Book Review

Sylë Ukshini. **2025**. ***Roli i Politikës së Jashtme të Gjermanisë ndaj Kosovës 1990–2008*** (The role of Germany's foreign policy toward Kosovo, 1990–2008). Prishtina: Botime Artini. 480 pp., ISBN 9789951284493, €12.00

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What role did Germany play in Kosovo's path to independence, and how should one assess the moral, strategic, and diplomatic rationale behind Berlin's approach? These questions are central to understanding post-Cold War European diplomacy and lie at the core of Sylë Ukshini's ambitious monograph, *Roli i Politikës së Jashtme të Gjermanisë ndaj Kosovës 1990–2008* (The role of Germany's foreign policy toward Kosovo, 1990–2008). Although much of this historical terrain has already been explored in international scholarship, Ukshini offers a distinct contribution by reconstructing key diplomatic episodes through German-language archival sources and reframing them from a Kosovar perspective. His work provides the first comprehensive analysis of German–Kosovar relations in the Albanian language, filling a significant historiographical gap. Rather than presenting radically new interpretations, Ukshini brings analytical depth and accessibility to existing knowledge, emphasizing Germany's evolving role as a normative actor. In doing so, he not only challenges lingering assumptions of German passivity but also revalidates known sources for a new audience. The result is both a scholarly synthesis and a civic resource – one that affirms the importance of local agency in narrating international history.

The strength of Ukshini's work lies in his command of his empirical material. Drawing from debates in the German parliament (*Bundestag*), the Political Archive of the German Foreign Office (*Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes*), diplomatic correspondence, firsthand interviews, and contemporaneous press coverage, the author constructs a narrative that is both rich in documentary details and interpretively well-founded. The author resists any triumphalist tone or partisan positioning – which is important to note given the sensitivities in Kosovo around the subject – and instead proceeds with an analytical clarity that enhances rather than diminishes his advocacy for the importance of Germany's involvement.

The early chapters trace Germany's cautious approach to Yugoslavia's disintegration following its own reunification in 1990, shaped by its commitment to territorial integrity and the historical burden of its World War II legacy. These themes are well established in the literature, and Ukshini's account largely confirms prevailing

interpretations. However, what Ukshini accomplishes is a more granular reconstruction of how these historical constraints played out in specific diplomatic episodes, most notably, Germany's marginalization of the Kosovo question during the 1995 Dayton negotiations. Drawing extensively on German diplomatic sources, he shows that Berlin's peripheralization of Kosovo was not merely a function of disinterest, but a calculated balance of normative commitments and geopolitical caution. His contribution lies in offering a well-documented Albanian-language synthesis that brings these dynamics into focus for a local scholarly audience. His intention, it seems, is not to radically reinterpret this history, but to embed it within a Kosovar historiographical framework that foregrounds issues that have often been treated as marginal in international studies.

The book once again provides evidence on how Germany's early recognition of Slovenia and Croatia in December 1991 reshaped European dynamics. Ukshini argues that the subsequent recognitions by other European states were, in part, a reaction to Germany's perceived unilateralism (110). Setting this action in a broader context, Ukshini contends that even after the signing of the Dayton Agreement in November 1995, Germany remained more aligned with US policy on Kosovo than many of its European counterparts, although it continued to refrain from any deeper involvement until late 1998.

Ukshini presents compelling archival evidence that early German diplomacy toward Kosovo was more flexible than is commonly assumed. A German diplomatic cable sent on 17 December 1991 even left open the possibility of unification with Albania, provided it occurred peacefully (88). In a meeting on 11 December 1991, the Kosovo Albanian leader Ibrahim Rugova presented a conditional strategy to the German diplomats: If Yugoslavia continued to exist, Kosovo should gain the status of a republic, equal to Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, and Slovenia; if borders were redrawn along ethnic lines, unification with majority Albanian-inhabited areas in Montenegro and Macedonia should follow; and if Yugoslavia were to collapse entirely, a fully independent state of Kosovo would be the goal (89).

A decisive shift in German policy came with the election of the Social Democrat Gerhard Schröder as chancellor in October 1998. Even before formally assuming office, incoming Chancellor Schröder and his designated Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer met, on 9 October 1998, with US President Bill Clinton and senior officials in Washington (141–2). This very early alignment with the US marked a break from the caution of Schröder's predecessor, Christian Democrat Helmut Kohl. It signaled Berlin's readiness to assume a more active role in addressing the Kosovo crisis. As humanitarian concerns mounted, Germany increasingly reassessed its traditional legalist restraint. The turning point came with the – subsequently much debated – massacre in the village of Reçak, which triggered what Ukshini describes

as a "moral awakening" (150–1). Ukshini's reading of the sources confirms how Foreign Minister Fischer's famous invocation of "Never Again Auschwitz" (*Nie wieder Auschwitz*) mirrored the decisive moment of discursive transformation, when Germany's foreign policy identity transitioned from restraint to responsibility (236). The German government's support for the NATO air campaign – despite the absence of a UN mandate – represented a historic rupture with past doctrine. Ukshini's detailed depiction of the *Bundestag*'s debate over Operation Horseshoe – an alleged plan developed by Serbia to ethnically cleanse Albanians in Kosovo – and the decision to deploy the German army (*Bundeswehr*) is one of the book's highlights (180) – indeed it is the first account of this reinterpretation of Germany's pacifist legacy in the Albanian language, making German-language sources accessible to Albanian readers.

Ukshini's reevaluation of the Rambouillet negotiations and what was dubbed the "Fischer Plan" (254) offers a fresh interpretive angle, particularly in contrast to dominant accounts that portray Germany as a secondary actor, subordinate to the US and UK leadership. While he does not systematically position his analysis in dialogue with the international historiography on Rambouillet, Ukshini nonetheless advances an implicit corrective by emphasizing the assertiveness of German diplomacy. He portrays Foreign Minister Fischer as a *norm entrepreneur,* a term he employs heuristically rather than theoretically, to capture Fischer's efforts to anchor Kosovo's postwar status within a multilateral, UN-administered framework. This reading nuances the perception of Germany's role, arguing that Berlin, holding the EU Council Presidency at the time, strategically leveraged institutional mechanisms to influence the negotiation outcome. Although he does not directly engage with Anglophone academic debates, Ukshini's account makes an original contribution by reconstructing Germany's involvement from primary German-language sources and offering a Kosovo-centric lens. His depiction of the talks' moral ambiguity and structural coercion adds further depth, leaving little doubt that Germany played a more central role than is often assumed.

Following the war of 1998/99, Germany's post-conflict engagement became a pillar of the new international order in Kosovo. Ukshini's description of the well-known confrontation between the German General Helmut Harff and Serbian forces in Morinë on the Albanian border, with the former telling the latter to leave their position as agreed – "End of discussion: you now have 28 min" – captures the policy shift well: Germany was now not merely supporting Kosovo's separation from Serbia; it was enforcing it on the ground (319). Through its participation in the Kosovo Force (KFOR) and the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), established at the war's end in June 1999, and, since February 2008, in the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX Kosovo), which took over

several core tasks previously held by UNMIK, Germany has contributed to Kosovo's path to independence from Serbia.

However, as Ukshini's analysis of the 2005–2008 status process shows, the way things turned out in the end was not how Germany initially envisaged. His discussion of the diplomacy of what was dubbed the "Troika", consisting of representatives of the United States, Russia, and the European Union, includes the proposed "German model" inspired by the 1972 Basic Treaty (*Grundlagenvertrag*) between East and West Germany. He demonstrates the ways in which the German government sought a solution that could reconcile the recognition of the realities on the ground with creating multilateral legitimacy (364). Rather than promoting unilateral action by Kosovo, Germany sought to navigate between support for independence and caution over bypassing the UN framework, particularly in light of Russian opposition.

Ushkini provides a nuanced account of Germany's swift recognition of Kosovo just ten days after it unilaterally declared independence from Serbia on 10 February 2008, carefully reconstructing the parliamentary debates, the legal arguments, and the rhetorical insistence on Kosovo being a case "sui generis". He interprets the fact that Germany was the 11th state to recognize Kosovo – a few days after the other key EU countries France and the UK, as well as the US – as a policy of calibrated caution and deliberative diplomacy (404). As at other points in his narrative, Ukshini traces the complex interplay of domestic politics, international law, alliance dynamics, and moral responsibility, making Germany an actor whose policy evolved through recalibration in response to shifting normative commitments and geopolitical pressures.

One limitation of the book is its lack of sustained theoretical engagement. While Ukshini implicitly draws on concepts such as normative power and discursive transformation, these frameworks remain largely undeveloped. Furthermore, his work is based almost exclusively on German sources – parliamentary records, diplomatic cables, and policy documents – without drawing to any significant extent on Kosovar, Serbian, or broader Anglophone scholarship on the topic. This gives the book empirical strength but also leads to a certain interpretive narrowness. The absence of Serbian primary sources and a more dialogical treatment of the wider literature limits the depth of bilateral or regional analysis. That said, the book's key contribution lies in the synthesis of its material into a comprehensive Albanian-language study of Germany's Kosovo policy. Ukshini makes international-standard empirical research available to Kosovar scholars, students, and policymakers, and this act of knowledge translation alone is a significant contribution to Kosovar – and Albanian – historiography as well as to public discourse.

Ukshini's study fills a crucial gap. Its linguistic and epistemic contribution is especially important in a field where English and German accounts have dominated both the narrative and the analytical frameworks. His work functions as a form of

historiographical translation: reassembling and revalidating key diplomatic episodes through German archival sources, but from a Kosovo-centric vantage point. So, *Roli i Politikës së Jashtme të Gjermanisë ndaj Kosovës 1990–2008* represents a significant step forward for Albanian-language international relations scholarship. It is not only a study of Germany's foreign policy, but a profound reflection on how values, institutions, and identities interact and at times collide in the making of new states.