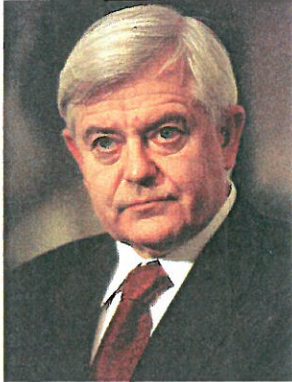


## 2.4 The disintegration of Yugoslavia, 1990–95



▲ Milan Kučan, Slovenia's first president, 1991–2002

### Conceptual understanding

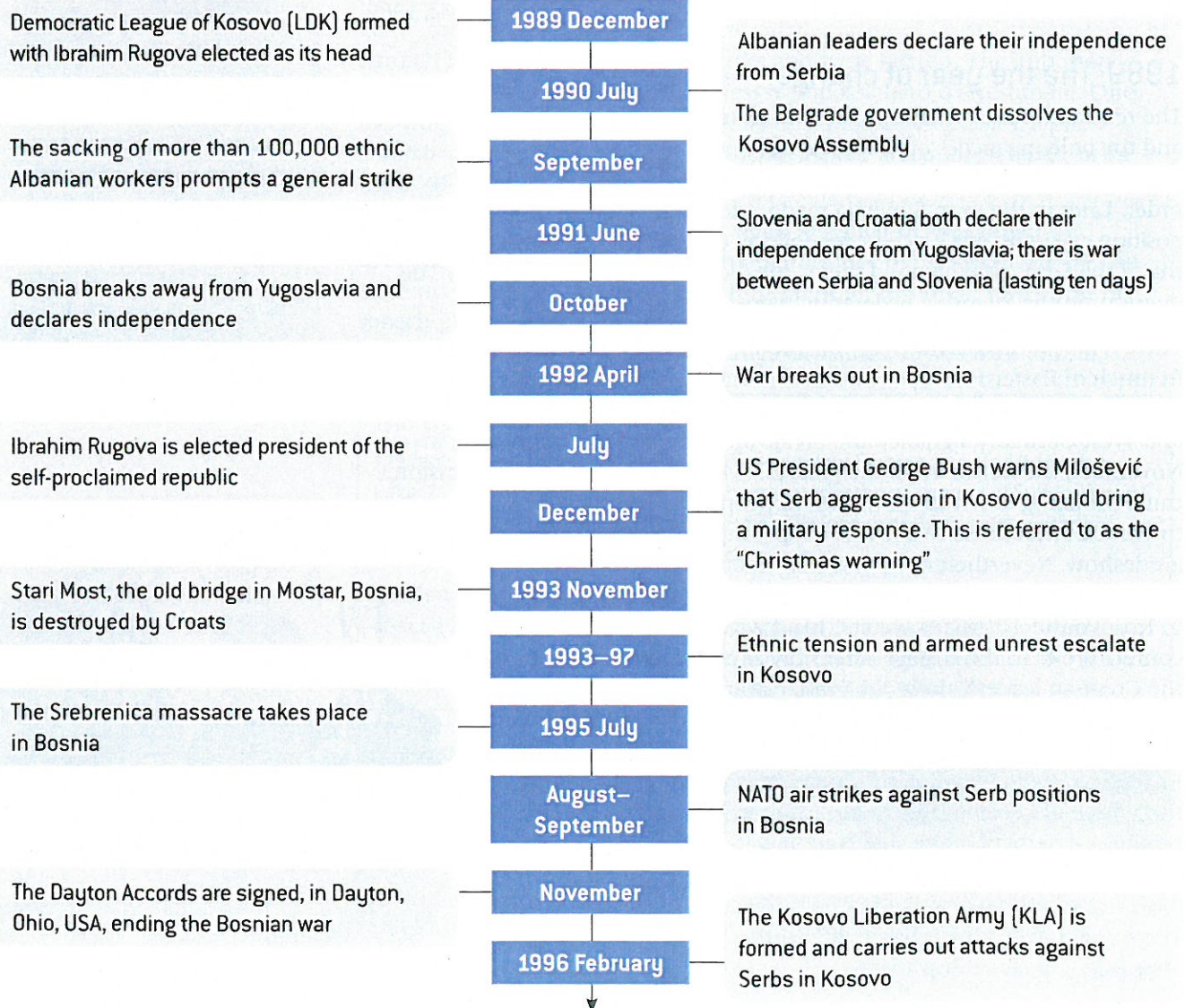
#### Key concepts

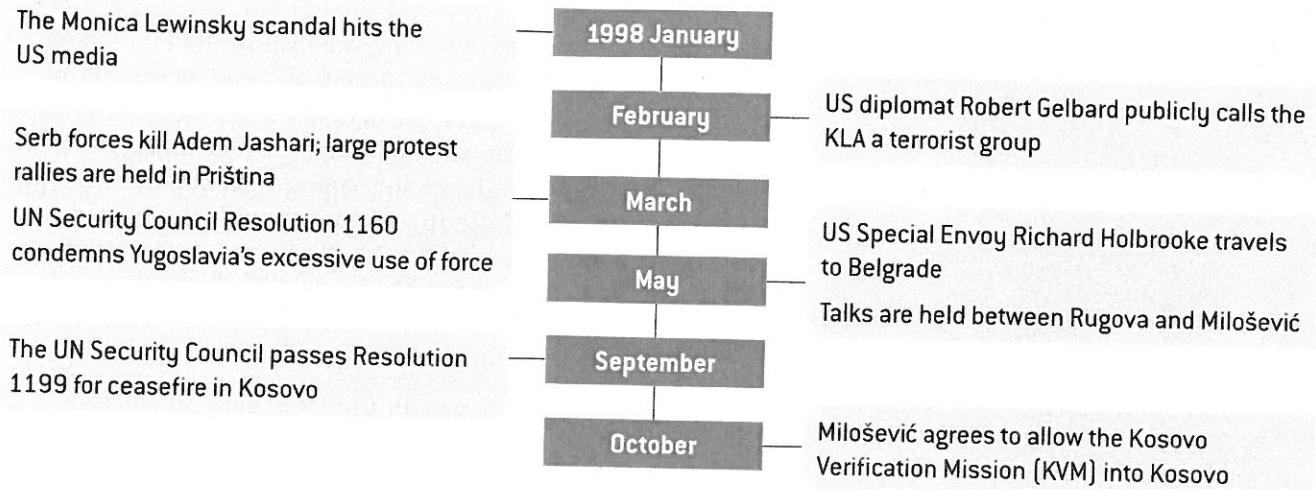
- Change
- Causation
- Consequence

#### Key questions

- What were the consequences of the break-up of Yugoslavia?
- Why did Yugoslavia fall apart?

### A chronology of key events in Kosovo and the Balkans, 1989–98





### Franjo Tudjman (1922–99)

Tudjman was the first president of the state of Croatia after it broke away from the former Yugoslavia in 1991. He remained its president until his death in 1999. A fervent nationalist, he fought with the partisans during the Second World War and later joined the military to become the youngest general in the Yugoslav army. He later gained a university degree in history and his outspoken manner led him to be expelled from the Communist Party in 1967.

He continued to be a defender of Croatia's record and became even more nationalistic. He was imprisoned for political activities against the government, although it is said that Tito, who was himself half Slovene and half Croat, was sympathetic to him and so his prison sentence was a soft one. Tudjman revered and greatly admired Tito.

He said in 1990:

*If Yugoslavia is to exist, it can exist only as an alliance, a confederation of independent states.*

In the 1980s, Tudjman formulated the Croatian Nationalist Programme. In 1989, he founded the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ), which won Croatia's first free parliamentary elections the following year.

Tudjman's autocratic style and hardline approach made him unpopular with many outside his country, but he led the country at a crucial time in its history. He has been accused of human rights violations during the early 1990s and in 2008 was indicted for war crimes, even though he had died almost a decade before. Tudjman is credited with creating an independent Croatia, and with helping the country move away from communism and towards greater democracy.

In the next year, both Slovenia and Croatia broke away from the Yugoslav Federation and held their own multi-party elections. In April, Slovenia elected Milan Kučan as its new president and Franjo Tudjman became head of state in Croatia. There is little doubt that the inflammatory nationalist rhetoric and actions of Serbia contributed to the decisions that brought about the breakdown in relations between the Yugoslav states.

Although Slovenia was the state that led the way, it was in Croatia that most of the problems developed. This was partially due to the fact that, ethnically, Slovenia had hardly any Serbs living in its territory. In contrast, in Croatia there existed a significant number who had been living there for generations. The percentage of those who declared themselves Serbs living in Croatia was, according to the census of 1991, almost 12% of the total population, living among an 80% Croat majority.

Apart from the desire to ensure the well-being of Serbs in the whole of Yugoslavia, the relationship that had existed before 1990 between Serbs and Croats was a rocky one. The actions committed by the collaborationist Croatian state and the Ustaša during the Second



▲ The Republic of Serbian Krajina inside Croatia (shaded in red-pink), which proclaimed its independence in 1991 up to 1995

World War against the Serbs could not be forgotten. As Milošević preached Serb nationalism in the late 1980s, pressure was put on other Yugoslav republics to allow Serb nationalist rallies, particularly in Croatia, where a large minority lived. Now it appeared as though Croatia wanted to leave the Yugoslav Federation, while many ethnic Serbs living within its borders opposed the secession and wished Croatia to remain a part of Yugoslavia. The answer for many Serbs in Croatia was the creation of a new Serb state within that republic, or to be allowed to join a Greater Serbian state.

After Tudjman's victory in the 1990 general election, the Croatian parliament changed the status of Serbs in Croatia from residents of a constitutional nation to that of a national minority. Croatian Serbs in the southern town of Knin (a *Chetnik* heartland in 1941–45), under the leadership of local Knin police inspector Milan Martić, formed a separatist body called the SAO Krajina. This organization's demand was to remain in union with other Serb populations in the Krajina region (see the map) if Croatia decided to secede. In the summer of 1990, SAO Krajina organized resistance to the Croatian authorities with the support of Milošević, who was wary of Tudjman's nationalistic and separatist stance. The

Yugoslav army, dominated by Serbs, was urged by Milošević to defend the rights of Serbs in Croatia. In December 1991, the Croatian Serbs created the Republic of Serbian Krajina. Yugoslavia was in imminent danger of imploding.

## The independence of Slovenia and Croatia: War in 1991

### Croatia's War of Independence

As a result both of the victory in the 1990 multi-party parliamentary elections of nationalist groups in Slovenia, Croatia, Macedonia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, and also of the failure of the politicians to agree to remain in a federated Yugoslavia, Slovenia and Croatia declared their independence in June 1991. Both Tudjman and Milošević had decided that force was going to solve their problems. Meanwhile, in April, fighting had already broken out between the Croatian government and the rebel ethnic Serbs in Krajina, supported by the Serb-controlled Yugoslav People's Army or JNA. The Croatian War of Independence set the scene for greater conflicts in the coming years in Bosnia and later, at the end of the decade, in Kosovo. It soon became clear that this first war in Croatia was going to be a bloody one, with ethnic hatreds quickly coming to the surface. Civilians were caught up in



▲ Bombardment of Dubrovnik in 1991



the conflicts and brutality was common on both sides. In the early months of the war, the Yugoslav People's Army deliberately targeted civilian areas in the coastal treasures of Split and Dubrovnik, both UNESCO World Heritage sites.

What happened in episodes such as the siege and bombardment of cultural sites like Dubrovnik and Split appalled many but it was a taste of things to come. After the war, an ex-minister commented:

*All armies in the past did their best and refused to wage war or to target and to bomb the city of Dubrovnik. It was simply impossible for anyone to attack and demolish Dubrovnik. In the 1800s, Dubrovnik was captured by Napoleon, but without a fight. The Russian fleet of Admiral Senyavin came to attack Dubrovnik but they lowered their guns ... there was not a single shell or bullet fired at Dubrovnik. That's Dubrovnik's history, and that indicates the level of the human civilisation, the level of respect afforded to Dubrovnik. What we did is the greatest shame that was done in 1991.*

— Nikola Samardžić, 2004



▲ Shelling of the old town in Dubrovnik in 1991

## Slovenia's War of Independence: The Ten-Day War

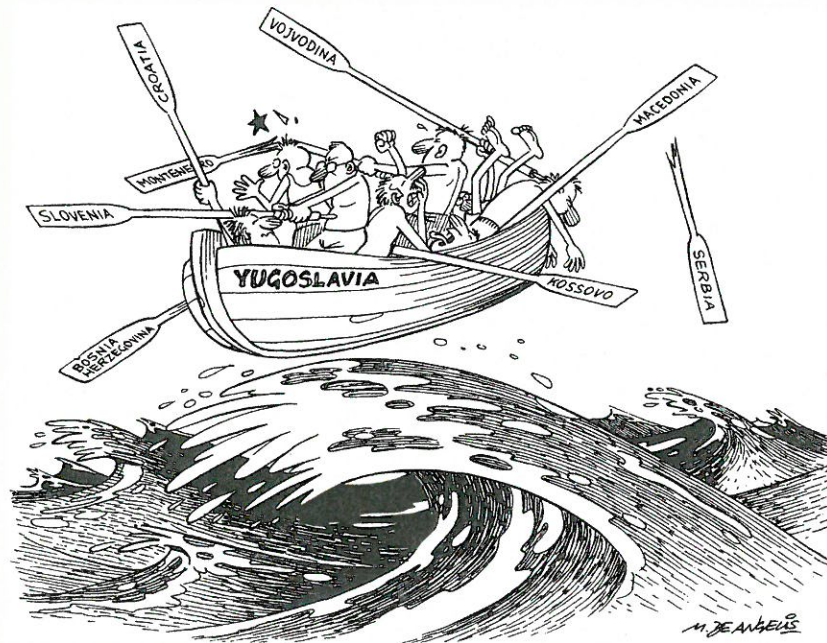
Slovenia had long regarded itself as Yugoslavia's most developed state. Slovenia's borders with Italy, Austria and Hungary; its attractions, which included some of the largest sources of tourist revenue in Yugoslavia, and its open attitude went a long way to accounting for this outlook among the Slovenes. The fighting was a short affair, lasting only ten days before peace was declared. In June 1991, the Slovenian government took control of the republic's border posts and the international airport in the capital, Ljubljana. After three days and a handful of casualties on both sides, the European community took action and met to propose a ceasefire. Eventually, both sides agreed to this and the conflict was concluded on 7 July. It had cost less than 100 dead on both sides, but the consequences were significant for Yugoslavia. The Slovenes had counted on the international community stepping in to prevent fighting and, in this, they were correct. They also knew that the Milošević's government was not as concerned about Slovenia's independence, given the small number of ethnic Serbs in the country; besides, the issue of Croatia was more important to the Serbs.

For Slovenia, the Ten-Day War marked its independence from Yugoslavia, which was officially recognized by the European community in the following year. For the international community, there were more pressing issues. In 1990, Saddam Hussein's Iraq had invaded Kuwait, bringing about UN intervention in March 1991. The attention of the United States and the world was on Iraq and the gulf war in 1991, along with a sharp rise in oil prices and a slowdown in the world economy. In addition, there had been a coup in the former Soviet Union and Boris Yeltsin had replaced Mikhail Gorbachev. With both Slovenia and Croatia now independent, the stage was set for a much more violent conflict in Bosnia in 1992, the bloodiest of all the battles waged in the break-up of the Yugoslav state. Meanwhile, in Kosovo, the majority Kosovars watched and waited.

### Source skills

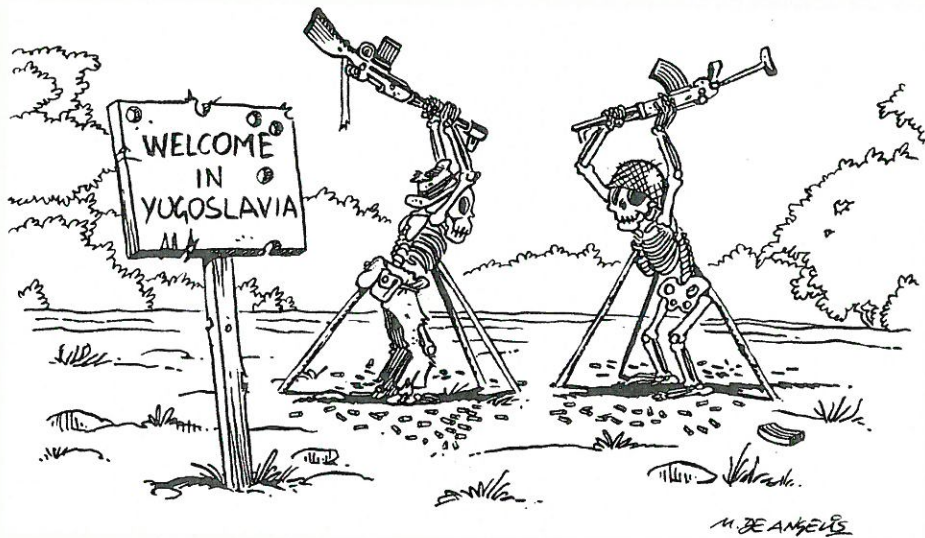
#### Source A

A cartoon by De Angelis showing the break-up of Yugoslavia, published in the Italian newspaper *Il Popolo*.



#### Source B

A cartoon, "Welcome to Yugoslavia", also by De Angelis, published in the Italian newspaper *Il Popolo*.



First question, part b – 2 marks for each source

What is the message of each of the cartoons?

First question, part a – 3 marks

In Source A, what is the significance of the two oars Montenegro and Serbia having broken off?



▲ Serb populations in the Republics of Croatia and Bosnia

### ATL Thinking skills

How accurate was the message of Source A in 1992?

## The repression of the Albanian independence campaign, 1991–95

The secession of both Slovenia and Croatia in 1991 meant the end of Tito's federation, and worse was still to come in Bosnia. However, for the remaining republics, particularly for the formerly autonomous region of Kosovo, the choice was unpalatable: should they remain with the remnants of the Yugoslav state and strive to make it work or should they go it alone?

### Ethnicity in Kosovo and the wars in Yugoslavia

The issue of ethnicity in the conflict in Yugoslavia and Kosovo has been overplayed. In Rwanda, the divide between the Hutu and the Tutsi was accentuated by other factors as well as by recent developments under colonial rule. In the case of Yugoslavia, one of the accusations levelled at Milošević by the War Crimes Tribunal was his overt nationalism and that he tried to create a "Greater Serbia". This was to comprise a Serb-dominated state, which included the Serb-populated areas of Croatia, Bosnia, and Kosovo.

However, it is reasonable to say that it is a common misconception about the Yugoslav wars in the 1990s that they were the result of centuries of ethnic conflict. There is little evidence to support such a contention. Ethnic groups had existed side by side for centuries and, with the coming of Ottoman rule in the 14th century, the influence of Islam added a religious element to this ethnic mix. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Serbs

and Croats lived together harmoniously in the ethnically mixed region of Dalmatia and many early advocates of a united Yugoslavia came from this region. Among them was the Croat Ante Trumbić. Nevertheless, by the time of the outbreak of the Yugoslav wars in the 1990s, the hospitable relations between Serbs and Croats in Dalmatia had broken down. This saw Dalmatian Serbs fighting on the side of the Republic of Serbian Krajina. This supports the claim that ethnic conflict between the different groups in Yugoslavia became conspicuous in the 20th century, starting with the tensions over the establishment of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes after the First World War escalating in the late 1920s following the assassination of the popular Croatian politician Stjepan Radić. It is without doubt that severe ethnic conflict took place during the Second World War when the Croatian Ustaša movement committed genocide against Serbs. In return, the Serbian *Chetnik* movement

responded with violence against Croats and Bosniaks. Only Tito, when he came to power, was able to promote a Yugoslav nationalism that held the state together.

When Tito died in 1980, the federation he had helped create fell apart and for this Milošević must bear a significant share of the blame, although he is not alone. Tudjman was certainly a key partner in this but it was the promotion of a Serb nationalism that did much to bring

about the ethnic hatreds that ensued from the bitter wars that broke up Yugoslavia in the 1990s. Finally, when the Kosovar Albanians began to demand their own state, Serb nationalists were unwilling to grant this ethnic minority any of the freedoms they wanted for themselves. The consequence was bloodshed, the break-up of the federation and a Europe thrown into turmoil because of the exploitation of ethnic divisions.

The events happening in Yugoslavia, the rest of the communist world and in the Middle East overshadowed Kosovo and its campaign for possible independence. The removal of the Albanian Kosovar leaders Jashari and Vllasi, and Kosovo's autonomous status in 1989, was followed by the adoption of special measures to control any dissent in the province to separate from Serbia. In the summer of 1990, as Slovenia and Croatia began to hold multi-party elections, there were further protests in Kosovo. In July, a number of Albanian delegates met in the street outside the assembly building to declare Kosovo an independent republic as "*an equal and independent entity within the framework of the Yugoslav federation*" (Elsie, 2011: 66). A week later, the Serbian parliament dissolved the Kosovo Assembly and took measures to ban Albanian language media and broadcasts.

In September of the same year, many of the same delegates who had gathered in July to declare Kosovo an independent republic met again, in secret, in the small town of Kaçanik in the south of the province to draw up a constitution for the Republic of Kosovo. The most important impact of the Yugoslav wars on the thinking of the Albanian nationalists in Kosovo was that, instead of striving towards remaining part of the Yugoslav Federation, they would seek full independence. A year later, in September 1991, the Albanians held a referendum and declared Kosovo an independent state, claiming a 99% vote in favour. Despite the repression of Albanian nationalist sentiment in Kosovo, the people of the province were determined to resist. A key part of this political movement was centred on the Democratic League of Kosovo, known by the initials LDK, from its Albanian name *Lidhja Demokratike e Kosovës*. This was originally founded in 1989 and led by Ibrahim Rugova.

### Ibrahim Rugova (1944–2006)

Ibrahim Rugova was born at the end of 1944. His father and grandfather were killed by communists only six weeks after his birth. Rugova was brought up in Kosovo, where he attended Priština University before going to Paris for a year to study literature.

In 1988, he was elected the president of the Kosovo Writers Association, which became the focus of the growing Albanian opposition to Serb rule in Kosovo. In 1989, Rugova became the president of the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK).

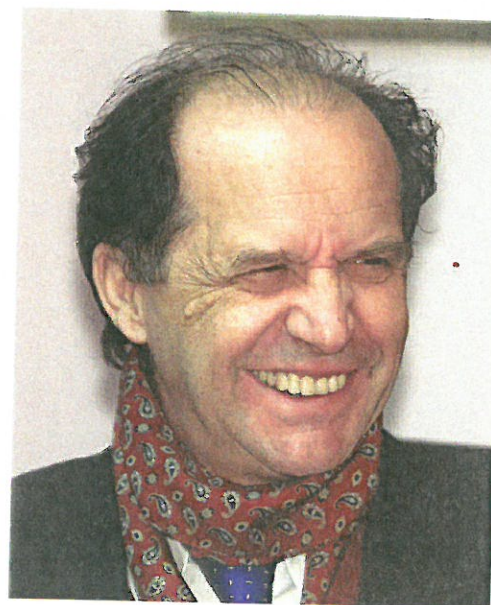
Rugova was president of Kosovo between 1992 and 2006. He did not look like a man who might change

history. His office was a bungalow behind the football stadium in Priština, where he spent much of his adult life until he died in 2006. He was hailed by some as the "Gandhi of the Balkans"; with his trademark silk scarf, and a cigarette in his hand, he cultivated a bohemian air. A journalist once described him disparagingly as "*a kind of loser who sat in a corner drinking too much coffee*" (<http://www.economist.com/node/5436910>). However, this man held the aspirations of almost 2 million Kosovo Albanians and led his tiny country on the road to independence.



## The role and significance of Ibrahim Rugova

Rugova was essentially a pacifist as well as an academic, and spent the last 18 years of his life at the centre of Kosovan politics, where he advocated that the province should be a democratic sovereign state, independent of Serbia. Initially, when Rugova became head of the LDK, he believed he could win independence without the use of force. He worked towards developing a parallel system of education, health services and local government for the ethnic Albanian majority in Kosovo when they were denied many of these by the Serbian government in the 1990s. Events overtook both him and his methods, however. Before the Bosnian war broke out in 1992, Rugova had resisted pressure by the Croats to open up a campaign against Serb rule the year before, fearing the possible consequences for his people. Instead, as Bosnia was carved up and thousands died, his low-key, peaceful approach led to Kosovo being totally ignored in the Dayton Accords signed in Ohio in 1995 to bring an end to the Bosnian conflict.



▲ Ibrahim Rugova

After 1995, Rugova's role changed, as Milošević and the Serbs turned their focus back towards Kosovo. Rugova had been elected president of the self-proclaimed Republic of Kosovo in 1992 but he was not granted international recognition and, following the signing of the Dayton Accords, for some Albanians at least, more radical measures were needed. They formed the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) in 1996. Rugova's policy of passive resistance had managed to maintain peace in Kosovo during the wars with Slovenia, Croatia and Bosnia during the early 1990s but this came at the cost of increasing frustration among Kosovo's Albanian population, hence the emergence of the KLA. Despite his more radical stance by some, Rugova was re-elected president in another unofficial vote in 1998. In 1999, Kosovo was attacked by Serbia and defended by NATO. Rugova went on to be elected as president again in 2002 and 2004, a position he held until his death in January 2006. His significance for the people of Kosovo is huge. Throughout the 1990s, he was seen as the moderate, intellectual face of Albanian opposition that stood against Milošević's Belgrade regime and is, by some, regarded as the "father of the nation".

## The Bosnian war, 1992–95

The face of passive resistance which Rugova presented to the world was at odds with what happened in neighbouring Bosnia in the early years of the decade. The attention of the world was to be drawn to Bosnia and the full horrors of the conflict examined. In Rwanda, the genocide developed and the international community did little of practical use to stop the killing. Lessons learned in Rwanda were to have an impact on Bosnia and for Kosovo, finally leading to intervention in 1999. In Bosnia, the United States, Britain, France, Germany, Russia and countries of the Middle East followed widely differing policies.

Why might this have been the case? According to a census taken in 1991, Bosnia and Herzegovina's population consisted of 44% Muslims, 1% Serbs, 17% Croats and 5% "other". The birth rate of the Muslim community was higher than that of the others, so the probability was that Muslims would dominate the state within one or two generations.