

Written Interview by Christian Costamagna, PhD

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1. Please present yourself and your research project

My name is Christian Costamagna, and I am a scholar specializing in the political history of Yugoslavia. My main research interests include the causes of the dissolution of Yugoslavia, the wars in the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s, and particularly the Kosovo War and the NATO intervention against Yugoslavia in 1999. My academic background is interdisciplinary, with a bachelor's degree in Communication Sciences, a master's degree in International Relations, and a Ph.D. in Historical Sciences. During my doctoral studies, which I completed in 2013 at the University of Eastern Piedmont in Italy, I focused on the rise to power of Slobodan Milošević in the late 1980s. I worked with documents from the League of Communists of Serbia in the archives of Serbia in Belgrade. Specifically, I highlighted how the Serbian communist leader managed to gain popular support by politically exploiting the sensitive issue of Kosovo, which remains relevant to this day.

My current research, made possible by the generous support of the EEGA ScienceCampus fellowship, investigates the very reasons behind NATO's intervention against Yugoslavia in 1999. This military intervention, which sparked contrasting reactions at the time, is commonly framed conceptually as an episode of the Kosovo War (1998-1999). My project seeks to understand and explain the political and strategic motivations behind the NATO bombing, as well as the motivations and concepts that guided the Yugoslav political leadership during that historical period. I acknowledge that this is an ambitious and challenging project. It is ambitious because I intend to critically assess the extensive academic literature in the fields of historiography, political science, and international relations related to these historical events. My goal is to understand the core motivations that drove NATO to intervene against Yugoslavia by using new American and Yugoslav government documents. An evident limitation of my research is that NATO documents related to the Kosovo War have not yet been declassified. However, after thorough scientific investigations, it has become clear that there are numerous declassified American and Yugoslav government documents (accessible online) that provide invaluable insights into the thinking and motivations behind the NATO intervention. These documents come from some of the most important political and military government bodies of the key countries involved.

In the case of the United States, as the leading country within NATO, it is possible to access some documents released on the website of the Bill Clinton Presidential Library, rather than the State Department's website. For Yugoslavia, the primary sources consist of a series of documents used as evidence in the trial against Slobodan Milošević and other Yugoslav political and military leaders at the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY). In this regard, my work primarily focuses on the political and strategic choices made by the political and military elites of the United States and Yugoslavia. After a preliminary review of numerous primary sources, I have formulated hypotheses and interpretations of historical events that challenge the prevailing interpretations. For example, regarding the motivations for NATO's intervention, thanks to access to declassified American sources and contemporary journalistic sources, it is possible to argue that the idea of an American military intervention against Serbia, should Belgrade conduct an ethnic cleansing operation in Kosovo against Kosovo Albanians, dates back to the second half of 1992. The Americans feared that a massive influx of Kosovo Albanian refugees into Albania and Macedonia would trigger a domino effect of various nationalisms in the region, similar to the two Balkan Wars of the early 20th century. In short, the American conception was to prevent a large-scale conflict in the Balkans, which, in their view, could involve

countries not belonging to the former Yugoslavia. A conflict in the Balkans was seen as a significant risk to American national interests in Europe.

2. How did you come up with your research project?

My interest in the former Yugoslavia region began when I was a teenager in the early '90s during the wars in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. In Italy, newspapers and television news reported horrifying updates about those conflicts every day, in a territory – the former Yugoslavia - so close to Italy, yet about which I knew nothing. It was during this time that my desire to comprehend the tragic events of the Yugoslav conflicts first arose. Consequently, driven by my enduring interest in the former Yugoslavia, which has persisted throughout most of my adult life, I embarked on my current research project over a year ago. While reviewing my personal notes dating back to 2016, concerning Yugoslav documents from 1998 on the ICTY website and American documents from 1998-1999 on the Bill Clinton Presidential Library website, I began to contemplate the significance of their contents. In 2016, although I recognized the documents as having substantial historiographic value, I was still deeply immersed in the issues of the 1980s and the dissolution of socialist Yugoslavia, prompting me to temporarily set them aside. Therefore, when I revisited these documents a little over a year ago and reevaluated their contents, I fully grasped their importance in shedding light on the Kosovo War. By cross-referencing American sources with Yugoslav ones, I succeeded in obtaining a more comprehensive and lucid overall understanding of some of the principal factors that precipitated NATO's intervention.

Furthermore, another compelling factor that prompted me to undertake this research project relates to my serendipitous discovery of numerous interviews with former government and military officials, both American and Yugoslav (primarily Serbian), on platforms like YouTube. These interviews provide invaluable supplementary insights for assessing archival information. These collective considerations cemented my conviction that there was indeed ample room for an engaging research project on the Kosovo War.

3. How did you get to know EEGA ScienceCampus?

During my initial bibliographic research in 2022, I had noticed that there was a researcher, Dr. Elisa Satjukow, at the University of Leipzig, who had recently worked on the Kosovo War, albeit with a different approach from mine. Several months later, while I was conducting my research at the Open Society Archives in Budapest, I unexpectedly came into contact with Dr. Elisa Satjukow and discussed the work I was undertaking. Our discussions proved to be highly engaging and productive, and it was through her that I became aware of the EEGA ScienceCampus. Thanks to Dr. Satjukow, who generously served as my supervisor during my EEGA fellowship, I was able to benefit from her invaluable insights.

4. What are the links between your research project and EEGA ScienceCampus?

My research project examines a historical event that pertains to a geographical area in Eastern Europe, but it also holds global significance, extending beyond Southeastern Europe alone. The NATO intervention, under American leadership, has elicited diverse reactions not only in Russia but also in China and various other countries worldwide. Kosovo War, especially NATO intervention, was an important event in world history. Furthermore, it is worth noting that even now, about 25 years later, the Kosovo War has left deep-seated rifts and divisions in the region, exemplified by the challenging dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina. Lastly, it is crucial to emphasize that the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 has introduced additional reasons for concern, impacting the overall security landscape in Europe and potentially reverberating with adverse

consequences in the Balkans. The protests and incidents of violence in the northern part of Kosovo, at the very least, underscore the necessity for vigilant monitoring of the region.

5. What is the EEGA ScienceCampus for you?

I think of the EEGA ScienceCampus as a network of top academics and research institutes that stimulate thinking. In my particular case, I have primarily benefited from engaging with numerous academic experts who generously provided their feedback. Within this context, I would like to express my special gratitude to Dr. Elisa Satjukow and Prof. Stefan Rohdewald.

6. The benefit of EEGA ScienceCampus to me is ...

Restricting my discussion to a few examples, I have benefited significantly from books and numerous sources that Dr. Satjukow utilized for her doctoral thesis, which was published in 2020 as a monograph: *Die Andere Seite der Intervention: Eine serbische Erfahrungsgeschichte der NATO-Bombardierung 1999*, Transcript Historie, Band 162. Prof. Rohdewald gave me the opportunity to attend fascinating seminars on contemporary Eastern European and Balkan history. These seminars featured the participation of numerous international scholars as guest speakers. Equally noteworthy were the seminars and other events organized by EEGA at The Leibniz Institute for the History and Culture of Eastern Europe (GWZO), with a diverse array of international guests. Additionally, the program offered educational opportunities, including workshops dedicated to young researchers. EEGA ScienceCampus has provided me with the chance to receive feedback on my project and to connect with fellow scholars and researchers, both at the University of Leipzig and beyond. Moreover, EEGA ScienceCampus, in collaboration with the University of Leipzig, has given me a perfect working environment, complete with an office at the Department of History. This office is conveniently located opposite the University Library and in close proximity to the equally valuable GWZO library. Thanks to the EEGA fellowship, in addition to facilitating the continuation of my research and the refinement of my research hypotheses, I have had the opportunity to enhance my social capital. In conclusion, if my experience in Leipzig has been rewarding, it is attributable to the many individuals who have accompanied me on this journey. I extend my gratitude to all the EEGA staff members and the administrative personnel of the Department of History at the University of Leipzig for their invaluable support.