly more vulnerable to civil conflict than countries in the late transition. The probability of civil conflict has steadily declined for high-risk countries as they have experienced general declines in fertility and mortality (Haddock, Leahy, and Engelman 2008). From the 1970s to the 1990s, a decline in a country’s annual fertility rate of ten births per 1,000 people corresponds to a reduction of approximately 10% in the probability of civil conflict (Haddock, Leahy, and Engelman 2008). The demographic factors most closely associated with the likelihood of new civil conflict outbreaks during the 1990s were a high proportion of young adults aged 15–29 and rapid urban population growth. Combined with a large youth population, very low arable land availability and/or renewable fresh water, and rapid urban population growth rates, countries had approximately a 40% probability of experiencing civil conflict in the 1990s. Finally, the authors conclude that migration and different population growth rates among ethnic groups competing for political and economic power also played an important role in political destabilization.

The intended goal of this paper is to provide a systematic description of the demographic transition in the territory of Kosovo and Metohija, with a special focus on security and military aspects. For the purposes of the paper, several data collection techniques will be applied that should complement each other in achieving the intended goal. Namely, in the first phase, scientific papers from various fields (demography, political science, geopolitics, military science) were identified and grouped by research subject, including temporal and

spatial coverage, after which the content analysis technique was applied. Additionally, the technique of secondary data analysis of a certain number of databases generated by the World Bank, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat was used. The paper uses the night lights method, i.e., the analysis of satellite data from the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, to show the level of illumination in the area of Kosovo and Metohija.

APPLICATION OF NIGHTLIGHT METHODS IN SOCIAL SCIENCES

The night lights method has been widely applied since the 1980s to assess population density in a defined geopolitical area. A systematic review of the social science literature shows that researchers primarily focus on a few key topics, such as economic activity, demographic transitions, and rapid urbanization.

The relationship between economic activity and light emission is the subject of numerous scientific studies, whose results confirm the assumption that changes in light levels are directly influenced by economic development (Chen et al. 2024). For example, one of the first works in this field, entitled *The relationship between satellite-observed visible-near infrared emissions, population, economic activity and electricity consumption*, describes the strength of the connection between night-light emission and economic activity, i.e. of gross national income (GNI) over a year in the United States, South America, Madagascar, and island states of the Caribbean and Indian Ocean (Elvidge et al. 1997). Applying linear regression for the period 1994–1995, the authors conclude that GNI shows a strong linear relationship with the illuminated area ($P=0.97$) across all analyzed studies. Significantly more precise results of the application of the night lights method in the context of economic development were presented by Chen and Nordhaus through several time series. The goal of their work is to identify the light intensity that can contribute to estimating a nation-state's real GNI (Chen and Nordhaus 2011). The authors calculated light-intensity weights to reduce the mean-squared error of the difference between actual and estimated GNI values for all

countries worldwide for the period 1992–2008 (Chen and Nordhaus 2011). They found that light intensity has significant potential to add value to GNI estimates in data-poor countries, at both the national and sub-national levels. In data-rich countries, light intensity data add less value because their measurement error is generally larger than that of available economic data (Chen and Nordhaus 2011). Thus, the literature clearly shows that it is possible to identify a strong relationship between nighttime light (NTL) emissions and economic activities, as measured by surface area and illuminance, which can further help estimate real GNI. As noted, linear regression is most often used as an additional technique for establishing and analyzing relationships within this topic.

Unlike monitoring conditions related to economic activity, the illuminated area is a significant indicator of changes in empirical work on the population. Namely, the night lights method is often used in research related to monitoring demographic flows, i.e., population density and geographic distribution at the local, national, and global levels. Christopher Doll, in his paper “DMSP-OLS Population Detection Profiles for Nighttime Images by Regions of the World”, examines the probability that a pixel will appear illuminated at a given population density in order to describe the detection of light that varies with population density (Doll 2010). The author tested two population datasets against a steady-state light dataset for 2000 and 2008 for developed and developing regions. The results of the study show that developed regions have fewer unlit cells at all population densities and that they increase illuminance rapidly with relatively small increases in population density, while less developed regions show a more gradual increase. Finally, he found that globally, at 2,000 people/km², about 15 percent of the population is undetectable by light emissions (Doll 2010). In addition, Francesca Pozzi and others are developing a population distribution dataset to improve the Gridded Population of the World (GPW) database as part of the Center for International Earth Science Information Network (CIESIN) (Pozzi, Small, and Yetman 2003). They first examined the relationship between population and percentage light frequency in the northeastern United States, France, Spain, and Portugal. They then developed a transfer function to map light frequency to population density and an algorithm to move population from areas with population density below a threshold to illuminated

areas. They found that in countries with large populations and poor spatial detail, their model improved on the Gridded Population of the World dataset (Pozzi, Small, and Yetman 2003).

It should be noted that, in a number of studies, results show a strong relationship between nighttime light and population density. However, studies on economic activity and demographic transition have mostly focused on one-year analyses, which limit further projections. In demographic studies, the authors focus more on the relationship with the illuminated area than with illumination intensity, using linear regression as a complementary research method.

The latest application of the nighttime light method appears in works in the field of urbanization, i.e., monitoring the extent of urban areas as an indicator of the socio-economic state of countries or regions. In many parts of the planet, characteristic features of human activity, such as construction and other infrastructure, can be associated with nighttime light emissions. According to some authors, the aforementioned light enables mapping the extent of urban areas, studying emission patterns, identifying light corridors, measuring the coverage of illuminated streets, monitoring the energy transition of lighting types, and estimating the logistical aspects of population access to electricity (Abascal et al. 2023). However, one of the shortcomings of this methodological approach is that a significant number of underdeveloped and low and middle-income countries (Low and Middle-Income Countries – LMIC) lack adequate electricity coverage within their territories. For example, according to the World Bank, more than 50% of Sub-Saharan Africa's population (about 600 million people) lacks access to electricity (World Bank 2019). From a security perspective, the poor electrification of the country can cause a number of other problems, as the population decides to use alternative solutions such as paraffin lamps (frequent fires), then coal burning, which increases the emission of pollutants, high crime rates, low safety culture, and inadequate education, etc. Despite the aforementioned shortcomings, satellite images (photographs) created using highly sophisticated computer programs are often used to determine the extent of urban areas (Zhou et al. 2015).

DEMOGRAPHIC TRANSITION IN KOSOVO AND METOHIA SINCE 2008

The illegal, unilateral declaration of independence of Kosovo and Metohija in 2008 by the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government can be interpreted as a precedent in international politics that, to this day, continues to spark controversy regarding the manner in which the principle of sovereignty is realized at the global level. Namely, the temporary suspension of the Republic of Serbia's jurisdiction in this part of the territory and the establishment of an international protectorate cumulatively contribute to the emergence of a political vacuum that Albanian secessionists are gradually filling through their manipulative activities (Tomić 2020; Gaćinović 2017; Milosavljević 2023). The main goal of the representatives of the Provisional Institutions of Priština is to completely eliminate the presence and then the participation of the local Serbian population in all aspects of social life. In this regard, the population censuses in Kosovo and Metohija conducted in 2011 and 2024 are just one indicator of the institutional pressure on Albanians, given how they were organized and conducted in the northern part of this southern Serbian province. International organizations, primarily UNMIK (United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo), KFOR (Kosovo Force), and EULEX (European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo), with their active actions, further facilitate the creation of a completely ethnically pure region by Albanian secessionists by creating an unfavorable environment for the normal life of the remaining Serbian population.

The first population census conducted in Kosovo and Metohija in 2011 was very different from all previous ones in which Albanians did not participate, thus expressing a boycott of the Serbian state and its institutions. Namely, the population census in Kosovo and Metohija was conducted from 1 to 15 April 2011 in 34 municipalities, excluding the northern parts of Kosovska Mitrovica, Zvečan, and Zubin Potok, where the majority of residents are of Serbian nationality. The results of the census of the provisional Kosovo institutions show that at that time, 1,733,872 residents were registered, of whom 198,214 lived in Priština (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe [OSCE] 2014). Of this number, 1,6 million people declared themselves Albanians,

followed by 27,533 Bosniaks, 18,738 Turks, 15,436 Ashkali, 11,524 Egyptians, 10,265 Gorani, 8,824 Roma, and 5,104 undeclared (OSCE 2014). The average age is estimated at 29.97 years, making the Kosovo Albanian population one of the youngest in Europe (OSCE 2014).

However, the report of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe Mission “Assessment of Local-Level Mechanisms for the Protection and Promotion of the Rights and Interests of Communities in Kosovo”, published in 2014, notes a number of shortcomings (and recommendations for overcoming them) in the local administration that affected the reliability of the data (OSCE 2014). One of the key shortcomings concerns the insufficient participation of Serbs in local government mechanisms. It should be noted that the UNMIK did not participate in the population registration process, in contradiction of Security Council Resolution 1244, which guarantees certain rights of the Republic of Serbia and its citizens. The majority of Serbs and other communities were not informed about the census, as evidenced by the fact that in the village of Žitkovac, not far from Priština, there were no residents, while the real situation is completely different, given the active presence of several dozen Serb families. The next problem identified by OSCE representatives is the shortage of enumerators and the lack of adequate census forms in the languages of minority communities (e.g., Roma, Ashkali).

The next census was conducted in 2024, with Serbs, as before, boycotting the entire process precisely because of their distrust in the work of the provisional Kosovo institutions. According to the census results, 1,586,659 people live in Kosovo and Metohija, of which 93.49 percent belong to the Islamic religion, 2.31 percent to the Orthodox Church, 1.75 percent to the Catholic Church, while 1.5 percent did not declare their religious affiliation, 0.5 percent did not belong to any religion, and 0.45 percent opted for other religions (Agjencia e Statistikave të Kosovës 2024). It is interesting that, as an addition to the survey questionnaire, a statement on war damage was also included, stating that 11,417 people were killed during the war, 1,047 of them are listed as missing, 6,682 were wounded, and 3,312 were imprisoned (Agjencia e Statistikave të Kosovës 2024). In contrast to the 2011 census, the average age of the population has increased to 34.84 years, or 35.66 for women and 34.03 for men (Agjencia e Statistikave të

Kosovës 2024). In addition, the population growth rate in rural areas decreased from 62 percent in 2011 to 49.8 percent in 2024 (Agjencia e Statistikave të Kosovës 2024). Looking at the development category, the urban population accounts for 50.2 percent, compared to the rural population at 49.8 percent, suggesting increased migration to urban areas (Agjencia e Statistikave të Kosovës 2024). The number of family households increased by 69,505 or 23.4 percent, while the number of apartment buildings and houses increased by 21.5 percent (Agjencia e Statistikave të Kosovës 2024). In 11 municipalities, the number of Albanians increased by 66,897, while in 27 municipalities it decreased by 228,803 (Zdravković 2024). A larger number of residents compared to 2011 was registered in Pristina (+28,446), Kosovo Polje (+28,126) and Gračanica (+6,149), while the number of residents decreased by more than 10,000 in as many as 12 Kosovo-Metohija municipalities, namely in Prizren (-31,234), Podujevo (-17,452), Đakovica (-15,576), Orahovac (-14,675), Suva Reka (-13,888), Peja (-12,496), Dečani (-12,136), Vitina (-11,346), Mališevo (-10,684), Glogovac (-10,409) and Srbica (-10,296) (Zdravković 2024). An interesting piece of information is the result of the 1981 census, which registered 1,585,566 inhabitants, an increase of 228,227 Albanians (Table 1). Generally speaking, in 2024, a drop in the birth rate was recorded: 140,000 fewer Albanians were registered than in 2011, continuing the depopulation trend that has been present since 2000 (Đorđević 2014).

Table 1. Census results by age groups according to the results of the 1981 and 2024

Age	1981	2024	Difference
0–4	235,912	107,710	-128,202
5–9	221,376	117,272	-104,104
10–14	198,699	123,022	-75,677
15–19	172,284	122,613	-49,671
20–24	140,052	134,270	-5,782
25–29	111,499	113,474	1,975
30–34	92,034	109,335	17,301
35–39	76,214	103,883	27,669
40–44	73,758	103,224	29,466
45–49	64,328	105,345	41,017
50–54	55,533	100,167	44,634
55–59	35,975	91,084	55,109
60–64	29,302	80,292	50,990
65+	68,701	173,875	105,174
Unknown	8,773		
Total	1,584,440	1,585,566	1,126

Source: Zdravković 2024.

Data on the age structure of the population of Kosovo and Metohija from 1981 and 2024 show long-term demographic trends, with the caveat that 1981 reflects the period of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY), with a different political and administrative structure, while 2024 covers the current demographic and political circumstances. The number of young people (0–14 years) has decreased significantly, indicating a decrease in the birth rate and a phase of “delayed demographic transition”, while the age groups above 35 have increased dramatically, with the largest growth in the 65+ group, which confirms the process of population aging (Zdravković 2024). These data show that demographic trends are not uniform and that the age structure and migration flows must be taken into account when assessing demographic and security risks.

It is interesting that, according to some estimates, unlike the number of Kosovo Albanians, the number of Serbs in Kosovo and Metohija is increasing slightly, especially among younger residents.¹ The Provisional Institution of Self-Government, the Agency for Statistics, published data on December 19, 2024 that around 20,000 Serbs live in the territory of four municipalities in the north of Kosovo and Metohija, while the other six municipalities south of the Ibar River have 27,000 residents of Serbian nationality. The number of registered Serbs increased by 11,120, or 43.6%, with Štrpce recording the largest individual increase of 4,932 residents, followed by Leposavić (+2,677), Parteš (+1,436), Gračanica (+1,351), and Obilić (+1,324), and the largest decrease was in Ranilug (-1,343) and Novo Brdo (-2,516) (Zdravković 2024; Kosovo Agency of Statistics [ASK] 2024). For comparison, reports by the OSCE and the European Centre for Minority Issues in Kosovo and Metohija recorded a number of 146,128 Serbs in 2013, with that number having decreased drastically by 2017 to around 95,000, according to the highest state officials of the Republic of Serbia (European Centre for Minority Issues [ECMI] 2013; Predsednik Republike Srbije 2019).

Milosavljević and his associates in the work *Changes in the ethnic structure of the population of settlements in the Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija 1948–2022*, explain that numerous demographic indicators indicate that the Albanian community

¹ An additional argument for a slight increase in the number of Serbs in Kosovo and Metohija in recent years can be supported by data on migration movements and local return initiatives. In addition to the northern municipalities and central Serbian enclaves where population growth has been recorded, reports from local municipalities indicate that part of the return is related to economic and infrastructure projects, as well as support from the Serbian state for the preservation and improvement of Serbian communities in Kosovo and Metohija (Zdravković 2024). For example, the increase in the number of young families in Štrpce, Leposavić and Parteš, as well as new housing and economic projects, contribute to the stabilization and slight expansion of the Serbian population in these localities. These trends show that, although in the long term, the Serbian population in Kosovo and Metohija decreased from 2013 to 2017, there are segments where relative growth has been recorded in recent years, especially in young age categories, which is important for assessing the demographic and security potential for the survival of Serbian communities.

currently dominates the territory of Kosovo and Metohija, which is a direct consequence of NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) aggression, violent expulsions, murders, threats and pressures of various kinds to which Serbs and other non-Albanians are exposed (Milosavljević, Medojević, i Valjarević 2023, 238). 23,000 Serbs, 6,000 Roma, 1,000 Muslims, and 1,000 Turks fled the city of Priština alone (Milosavljević, Medojević, and Valjarević 2023, 238). The large urban centers of Kosovo and Metohija, such as Priština, Prizren, Peć, Djakovica, Uroševac, Gnjilane, Podujevo, Vučitrn, and Southern Mitrovica, are inhabited exclusively by Albanians. The Serbian and other non-Albanian populations have remained in rural areas, where they still constitute the majority, and for which the term “enclaves” has become established (Milosavljević and Medojević 2020).

It should be noted that the changes in the ethnic structure of the population of Kosovo and Metohija cannot be viewed solely as a consequence of the events after 1999, but rather represent a long-term process with deeper historical roots. During the second half of the 20th century, the province underwent a gradual demographic transformation, reflected in the growth of the Albanian population and the simultaneous decrease in the share of the Serbian population. These processes were conditioned by a combination of factors, including different rates of natural increase, migration movements, and specific political and institutional circumstances within the then SFRY (Vukadinović 2022). Periodic political crises and ethnic tensions in the province also significantly affected demographic trends. Demonstrations by Albanian students in 1968, accompanied by demands for greater autonomy for the province, intensified the exodus of the Serbian population from certain urban and rural areas (Vukadinović 2022). A similar trend continued after the 1981 crisis, when mass protests and rising political tensions led to a further deterioration of interethnic relations and increased migration movements (Todorović Lazić 2024). At the same time, after the adoption of the 1974 Constitution of the SFRY, which granted Kosovo and Metohija a high degree of political autonomy, demographic processes continued, leading to a gradual decrease in the share of the Serbian population in the province's total population (Ristanović 2019). The synergistic effect of the aforementioned political, economic, and security factors led to the ongoing emigration of Serbs, resulting in

significant changes in the ethnic composition of the population of Kosovo and Metohija.

According to the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the largest wave of international migration occurred in 2012, when more than 50,000 people left the Kosovo and Metohija region in just two months (United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division [UNDESA] 2024). One of the highest rates of population migration in Europe is also indicated by periodic reports of the World Bank, which state, among other things, that 245,000 people emigrated in the period 2012–2020 (World Bank 2024). The most common final destinations are Germany (37%), Switzerland (23%), Italy (8%), Sweden (6%), and Slovenia (5%), while the reasons for migration are economic (low living standards) and security (armed conflicts) (World Bank 2024). Moreover, the inflow of funds from the diaspora, amounting to over 600 million euros annually, testifies to the significant number of migrants from Kosovo and Metohija (according to some estimates, around 700,000 people).

In the context of the application of night-light methods, it is worth noting that, according to data from the International Energy Agency (IEA), electricity consumption per capita during the observed period amounted to 3 MWh/capita (International Energy Agency [IEA] 2025). At the same time, total consumption by sector was highest in households, with a share of more than 50%, or 2,296 TJ (IEA 2025).

On the other hand, data from the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (National Aeronautics and Space Administration [NASA] 2025) 2025 from February 2025 show significantly higher night-time light emissions, which can be interpreted as one of the indicators of accelerated economic activities. Namely, according to data from the International Atomic Energy Agency, per capita electricity consumption in 2022 was 3,789 MWh/capita, which is 143% more than in 2000 (IEA 2025). In addition, citizens are identified as the largest consumers of electricity, accounting for 59% of total consumption in Kosovo and Metohija (IEA 2025). Moreover, publicly available satellite images² show that the road infrastructure connecting larger urban areas has been further built and well-lit. However, if we compare the level of

² For example using VIIRS/NPP.

development (based on night light emissions) of municipalities with a majority Serbian population with the scope and intensity of progress of other Albanian local governments, it can be concluded that the northern part of the Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija is largely lagging behind.

The estimation of the total population of Kosovo and Metohija based on official census data is limited by a number of different factors related to natural growth, population response, diaspora participation, boycotts, undefined administrative regulations at the local level (e.g. municipal borders), immigration and migration of the population, and inadequate participation of international organizations (OSCE, EULEX and UNMIK) that should ensure the legitimacy of the entire process and ultimately the validity of the results. Moreover, the 2025 elections revealed irregularities in the number of citizens with active voting rights. According to data from the interim institution of the Central Election Commission, 1,970,944 citizens have the right to vote, of whom 104,924 are registered to vote outside the territory of Kosovo and Metohija (Komisioni Qendror i Zgjedhjeve [KQZ] 2025). An analysis of these results leads to the conclusion that there are about half a million more voters than officially registered residents of Kosovo and Metohija, which opens the door to further political malpractice.

FORMATION OF PARASECURITY AND PARAMILITARY FORMATIONS IN KOSOVO AND METOHIJA – DEMOGRAPHIC CAPACITY

The security situation in Kosovo and Metohija has been burdened by a number of problems at both the internal and external levels for a long time. Since the illegal declaration of independence of Kosovo in February 2008, representatives of Kosovo Albanians, with the help and support of a part of the international community, have been actively implementing a policy of the so-called sovereignization of this part of the Republic of Serbia (Bjelajac 2019). Namely, contrary to UN Security Council Resolution 1244, which, among other things, regulates the presence of NATO armed forces, and as the only military and security formation (KFOR), representatives of the provisional institutions of self-government have established the so-called Kosovo

Security Forces and the so-called Kosovo Police. In this way, the continuity of the presence of the terrorist organization UCK (*Ushtria Çlirimtare e Kosovës – UÇK*) is established, especially if we consider the fact of the reintegration of its leading members accused (but not prosecuted) of the most serious crimes against Serbs and other minority communities.

The United States, as the main promoter of Kosovo's "independence", established the Defense Institute Reform Initiative with the task of gradually transforming the "Kosovo Security Forces" into the "Kosovo Armed Forces". Moreover, since 2010, NATO has been gradually reducing the number of members through the implementation of a new concept of "deterrence presence", which is based on the engagement of smaller dispersive local teams (liaison monitoring teams) to monitor the social, political, and economic situation in the municipalities for which they are responsible. However, one of the obstacles to the transformation of the aforementioned paramilitary organizations is the normative legal documents adopted by the representatives of the Kosovo Albanians after 2008, which limit membership to 2,500 people tasked with carrying out "activities of providing support to civil authorities in emergency situations". The aforementioned members do not possess heavy weapons, artillery, tanks, and helicopters, which is the main complaint of the leading extreme secessionist Albanian political parties. Overcoming such legal restrictions is possible through political consensus within the provincial parliament, which would also include representatives of the Serbs. On the other hand, it can be stated that this strategy is simply impossible, bearing in mind that paramilitary and parasecurity organizations in Kosovo are used exclusively for the expulsion of the remaining Serbian population. Therefore, the primary mission of KFOR, according to international law and United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244, is the demilitarization of the UCK terrorist organization without the possibility of transferring its security powers to other illegal formations such as the "Kosovo Security Force".

An attempt to control the security situation and calm tensions surrounding the transformation of the "Kosovo Security Forces" into the "Kosovo Armed Forces" was achieved in 2016 by forming a NATO Liaison and Advisory Team (NLAT) with the task of respecting

the entrusted status of the KFOR mission (North Atlantic Treaty Organization [NATO] 2026). Although some NATO members advocate compliance with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244, the United States provides the greatest support for the transformation of the “Kosovo Security Forces” through various cooperation mechanisms, such as the Office of Defense Cooperation (ODC) and specialist training at Bondsteel. In addition, in 2021, the US donated 55 M1117 armored fighting vehicles with 40mm rocket launchers, 12.7mm machine guns, 246 Javelin anti-tank missiles, and 150 Hammer vehicles to the representatives of the Provisional Institutions of Kosovo (Defense Security Cooperation Agency 2024). Increasingly frequent exercises by the American contingent of KFOR and by the armies of other countries that have recognized the so-called independence of Kosovo and Metohija (Turkey, Great Britain, Albania) are taking place in Pomazatin, near Kosovo Polje, where the Search and Rescue Center is located. According to publicly available data, more than 3,000 people, mostly from other countries, have completed the training so far.

According to official NATO figures, the number of KFOR troops was gradually reduced from around 50,000 in 1999 to around 39,000 by 2002, and then further reduced in the following years as the security situation improved and local security forces developed (NATO 2026). However, numerous incidents involving members of para-security forces, such as the so-called Regional Operational Support Unit (ROSU), clearly indicate that the process of ethnic cleansing of Serbs from the area of Kosovo and Metohija is still being carried out despite the presence of international armed forces.³ On the other hand, an increase in the number of members of the “Kosovo Security Forces” from the original 2,500 people, including 800 reservists, as envisaged in the Ahtisaari plan, to as many as 5,000 if the transformation into the so-called “Kosovo Army” is implemented (Radio Televizija Srbije [RTS] 2018). Namely, in 2018, representatives of the provisional Kosovo institutions adopted three “laws” enabling the aforementioned transformation of the “Kosovo Security Forces” and changing their

³ According to data from the Office for Kosovo and Metohija of the Government of the Republic of Serbia, 128 ethnically motivated incidents were recorded in Kosovo and Metohija in the period 2021–2025 (KiM n.d.).

purpose, further complicating the already deteriorated security situation. In addition, the introduction of mandatory military service for all residents of Kosovo and Metohija who have reached the age of 18 has been announced. Therefore, in this way, UN Security Council Resolution 1244 is directly violated and calls into question the security of the Republic of Serbia and the entire surrounding area (Kancelarija za Kosovo i Metohiju, Vlada Republike Srbije [KiM] n.d.).

According to some estimates from 2018, the “Kosovo Security Forces” has 103 members of Serbian nationality, with their number constantly decreasing. After the call of Serbian political officials “that joining illegal foreign armed formations is illegal and punishable by up to ten years in prison”, a large number of Serbs left the “Kosovo Security Forces”, while a smaller number (45) of them are still engaged (Cvetković 2020). A similar situation occurred in November 2022, when more than 550 members from municipalities with a majority Serb population in Kosovo and Metohija left the so-called “Kosovo Police”. Accordingly, the reduced demographic capacity recorded in the territory of Kosovo and Metohija in recent years is reflected in the staffing of the aforementioned para-security and paramilitary formations. It is for this reason that representatives of the provisional institutions of self-government based in Priština are trying to attract, i.e., recruit, the younger population through various manipulative activities (increasing salaries, reducing workload, granting broader powers, rapid advancement, etc.). However, as the results of the 2024 census showed, the age group from 19 to 29 has decreased by as much as 55,000 people compared to 1981, with the current economic, political, and security (in)conditions further accelerating the migration of the remaining younger part of the population. For example, during 2021, over 50 members left the “Kosovo Security Forces”, mostly those who had undergone various types of special training in many NATO member states such as Croatia, Turkey, and the USA. Therefore, the presence of KFOR as the only legitimate military organization in Kosovo and Metohija should enable the achievement of a stable security situation through respect for the basic human rights of all ethnic groups in Kosovo and Metohija; a security vacuum may be created that is filled by the aforementioned paramilitary and paramilitary organizations, in violation of all applicable international agreements. In this way, the

national security of the Republic of Serbia and the further survival of Serbs in Kosovo and Metohija are directly called into question.

It is inevitable to note that the Republic of Serbia is taking certain but insufficient measures aimed at protecting the rights and survival of the Serbian population in Kosovo and Metohija. Diplomatic activities within international institutions point to violations of UN Security Council Resolution 1244 and to the illegal activities of the provisional Kosovo institutions. Serbia also supports local Serbian communities through infrastructure, educational, and religious projects, as well as coordination with international security forces (for example, cooperation with KFOR in the land security zone), with the aim of preventing incidents targeting remaining Serbs. Therefore, the preservation of vital national interests requires a multidimensional strategy that manifests itself through: strengthening diplomatic engagement, continuous support to local Serbian communities, cooperation with international security structures, and ensuring legal protection of Serbs. It is also important to encourage the younger population to stay or return to Kosovo through education, job opportunities, and the preservation of cultural and religious heritage. Only an integrated approach combining diplomacy, local support, and legal protection can ensure the long-term, sustainable survival of the Serbian population and, more broadly, the stability of the entire region.

CONCLUSION

Demographic transition brings with it a series of radical social changes in the development of modern society, especially in terms of economy and security. The paper describes the connection between demographic transition and the security or military capacity of the population in the territory of Kosovo and Metohija. Namely, the results of the population censuses from 2011 and 2024, which were organized and conducted by the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government with headquarters in Priština, clearly show a trend of decreasing numbers of people in all age categories, unlike previous censuses when ethnic Albanians from the territory of Kosovo and Metohija were considered the fastest growing population in Europe. On the other hand, by applying the night light method to the analysis of satellite images of

this part of the Republic of Serbia, one can observe an increased degree of urbanization in larger cities, accompanied by economic activity related to infrastructure construction. However, the aforementioned footage clearly shows a pronounced economic development gap between municipalities with a majority Serb population, such as North Mitrovica, Zubin Potok, Leposavić, and Zvečan, which is linked to decades-long problems with the survival of Serbs in Kosovo and Metohija.

From a security perspective, the demographic transition of Kosovo Albanians at the beginning of the 21st century was used as the main instrument for carrying out separatist propaganda against the institutions of the Republic of Serbia. Since the demographic process of Albanization is in an increasing decline, representatives of the provisional institutions of self-government continue to form paramilitary formations, such as the so-called Kosovo Security Forces, which are to be further transformed into the so-called Kosovo Army, in violation of the applicable norms of international law (UN Security Council Resolution 1244). The problematic demographic capacity of the aforementioned illegal formations is compensated for by various economic mechanisms and logistical support from several NATO member states, the most notable of which is the USA. Despite significant assistance and support from parts of the international community, there is a constant outflow of members of para-security ("Kosovo Police") and paramilitary ("KSB") organizations, with their migration to European Union countries. Therefore, based on available data, a further trend of rapid decline in the birth rate of Kosovo Albanians and, conversely, a partial increase in the number of newborn Serbs can be predicted, which will affect the overall ethnic structure of the population in the territory of Kosovo and Metohija.

Based on the presented data, it can be concluded that the demographic transition numbers directly affect the security and demographic position of Serbs in Kosovo and Metohija. While the number of Albanians is decreasing, the number of Serbs is partially increasing, which in the long term may partially mitigate the security risks for the survival of Serbian communities. The stability of Serbian communities is still threatened by economic disproportion and migration, but this situation can be improved through continued support

for local Serbian institutions, investments in infrastructure, education, and economic activities, as well as through active protection of human and minority rights. These measures enable the preservation of the demographic potential of Serbs and the protection of the Republic of Serbia's vital national interests.

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БЕЗБЕДНОСНИ АСПЕКТИ ДЕМОГРАФСKE ТРАНЗИЦИЈЕ: СЛУЧАЈ АП КОСОВО И МЕТОХИЈА

Резиме

Рад пружа свеобухватну анализу демографске транзиције у Аутономној покрајини Косово и Метохија, са посебним фокусом на њене безбедносне, политичке и војне импликације у контексту текуће албанизације, која се активно спроводи од завршетка НАТО интервенције 1999. године. Примарни циљ студије је да систематски разграничи и делимично објасни међусобну везу између социо-структурне трансформације, демографске динамике и рањивости државе, посебно у сценаријима које карактеришу етничке тензије, сепаратистичка мобилизација и асиметричне претње. Ради постизања дефинисаног циља у истраживању је примењен мултидисциплинарни методолошки оквир који комбинује анализу садржаја, историјско-компаративне методе, статистичко-демографско моделирање и методу ноћних светала засновану на даљинском читавању, чиме се олакшава просторна и временска процена економске активности, урбанизације и разлика у регионалном развоју. Резултати истраживања наглашавају да демографска транзиција, заједно са миграционим обрасцима, прогресивно мења етнички састав територије: становништво косовских Албанаца доживљава континуирани пад, док српско становништво показује скроман, мада делимичан, пораст. Упркос овом демографском порасту међу Србима, стална економска неразвијеност, просторне неједнакости у инфраструктури и континуирана емиграција млађег становништва погоршавају рањивост српских заједница. Ова динамика директно утиче на друштвену отпорност, задржавање људског капитала и

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стратешки безбедносни положај српског становништва. У раду се даље тврди да стабилизација и дугорочна одрживост српских заједница захтевају спровођење интегративних политичких мера, укључујући јачање локалне самоуправе и институција заснованих на заједници, циљане програме социо-економског развоја, улагање у људски капитал кроз образовање и стручно оспособљавање и систематску заштиту мањинских и људских права у складу са међународним правним нормама. Истраживање закључује да су такве вишедимензионалне интервенције кључне не само за очување демографског потенцијала српског становништва, већ и за ублажавање безбедносних ризика, неговање друштвене кохезије и заштиту виталних националних интереса Републике Србије у сложенем постконфликтном окружењу.

Кључне речи: албанизација, демографска транзиција, етничка структура, национална и регионална безбедност.

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