

## BOOK REVIEW

### *“The great clash” by Enver Hoxhaj* \_\_\_\_\_

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“The years that await upon us can either be a time of loneliness and oblivion for Kosovo or a time of great opportunities. Because this is the time when taboos and rules are broken ”

This is the opening remark that sets the inception of Enver Hoxhaj’s confession, in the light of new developments and questions that imply the ‘great clash’ between the West and Russia. The author Enver Hoxhaj, is the longest-serving Foreign Minister of the Republic of Kosovo, as well as a protagonist of many occurrences that have conveyed the freedom and independence of Kosovo and an essential set piece of the still active professional political elite that was produced by the 23-year-long journey of building the state of Kosovo.

“The great clash” seems as though a “prophetic” call towards the “Albanian world” and its allies with the intention to prepare us for the worst-case scenario, that of the escalation and enlargement of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict in the region of Western Balkans, in the core of which will be the Republic of Kosovo.

It is no coincidence that Hoxhaj’s book is published in the midst of the Ukrainian war, for it contains warnings of major repercussions in the edifice of international security risen from the ruins of World War II, 77 years ago.

The author, Hoxhaj, has not been caught off guard by all these current events. In his quasi-empirical analysis, he attempts to provide the reader with the relevant clarity on the warned, long-standing goals of Vladimir Putin’s Russia and Putinism as an established doctrine. He bases the latter on two main pillars: On the one hand

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the restoration of the Tsarist glory by any possible mean, including the use of force and, on the other, the goal to strike down, degenerate and demolish the supremacy of the US-led model of liberal democracy. All of this, through the infamous hybrid war, the main battlefield of which is the region of the Western Balkans.

“There is no longer a common order, but a polycentric world, with some decision-making centers, which ought to be against American hegemony” - this is the Russian motto. The hybrid war is nothing but a collision of liberal democracy and autarchy, with Vladimir Putin being the par excellence representative of the latter, striving to win this battle by any mean possible.

In Hoxha's analysis, it is clear that the entirety of Kosovo's state-building journey, beginning with the gaining of freedom in 1999, after NATO's military intervention and followed by the promulgation of Kosovo's independence, is essential for understanding Putinism as a political doctrine in the field of international relations: “The more we deepen the understanding of why Putin has struck Kosovo in the past twenty years, the more we will be able to understand his worldview.”

The author provides us with a summarized historical and analytical excursus of all the defining events that support the above assertion, starting with Putin's emergence in 1999 as a High Security Counsel, to former President Boris Yeltsin and later on his appointment as Prime Minister, aligned with the visits in the bombed Belgrade and his first and only visit to Kosovo. To be continued with his “programmatic” speech in the Conference of Munich in 2007 “on the minimization of international law due to the overuse of force by the USA”, the attempt to prevent the declaration of independence of Kosovo, the military intervention in Georgia and Crimea, the escalation of the hybrid war during the pandemic and, last but not least, the unprovoked aggression against Ukraine.

Through analysis and contextualization, the author illustrates, with empirical clarity, the silence and inability of the international community to anticipate and halt the use of force for the purposes of states' relations and the realization of the Russian expansionist agenda.

The border of this essay seems to be the politician Enver Hoxhaj. Being an active figure in Kosovar politics, he has perhaps evited one of the topics that was expected with the most interest by his pen: that of the special court in The Hague, which is in fact one of the battlefields of the “great clash”.

The declaration of independence of the state of Kosovo and, above all, its certification by the International Court of Justice in The Hague, relied on the history and legitimacy of the KLA-led war in Kosovo, the aftermath of the genocide and plateau violations of the so-called Jus Cogens norms by Slobodan Milosevic's regime.

This was in short the basis for the recognition of Kosovo as a Sui Generis case by the ICJ and the international community. What is happening in The Hague? Is



the process against the leaders of the Kosovo Liberation Army a fair and honest process? Is there an attempt to rewrite the history of the Kosovo war, through this process? What are the consequences on Kosovo's international subjectivity if the indictments against the leaders are confirmed? Questions that unfortunately remain unanswered in the work of Enver Hoxhaj.

According to Hoxhaj, the exploitation of the conflict in Ukraine will affect all international agreements and the manner of conducting diplomacy. It will first amount to a strike upon the UN Charter, which in the event that it crumbles, will undoubtedly affect the structure of the Security Council in particular. In fact, it is clear that the strategy of the "five gendarmes" who oversee the compliance of the UN Charter and who guarantee the worldwide order for more than 77 years will no longer stand, as long as this explicitly violates the "sacred" principles of the Charter. It is widely known that Security Council resolutions are one of the sources of international law and thus they produce *erga omnes* international norms. Furthermore, the Security Council has the power to impede the development of international law. When we mention the Security Council, we are referring to its five permanent members, including Russia and China.

The necessity of a Hobbesian approach pervades the entire narrative of Hoxhaj, which in my view constitutes the most pivotal value of the book. He talks about a "repositioning of Kosovo", which is nothing but an invitation for the alignment of the strategic objectives of the Republic of Kosovo in relation to its security and the protection of the international subjectivity achieved so far, for which Hoxhaj does not speak implicitly. Hoxhaj recalls that the distinctive feature of the global circumstances that enabled Kosovo's freedom and independence was driven by the American strength and supremacy. "Kosovo was fortunate in its receipt of the American support, especially by the US President George W Bush, whom clearly understood Putin's games; he supported Albania's membership in NATO and Kosovo's independence" he stipulates.

Hoxhaj conveys between the lines that with the weakening of the American supremacy, the region of the Western Balkans has turned into a battlefield for the collision of the the great powers. An important spot in this regard is occupied by China, which, despite refusing to enable the use of force, is as aggressive as Russia, if not an ally in the hybrid war, "with Serbia as its main common stronghold."

Russia and China have largely prevented from the very beginning the consolidation of Kosovo's subjectivity under the threat of the veto and are the leaders of the non-recognition of Kosovo campaign, alongside Serbia.

Under these circumstances, Hoxhaj considers Kosovo's membership in the NATO as almost vital, as the latter is the only organization that offers credibility and guarantees under the threat of the worst-case scenario. "Recognition of independence by all European countries and Kosovo's membership in NATO are the sole tools for weakening Russia's influence in the region."

Built on facts, generally known events, Hoxhaj's book comes as a new synthesis with added cognitive values for developments in Kosovo and the region in the light of Russian aggression against Ukraine. It is no coincidence that the book was written and published as "knowing by heart", within a short time after this aggression. The sensitive sensors of the politician, diplomat and analyst Hoxhaj are immediately enabled to understand and analyze, among other things, or better to say, in the first place, the frequent mention of Kosovo by the Kremlin leader and his ministers as a *casus belli* to justify the attack against Ukraine. Sounds like a cynical retaliation against the US and NATO for propaganda consumption. Hoxhaj highlights once again the "cosmic" asymmetry between the *sui generis* case of Kosovo and the typical Nazi alibis of Moscow to attack Ukraine.

"The Great Clash" is a book that is pleasure to read. The author intertwines the deep acquaintance of the subject with the laconic style of expression. It is not customary for such books to be written often by active Albanian politicians. This book enriches the Albanian political literature. Above all, it helps to make the big politics "chewable" and provides useful knowledge even for non-professional readers.

