I. Introduction: Aim, Method and Structure

It is a tired cliché to describe Kosovo as ‘the powder-keg of the Balkans’. However, the very fact that this metaphor has been overused highlights a certain irony. From the very beginning of the conflict in Yugoslavia, it was clear to all international decision-makers that Kosovo represented the most dangerous aspect of the evolving situation. Nevertheless, the conflict in Kosovo was left to simmer more or less unattended until the early part of 1998, when armed conflict erupted in the territory – the very result international decision-makers had hoped to avoid from the outset. Even at that late stage, it proved impossible to adopt international decisions that would halt the escalating violence and avoid the deterioration of the situation up to the point of dramatic, unprecedented and sustained use of force by NATO.

This result reinforced the disappointment of decision-makers within the European Union in relation to their own performance. After all, throughout the 1990s, the Union had been building up its capacity to monitor conflicts and to conceive of conflict prevention and crisis management approaches in relation to them. It attempted to do so with an emphasis on peaceful dispute resolution techniques, generally excluding the threat or use of force as a tool of international policy. Nevertheless, the Kosovo conflict appeared to highlight a further failure on the part of the Union to establish itself as a credible actor in international crises, even on the European continent. One of its first attempts, directed towards the management of the conflicts in Croatia and then in Bosnia and Herzegovina, had been widely perceived as an obvious and very costly disaster, both in human and in political terms. In Croatia, several years of Serb armed occupation and sustained ethnic cleansing were only terminated when the authorities in Zagreb used force to reverse the situation. Further human suffering followed, this time on the part of the ethnic Serb population. The management of the conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina was finally taken over by the United States when, by 1995, over a hundred thousand civilians had been killed in that state, and over half of its population had been forcibly displaced in the face of European inaction. The United States employed hard diplomacy, relying on covert support for some parties to the conflict,
the forging of an alliance with Croatia and, ultimately, on the direct use of force by NATO to terminate the hostilities and to obtain a provisional peace settlement that was later transformed into the Dayton peace accords.

A similar scenario appears to have resulted in the case of Kosovo. European initiatives for conflict prevention were ultimately eclipsed by the United States and by an emphasis on the threat or use of force. A transatlantic rift in approaches to conflict prevention appears to have been reopened.

This study investigates the international response to the evolving conflict in Kosovo from its inception in 1987 to the outbreak of armed conflict involving NATO in March 1999. It considers whether alternative means of conflict prevention could have been employed by the European Union and its member states and by other actors throughout this 12-year period. It also seeks to establish why such alternatives, if they existed, were not considered and, if considered, why they were not then adopted. Throughout, a transatlantic approach is taken, that seeks to assess whether indeed there existed distinct and competing US and ‘European’ approaches to conflict prevention in this instance.

The study adopts the methodology for the analysis of conflict and conflict prevention developed by the Council of the European Union in its definition of Causes of Violent Conflict of November 1998. Following the analytical approaches developed by the Conflict Prevention Network (CPN) pursuant to this definition, the study divides the evolution of the Kosovo conflict into four phases. According to the EU/CPN view, each of the phases of a conflict typically attracts a certain type of international action:

**Stable/Durable Peace:** Members of a society are aware of conflicting interests, but value their peaceful patterns of interaction more than their specific self-interests. Conflicting interests are

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