



INTERNATIONAL DIPLOMACY AT THE RAMBOUILLET CONFERENCE (6 February – 18 March 1999)

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Abstract:

The Rambouillet Conference, which took place from 6 February to 18 March 1999, was a pivotal moment in international diplomacy during the Kosovo crisis. Convened by the Contact Group, the conference aimed to negotiate a settlement between the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the Kosovo Albanian leadership amid escalating violence and mounting humanitarian concerns. The proposed agreement included provisions for substantial autonomy for Kosovo and the deployment of NATO forces to oversee its implementation. It was accepted by the Kosovo Albanian delegation, but rejected by the Yugoslav authorities. Led by Slobodan Milošević, Yugoslavia opposed the presence of foreign troops on its territory, viewing it as a violation of sovereignty. Ultimately, the failure of the negotiations resulted in NATO's military intervention on 24 March 1999, marking a pivotal moment in the Kosovo conflict.

Keywords: Kosovo conflict, Rambouillet Conference, international diplomacy, NATO intervention, Yugoslavia, humanitarian intervention, sovereignty, peace negotiations.

Titulo en Español: Diplomacia internacional en la Conferencia de Rambouillet (6 de febrero – 18 de marzo de 1999).

Resumen:

La Conferencia de Rambouillet (6 de febrero - 18 de marzo de 1999) fue un momento crucial en la diplomacia internacional durante la crisis de Kosovo. Convocada por el Grupo de Contacto, la conferencia tenía como objetivo negociar un acuerdo entre la República Federal de Yugoslavia y el liderazgo albanokosovar en un contexto de creciente violencia y preocupaciones humanitarias. El acuerdo propuesto, que incluía una amplia autonomía para Kosovo y el despliegue de fuerzas de la OTAN para supervisar su implementación, fue aceptado por la delegación albanokosovar pero rechazado por las autoridades yugoslavas. Yugoslavia, bajo el liderazgo de Slobodan Milošević, se opuso a la presencia de tropas extranjeras en su territorio, considerándola una violación de su soberanía. El fracaso de las negociaciones condujo a la intervención militar de la OTAN el 24 de marzo de 1999, marcando un punto de inflexión en el conflicto de Kosovo.

Palabras Clave: *Conflicto de Kosovo, Conferencia de Rambouillet, diplomacia internacional, intervención de la OTAN, Yugoslavia, intervención humanitaria, soberanía, negociaciones de paz.*

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DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.31439/UNISCI-242>



1. Introduction

The Rambouillet Conference of 1999 was a crucial and decisive event in the history of Kosovo, particularly in the context of the Kosovo War of 1998–1999. In the early 1990s, Kosovo experienced significant political and social instability, with escalating ethnic tensions between Albanians and Serbs. Against this complex backdrop, the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) initiated an armed campaign for independence, provoking a severe response from the Serbian government. This ultimately led to the outbreak of the war for liberation in Kosovo, which lasted until June 12, 1999.²

In this context, the Rambouillet Conference was organized with the hope of finding a sustainable and peaceful resolution to the conflict in Kosovo. The conference took place at Château de Rambouillet, near Paris.³ Led by NATO, the negotiations brought together representatives from various parties, including the Serbian government delegation, headed by Slobodan Milošević, and the Kosovo delegation, led by Ibrahim Rugova, along with representatives of the Kosovo Liberation Army (led by Hashim Thaçi), the Democratic League of Kosovo (represented by Rexhep Qosja), and independent figures such as Veton Surroi. The negotiations were chaired by NATO officials, including Robin Cook, Hubert Védrine, Madeleine Albright, and Joschka Fischer. Before the start of the Rambouillet negotiations, both delegations—the Kosova and the Yugoslav/Serbian representatives—were subjected to intense international diplomatic efforts, which frequently shifted in response to changing geopolitical circumstances.⁴ For instance, during the 1990s, the United Kingdom initially pursued a pro-Serbian policy, supporting Milošević's expansionist agenda and his military campaigns. However, with the victory of the Labour Party in 1997, Britain's stance on the Balkans shifted dramatically, opposing Milošević's policies and supporting Kosovo's right to freedom. A similar transformation occurred in France, which had previously backed Milošević but adopted a different position after 1997. The United States also initially favored maintaining Yugoslavia's territorial integrity. However, in light of Milošević's actions, particularly his war crimes in Bosnia and later in Kosovo, American policymakers revised their approach and pushed for a new order in the Balkans.

The Rambouillet Conference was preceded by significant developments in the war, including the emergence of the KLA as a liberation force—though Serbia and the United Nations Security Council labeled it as a “terrorist” organization. A decisive moment that accelerated the push for negotiations was the 15 January 1999, Račak Massacre, which was exposed to the world by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), particularly through the efforts of its head of mission, William Walker.⁵ This atrocity galvanized the international community into action, prompting the urgent convening of the conference. Delegations were invited to Rambouillet on January 29, 1999, with negotiations officially commencing on February 6 and continuing until 18 March 1999.⁶ A preliminary draft agreement was introduced on 23 February as a framework for finalizing negotiations, culminating in the 18 March agreement.

The primary objective of the conference was to secure a lasting agreement between the involved parties, defining Kosovo's political status and granting it autonomy under international oversight, primarily under NATO supervision. This effort led to the drafting of the “Rambouillet Agreement,” which proposed an autonomous regime for Kosovo under international governance. However, the Serbian delegation refused to sign the agreement,

² Zogaj, Agim (2023): *Kurthet e Serbisë*, Prishtinë: Faik Konica, p. 125.

³ Schmitt, Oliver Jens (2012): *Kosova histori e shkurtër e një treve qendrore ballkanike*, Prishtinë: Koha, p.260.

⁴ Zogaj, op. cit., p. 126.

⁵ Koci, Ibrahim (2002): *Gjenocidi Serb në Kosovë në prag të shekullit XXI*, Prishtinë: Koha, p. 95.

⁶ Zogaj, op. cit., p. 128.



leading to a diplomatic impasse. The Kosovar delegation, on the other hand, accepted and signed the agreement on 18 March 1999, with signatories including Ibrahim Rugova, Hashim Thaçi, Rexhep Qosja, and Veton Surroi.

Following the conclusion of the Rambouillet Conference and Serbia's refusal to sign the agreement, the situation in Kosovo deteriorated significantly, prompting an urgent international response. This ultimately led to NATO's military intervention on 24 March 1999—just six days after the conference ended—with the objective of halting violence in Kosovo and ensuring a sustainable resolution to the conflict.⁷ Western diplomacy played a pivotal role in the Rambouillet Conference, representing a critical international effort to resolve the Kosovo crisis through peaceful negotiations. The key Western powers—particularly the United States⁸, the European Union, and NATO—were central figures in mediating and attempting to impose a solution aimed at ending violence and establishing a stable framework for peace. Given that the Kosovo War was contributing to continued territorial instability in the Balkans, countries such as the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Italy, and Russia played primary roles in the diplomatic efforts. Through intensive negotiations and strong diplomatic and military pressure, these nations sought to broker an agreement acceptable to both Kosovo Albanians and the Serbian government.

Although Western diplomacy did not immediately secure a final agreement, it paved the way for NATO's military intervention and ultimately reshaped the geopolitical landscape of the Balkans. Western diplomats played a crucial role as mediators, exerting considerable pressure on both parties—particularly the Serbian delegation—to accept the 18 March agreement. The United States, through diplomat Richard Holbrooke and other key representatives, was deeply engaged in the negotiations. However, when all diplomatic efforts failed, the focus shifted to military diplomacy, culminating in NATO's intervention in Kosovo on 24 March 1999.⁹

In the international literature, scholars such as Marc Weller (1999) have provided a detailed account of the dynamics of the negotiations, underscoring both the tensions between the parties and the decisive role played by international actors. By contrast, diplomats directly involved in the process, such as Christopher R. Hill (2024), have offered personal recollections that illuminate the behind-the-scenes dimensions of the talks and the strategic dilemmas confronting the Western allies. Similarly, Ivo Daalder and Michael O'Hanlon (2000) have examined Rambouillet as a prelude to NATO's military intervention, situating it within the broader transformation of Euro-Atlantic security policy.

From a wider historical perspective, Tim Judah (2002) and Noel Malcolm (1998, 1999) have placed Rambouillet within the longer trajectory of the Kosovo conflict and Serbian policies in the region, highlighting why the agreement proved so difficult for Belgrade to accept. In the fields of international law and international relations, works such as the Independent International Commission on Kosovo (2000) have addressed questions of legitimacy surrounding the process and the implications of its failure for international law.

While this scholarship offers a solid foundation, my article seeks to contribute a new dimension by focusing on the narratives, support, and criticism of the agreement; the role of European diplomacy in relation to the United States; and the impact of Rambouillet on Albanian and Serbian public opinion. This perspective aims to advance our understanding of Rambouillet not only as a diplomatic episode, but also as a pivotal moment that reshaped the security

⁷ Schmitt, *op. cit.*, p. 262.

⁸ Zogaj, *op. cit.*, p. 126.

⁹ Shala – Peli, Teuta (2019): *Gjenocidi Serb në rajonin e Pejës*, Prishtinë: Instituti i Historisë “Ali Hadri”, p.26.



architecture of the Balkans and redefined Kosovo's relationship with the international community.

The article raises several hypotheses that guide the study, as is the case with the necessity of holding the Rambouillet Conference and the participation of multiple groups within the Albanian delegation at Rambouillet. This is mainly related to political differentiation, since the faction representing the LDK, led by Ibrahim Rugova, advocated a peaceful movement, while the faction representing the KLA (UÇK), led by its political director Hashim Thaçi, represented the armed movement. Additionally, the delegation included other figures, such as a group of academics led by Rexhep Qosja, as well as another group led by Veton Surroi. For internal mobilization, the Albanian side was also represented by the Student Union.

The second question concerns why the Kosovo delegation accepted the agreement and how it was received by the population. Despite the promise of peace, the majority of the population aligned with the idealistic vision of a liberated Kosovo united with Albania. Only a few embraced the idea of "Kosovarism" or a "Kosovar identity," a political notion emphasized since the 1974 constitution. Nevertheless, the ideal of the Albanian population in Kosovo led to resistance against the agreement, as it did not foresee the removal of Serbian nationalist influence in Kosovo.

The third question is why Milošević did not accept the agreement. Almost everyone in Kosovo agrees that Milošević was committed to the idea of full control over Kosovo and was not loyal to the Yugoslav idea. This view is also acknowledged by Serbs, who emphasize that Rambouillet was detrimental to them at a time when NATO troops would have had control over Kosovo. Accepting the agreement would have diminished Serbia's power and prestige. Moreover, it represented a struggle of American influence against Russia in the Balkans, a perspective embraced by the Serbian side.

2. Events of the 1990s from a Historical Perspective

Between 1989 and 1999, Kosovo underwent significant constitutional changes that escalated tensions in the region. The constitutional amendment of March 23, 1989, effectively reversed Kosovo's political status to its pre-1974 position, resulting in the revocation of its autonomy.¹⁰ This shift placed Kosovo directly under Serbian administration¹¹, effectively making it part of the Republic of Serbia. Consequently, unrest erupted in Kosovo, culminating in the proclamation of Kosovo as a Republic within the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) on July 2, 1990. As stated in Article 5 of the Constitutional Declaration, Kosovo was declared "*an independent and equal entity within the Federation (or Confederation) of Yugoslavia, holding equal status with other federal units.*"¹² This declaration was followed by the adoption of the Kaçanik Constitution on September 7, 1990.¹³

These actions were carried out clandestinely, yet at the time, Kosovo's political status remained largely unaddressed by the international community. This led Kosovo's political movements to initiate efforts toward international representation. As part of these efforts, parliamentary elections were held, and Kosovo's representation was largely assumed by the Democratic League of Kosovo (DLK), led by President Ibrahim Rugova. Under Rugova's

¹⁰ Krasniqi, Agon. "The Political Movement for the Republic of Kosovo—July 2, 1990." *Journal of Balkan Studies*, vol 5, n° 1 (January 2025), pp. 151.

¹¹ Xheçovi, Shtjefan (ed.) (2008): *Historia e Popullit Shqiptar vëllimi IV*, Tiranë, Botime Toena, p. 371.

¹² The State Agency of Archives of Kosovo (hereinafter: SAAK): Fondi Koleksion Deklarata Kushtetuese e KAK 1990, Kutia 1, fl. 1. Proccverbal i mbledhjes së VIII të përbashkët të të gjitha dhomave të Kuvendit të Krahinës Socialiste Autonome të Kosovës, të mbajtur me 2.VII.1990, Prishtinë, 2 July 1990.

¹³ The Assembly of Kosovo (hereinafter: KK): Ligji KK. Nr.1/90, Kushtetuta e Republikës së Kosovës, 7 September 1990, fl.35.



leadership, a pacifist movement emerged, aiming to internationalize the Kosovo issue through diplomatic means.

The second major political movement in Kosovo was represented by the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA), which, in contrast to the pacifist approach, pursued a strategy of armed resistance.¹⁴ Military training and organizational efforts strengthened KLA's capabilities, positioning it as a key force in the internationalization of Kosovo's struggle. Its guerrilla warfare tactics gained international attention, particularly following the armed resistance of the Jashari family in Prekaz.¹⁵ This event significantly elevated KLA's role in Kosovo's developments and secured its place in political negotiations, including the Rambouillet Conference, where its political representative was Hashim Thaçi. Thus, KLA functioned not only as a military organization but also as a political and diplomatic actor. During the late 1990s, KLA played a pivotal role in Kosovo's political and military landscape. Despite Serbian propaganda attempts to portray it as an Islamist movement financed by Iran, the reality was quite different. KLA's resistance became the central argument for Kosovo's case in the international arena.

By the mid-to-late 1990s, KLA had established itself as a military-political force, shaping the political dynamics in Kosovo. Parallel developments were unfolding across the Yugoslav republics, where nationalist political parties advocating for full independence from Belgrade were rising to power. In Kosovo, since 1989, a parallel system had been established to resist Serbian rule. Meanwhile, Slovenia and Croatia pursued peaceful secession, but their efforts inadvertently fueled a broader conflict within Yugoslavia. A 1990 analysis by U.S. intelligence services predicted the imminent dissolution of the Yugoslav Federation, forecasting that Yugoslavia would cease to function as a federal state within a year and potentially dissolve entirely within two years. The report also suggested that Serbia's resistance to Slovenian and Croatian proposals for a looser Yugoslav confederation would likely provoke further conflict. In Kosovo, dissatisfaction among Albanians hinted at a long-term insurgency, with expectations that Albanians would procure weapons primarily from Albania, sourced from China and the Soviet Union. Analysts foresaw significant challenges in achieving the rapid withdrawal of Serbian forces.¹⁶ During this period, Kosovar Albanians organized to prepare for armed resistance, engaging in discussions with the Albanian state (then led by Ramiz Alia) and political actors in Kosovo, particularly LDK. However, the prospect of armed resistance was met with skepticism by Western diplomats, particularly the Americans, who feared it would provide Serbia with a pretext for ethnic cleansing.¹⁷ European and American diplomatic circles were aware of early military training efforts in Albania, including those conducted by Kosovar recruits in September and October 1992. Western officials urged Kosovar political leaders to denounce these military activities, viewing them as a potential trigger for wider conflict. British Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd, after visiting Albania and Yugoslavia in 1992, warned that "the situation in Kosovo could explode, leading to catastrophe in the event of a conflict." Throughout the 1990s, KLA carried out guerrilla operations, targeting Serbian police stations and military checkpoints, particularly in the Drenica region, including the attack on the police station in Glogovac. Meanwhile, the political leadership, particularly DLK, initially distanced itself from KLA, with some DLK figures referring to it as an extension of Serbian intelligence

¹⁴ Jasharajt dhe lufta çlirimtare (Materiale nga Konferenca Shkencore ndërkombëtare "Jasharajt dhe lufta çlirimtare", Prishtinë, 6 March 2018, Verli, Marenglen (2019): *Jasharajt – produkt i një vatre patriotike*", Prishtinë: Instituti i Historisë "Ali Hadri", 15.

¹⁵ Jasharajt dhe lufta çlirimtare (Materiale nga Konferenca Shkencore ndërkombëtare "Jasharajt dhe lufta çlirimtare", Prishtinë, 6 March 2018, Krasniqi, Jakup (2019): "Kontributi i Jasharajve të Prekazit në luftën çlirimtare të Kosovës (1991-1999)", Prishtinë: Instituti i Historisë "Ali Hadri", 23.

¹⁶ Nika, Lulzim (2021): *Diplomacia ndërkombëtare dhe çështja e Kosovës*, Prishtinë: Instituti Albanologjik, 71.

¹⁷ Nika, *op. cit.*, p. 71-72.



efforts. On April 5, 1993, a significant meeting of KLA activists from the Drenica region took place at Adem Jashari's home in Prekaz, where Jashari was designated as the movement's military commander.¹⁸ On November 17, 1994, the People's Movement of Kosovo, the precursor to KLA, issued its first official communiqué, calling for armed struggle to end Serbian rule. However, these early statements remained largely unpublicized until the later communiqués, while Serbian authorities labeled KLA a terrorist organization. By 1996, KLA had begun publishing its own bulletin, detailing its operations and commenting on contemporary political events.¹⁹ During 1996–1997, its activities expanded to other regions of Kosovo, particularly through the actions of Zahir Pajaziti. The pacifist approach of DLK was gradually losing support among Albanians who had grown disillusioned with the prospect of a peaceful resolution. Both Pristina and Tirana initially denied KLA's existence, with Kosovo's government-in-exile even writing to U.S. President Bill Clinton, characterizing KLA's actions as provocations by Serbian factions seeking to destabilize Kosovo rather than as legitimate Albanian resistance.²⁰ A 1995 Human Rights Watch report documented that Serbian police and military forces had killed 11 Albanians, wounded 11 others, and detained more than 2,500 throughout the year.²¹

A pivotal moment occurred on November 25, 1997, when KLA carried out an attack in Vojnik, followed by another operation the next day, which resulted in the killing of Albanian teacher Halit Isuf Geci.²² During Geci's funeral on November 28, 1997, KLA publicly emerged for the first time. Subsequently, a meeting between Albania's Minister of Foreign Affairs and a KLA representative took place in Munich, Germany, to discuss ongoing developments. By March 1998, KLA had launched its first major offensive, and in May 1998, the U.S. invited Kosovar representatives for discussions, leading to further diplomatic engagements, including a November 3, 1998 meeting between Ambassador Christopher Hill and Ibrahim Rugova in Malisheva.²³

Despite these developments, Serbian forces continued to perpetrate massacres and ethnic cleansing campaigns across Kosovo, particularly in the Drenica region.²⁴ The strategy employed in Bosnia and Herzegovina was replicated in Kosovo, leading to mass killings and forced expulsions. One of the most notorious massacres occurred on January 15, 1999, in Reçak, where 45 civilians, including children, were brutally killed.²⁵ The massacre, uncovered by OSCE representative William Walker, played a decisive role in galvanizing international support for intervention and was a catalyst for the Rambouillet Conference.²⁶ Some French media outlets at the time accused Walker of fabricating the incident to justify intervention, but the massacre was well-documented, with photographic evidence confirming its occurrence. The Reçak massacre directly influenced NATO's decision to initiate airstrikes against Serbian military targets. Following continued Serbian atrocities and forced expulsions of Kosovar Albanians, the conflict culminated in the signing of the Kumanovo Agreement on June 9, 1999, which mandated the withdrawal of Serbian forces from Kosovo. On June 12, 1999, Kosovo was officially liberated, marking the end of a decade-long struggle.

¹⁸ Krasniqi, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

¹⁹ Nika, *op. cit.*, p. 72.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 73.

²¹ Krasniqi, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

²² Verli, *op. cit.*, p. 70.

²³ Nika, *op. cit.*, p. 76.

²⁴ Caplan, Richard (1998): *International Diplomacy and the Crisis in Kosovo*. London: Routledge, 745.

²⁵ Koci, *op. cit.*, p. 103.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 105.



2. Diplomatic Activity of Western Allies on the Eve of the Conference

The political engagement of Western diplomacy was closely linked to diplomatic and military developments in Kosovo and the broader sphere of international diplomacy. This diplomatic framework contributed to making Kosovo a subject of discussion in international diplomacy. In this context, following the Dayton Agreement, German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer, in his book *The Red-Green Years*, wrote that after Dayton, Albanians realized that achieving their aspiration for liberation from Serbia would be difficult without armed struggle.²⁷ Fischer considered the exclusion of Kosovo from the Dayton Conference a grave mistake. According to him, the omission of Kosovo created the possibility for further wars in the Balkans, as Kosovo was next in line after Bosnia's case was settled. The only diplomatic achievement regarding Kosovo at Dayton was the opening of an American Information Office in Pristina in 1996.²⁸ The establishment of this office played a crucial role, particularly at the international level, ensuring that developments in Kosovo were promptly and accurately communicated to both American and global public opinion. However, it is important to note that after the Dayton Conference, President Clinton's administration made it clear that Kosovo had not been forgotten and that it would be a priority on the American agenda in the future.²⁹

From January 1997, within the framework of American foreign policy priorities, President Clinton declared that sanctions against Serbia would only be lifted if the Kosovo issue was resolved.³⁰ Following this stance, the Contact Group issued its first declaration on September 24, 1997, at the level of foreign ministers, expressing concern over the situation in Kosovo and calling on both the Serbian government and Albanian leaders to engage in peaceful dialogue. Additionally, they urged the implementation of the Education Agreement.³¹

Meanwhile, the European Union initiated diplomatic efforts to resolve the Kosovo issue in 1998 by appointing Spanish Prime Minister Felipe González as a mediator in the Kosovo conflict. However, on June 8, 1998, Serbia denied him entry, leading the EU to transfer mediation responsibilities to U.S. Ambassador Christopher Hill, who sought to facilitate negotiations between the two parties.³²

International diplomacy and the EU had assumed the primary role in resolving the Yugoslav dissolution peacefully and in accordance with the principles of sovereignty and international order. Nevertheless, the failure of international and European diplomacy to prevent conflicts in the Balkans—ranging from Slovenia and Croatia to Bosnia and eventually Kosovo—highlighted their shortcomings. However, the evolving international status of Kosovo led to its more serious and realistic treatment as a political and security issue, positioning it on the agendas of the Contact Group, the UN, NATO, and other international organizations.³³

As massacres continued in Kosovo, international diplomacy persisted in efforts to resolve the issue. However, there were divisions within Western diplomacy: the positions of the U.S. and European countries differed significantly. Europeans hesitated to include the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) in negotiations, aligning with Belgrade's characterization of

²⁷ Fischer, Joschka (2007): *Vitet kuq e gjelber*, Prishtinë: Koha, p. 100.

²⁸ Clark, Wesley (2003): *Të bësh luftë moderne*, Prishtinë: Zëri, p. 95.

²⁹ Tahiri, Edita (2001): *Konferenca e Rambujesë*, Pejë: Dukagjini, pp. 38-40.

³⁰ Judah, Tim (2002): *Kosovo: War and Revenge*. New Haven: Yale University Press, p. 54.

³¹ The Education Agreement, also known as the Saint Egidio Agreement, was signed in 1995 between Ibrahim Rugova and Slobodan Milošević to address the status of Albanian-language education in Kosovo. This agreement aimed to reactivate educational institutions in Kosovo. Weller, Marc (2011): *Shtetësia e kontestuar, administrimi ndërkombëtar i luftës së Kosovës për pavarësi*, Prishtinë: Koha, p.154.

³² Bajraktari, Halim (2014): *Roli dhe prespektiva evropiane e Kosovës*, Tiranë: Punim Doktorature – Universiteti i Tiranës, p. 14.

³³ Tahiri, *op. cit.*, p. 111.



the organization as “terrorist,” whereas American diplomats, particularly Richard Holbrooke, actively worked to involve the KLA in negotiations.³⁴ European reluctance stemmed from perceptions of the KLA as an Islamist organization allegedly funded by Iran, a narrative also promoted by Serbian authorities.

Initially, the U.S. State Department adopted a cautious approach toward KLA representatives. Washington sent Holbrooke to meet with KLA representatives in the diaspora, including Bardhyl Mahmuti and Ramadan Avdiu, in discussions lasting approximately four hours. The Americans sought detailed information on the KLA’s operations. Following these contacts, U.S. support for the KLA gradually increased. In June 1998, Hashim Thaçi met with CIA representatives, through whom he successfully convinced U.S. officials to expand their cooperation with the KLA.³⁵ While the American stance was shifting, other members of the Contact Group remained reserved. However, Austrian diplomats, led by Wolfgang Petritsch and Albert Rohan, played a role in gradually altering the European perspective on Kosovo’s liberation war. Petritsch and Rohan held initial meetings with Thaçi and Kadri Veseli, which contributed to the gradual articulation of a more supportive European stance toward the armed struggle in Kosovo during 1998–1999.³⁶ The ongoing massacres committed by Serbian forces in Kosovo were condemned by nearly all international institutions, which called for an end to the atrocities and the commencement of negotiations between Belgrade and Albanian representatives. These events prompted NATO to issue its first formal statement on March 5, 1998, urging Serbian authorities to engage in talks with Albanian leaders.³⁷

At this time, Joschka Fischer believed that allowing the ethnic cleansing of Albanians in Kosovo to continue without a strong NATO response would be unacceptable. Thanks to Fischer’s efforts, on October 12, 1998, the German Bundestag approved Germany’s participation in NATO’s efforts to prevent the unfolding humanitarian catastrophe in Kosovo.³⁸ This decision was historically significant, as German forces had not participated in any military engagements since the end of World War II in 1945. Beyond the broader developments of the war and ongoing massacres, the Račak Massacre was independently verified by OSCE representatives in Kosovo. Led by diplomat William Walker, OSCE officials witnessed firsthand the bodies of murdered Albanian civilians.³⁹

Overall, Western diplomacy failed during this phase due to a lack of coordination among EU member states. In 1991–1992, the British and French governments maintained pro-Serbian positions, viewing Albanians, Croats, and Bosniaks with skepticism, a stance rooted in World War II historical memory and past allegiances. British interests in the Balkans were closely aligned with Serbia’s until 1997.⁴⁰ Prime Minister John Major openly supported Serbia’s expansionist policies. However, this changed after the Labour Party won the 1997 elections, adopting a policy against Serbia and playing a leading role in diplomatic and military developments during the Kosovo War. France followed a similar trajectory, maintaining a pro-Serbian stance until the spring of 1998, when its policies began shifting against Milošević’s regime. During the 1990s, the U.S. aimed to preserve Yugoslavia, but its policy shifted due to the wars in Croatia and Bosnia. Within this context, diplomatic efforts toward Kosovo were sporadic. The political developments in Kosovo, led by President Rugova, influenced the

³⁴ Rathfelder, Erich (2018): *Kosova: Historia e një konflikti*, Prishtinë: Artini, p. 181.

³⁵ Baudoin, Jacques (2018): *Lindja e një demokracie: Hashim Thaqi dhe Rruga drejt Kosovës së pavarur 1987-2008*, Prishtinë: Buzuku, p. 121.

³⁶ Baudoin, *op. cit.*, pp. 121-123.

³⁷ Tahiri, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

³⁸ Fischer, *op. cit.*, p. 111.

³⁹ Baudoin, *op. cit.*, p. 142.

⁴⁰ Independent International Commission on Kosovo (2000): *The Kosovo Report: Conflict, International Response, Lessons Learned*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 93.



diplomatic discourse, particularly through his extensive engagements with Western countries. However, Rugova's pacifist approach failed to yield significant political results, prompting the emergence of the Kosovo Liberation Army as an alternative strategy for achieving Kosovo's independence.⁴¹

The alignment of Western diplomacy toward resolving Kosovo's status continued within the framework of traditional international politics, encountering opposition from Russia and China. Despite this, some elements within Russia's diplomatic establishment, under President Boris Yeltsin, were open to cooperation with Western nations considering intervention in Kosovo.⁴²

Regarding military intervention in Kosovo, the United Kingdom and France supported the move, while Germany and Italy initially opposed it, fearing a potential influx of refugees into their territories.⁴³

The systematic engagement of American and European allies gradually helped Kosovo transition from being regarded as an internal issue of Yugoslavia and a matter of human rights to an internationally recognized political subject. Joschka Fischer, in his book *The Red-Green Years*, emphasized that after Dayton, Albanians understood that achieving independence from Serbia without armed struggle would be highly challenging. He also viewed Kosovo's exclusion from the Dayton Conference as a serious diplomatic failure. Kosovo was not initially internationalized, as the entire political situation revolved around the Yugoslav federation. However, with the Rambouillet Conference, Kosovo's internationalization process began in earnest.⁴⁴

3. The Opening of the Rambouillet Conference

The signing of the Rambouillet Agreement by the Kosova Albanian delegation can be understood through two key dimensions. First, it reflected a political unification despite significant differences between Ibrahim Rugova's pacifist approach and the military strategy of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA). Second, it demonstrated the Albanian side's willingness to pursue peace under international supervision, even though Rambouillet did not fully align with Albanian political objectives. Albanians of Kosovo politics at the time was shaped by three main orientations. The first, the pro-Yugoslav communist faction, sought to preserve Yugoslavia's identity while incorporating Kosovo as a constituent republic. The second, Rugova's progressive policy, aimed at establishing Kosovo as an independent state, linking its historical legacy to Dardania. The third, the "irredentist" policy initiated by Adem Demaçi and later adopted by the Kosovo Liberation Movement and the KLA, pursued national unification. In practice, Rambouillet curtailed both Rugova's aspirations for statehood and the KLA's goal of unification, instead maintaining the notion of a Yugoslav state and Kosovo as part of its republican structure. Nevertheless, the Albanian delegation set aside ideological differences in pursuit of the broader goal of achieving peace in Kosovo.⁴⁵

Today, Rambouillet is widely regarded as the conference that internationalized the Kosovo issue. At the same time, many view it as a betrayal, believing that national ideals and the liberation struggle were compromised. Slobodan Milošević's refusal to sign the agreement decisively altered Kosovo's political trajectory. His ambitions, rooted in the early concepts of the "Načertania" and the legacy of "Tsar Lazar,"⁴⁶ meant that he remained committed to the

⁴¹ Schmit, *op. cit.*, p. 258.

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 258-259.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 259-260.

⁴⁴ Krasniqi, Jakup (2006): *Kthesa e Madhe*, Prishtinë: Buzuku, p. 158.

⁴⁵ Fischer, *op. cit.*, p. 111.

⁴⁶ Hill, Christopher R., *OUTPOST*, New York, Simon and Shuster 2015, p. 120.



idea that Kosovo belonged to Serbia, despite its historical ties to Albania. His refusal directly precipitated NATO's intervention in Kosovo on March 24, 1999.⁴⁷ Thus, Rambouillet stands as a testament to the Albanians' readiness for peace, yet the perceived abandonment of national ideals generated significant criticism of Kosovo's political leadership during the negotiations.

All the events discussed above are linked to a conference that aimed to bring either a temporary or permanent solution to the Kosovo issue. Without the political movements of the 1990s, as well as those preceding them, it would have been difficult to reach this conference. The most crucial aspect was that the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) participated as an equal party in the negotiations alongside the Serbian state delegation. The Rambouillet Conference further internationalized the KLA's leading role, recognizing it as an equal warring party against Serbia. This was a significant achievement, as Serbia was compelled to engage in dialogue with the KLA, whom it had labeled as terrorists and had even sentenced some members in absentia.⁴⁸ The Rambouillet Conference should be regarded as the most important international event ever held concerning Kosovo, as it laid the legal foundation for the international recognition of Kosovo's right to self-determination. It marked another step towards Kosovo's independence. As Rexhep Qosja stated, "This is the most decisive event in Kosovo's history since the Conference of Ambassadors in London."⁴⁹

Aiming to end the war and shift the struggle to diplomatic means, the international community, particularly the United States, made every effort to assemble a comprehensive delegation for Kosovo. During this time, the international community's key message was, "Kosovo must speak with one voice," emphasizing the necessity of including the armed resistance in all negotiation processes. At that time, the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) claimed governmental legitimacy, as it had twice won elections with an absolute majority. Christopher Hill proposed that the KLA should also be included in the Kosovo delegation and that a broad-based negotiating team, incorporating all key Albanian political actors in Kosovo, should be formed. It was only in mid-1998, when an informal group led by Fehmi Agani began responding to Hill's successive proposals, that a broad-based negotiating team, including the KLA, became feasible.⁵⁰

The Rambouillet Conference represented an effort to impose negotiations.⁵¹ This initiative was backed by United Nations Security Council resolutions and actions taken by the Contact Group, which included Russia, Yugoslavia's ally. The conference appeared promising at certain stages, while at others, it seemed destined for failure. The invitations to the conference followed the diplomatic mission of U.S. Ambassador Christopher Hill in Kosovo. The Račak Massacre prompted the international community, particularly the Contact Group, to take expedited steps toward organizing a conference that would result in an agreement to end the war and determine Kosovo's status within Yugoslavia. On January 29, 1999, the Contact Group invited the parties to negotiations.⁵² According to its representatives, the proposed solution was based on the principles of the Contact Group, which were primarily those of Christopher Hill. Consequently, the negotiations and the agreement were perceived as an international imposition.⁵³

⁴⁷ Hill, *op. cit.*, p. 157-158.

⁴⁸ Nika, *op. cit.*, p. 88.

⁴⁹ Qosja, Rexhep (1999): *Paqja e Përgjakshme*, Tiranë: Toena, p.16.

⁵⁰ Weller, *op. cit.*, p. 217.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 189.

⁵² Hill, *op. cit.*, p. 148.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp. 190-192.



The Rambouillet Conference began its negotiations on February 6, 1999, and concluded with the signing of the agreement by the Kosovo delegation on March 18, 1999.⁵⁴ Diplomatic efforts continued in parallel with military preparations. The Contact Group convened the peace talks in Rambouillet on February 6, 1999. The negotiations were co-chaired by the United Kingdom and France, which presented a draft agreement proposing temporary self-administration for Kosovo. This plan sought to accommodate both the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia's insistence on territorial integrity and the aspirations of the oppressed Albanian majority in the province. The first round of talks did not yield a definitive agreement, as neither the authorities in Belgrade nor the Kosovar representatives were prepared to sign the proposed settlement. Negotiations were suspended on February 23 and resumed on March 15 at the Kléber Center in Paris. On March 18, the Kosovo Albanian delegation accepted the terms, while the Serbian government rejected them. The Rambouillet negotiations ultimately failed. Many have rightly concluded that Slobodan Milošević approached the negotiations in bad faith he did not believe that NATO would follow through on its threats and saw no reason to make any effort to find a diplomatic solution to the crisis.⁵⁵

The Kosovo delegation included the following members: Adem Qopani, Agim Çeku, Arsim Bajrami, Avni Jarshellari, Bajram Kosumi, Blerim Shala, Bujar Bukoshi, Edita Tahiri, Enver Hasani, Fehmi Agani, Hashim Thaçi, Hydajet Hyseni, Ibrahim Rugova, Idriz Ajeti, Jakup Krasniqi, Mehmet Hajrizi, Musa Limani, Naip Zeka, Ramë Buja, Sabaudin Konomi, Sokol Bare, Veton Surroi, Shenasi Rama, and Xhavit Haliti.⁵⁶ International legal experts assisting the delegation included Marc Weller and Norton Abramović.⁵⁷ The Kosovo delegation that ultimately signed the Rambouillet Agreement consisted of: Ibrahim Rugova, Hashim Thaçi, Rexhep Qosja, and Veton Surroi.⁵⁸ The Contact Group was composed of: Christopher Hill (United States), Wolfgang Petritsch (European Union), and Boris Mayorski (Russia).⁵⁹

The Serbian delegation included: Faik Jashari, Guljebehar Sabović, Ibro Valt, Ljuan Koka, Milan Milutinović, Nikola Šainović, Qerim Abazi, Refik Senadović, Sokolj Cuse, Vladan Kutlešić, Vladimir Stambuk, Vojislav Živković, and Zejnebalidin Kurejsh.⁶⁰

From Hill's outpost in Kosovo: The delegation of the Albanians of Kosovo returned home to prepare for peace and to persuade others in Kosovo to follow the same path.⁶¹ Meanwhile, the Serbian side returned to prepare for war. Violence began to rise again, bringing the spring season of clashes earlier than expected, as Secretary Albright had warned. In these circumstances, Hill set out for Kosovo to meet with KLA commanders west of Pristina, carefully passing through their checkpoints. On March 8, from his outpost, Hill reported that the KLA had definitively accepted the Rambouillet Agreement.⁶²

⁵⁴ Buja, Ramë (2007): *Çështja e Kosovës dhe shkatërrimi i Jugosllavisë*, Prishtinë: AAB, 322; Milo, Paskal (2009): *Kosova nga Rambuje në pavarësi*, Prishtinë: Toena, p.142.

⁵⁵ "The Background to Military Intervention", Parliament UK, at <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm199900/cmselect/cmdfence/347/34709.htm#note114>

⁵⁶ Nika, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 95.

⁵⁸ United Nations, Security Council. Annex Rambouillet acords. Interim agreement for peace and self-government in Kosovo. Letter dated 4 june 1999 from the permanent representative of France to the United Nations addressed to the secretary – general. Distr. General, S.1999/648, 7 June 1999, f. 86.

⁵⁹ World: Europe Kosovo talks: The Negotiators, 6 February 1999, at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/273830.stm>

⁶⁰ World: Europe Kosovo talks: The Negotiators 6 February 1999, at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/273830.stm>

⁶¹ Hill, *op. cit.*, p. 155.

⁶² *Ibid.*, pp. 155.



In the spring of 1999, the United States, after assessing the developments in the situation in Kosovo and the outcomes of the initial Rambouillet negotiations, concluded that one final diplomatic effort was necessary before military intervention. In this context, Richard Holbrooke was sent back to Belgrade to meet directly with Slobodan Milošević in an attempt to reach a possible compromise and prevent the outbreak of conflict. According to Hill's memoirs, relations between the American representatives and the Yugoslav leadership had significantly deteriorated due to the previous Rambouillet meetings, highlighting Belgrade's deep mistrust of international pressure. Holbrooke's mission also carried a symbolic and propagandistic dimension: Milošević's refusal to meet personally with the American envoy was intended to be publicly visible as a sign of Serbian intransigence. In line with this expectation, Milošević delegated the negotiations to the Foreign Minister, thereby confirming his unyielding stance. This action, although seemingly a formal refusal, was of great importance for the United States. It publicly demonstrated the rigidity of the Serbian regime and strengthened the rationale for NATO intervention, using the appearance of the failed negotiations as an instrument to support the forthcoming military decision. As Hill notes, this period illustrated not only the complexity of the diplomatic process but also the importance of symbolic and propagandistic strategy in international negotiations concerning humanitarian and security crises.⁶³

4. The Role of Western Diplomacy During the Rambouillet Conference

The role of international actors in the conference was significant. In addition to the involvement of European and Atlantic states, the conference was also hosted by Turkey. A statement from the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, titled "Press Release on the Direct Negotiations Held in Rambouillet for the Resolution of the Kosovo Problem," emphasized: "We welcome the initiation of direct negotiations in Rambouillet on February 6, 1999, aimed at achieving a political solution to the Kosovo issue, which poses a serious threat to the security and stability of the Balkans and Europe. [...] Furthermore, the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated: 'We hope that the negotiations will result in a political solution that enables the establishment of a pluralistic and participatory democracy, guaranteeing the highest level of rights and freedoms for all national communities living in Kosovo, including the Turkish national minority'.⁶⁴

International actors made efforts to persuade both the Serbian and Albanian delegations to sign an agreement that would grant Kosovo substantial self-governance.⁶⁵ However, these efforts were ultimately unsuccessful due to President Milošević's refusal to allow a NATO-led force to guarantee the implementation of the agreement, a decision that led directly to NATO's air campaign against Yugoslavia. A segment of the international literature has questioned the very nature of Rambouillet. Some scholars, such as Daalder and O'Hanlon (2000), regard it as a necessary diplomatic initiative aimed at creating an opportunity for peace. Others, however, interpret it as a prelude to NATO intervention, presenting a text that Serbia was fundamentally unable to accept.⁶⁶

The convening of the peace conference at the Château de Rambouillet near Paris was prompted in part by the Račak massacre, in which Serbian police forces killed 45 Albanian civilians on January 15, 1999. Frustrated by the situation, the five Western powers and Russia

⁶³ *Ibid.*, pp. 156.

⁶⁴ MFA, Press Release Regarding The Direct Negotiations which were held in Rambouillet to solve the Kosovo Problem (Unofficial Translation), February 8, 1999. at Press Release Regarding The Direct Negotiations which were held in Rambouillet to solve the Kosovo Problem (Unofficial Translation) February 8, 1999 / Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs (mfa.gov.tr)

⁶⁵ Weller, *op. cit.*, p. 260.

⁶⁶ Daalder, Ivo H., and Michael E. O'Hanlon: *Winning Ugly: NATO's War to Save Kosovo*. Washington, D.C., Brookings Institution Press, 2000.



gave both sides a three-week deadline to reach an agreement. In this context, U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright warned that merely attending the Rambouillet negotiations “would not be enough.” She further emphasized: “We have sent the parties an unmistakable message—take this seriously.” On February 10, NATO issued an official statement declaring:

“NATO is closely monitoring the negotiations in Rambouillet and continues its military preparations should it be called upon on short notice to support the international community in implementing an Interim Agreement for Kosovo. If negotiations fail, it must be recalled that on January 30, NATO authorized its Secretary-General to order military action to bring an end to the conflict. [...] At the same time, NATO’s Extraction Force, under Operation JOINT GUARANTOR and based in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, stands ready to assist the OSCE if required, including in the evacuation of Kosovo Verification Mission observers. Additionally, NATO-led aerial surveillance over Kosovo continues under Operation EAGLE EYE.”⁶⁷

Meanwhile, the French government viewed the Rambouillet agreement as a rare opportunity for both parties. In his opening speech at the conference, French President Jacques Chirac remarked that this was “one of those rare moments when history is in the hands of a few those willing to sit down at the negotiating table.”⁶⁸ On the other hand, the European Union, represented by Wolfgang Petritsch, acknowledged that direct negotiations between the Serbian and Albanian parties would have been preferable but deemed them practically impossible.⁶⁹ Petritsch explained: “Had the Serbian and Albanian sides met face-to-face immediately, the agreement would have collapsed at once. It would not have been signed by either the Albanians or the Serbs.” When asked whether this meant that bringing the opposing sides together would have led to immediate failure, Petritsch unequivocally responded: “*Yes. There would have been no realistic chance for a meaningful agreement.*”⁷⁰

Outside the Rambouillet château, protests erupted, featuring slogans and banners associated with the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA), along with individuals wearing KLA uniforms. The Serbian delegation perceived these demonstrations as a deliberate provocation aimed at discouraging them from signing the agreement. Military-political analyst Michael McGuire, formerly of the Brookings Institution in Washington, argued that NATO had deliberately included a clause that ensured the failure of the peace conference. According to him: “It was almost certain to fail as a result of NATO’s insistence on having complete control, with command structures leading directly back to NATO headquarters.” However, the co-chair of the peace talks, British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook, dismissed this claim as baseless: “There was never any intention for NATO troops to invade Serbian territory outside of Kosovo. No one seriously imagined for a minute that this would happen—not even the Serbian negotiators themselves. [...] If that specific technical annex had been a point of concern for them, we would have been more than happy to consider constructive amendments. They never even raised the issue. Given this, the reason they rejected the peace package was simply because they were unwilling to agree to Kosovo’s autonomy or to have such autonomy guaranteed by an international military presence.” Furthermore, Cook described the post-conference Serbian rhetoric as “part of Belgrade’s propaganda machinery, constructed after the talks, not before them.”⁷¹

⁶⁷ Nato report, Kosovo, at NATO - News: Kosovo, 10 February 1999.

⁶⁸ Gecaj, Bajram (2009): *Konferenca e Rambujesë*, Prishtinë: AIIKD, p. 55.

⁶⁹ Petrisch, Wolfgang; Pichler, Robert (2002): *Rruga e gjatë në luftë, Kosova dhe Bashkësia Ndërkombëtare 1989-1999*, Prishtinë: Koha, p. 42.

⁷⁰ Petrisch, Pichler, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

⁷¹ “Rambouillet talks 'designed to fail', BBC, 19 March, 2000 at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/682877.stm>



Russia's role in the negotiations was represented by Boris Mayorsky. The talks were further complicated by Russia's refusal to participate in discussions on the military aspects of the agreement, although they did not obstruct them. For Mayorsky, this issue was particularly sensitive "It is suggested that Russia's role in these negotiations is to convince Yugoslavia to accept NATO's presence as part of the agreement's implementation." According to Wolfgang Petritsch, Mayorsky faced strong resistance from Yugoslav officials due to his firm and impartial stance: "I was present when the Yugoslavs fiercely opposed Boris Mayorsky because he was both fair and firm when dealing with them." Petritsch, along with U.S. representative Christopher Hill, strongly advocated for the demilitarization and dissolution of the KLA. Petritsch stated: "On the other hand, I must tell you that Chris Hill and I were extremely firm with the Albanians because there was a crucial and decisive issue—we were demanding the complete demilitarization and dissolution of the KLA."⁷²

On February 23, 1999, NATO Secretary-General Javier Solana issued a statement to the press: "NATO welcomes the substantial progress made in the Rambouillet Peace Talks on Kosovo towards a political solution that would grant Kosovo considerable autonomy and contribute to regional stability. I call on all parties to swiftly accept the Peace Plan of the Contact Group, including its military provisions, no later than the implementation conference in France on March 15." Regarding the timeframe between February 23 and March 15, Solana further stated "During this period, NATO expects the parties to work towards achieving a peaceful resolution. They must uphold the ceasefire, refrain from provocations, and comply with all provisions of the UN Security Council Resolution on Kosovo. The Federal Republic of Yugoslavia must fulfill its commitments under the October 25, 1998, agreement with NATO."⁷³

The OSCE Verification Mission in Kosovo must be allowed to carry out its duties." NATO's role remained focused on achieving a rapid resolution to Kosovo's political status and ending the war. As the negotiations continued, NATO maintained its oversight of the general situation in Kosovo. Solana reiterated: "NATO will continue to closely monitor the situation on the ground. We are deeply concerned about the ongoing violence in Kosovo. We remain ready to use all necessary means to bring about a peaceful resolution to the Kosovo crisis and to prevent further human suffering. Those who obstruct the achievement of an interim agreement, provoke violent incidents, or threaten the safety of the Kosovo Verification Mission personnel will bear full responsibility for their actions." Finally, Solana emphasized NATO's long-standing commitment to the diplomatic process: "Since the beginning of the crisis, NATO has fully supported the international community's efforts to bring peace to Kosovo and to facilitate a negotiated political solution. Our approach—placing the threat of force in the service of diplomacy—has helped create the conditions for progress in the Rambouillet talks. The Alliance remains ready to lead an international military force in Kosovo to guarantee the implementation of an interim political settlement. I urge both sides to build on the significant progress achieved at Rambouillet and seize this opportunity to reach a lasting solution for the benefit of all the region's people. NATO stands ready to assist them in this endeavor."⁷⁴

5. The Draft Agreement Developments during the Rambouillet Conference

On 23 February 1999, six conclusions were adopted by the Contact Group, published by the Office of the High Representative. Below are presented the five main points, which are of particular importance regarding the international role at Rambouillet:

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ NATO publication press releases, Statement by the Secretary General of NATO, Dr. Javier Solana, on the outcome of the Rambouillet talks, Press Release, 23 February, 1999, at <https://www.nato.int/docu/pr/1999/p99-021e.htm>

⁷⁴ NATO publication press releases, at <https://www.nato.int/docu/pr/1999/p99-021e.htm>



1. The Ministers of the Contact Group met in Rambouillet on 23 February, at the end of more than two weeks of intensive efforts to reach an agreement on substantial autonomy for Kosovo, while respecting the national sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.
2. The Ministers noted the historic nature of the Rambouillet Conference, which initiated a process based on the principles and core elements adopted by the Contact Group in London on 29 January, bringing together those who had long been divided by deep and bitter differences.
3. These have been complex and difficult negotiations, as expected. The significant efforts of the parties and the tireless commitment of our negotiators—Ambassadors Hill, Petritsch, and Mayorsky—have led to a consensus on substantial autonomy for Kosovo, including mechanisms for free and fair elections for democratic institutions, for the governance of Kosovo, for the protection of human rights and the rights of members of national communities, as well as for the establishment of a just judicial system.
4. A political framework has now been established, as defined in the Rambouillet Agreement, thereby laying the foundations for the finalization of the implementation chapters of the Agreement, including the modalities of the invited international civilian and military presence in Kosovo. It is essential that the Interim Agreement be completed and signed in its entirety. In this spirit, the parties committed themselves to participate in a conference covering all aspects of implementation, to be held in France on 15 March, following consultations with the parties and relevant international organizations. We are determined to closely monitor that this commitment is fully respected, in order to conclude the Rambouillet process.
5. The parties must refrain from any actions that would undermine the achievements of Rambouillet. In particular, we expect the parties to fully and immediately observe the ceasefire, which must be in force throughout Kosovo, to abstain from all provocative acts, and to fully respect their commitments from October 1998, as well as the relevant Security Council Resolutions. We fully support the mission and personnel of the OSCE Kosovo Verification Mission (KVM) and insist that the parties guarantee the safety of the KVM and other international personnel, for which they will be held accountable.
6. We are committed to working together to achieve a solution that meets the legitimate aspirations of all the people of Kosovo. Only such a solution can create the conditions under which a humanitarian catastrophe may be averted. Those who obstruct the completion of the Interim Agreement for Kosovo, or who provoke further hostilities or threaten the security of the KVM, will bear full responsibility for their actions.⁷⁵

The format of the Rambouillet talks produced a non-negotiable draft. A few days after the Contact Group's decision was adopted, the Contact Group negotiators presented the parties with a one-page document containing non-negotiable principles or basic elements for a solution. This document established the following principles, which must be cited in full, as they served as a constant point of reference during the Rambouillet talks:

⁷⁵ OHR, Office of the High Representative and EU special Representative, Contact Group Statement - Rambouillet, 23 February 1999, "Contact Group Rambouillet Accords: Co-Chairmen's Conclusions", at Contact Group Statement - Rambouillet, 23 February 1999 ([archive.org](https://www.archive.org))



General Elements

- The necessity of an immediate end to violence and respect for the ceasefire;
- Peaceful solution through dialogue;
- Interim agreement: a mechanism for a final settlement following an interim arrangement;
- Three-year period; no unilateral change of the interim status;
- Territorial integrity of the FRY and neighboring countries;
- Protection of the rights of members of all national communities (preservation of identity, language, and education; special protection for their religious institutions);
- Free and fair elections in Kosovo (municipal and province-wide) under the supervision of the OSCE;
- Neither party shall prosecute anyone for crimes related to the Kosovo conflict (exceptions: crimes against humanity, war crimes, and other serious violations of international law);
- Amnesty and release of political prisoners; international involvement and full cooperation of the parties for implementation.

Governance in Kosovo

- The people of Kosovo to be self-governed by Kosovo institutions with democratic accountability;
- A high degree of self-governance exercised through its own legislative, executive, and judicial bodies (with authority, among others, over taxation, finances, police, economic development, judicial system, healthcare, education and culture—subject to the rights of members of national communities—communications, roads and transport, environmental protection);
- Legislative Assembly; executive: President of Kosovo, government, administrative bodies; judiciary: the judicial system of Kosovo;
- Clear definition of competencies at the municipal level;
- Members of all national communities to be fairly represented at all levels of administration and elected government;
- Local police representatives of mixed ethnic composition, coordinated at the Kosovo-wide level; harmonization of Serbian and federal legal frameworks with the Kosovo interim agreement;
- Among other matters, the consent of Kosovo is required for border changes and the declaration of a state of emergency.

Human Rights

- Judicial protection of human rights as enshrined in international conventions and the rights of members of national communities;
- An Ombudsman elected under international auspices;



- The role of the OSCE and other relevant international organizations.

Implementation

- Mechanism for dispute resolution;
- Establishment of a joint commission to oversee implementation; participation of the OSCE and other international bodies as needed.

On the other hand, the Kosovo side and the Contact Group continued their presentations within the negotiations, where it is worth noting that the Albanian side initially faced strong objections from the commanders of the operational zones, and later also from the political office of the KLA, led by Adem Demaçi.⁷⁶

Proposals of the Kosovo Delegation

- The unconditional withdrawal of enemy forces from the territory of Kosovo.
- The release of all Albanian political prisoners.
- Recognition of the right of the people of Kosovo to self-determination through a referendum to be held after three years to decide on the final status of Kosovo.
- The right of Kosovo to establish its own defense force.
- Kosovo's security and protection to be ensured by NATO under the supervision of the United States.
- The participation of the Kosovo Liberation Army (UÇK) alongside NATO troops in the defense of Kosovo's borders.
- The retention of Serbian heavy weaponry in Kosovo as compensation for war damages.⁷⁷

In the event that these demands were not met, the UÇK delegation, led by Hashim Thaçi, would insist on the implementation of four key demands:

- The deployment of NATO forces to establish a three-year peace period and the withdrawal of enemy forces.
- The organization of a nationwide referendum in Kosovo after three years to determine its final status.
- The transformation of the Kosovo Liberation Army (UÇK) into the Kosovo Defense Force.
- The release of Albanian political prisoners.⁷⁸

Draft Agreement Proposed by the Contact Group:

- "Kosovo will have a president, a prime minister and government, an assembly, its own Supreme Court, a Constitutional Court, and other judicial bodies."⁷⁹
- "Kosovo will have the authority to enact laws that will not be subject to review by Serbia or the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, including the power to impose taxes, establish economic, scientific, technological, regional, and social development programs, and conduct external relations within its sphere of responsibility, similar to a Republic."

⁷⁶ Hill, *op. cit.*, p. 153.

⁷⁷ Nika, *op. cit.*, p. 94.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 94.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 122.



- “The Yugoslav military forces and Serbian security forces will completely withdraw from Kosovo, except for a limited border guard force, which will operate solely within a five-kilometer border zone.”
- “The parties invite NATO to deploy a military force (KFOR), which will be authorized to use necessary force to ensure compliance with the agreements.”
- “The international community will play a role in ensuring the implementation of these provisions through a Civil Implementation Mission (CIM) designated by NATO.”
- “The head of the CIM will have the authority to issue binding directives to the parties on all matters deemed necessary, including the appointment and dismissal of officials and the restructuring of institutions.”⁸⁰
- “Three years after the implementation of the Agreement, an international conference will be convened to determine a mechanism for a final resolution for Kosovo based on the will of its people.”
- “NATO personnel, along with their vehicles, ships, aircraft, and equipment, will enjoy free and unrestricted passage and unimpeded access throughout the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, including its airspace and territorial waters. This will include, but not be limited to, the right to bivouac, maneuver, billet, and utilize any area or facility as required for support, training, and operations.”
- “NATO will be allowed to use roads, railways, ports, and airports without incurring any fees, duties, charges, or tolls arising from their use.”
- “Yugoslavia and Kosovo, upon simple request, will provide all telecommunications services, including broadcasting services, necessary for NATO operations, as determined by NATO. This will include the right to use such means and services as required to ensure full communication capability, as well as the right to utilize the entire electromagnetic spectrum for this purpose, free of charge.”
- “For the purpose of its operations, NATO may need to undertake improvements or modifications to designated infrastructure in the FRY, such as roads, bridges, tunnels, buildings, and utility systems.”
- “NATO will be immune from any legal proceedings, whether civil, administrative, or criminal.”
- “NATO personnel, under all circumstances and at all times, will be immune from the jurisdiction of the Parties concerning any civil, administrative, criminal, or disciplinary offense they may commit within the FRY.”
- “NATO personnel will be immune from any form of arrest, investigation, or detention by the authorities of the FRY.”⁸¹

The parties were asked to keep these non-negotiable principles in mind. There was no formal requirement to indicate their consent to them, but there was an expectation of implicit acceptance through the decision of the parties to participate in the Rambouillet Conference. Some of the points in this list reflected the structure of the final version of the Hill draft.⁸²

⁸⁰ United Nations, Security Council. Annex Rambouillet accords. Interim agreement for peace and self-government in Kosovo. Letter dated 4 June 1999 from the permanent representative of France to the United Nations addressed to the secretary – general. Distr. General, S.1999/648, 7 June 1999, pp. 1-86.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² Weller, Marc: “The Rambouillet conference on Kosovo”, *International Affairs*, vol. 75, n° 2 (April 1999), pp. 228.



The conference was officially chaired by the French and British foreign ministers. All foreign ministers from the Contact Group were to convene to review the progress made after the first week, again after the second week, and at the conclusion of the conference. The Contact Group members also maintained substantial delegations in Rambouillet, alongside representatives of the OSCE, the EU Presidency and Commission, and other institutions. From time to time, individual foreign ministers would address the delegations, even after the initial opening of the conference, and especially towards the quite dramatic final stage of the talks. Nevertheless, the actual conduct of negotiations was centered on the three negotiators appointed by the Contact Group-Ambassadors Christopher Hill (United States), Wolfgang Petritsch (EU), and Boris Mayorski (Russian Federation).⁸³ These, in turn, were supported by a group of legal experts from the Contact Group, led by Jim O'Brien of the U.S. State Department.⁸⁴

Most of the substantive negotiations took place through this group of experts. The physical arrangements were suited for proximity talks. Each of the two parties was given a separate conference room (on different floors) where discussions could be held within delegations and with negotiators.⁸⁵

At the beginning of the conference, the parties were presented with a new proposal covering most of the elements of the proposed political settlement, contained in a framework agreement, a substantial annex titled the Constitution of Kosovo, and two other annexes respectively on elections and the proposed Ombudsman. The negotiators set the procedure to be followed in the negotiations as follows: both parties would be invited to submit comments on the drafts. If both parties agreed on a modification to the draft, that modification would be adopted. If there was no agreement, the draft would remain unchanged unless the negotiators were persuaded that the modification would better facilitate implementation of the agreement. No proposal could be made that was inconsistent with the non-negotiable principles, and there would be no major changes to the two implementation annexes (military and civilian) once they had been presented.

The conference opened with some disputes over the need to secure a solid ceasefire on the ground in Kosovo before substantive negotiations could proceed. Pushing this point aside, the Kosovo delegation nonetheless delivered detailed oral comments on the draft framework agreement on 9 February and proceeded with drafting written responses on the other elements of the draft that had been presented. By the end of the first week, Kosovo had submitted detailed and substantive comments on all the documents placed before it. In its written comments, the delegation explicitly and with some discussion stated that each relevant document (annex) was "in principle acceptable." The comments would then focus on improvements that could be made to the draft. All comments were carefully developed so as to remain within the non-negotiable principles and indeed mostly within the terms of the initial draft.⁸⁶

The FRY/Serb delegation made one brief oral comment and then fell silent. Instead of engaging with the negotiators in substantive dialogue, two main diversionary tactics were employed. Although the FRY/Serb delegation had initially argued that it would not participate in the conference if representatives of the KLA were present, it then proposed to engage in direct rather than proximity talks. This proposal was strongly supported by Ambassador Mayorski, while the other negotiators took a more neutral position.⁸⁷

⁸³ "World: Europe Kosovo talks: The negotiators", *BBC*, 6 February 1999, at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/273830.stm>,

⁸⁴ Weller, *op. cit.*, p. 232

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 225.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 242.

⁸⁷ Rachfelder, Erich (2010): *Kosovo – Geschichteeines Konflikts*, Berlin, Suhrkamp Verlag, p.228.



The Kosovo delegation replied that it was engaged in a productive and constructive process of drafting detailed comments and that, although direct talks were not excluded later, at that moment they would not help to maintain this positive momentum. In fact, there were at least two occasions when the heads of the two delegations met, although no direct negotiations took place. On 14 February, the Contact Group met and determined that negotiations should continue until midday on 20 February, by which time an agreement was expected to be reached. At this stage the FRY* delegation had still not provided any written comments and instead reverted to its second tactic, namely to offer formally to sign only the non-negotiable principles. The hope may have been that the Kosovo delegation would find it politically inappropriate to do the same, and the talks could then be declared a failure.⁸⁸ However, this was not an issue, and the negotiators placed no formal pressure on the Kosovo delegation to sign the principles. The draft text issued by the group reflecting those principles was a sufficient indication of acceptance. Meanwhile, the negotiators had produced two additional annexes (on economic issues and humanitarian assistance), which were again commented upon in writing very quickly by the Kosovo delegation.

To overcome the lack of response from the FRY, Ambassador Hill then traveled to Belgrade for consultations with President Milošević, taking with him a senior member of the FRY/Serb delegation. Kosovo formally protested against this breach of the isolation imposed on the delegations. Almost immediately after Ambassador Hill's return from Belgrade, around eleven days after the start of the negotiations, the FRY/Serb delegation finally presented a lengthy document, most of which was inconsistent with the non-negotiable principles and the overall structure of the draft settlement. The negotiators then continued to engage the FRY/Serb delegation in intensive dialogue in order to reduce its extensive comments to a more limited set of submissions that could be discussed. Since the proposals submitted by the Kosovo delegation remained within the terms of the initial draft and sought to improve the functioning of the political settlement in practical ways, the expectation and hope within the delegation was that its constructive stance would now be rewarded. Given the balance of political groups within the delegation and the fact that it was not composed of professionals with experience in international affairs, this constructive approach was perhaps surprising to some and must have required a degree of guidance from the Contact Group.⁸⁹

The new draft was presented by the negotiators together with an invitation for the parties to consider it as the final version of a political settlement. This invitation was rejected by both sides. In fact, the Kosovo delegation issued a formal protest, stating that it considered the presentation of an essentially new document two days before the planned conclusion of the conference—apparently as a result of discussions held directly with Belgrade—a breach of trust, and it refused even to accept the document. This gesture was intended to communicate to the negotiators a serious warning that the substantial change of the draft in favor of the party that had obstructed progress in the negotiations until the last minute risked undermining the further constructive participation of the Kosovo delegation. The Kosovo delegation would not be able to accept any solution, regardless of its content, and could not continue to be taken for granted. In fact, the presentation of the new draft had provoked in the delegation a sense of betrayal, which would be very difficult to overcome in the course of continued negotiations.⁹⁰

The protest of the Kosovo delegation was not understood in this way by the Contact Group; on the contrary, it was sharply criticized as impulsive and unfounded. Since there appeared to be no prospect of returning to the original draft, the Kosovo delegation reluctantly prepared a very short paper of less than one page, indicating the essential changes that would

⁸⁸ Nika, *op. cit.*, p. 105.

⁸⁹ Weller, *op. cit.*, p. 243.

⁹⁰ Weller, *op. cit.*, p. 64.



need to be made if discussions were to continue with any prospect of success. For its part, the FRY continued to demand changes on a number of key points. Thus, one day before the deadline for the acceptance of the agreement, a considerable number of substantive issues had not even been negotiated. Moreover, the essential annexes for civil and military implementation had only just been presented to the parties (or at least to the Kosovo delegation).⁹¹

The reasons for the delay in presenting the military annex seem to have been twofold. It appeared that the Contact Group itself remained divided on the functions, modalities, and powers of NATO's implementation of the agreement. Furthermore, since it had been announced that no proposal for amendments to the implementation annexes would be considered, it might have been felt unnecessary for the parties to be acquainted with the contents of a document that they were simply expected to accept. Whatever the merits of this strategy, it had the disadvantage that the Kosovo delegation, and particularly its military elements, had not had the opportunity to discuss in depth with NATO and other representatives how the NATO annex would be interpreted in practice. Since the annex foresaw the demilitarization of the KLA, it could hardly have come as a surprise to the negotiators that certain assurances regarding the implications of this concept would need to be given to a delegation that was effectively dominated by the KLA and a political party closely aligned with it.⁹²

Despite these uncertainties, on 20 February, shortly before the noon deadline, the parties were presented with a short document in which they were to indicate their acceptance of the agreement, subject only to technical changes to be made later by the experts. Unfortunately, at that time the negotiators had not been able to give the delegations the actual text of the agreement as it stood.⁹³ In fact, it was known that negotiations were still ongoing with the FRY/Serb delegation regarding further substantive concessions it had requested, which were clearly not merely technical changes. Neither the FRY/Serb delegation nor the Kosovo delegation was in a position to sign this text. While much time was spent on unresolved issues raised by the FRY/Serb delegation during this period, eventually attention was also paid to the concerns of the Kosovo delegation. This manifested itself in three ways. First, the negotiations for finalizing the political settlement were now taking place in the form of genuine proximity talks. Substantive proposals from one side were transmitted through the group of legal experts. A number of these proposals were accepted by the other side. Where there was no agreement, representatives of the Contact Group would seek to narrow the scope of the respective proposals through tough and skillful negotiations and refine them until they became acceptable. In this way, it became possible to produce a consolidated text of the entire agreement before the expected signing on 23 February. At the insistence of the FRY/Serb delegation, that text was no longer a short framework agreement linking together a number of essential annexes. Instead, all the annexes were incorporated into a comprehensive document entitled the Interim Agreement for Peace and Self-Government in Kosovo.⁹⁴

Second, a long overdue but intensive effort finally began to persuade the KLA and its supporters of the merits of signing the agreement. This included briefings from military experts, including, in the final stage of negotiations, by NATO itself. Through these contacts, the KLA had to be reassured of the actual meaning of demilitarization in practice. One government also offered to record its willingness to contribute to the transformation of the KLA (based on the above-mentioned request of the KLA), in full compliance with the conditions of the agreements.

⁹¹ Weller, *op. cit.*, p. 245.

⁹² Nika, *op. cit.*, p. 101.

⁹³ Petrisch and Pichler, *op. cit.*, p. 76.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 77.



Finally, a determined effort was made to address the issue of the final settlement that would occur after the three-year interim period. The Kosovo delegation had raised this issue in its initial comments on the draft framework agreement, but since then there had been no discussions on this point. To meet the demands of the Kosovo delegation, a significant addition was made in the final part of the agreement, referring to the “will of the people.” In addition, as a result of stormy negotiating developments, one delegation may have indicated its willingness to give certain bilateral assurances that this formulation indeed referred to the right of the people of Kosovo to express their will regarding the future status of the territory through a referendum. All three of these persuasive directions were directly supported by U.S. Secretary of State Albright, who had remained in Paris to assist in securing acceptance of the agreements. Nevertheless, even her presence could not secure official signing on 23 February.⁹⁵ In fact, her personal intervention had helped sway the majority of the Kosovo delegation, which was ready to sign, despite the fact that the KLA leadership in Kosovo was undergoing significant and somewhat disorienting changes at precisely that moment. But, according to press reports, a single member of the delegation was unable to support such a step. Since the delegation had agreed at the outset of the talks to act on the principle of consensus, this made formal signing at that stage impossible. Instead, the delegation adopted by consensus a statement stressing that it retained the option of signing the agreement after a short period of consultation with the people of Kosovo and its political and military institutions. The statement also noted that, to facilitate such consultations, the delegation had voted in favor of the agreement as presented in the 23 February negotiations.⁹⁶

The FRY/Serb delegation, for its part, issued three statements over the course of the day. When it appeared early in the day that Kosovo would not sign, it issued a lengthy statement containing demands for further concessions. This was then followed by a more conciliatory text, which was replaced by an even shorter version issued when it appeared that Kosovo, after all, would accept the text. In its final statement, the FRY/Serb delegation stressed that significant progress had been achieved in defining a political settlement for substantial self-government for Kosovo while respecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic of Serbia and of the FRY. However, the modalities for self-government still had to be further defined.⁹⁷ The FRY/Serbia also agreed to discuss the scope and character of an “international presence” in Kosovo for the implementation of the agreement.⁹⁸

Thus, the final outcome of the Rambouillet Conference was somewhat confusing. Kosovo argued that its delegation had accepted the text as the final result of the negotiations and would sign it subject to consultation at home. This position was taken because the negotiators had indicated that a further conference would have the nature of a signing conference, consistent with the precedent of the 1995 Bosnia and Herzegovina agreement, which was formally signed in Paris several weeks after the negotiations concluded in Dayton. The FRY/Serbia, on the other hand, considered the negotiating process as not concluded at all. The Contact Group then issued the chairmen’s conclusions, which perhaps did not fully reflect the intention of either party. It was noted that a political framework had now been established and thus the basis had been laid for the finalization of the implementation chapters of the agreement, including the modalities of the invited international civil and military presence in Kosovo. The Contact Group indicated that the parties had committed to attend a further conference, covering all aspects of implementation, on 15 March. This further conference, as it appeared, would be neither a simple signing conference nor a conference in which the political

⁹⁵ Petrisch and Pichler, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

⁹⁶ Petrisch and Pichler, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

⁹⁷ Weller, *op. cit.*, p. 248.

⁹⁸ Qosja, Rexhep, (1999): *Paqja e Përgjakshme*, Tiranë, Toena, p.76.



settlement would be reopened. Instead, the talks apparently aimed to focus solely on implementation—precisely the issues that had been declared non-negotiable throughout the Rambouillet process up to that point.⁹⁹

The Contact Group negotiators and the FRY/Serb and Kosovo delegations then met as requested at the Paris International Conference Center on Avenue Kléber on 15 March 1999. On that day, the Kosovo delegation presented to the co-chairs of the Conference and others an official letter, confirming its decision taken at Rambouillet to accept the interim agreement as presented on 23 February. “We would be honored to sign the Agreement in your presence at a time and place of your choosing,”¹⁰⁰ the letter stated. Instead of offering an immediate opportunity to sign, the negotiators strongly urged Kosovo to delay such a step, in order to allow further discussions with the FRY/Serb delegation. That delegation engaged in a procedural debate with the negotiators. At the invitation of the FRY/Serb delegation, on 16 March the negotiators responded in an official letter signed by all three of them, emphasizing “the unanimous view of the Contact Groups that only technical arrangements can be considered, which of course must be accepted as such and approved by the other delegation.”¹⁰¹ Thus, it was confirmed that the exhausting process of attempting to entice the FRY/Serb delegation to accept the agreement by making further and further concessions had now come to an end. Instead, the talks would indeed focus on implementing this agreement. In the days that followed, Kosovo was given the opportunity to discuss in detail issues of economic reconstruction, civil implementation, and elections under the OSCE, as well as military implementation with the relevant implementing organizations. The FRY/Serb side did not accept this offer. Instead, it presented on the first day its own version of the Agreement. The fact that the first change proposed in that version was the deletion of the word “peace” from the title did not bode well for the acceptance of the Rambouillet Agreement. Rather than focusing on limited amendments, this counter-draft effectively aimed to reopen the discussions for a political settlement and start all over again, in fact outside the non-negotiable principles. The draft proposed a formal subordination of Kosovo to Serbia, removed the limits on the exercise of federal functions in Kosovo, and accordingly reduced the functions of the Kosovo Assembly.¹⁰²

The text of the agreement in the form of 23 February was opened for signature on 18 March. In a formal ceremony, Kosovo signed the agreement, witnessed by only two of the three negotiators. The categorical refusal of Ambassador Mayorski to witness Kosovo’s signature of the Rambouillet and Paris talks outcome is somewhat surprising. After all, until that moment it had at least been maintained that the negotiators were serving the Contact Group, rather than a particular government represented within it or even a specific party in the talks. There was even an attempt to prevent the European Union negotiator from witnessing the signing. This attempt was overruled by the government holding the EU Presidency. As is customary with the signing or ratification of legal instruments of this kind, the Kosovo delegation issued an interpretative declaration at the moment of signature. In doing so, it communicated several understandings. It stated that the text was now definitive and not subject to further modifications, apart from purely technical changes. Kosovo also indicated that it considered NATO-led implementation, according to the provisions of the interim agreement, as an essential condition for the overall package and for the consent given by Kosovo. It committed to full cooperation with all implementing organizations and invited their early deployment. Kosovo confirmed its intention, already expressed at the conclusion of the Rambouillet Conference, that at the end of

⁹⁹ Weller, *op. cit.*, p. 249.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 249.

¹⁰¹ Krasniqi, *op. cit.*, p. 98.

¹⁰² Weller, *op. cit.*, p. 247.



the three-year interim period, the people of Kosovo would exercise their will through a referendum, conducted freely and fairly. The expressed will of the people would be conveyed to the international meeting to determine the mechanism for a final settlement for Kosovo, in accordance with the interim agreement, in particular Article I(3) of Chapter 8. Finally, the delegation again noted the KLA's intention to exercise the opportunity to be involved in a transformation process and welcomed the guarantees for bilateral cooperation.¹⁰³

The next day, a final attempt was made to engage the FRY/Serb delegation in substantive discussions. When this attempt proved fruitless, the co-chairs issued the following statement:

- The Rambouillet Agreement is the only peaceful solution to the Kosovo problem.
- In Paris, the Kosovo delegation seized this opportunity and, by its signature, committed to the Agreement in its entirety.
- Far from seizing this opportunity, the Yugoslav delegation has sought to unravel the Rambouillet Agreement.
- Therefore, after consulting with our partners in the Contact Group (Germany, Italy, the Russian Federation, the United States, the European Union, the OSCE Chairman-in-Office), we consider there is no purpose in prolonging the talks further. The negotiations are adjourned. Talks will not resume unless the Serbs express their acceptance of the Agreement.
- We will immediately engage in consultations with our partners and allies to be ready to act. We will remain in contact with the NATO Secretary-General. We ask the OSCE Chairman-in-Office to take all necessary measures regarding the KVM strategy. The Contact Group will remain seized of this matter.
- We solemnly warn the authorities in Belgrade against any military offensive on the ground and any obstruction of the freedom of movement and action of the KVM, which would run counter to their commitments. Such violations would have the gravest consequences.¹⁰⁴

Among the points of the Rambouillet Agreement were the following:

- “Kosovo shall have a President, Prime Minister and Government, Assembly, its own Supreme Court, Constitutional Court, and other courts.”
- “Kosovo shall have the authority to enact laws not subject to review by Serbia or the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, including the levying of taxes, the creation of programs for economic, scientific, technological, regional, and social development, the conduct of foreign relations within its areas of responsibility in the same manner as a Republic.”
- “The forces of the Yugoslav army and Serbian security forces shall fully withdraw from Kosovo, except for a limited border guard force (active only within a 5-kilometer border zone).”
- “The Parties invite NATO to deploy a military force (KFOR), which shall be authorized to use necessary force to ensure compliance with the agreements.”
- “The international community shall play a role in ensuring that these provisions are implemented through a Civil Implementation Mission (CIM) designated by NATO.”

¹⁰³ Nika, *op. cit.*, p. 105

¹⁰⁴ Weller, *op. cit.*, p. 242-244.



- “The Head of the CIM shall have the authority to issue binding directives to the Parties on all important matters as he deems reasonable, including the appointment and dismissal of officials and the restructuring of institutions.”
- “Three years after the implementation of the Agreement, an international meeting shall be convened to determine a mechanism for a final settlement for Kosovo on the basis of the will of its people.”
- “NATO personnel, together with their vehicles, vessels, aircraft, and equipment, shall enjoy free and unrestricted passage and unimpeded access throughout the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, including its airspace and territorial waters. This shall include, but not be limited to, the right to bivouac, maneuver, billet, and utilize any areas or facilities as required for support, training, and operations.”
- “NATO shall be granted the use of roads, railways, ports, and airports without payment of duties, dues, tolls, or charges incurred by mere use.”
- “Yugoslavia and Kosovo shall, upon simple request, provide all telecommunications services, including broadcast services, necessary for the operation, as determined by NATO. This shall include the right to use such means and services as are required to ensure full ability to communicate, and the right to use the entire electromagnetic spectrum for this purpose, at no cost.”
- “In conducting the Operation, NATO may need to make improvements or modifications to designated infrastructure in the FRY, such as roads, bridges, tunnels, buildings, and utility systems.”
- “NATO shall be immune from any legal process, whether civil, administrative, or criminal.”
- “NATO personnel, in all circumstances and at all times, shall be immune from the Parties’ jurisdiction with respect to any civil, administrative, criminal, or disciplinary offenses that may be committed by them in the FRY.”
- “NATO personnel shall be immune from any form of arrest, investigation, or detention by the authorities in the FRY.”¹⁰⁵

The agreement proved unsuccessful as the Republic of Serbia, led by President Slobodan Milošević, refused to sign it. Milošević’s policies did not align with the draft agreement, which ultimately led to its failure.¹⁰⁶ Milošević’s ambition over Kosovo led the Serbian side to reject the agreement, while the Albanian side’s readiness made the international community finalize the issue through their military intervention in Kosovo.

6. Conclusion

The Rambouillet Conference of 1999 was a defining moment in the international diplomatic efforts to resolve the Kosovo crisis. The failure of the negotiations underscored the deep-seated divisions between the Kosovo Albanian delegation, which accepted the agreement, and the Yugoslav government, which rejected it. This impasse ultimately led to NATO’s military intervention, marking a turning point in the conflict.

¹⁰⁵ United Nations, Security Council. Annex Rambouillet accords. Interim agreement for peace and self-government in Kosovo. Letter dated 4 June 1999 from the permanent representative of France to the United Nations addressed to the secretary – general. Distr. General, S.1999/648, 7 June 1999, f. 1-86.

¹⁰⁶ Weller, *op. cit.*, p. 225.



The conference not only highlighted the complexity of international diplomacy in the Balkans but also solidified Kosovo's position as a key issue in global politics. Western diplomacy played a crucial role, with the United States, NATO, and European allies exerting pressure to reach a settlement. However, internal divisions within the Contact Group, particularly Russia's reluctance to support military intervention, contributed to the failure of the negotiations.

Despite its immediate failure, the Rambouillet Conference laid the groundwork for Kosovo's future internationalization. The rejection of the agreement by Belgrade accelerated international efforts to end Serbian control over Kosovo, leading to the NATO air campaign and, ultimately, Kosovo's liberation in June 1999. The conference thus remains a pivotal event in the history of Kosovo's struggle for self-determination, demonstrating the limits of diplomacy when confronted with intransigent nationalist policies and the necessity of international intervention in humanitarian crises. However, this approach, which paved the way for the military invasion in Iraq without a Security Council resolution or, in the case of Libya, with a resolution that was insufficient given the transformation of the conflict, highlighted the complications/stabilization obligations involved after a military intervention justified on humanitarian grounds and the 'responsibility to protect'. At present, despite the terrible humanitarian crises that are taking place, such approaches have not been repeated.

Today, a new historical dimension regarding Rambouillet and the actors involved in Kosovo's developments has emerged. A considerable number of scholars and commentators concur that Rambouillet represented a positive step for Kosovo, marking the first international move toward its independence. Nevertheless, critiques persist to this day, particularly due to the assumption that the consequences could have been far greater had Milošević signed the agreement. Thus, the subsequent course of events related to Rambouillet must be understood in connection with the developments of the Vienna Conference.

Rambouillet, however, stands as the diplomatic turning point that signaled the end of Milošević's international legitimacy and the beginning of Kosovo Albanian diplomacy on the global stage. Although initially rejected by the commanders of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA), over time consensus and conviction emerged in favor of its signing. This decision enabled Kosovo to take its first step toward liberation from Serbia and the pursuit of independence, while simultaneously distancing itself from nationalist irredentism advocating unification with Albania—an approach strongly opposed by the international community. In this respect, Rambouillet constituted the first international mission to address the Kosovo question. Today, Kosovo exists as an independent state, shaped by the historical contingency that Milošević refused to sign the agreement, thereby prompting international actors to intervene in the crisis. Through this intervention, the legitimacy of Kosovo's right to sovereign statehood became increasingly evident.



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