

BOOK REVIEW

Pettifer, James. 2005. *Kosova Express: A Journey in Wartime*. London: C. Hurst & Co. Ltd. ISBN: 978-0299204440, 262 pp., US\$ 21.95

James Pettifer's book about the events in Kosovo during the 1990-2001 period is remarkable in its breadth and depth of observation. It combines political, diplomatic, military and anthropological insight while providing a good discussion of the Kosovo conflict in the context of the broader political situation in the Balkans.

Pettifer's narrative is colourful. It evokes geography, tradition, language, and portraits of political leaders and public personages from Balkan countries. Even informed observers of Balkan politics will learn a lot from its detailed descriptions of events and personalities. A strength of the book is Pettifer's ability to make sense of complex and interconnected crises in Bosnia, Macedonia or Kosovo. The narrative captures the interplay between realities on the ground and the perceptions of international media. In doing so, the author offers interesting insights into linkages between several European governments and the Milosevic regime during 1990s.

The book is written in a clear, journalistic style. It begins with a historical overview of Kosovo Albanians' struggles for political and human rights in the former Yugoslavia and their lack of support from the West. However, the emphasis is on the recent struggle for independence and the contrasting approaches to this movement by the pacific Kosovo Democratic League of Dr. Ibrahim Rugova and the guerrilla tactics of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA).

The author dedicates a chapter to discussing the criminal activities of Arkan, a Serbian gang leader politician in late 1990s. Further, the author describes different organisational patterns of the Serbian army and the

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KLA. The former is described as well-equipped and disciplined, the latter as a small guerrilla group initially made of 300 individuals supported by local rural populations.

In a following chapter the author discusses the positions of Western European governments. Emphasis is given to role played by the Western media in mobilizing public opinion in Western Europe. Also important is the role of the Kosovo Albanian Diaspora in providing financial support to the guerrillas and the underground Kosovar government. Finally, the 1997 political crisis in Albania increased the supply of light weapons to arms dealers and the KLA.

One of the last chapters compares the coercive diplomacy of Dayton to the friendly atmosphere of the Rambouillet talks in France, whose failure led to NATO military intervention. The failure of these talks raised the spectre of more ethnic slaughters in the Balkans and hundreds of thousands of refugees displaced by the Serbian army. Western European governments could not stand aside while ethnic cleansing occurred in the middle of Europe.

Western intervention revealed mixed motives on the part of Western interveners and the Albanian independence movement. NATO and the West intervened to prevent ethnic cleansing and genocide but they didn't necessary want an independent Kosovo, either. On the other hand, the Kosovo Liberation Army and much of the Kosovo Albanian population interpreted NATO interventions as legitimising their struggle for independence from Serbia.

Pettifer's book is a pleasant read that is rich in information about Kosovo and South Eastern Europe more generally. However, given the writer's apparent bias in favour of Kosovo Albanians, the book could have benefited by its consideration of the positions and roles played by more moderated Serbian political interests.

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