

Institution: London School of Economics and Political Science		
Unit of Assessment: 19 – Politics and International Studies		
Title of case study: Promoting civil society-led approaches to post-conflict reconciliation		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2006-2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Denisa Kostovicova	Associate Professor in Global Politics	2003 to present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2015-2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No		
1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words) <p>Dr Denisa Kostovicova's research on post-conflict justice and reconciliation has influenced the development of UK foreign policy related to the legacy of war crimes in the Balkans. It led to the Balkan states' unprecedented "joint declaration on war crimes" at the London Summit, committing states to the establishment of facts of war crimes, including recognition of victims of conflict-related sexual violence. The research has enhanced the advocacy capacity of Balkan civil society organisations, notably providing RECOM with an evidence base for its negotiations with the European Union as it seeks political support for the establishment of a regional fact-finding commission. Finally, within the scope of a joint research project with King's College London and University of the Arts London, Kostovicova's research revealed new forms of marginalisation of women's voices and concerns in post-conflict contexts and influenced United Nations working practices, facilitating the promotion of women's interests and needs in peacebuilding discussions.</p>		
2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words) <p>Dr Denisa Kostovicova's research investigates how post-conflict justice and reconciliation can contribute to the strategic goals of post-conflict peacebuilding. Kostovicova has been motivated by a need to better understand how the legacy of mass atrocity can be addressed appropriately and comprehensively. Of particular interest is the role of civil society and community organisations as participating actors in the process of reckoning with war crimes and rebuilding post-conflict states and societies [2] [3]. This includes the promotion of a "gender-just" peace, one that recognises women's needs and concerns, which have been shaped by the gendered nature of violence [4] [5] [6].</p> <p>The research addressed gaps in peacebuilding policy and scholarship focused on national-level transitional justice mechanisms, such as war crimes trials or truth commissions, which ignore the regional dimensions of contemporary conflicts. Rebels cross borders to commit atrocities, and people cross borders to flee to safety. This means that when a national approach is applied to pursue post-conflict justice, an "impunity gap" is created. Additionally, domestic and international war crimes trials are insufficient to address the vast scale of suffering typical of contemporary conflicts. As such, they ultimately, and crucially, lack legitimacy with victims at grass-roots level. The necessity for complementary, "bottom-up", victim-centred restorative civil society processes is clear, but evidence of their effectiveness has been scant.</p> <p>Kostovicova's research, principally focused on the Balkans, has provided robust new empirical evidence - derived from text-mining and discourse analysis of reconciliation debates across six languages - of the impact of a regional, multi-national rather than national, approach to post-conflict justice, led by local civil society actors [1]. Analysis showed that regional-level post-conflict justice debates are more reconciliatory than national-level equivalents in that they focus the discussion on issues such as truth, justice, solidarity, and empathy for all victims regardless of their ethnicity [1] [2]. Evidence shows that for external efforts aimed at promoting justice to gain legitimacy in the Balkans, the European Union (EU) needs to support restorative, civil society-led approaches, such as inter-ethnic dialogues and consultations to address the weaknesses of its dominant approach to post-conflict justice through war crimes prosecutions at both international (through the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia) and domestic levels [3].</p> <p>In addition to providing new evidence of the benefits of regional justice-seeking, Kostovicova's research has also advanced understanding of the gendered dimension of peacebuilding and</p>		

reconciliation, including post-conflict violence against women [4]. This research analysed how women's voices are marginalised in peacebuilding discussions, providing evidence of men's domination of turn-taking (i.e. longer sequences of men talking after men) in public debates, restricting women's deliberative space and opportunities to develop and sustain arguments that reflect their concerns [6]. In addition, her research advanced the evaluation and understanding of arts-based approaches to peacebuilding [5]. It identified the limitations of art in confronting the stigma of conflict-related sexual violence. Based on analysis of a public art installation intended to address the legacy of wartime rape in Kosovo, this research shows that art can lead to recognition of a crime but not of a victim. This gendered dimension of Kostovicova's work represented her contribution to a joint project with King's College London and University of the Arts London (UAL). Kostovicova was a member of LSE's Department of Government from 2005 to 2019, before moving to the European Institute.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

- [1] Kostovicova, D. and Biquelet, A. (2018). Norm Contestation and Reconciliation: Evidence from a regional transitional justice process in the Balkans. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 41(4), pp. 681-700. DOI: 10.1080/01419870.2018.1380211.
- [2] Kostovicova, D. (2017). Seeking Justice in a Divided Region: Text Analysis of a Regional Civil Society Initiative in the Balkans. *International Journal of Transitional Justice*, 11(1), pp. 154-175. DOI: 10.1093/ijtj/ijw023.
- [3] Bojicic-Dzelilovic, V., Kostovicova, D., and Randazzo, E. (2020). EU in the Western Balkans: Hybrid Development, Hybrid Security and Hybrid Justice. In M. Kaldor, I. Ranglov, and S. Selchow (Eds.) *EU Global Strategy and Human Security: Rethinking Approaches to Conflict*. Routledge. ISBN: 9780367591465.
- [4] Kostovicova, D., Bojicic-Dzelilovic, V., and Henry, M. (2020). Drawing on the Continuum: A War and Post-War Political Economy of Gender-Based Violence in Bosnia and Herzegovina. *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 22(2), pp. 250-272. DOI: 10.1080/14616742.2019.1692686.
- [5] Krasniqi, V., Sokolić, I., Kostovicova, D. (2020). Skirts as Flags: Transitional Justice, Gender and Everyday Nationalism in Kosovo. *Nations and Nationalism*, 26(2), pp. 461-476. DOI: 10.1111/nana.12593.
- [6] Kostovicova, D. and Knott, E. (2020). Harm, Change and Unpredictability: The Ethics of Interviews in Conflict Research. *Qualitative Research*. DOI: 10.1177/1468794120975657.

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4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

This research has been instrumental in promoting civil society-led reconciliation and the importance of regional, restorative approaches to post-conflict justice as a complement to the national-level, retributive approaches. Stakeholders to have benefitted from engagement with this research include UK foreign policymakers, the EU, Balkan civil society organisations (most notably RECOM), and the United Nations.

Influence on UK foreign policy related to the Western Balkans

Through a series of interventions advocating for the inclusion of civil society actors as part of a regional approach to reconciliation in the Western Balkans, Kostovicova's research has influenced the development of UK policy relating to the legacy of conflict in the region. This was achieved by first ensuring the question of reconciliation was included on UK policymakers' agenda [1] [2], before subsequent sustained, committee-level engagement culminated in the Balkan states' unprecedented joint commitment "to overcome the legacy of the past through promoting reconciliation" [D].

The UK-sponsored Summit was part of the so-called "Berlin Process", which has supported the EU integration process of the Balkan countries since 2014. In July 2017, Kostovicova was part of a small group of experts who met with the House of Lords International Relations Committee to

discuss the scope of its new Western Balkans inquiry. This meeting, and Kostovicova's contributions on reconciliation, unresolved legacy issues of conflict and violence, and their impact on rising nationalism [3] [4] [5], were key to the question of conflict-resolution and inter-ethnic relations being included among the inquiry's questions of interest [A, p. 61], which also included geopolitical and governance challenges.

In September 2017, Kostovicova submitted written evidence to this committee on impunity for war crimes (especially wartime sexual violence) [4] [5] and the role of civil society in post-conflict justice and peacebuilding [2], outlining the perils of an inherently unstable region with "peace without reconciliation", where a lack of "consensus on the causes and nature of violence committed in the conflicts" feeds into post-conflict nationalism. This evidence was included in the committee's final report [A, p. 12], which recognised the importance of reconciliation in its recommendations: "[t]he UK must continue to support political capacity-building, strengthening the rule of law, gender equality, women's participation and post-conflict reconciliation" [A, p. 36].

Kostovicova made further contributions to UK policy approaches to the Balkans by submitting evidence on post-conflict justice and reconciliation to the House of Commons Foreign Relations Committee Balkans Inquiry, and its "Global Britain and the Western Balkans" report [B]. Findings from Kostovicova's research on civil society and its role in peacebuilding (including reconciliation) in the region [3] were cited in the report, which quoted her evidence on the "weakness of an already fragile civil society [that] is under increasing pressure from increasingly authoritarian leaderships", which she discussed in the context of the peacebuilding, stabilisation, and rule of law [B, p. 6]. In its response to the report, the government outlined its policy on the Western Balkans [C], particularly on the recommendation contained in the committee's report [B] that it should outline how it wants to achieve its policy goals in the Western Balkans - with "specific milestones and metrics for success" - including in the area of civil society: "Another key metric will be the degree to which the region has resilient institutions that underpin the rule of law, and enable inclusive and democratic societies with a free press and an engaged civil society" [C].

The Western Balkans Summit was held in London on 10 July 2018. In spite of the Balkan states elites' general resistance to coming to terms with the criminal past, the UK's approach in the run-up to and at the Summit itself, informed by the political complexities and sensitivities of dealing with accountability for mass atrocity perpetrated in the region, resulted in the unprecedented joint commitment of all Balkan states "to overcome the legacy of the past, through promoting reconciliation and good neighbourly relations" [D], with specific joint commitments on missing persons and establishing facts of war crimes against all victims, including victims of conflict-related sexual violence [D]. This declaration is important as it establishes an inter-state-level commitment to continue to work on the legacy of war and work towards reconciliation.

Before and after the London Summit, the UK distinguished itself among EU member states by becoming a firm champion of the region's so-called "legacy issues", marked by limited progress in addressing war crimes, which had undermined efforts towards peacebuilding and stability in the region. The government outlined how it would subsequently be "working closely" with the British Group International Parliamentary Union (BGIPU), which "will empower parliamentarians from the region to scrutinise their respective governments on the commitments they made at the Summit to help ensure that all such pledges are delivered" [C]. Again, Kostovicova was invited to present her research [1] [2] and engage on issues related to legacy and reconciliation with representatives of the UK parliament at an event with parliamentarians from all Western Balkan countries, organised by the BGIPU, in September 2018. This seminar represents the operationalisation of the UK's policy towards the Western Balkans, both in general and during the post-Brexit period.

Enhancing the advocacy capacity and effectiveness of civil society actors, especially RECOM, benefitting its interactions with the EU

RECOM is a regional network of civil society organisations which seeks to establish a regional fact-finding commission about war crimes and other serious violations of human rights committed in the former Yugoslavia. One of its principal means of achieving this is through diplomatic representations to the EU. The Kostovicova research has proved vital to the robustness of these representations, and to the effectiveness of interactions with the EU [1] [2] [3].

Kostovicova has engaged regularly with RECOM throughout the REF assessment period, sharing findings from her analysis of regional-level post-conflict justice debates, including the representation of women in the process [2] [6]. The RECOM Process Coordinator has noted how

the Kostovicova research *"has increased the advocacy capacity of the RECOM Network, provided evidence of the effectiveness of a regional approach to post-conflict justice, and enhanced the evidence base to support our efforts to establish a regional fact-finding commission, particularly in the context of RECOM's interactions with the EU"* [F].

Accordingly, at the Poznań Summit in July 2019, the successor summit to the 2018 London event, the Chair's conclusions explicitly took up the issue of reconciliation and RECOM's role in it: *"The legacy of the past creates a particularly acute sense of unfairness to victims still looking for justice and deep divisions between neighbours and communities. Action is needed at all levels across the region to reduce these impediments and to develop a process of confidence-building and reconciliation to fully unleash its potential. [...] Participants underlined their commitment to reconciliation, including through the RECOM initiative"* [I]. This declaration indicates the embedding of legacy issues within the Berlin Process initiated at the London Summit.

Further impacts from Kostovicova's research emerged from direct engagement with RECOM [6]. At a public event involving some 200 civil society representatives in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina in January 2018, attendees heard the first scientific evaluation of the regional versus national debates in which they had participated, as well as evidence of a need for more opportunities for women to present their views and concerns [1] [2] [6]. This was significant as it was later said to have reinvigorated both the commitment of victims' family members and of human rights activists to continue to press for the regional route to justice and reconciliation (which still faces opposition from some quarters). The RECOM Process Coordinator has confirmed that the research *"provided important evidence of [the] reconciliatory potential of the RECOM process...[This] finding was motivating for their engagement in the advocacy and [for] keeping this issue on the public agenda despite opposition from authorities who prefer to avoid confronting the past"* [F]. The research findings on gender inequalities reaffirmed RECOM's endorsement of a more inclusive approach thereafter, as noted by its then Outreach and Partnerships Director: *"It was Dr Kostovicova's research on gender issues within the broad consultative process on truth-seeking in post-Yugoslav states that focused our attention more on the importance of a fully inclusive and participative approach in dealing with the past"* [J].

Influence on the United Nations' approach to its reconciliation projects - promoting a regional approach and foregrounding women's voices

In March 2017, the United Nations Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA) and the Conflict Prevention and Peace Forum invited Kostovicova to contribute to a strategic brainstorming session on conflict prevention and peacebuilding in the Western Balkans, hosted by the Diplomatic Academy of Vienna. Here, Kostovicova again highlighted the value of a regional, bottom-up approach to reconciliation led by civil society actors, based on insights from her novel application of quantitative text analysis methods [1] [2] [3]. Following this session, the UN produced and distributed a summary of the discussion, in which it recognised that the *"UN could promote a regional approach to reconciliation as a way to unblock national efforts which remain stymied by the elites"* [K].

The Vienna meeting prompted further DPPA interest in a scientific evaluation of UN-funded reconciliation activities which would feed into the UN's policy process. Further interactions with the Senior Political Affairs Officer at the DPPA took place at events in London and at UN Headquarters in May 2019, held as part of the joint research project with King's and UAL, at which the Kostovicova research was again part of evidence presented and discussed [1] [2] [6]. The Senior Political Affairs Officer has subsequently attested to how Kostovicova's research insights on gender bias in reconciliation activities have informed his working practices in a way that benefits women and helps to redress gender imbalances in peacebuilding discussions facilitated by the UN. Citing the clear *"narrowing [of] women's deliberative space and opportunities to develop and sustain arguments that reflect their concerns"* identified by the research, he has described a changed approach to meetings and events facilitated by the UN: *"Your research established conclusively that the sequences of men talking after men are longer than those of women talking after women lead to a gendered outcome...I have benefitted from your insight and evidence-based approach in my work to ensure that women get equal, if not more space, in the workshops"* [L]. This new approach has since been implemented in the course of 2019 workshops in Eswatini, organised with the Government of Eswatini, and Tanzania, and with the Southern African Development Community [L].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

- [A] The UK and the future of the Western Balkans, House of Lords Select Committee on International Relations report, 10 January 2018.
- [B] Global Britain and the Western Balkans, House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee report, 3 July 2018.
- [C] Global Britain and the Western Balkans: Government Response to the Committee's Tenth Report, 7 September 2018.
- [D] Western Balkans Summit London 2018, Joint Declaration.
- [E] [REDACTED]
- [F] Supporting statement from RECOM Process Coordinator, 29 October 2020.
- [G] [REDACTED]
- [H] [REDACTED]
- [I] Western Balkans Summit Poznań, Chair's conclusions, 5 July 2019.
- [J] Supporting statement, Outreach and Partnerships Director, Humanitarian Law Center, one of the members of the RECOM coalition, 15 January 2019.
- [K] CPPF-DPA strategic brainstorming on conflict prevention and peacebuilding in the Western Balkans summary note, 22 March 2017.
- [L] Supporting statement from Senior Political Affairs Officer, Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, United Nations, 21 December 2020.