

PROJECT ON ETHNIC RELATIONS

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R e p o r t

NOVEMBER 13, 2004



BUCHAREST, ROMANIA

**KOSOVO 2005:
ASSURING SECURITY FOR
THE NEIGHBORHOOD**

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PREFACE

The still unresolved question of Kosovo, encompassing both the province's future status and the problems of daily relations among its Albanians and Serbs, has proven to be one of the most complex and potentially explosive in the Balkans. One of the foremost challenges in finding a resolution to the issue has been a lack of constructive dialogue between the two sides. Soon after Kosovo's 2004 parliamentary elections, on November 13, the Project on Ethnic Relations and the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs held a one-day roundtable discussion on "Kosovo 2005: Assuring Security for the Neighborhood." The goal of the meeting was to create a setting where Kosovo's closest neighbors could meet with leaders from Belgrade and Pristina to discuss the regional implications of the Kosovo problem, how the neighbors might play a more active role in finding a solution, and to assess the province's prospects for 2005.

The roundtable, which brought together senior government officials from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Greece, Macedonia, Romania, and Serbia and Montenegro (including Kosovo), and diplomats from the United States, Switzerland, the UN, NATO, the Council of Europe, and the EU, is part of PER's series on "Albanians and Their Neighbors." This ongoing initiative began in 2000 and has become the premier venue for negotiations and discussions on the most divisive interethnic issues in the Balkans. Regular local follow-up meetings convened by PER in Montenegro, Macedonia, and Kosovo have focused on working out practical solutions to the concrete problems of interethnic relations in these places.



From left to right: Miodrag Vlahovic, Charles English, Agron Buxhaku, Skender Hyseni, and Hashim Thaci.

While the “Kosovo 2005” roundtable, which was held in Bucharest, did not lead to a breakthrough in relations between Kosovo Albanians and Serbs, it was noteworthy that Kosovo’s neighbors embraced the importance of the Kosovo question for achieving regional stability, and that different regional players showed a serious commitment to increased cooperation in helping both Pristina and Belgrade overcome the many challenges they face.

PER would like to express its deep gratitude to the then Romanian Foreign Minister Mircea Dan Geoana and his staff for their extensive support and assistance in organizing the event. Adrian Severin, the *ad interim* director of PER’s Regional Center for Central, East, and Southeast Europe, also played an invaluable role in making the roundtable possible, as did PER staff members in Romania Elena Cruceru and Maria Koreck, and PER Senior Program Officer Alex N. Grigor’ev. Alan Moseley, PER Program Officer, was the author of this report.

PER would like to thank the participants in the meeting for their willingness to engage in frank and open discussion of difficult and often sensitive issues. Except as otherwise noted, participants’ remarks are not attributed to specific individuals, and the participants have not had the opportunity to review the text of this report, for which PER assumes all responsibility.

Allen H. Kassof, *President*
Livia Plaks, *Executive Director*
Princeton, New Jersey

January 2005

NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

In this report, the spelling of the name “Kosovo” is used (rather than “Kosova,” the spelling preferred by Albanians, or “Kosovo and Metohija” or “Kosmet” preferred by Serbs) because that is the spelling most commonly used in the English-speaking world. For the same reason, Serbian names of places are used, for example, Pristina and not Prishtina. However, the spelling “Kosova” is used in the names of Kosovo Albanian political parties and organizations. The term “Kosovo” is used as an adjective for Kosovo’s inhabitants, whether Albanians, Serbs, Roma, Turks, or others.

“Serb” is used as an ethnic term, whereas “Serbian” is employed when referring to Serbia.



From left to right: Dusan Francuski, Ognjen Pribicevic, and Miodrag Vlahovic.

INTRODUCTION

In the late summer and fall of 2004 the news from Kosovo was dominated by the run-up to the province's parliamentary elections, which were held in October, and the question of whether the Kosovo Serbs would take part. While Serbian president Boris Tadic encouraged Kosovo's Serbs to participate in the elections (though at the very last moment), prime minister Vojislav Kostunica, arguing that Kosovo's provisional government had failed to protect the Serb community, strongly urged a boycott, and, in the event, on October 23 less than one percent of the Serbs living in Kosovo turned out to vote.

On the heels of this development, which seemed to promise continued difficulties in the relationship between Albanians and Serbs in Kosovo, the Project on Ethnic Relations (both through its Princeton headquarters and its Center for Central, East, and Southeast Europe in Bucharest) together with the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, organized a roundtable meeting on "Kosovo 2005: Assuring Security for the Neighborhood." The meeting, which was held in Bucharest, took up issues of Kosovo's political dynamics, including Serb participation in Kosovo's provisional institutions of self-government, implementation of United Nations standards for Kosovo, ways to approach the issue of Kosovo's status, relations between Belgrade and Pristina and the impact of developments in Kosovo on regional security. At the time of the meeting Kosovo's new coalition government had not yet been formed, and neighboring states sought a chance to communicate with leaders from both Pristina and Belgrade about how resolution of the province's political status might move forward, and how the open issue of Kosovo affects a region that is eager for increased stability and, ultimately, European integration.

A significant contribution of the meeting was to frame Kosovo as a regional problem, with the province's neighbors considering what role they might play in helping find a solution. A conclusion of many participants was that finding a solution for Kosovo must also involve helping Serbia resolve its internal problems. As one participant from the region put it, "Serbia is a regional problem to the extent that without resolving the Serbian issues nothing positive will happen in the region. We need to help Serbia so that Serbia can help us." Kosovo's neighbors also considered different models of interethnic cooperation in the region—in Montenegro, Macedonia, or Bosnia and Herzegovina—and how these examples might apply to the situation in Kosovo.

For their part, Kosovo Albanians and Serbs from Belgrade continued to take hard positions that, on the one side, only full independence for the province would be acceptable, and, on the other, that internationally recognized borders cannot be changed. While these attitudes often appeared irreconcilable, a government official from Belgrade did unequivocally state that Belgrade is ready for dialogue "at any time, in any place, and on any subject." By the end of the day's discussion it became clear that the province's decentralization effort might present an opening for productive dialogue between the two sides.

Since the roundtable in Bucharest, the confirmation of Ramush Haradinaj as Kosovo's prime minister has significantly complicated, at least in the short-run, the possibility for high-level dialogue between Pristina and Belgrade. (Official Belgrade, which maintains that Haradinaj is a war criminal, refuses to consider talks with him.) Despite this obstacle, 2005 may yet prove a pivotal year for Kosovo. Whatever and whenever the ultimate resolution of Kosovo's status, it is clear that the situation in the province will remain an important concern of its neighbors, and that region-wide assistance and cooperation will be needed to ensure that progress is made. The Bucharest roundtable was a first step toward establishing this regional perspective, and in involving Kosovo's neighbors in a discussion of how they can help each other close a difficult chapter in their common history.

KOSOVO'S NEIGHBORS CONSIDER THE ISSUES

The discussion was opened by a senior government official from Montenegro, who drew a strong contrast between the situation of Kosovo and any problems facing his country. Montenegro does not have a problem with its interethnic relations, he asserted—it is in fact a positive example of how different people can live together and manage their differences. "The viability of the Montenegrin state," he said, "is based on the ability of its different groups to live together."

Regarding Kosovo, he observed that despite the fact that the international community intends to address the problem in a more active way in 2005, and Montenegro supports this effort, "immediate results should not be expected." It would be overly optimistic to expect that a final, long-term solution for Kosovo will be reached in 2005.

While Montenegro does support the notion of holding an international conference on Kosovo in the coming year, he noted, he does not believe that Montenegro should take part in the negotiations as a full participant. This would be very risky, he said: "Taking sides might be inevitable, and Montenegro could be exposed to accusations of being pro-Serbian, or not anti-Albanian enough." On the other hand, Montenegro could provide a neutral site for the negotiations, he suggested.

He also observed that the interests of Serbia, and the interests of Serbs, are in fact different in some respects, and this should be taken into consideration during discussions of Kosovo.

Finally, on the subject of Montenegrin independence, he said that Montenegro will wait, but it must know what it is waiting for, that is, what open issues will be addressed while it waits. "The formula 2002 plus three does not necessarily mean 2005," he said, referring to the 2002 Belgrade Agreement under which a referendum on the question of Montenegro's independence would be held three years after the ratification of the agreement. Montenegro must see some progress on issues that are important to it while it is waiting for its independence, however.

An international participant asked the speaker to be more specific. What are the most important issues for Montenegro, he asked? Let us hear them so we can see how far the problems of Montenegro are from the problems of Kosovo.

The participant from Montenegro replied that Montenegro is "the smallest problem [in the Balkans]," and Kosovo is very different. He added that he does not see any negative consequences for Montenegro if Kosovo's status is defined as has been suggested by Belgrade.

"We are ready to wait for independence, as Brussels wants, but we need to know what we are waiting for," he reiterated. "Montenegro is in the absurd position of being a problem because it is not a problem," that is, because it is a stable and unified entity, it is not high on the agenda of the international community, and its desire for independence is thus not addressed. However, he said, being pushed aside could have very negative consequences. For example, Montenegro is now being blocked by the failures of the Serbian government from participation in NATO's Partnership for Peace program, he said.

In Montenegro a majority wants independence, but that is not enough, he added. In Kosovo, for example, a majority also wants independence, but other conditions have not been fulfilled. In Montenegro all conditions have been fulfilled, and there is no reason to wait.

The chair of the meeting next turned to a leader of the Albanian community in Macedonia and a member of that country's government. What, he asked, are the consequences in Macedonia of failing to find a settlement for Kosovo in 2005?

The participant began his response by asserting that the sooner the problem of Kosovo is solved, the better. He supports the full implementation of standards in Kosovo, he said, one of which is the establishment of a functional democracy. The will of the people of Kosovo must be taken into consideration, he added.

He next referred to the recent opposition-led referendum in Macedonia against the newly adopted law on territorial organization. (The new municipal boundaries—part of Macedonia's decentralization plan—will create a number of majority Albanian municipalities that include several presently predominantly ethnic Macedonian towns, thus giving the Albanian community a correspondingly larger role in local affairs in those places.) The failure of the referendum shows that the people of Macedonia have accepted the Ohrid Agreement, he said. "This was a demonstration of great political maturity and gives overwhelming legitimacy to the Ohrid Agreement." "The referendum has shown," he added, "that Macedonia is not a problem. Macedonia is a solution." So, he concluded, those who have said that Macedonia's situation was fragile have now been proven wrong, and it cannot be argued that independence for Kosovo would create problems for Macedonia. We are aware that independence won't be achieved overnight, he added, but the sooner the process is started the better for all concerned.

The chair asked this participant if Macedonia would accept a variety of solutions for Kosovo. For example, what if the outcome were a loose union or federation, joining Kosovo with Serbia and Montenegro? In short, what is acceptable?

The participant responded that he cannot give an official position, but his personal view is that Kosovo's "conditional independence" would be the best option for Macedonia. Albanians in Macedonia and Kosovo are very closely linked, he said, through family ties and other connections. If

the dialogue on Kosovo ends with conditional independence, there will be no problems, he said. “Any other solution will leave Macedonian Albanians dissatisfied, and might lead to consequences.”

A Serbian leader from Bosnia and Herzegovina suggested that his country could be taken as a positive example during discussions on Kosovo. The Dayton Accords guaranteed freedom of movement, refugee returns, and consensus in decision making on essential issues—all of which are important themes for Kosovo. A solution for Kosovo should guarantee “all internationally recognized rights,” and should include Belgrade as well as the Kosovo Serbs and Albanians, he said.

The chair asked this participant to discuss the implications of independence for Kosovo in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Would the separation of Kosovo from Serbia and Montenegro also mean a change in the *status quo* for Bosnia and Herzegovina?

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The changing of borders and the creation of ethnic states is a dangerous precedent for the region, he replied. “The same right might be

sought by Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina, by Serbs in the Republika Srpska, or perhaps also by Bosnjaks in Sandzak.” He added that resolving problems by granting independence to parts of already recognized countries will slow the region’s progress toward Europe.

Turning to the subject of Kosovo’s recent parliamentary elections, a senior government official from Albania stated that in his view Belgrade did not play a positive role by discouraging Serbs from taking part. He added that he commends Serbian President Boris Tadic for taking a different position, despite the risks.

He went on to say that from the standpoint of Albania, the independence of Kosovo would not destabilize the region. “The people of Albania do not suffer from the idea of greater Albania,” he said, “This was a product of the time of Enver Hoxha.” The same is true in Macedonia—Albanians there have accepted that they are citizens of Macedonia.

THE VIEW FROM BELGRADE AND PRISTINA

A senior government official from Serbia and Montenegro stated that the attitude of Serbia and Montenegro to Kosovo can be summarized as insistence on the “three ‘Es’”: a European level of human rights, a European level of decentralization, and a European quality of borders. The full protection of human rights in Kosovo is the most important, he said. Decentralization primarily means security, he continued. While decentralization also implies a certain level of autonomy in education, health, and other matters, its main aspect is safety for residents. Finally, a “European quality of borders” means that borders cannot be changed without the permission of the state concerned. In this instance it means that the borders of Serbia and Montenegro cannot be changed, he added, but it also means that in the future the border will not be visible, as, for example, the border between France and Germany. Serbia and Montenegro is absolutely against changing any borders in this part of Europe, he said.

A diplomat from Western Europe expressed her support for this view, noting that changing borders can have far-reaching implications for neighboring societies. She added that she appreciates this interpretation of “European” borders.

A Serb participant from Serbia and Montenegro observed that expectations about Kosovo for 2005 are not very high in Belgrade. People there are preoccupied with internal problems and with building effective state institutions, he said. In Belgrade, Kosovo is only one priority among many. He added that there is also no single position on Kosovo in Belgrade, but that leaders are close to determining an approach that will be more proactive.

He expressed deep dissatisfaction with the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), saying that after the March violence, UNMIK is “suicidal,” and that there has been no change in its approach and no reform. He suggested that the European Union should increase its presence on the ground in 2005, and added that Kosovo, Serbia, and Montenegro should only go to the EU together.

In conclusion, he proposed that a productive dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina might be established on so-called “technical issues,” such as electricity, return of refugees, and so on. He also noted that perhaps

2005 is a good year for an international conference on Kosovo. This participant stated that the approach that was adopted by the international community that selects cooperative Serbs in Kosovo and works solely with them did not work. It is impossible to exclude Belgrade if we are to look for progress in the region, he argued.

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A senior Kosovo Albanian leader remarked that 2005 will certainly be an important year, but it will not be a year of miracles. What we need now, he said, is to build institutions, with the help of the international community. If we have a good start in this effort, it will be a positive step for the future; if not, he warned, “we will face crisis.” Building institutions is necessary for the implementation of standards, he continued. In its current condition Kosovo is not a proper state and does not have the capacity to provide adequate security for all its citizens.

On the subject of holding an international conference on the status of Kosovo, he asserted that, “we are past the time for organizing conferences such as Dayton or Rambouillet—we are past the time for compromises; we must not forget that Rambouillet was organized to prevent genocide and war.”

The worst example for Kosovo would be the arrangement similar to the one in Bosnia and Herzegovina, he said. You cannot draw parallels between the two situations. One should not compare the Kosovo Albanians with the Croats in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina or the Serbs in the Republika Srpska. The Republika Srpska was a violently created entity, whereas Kosovo was created constitutionally, he said. This key difference dictates that different solutions must be found.

Finally, he asserted that Kosovo Albanians are also against changes in borders, and that Kosovo has its own borders which must be protected. The only future is an independent Kosovo, Serbia, and Montenegro, he said, though of course future borders will be “open” and of a European quality.

A second ethnic Albanian leader from Kosovo began his remarks by arguing that it is “high time” to talk about a resolution of the Kosovo question in a serious and accountable way, without citing various

“pretexts” or supposed perils, such as the consequences for Bosnia and Herzegovina or Macedonia. Such arguments, he said, “are not serious.” For five or six decades Kosovo had a clear identity as a constitutionally recognized unit of Yugoslavia, he reminded the participants, and the importance of this fact should not be overlooked.

Why is now the time, he asked? Because with successful elections and the swift formation of the government Kosovo will be able to effectively address the question of standards in 2005. It is not overly optimistic to expect that Kosovo’s status will be comprehensively addressed in 2005, he objected, with very clear lines as to where Kosovo is headed. Whether through an international conference or not, he said, techniques are needed. “Even eating an apple requires a technique,” he pointed out, and for Kosovo there are essentially only two techniques available: direct recognition of Kosovo’s independence by individual countries and eventual formalization of that status by the United Nations, or an international conference where Kosovo’s neighbors would have a voice but not the right of veto.

No borders of the former constituent units of Yugoslavia should be changed, he continued. Doing this would create a very unpredictable situation. While it is nice to hear about open borders, unfortunately they still count. Not only in the Western Balkans, but everywhere, borders are an instrument of safety. Kosovo Albanians are very afraid for the future, he continued. We cannot envisage foreign investment until Kosovo is recognized as a state, and we also cannot receive loans from international financial institutions. So this is not an emotional issue, he observed, but a very practical one.

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Finally, he said that the Serbs’ nonparticipation in elections was a calculated move as part of the illusion that Belgrade will come back to play a role in the region again. “This won’t happen,” he stated. “Pristina will continue with decentralization with or without Kosovo Serbs.”

BREAKING THE STALEMATE AND THE QUESTION OF “STANDARDS”

The chair of the meeting asked the participants to consider what can be achieved by the end of the day. Clearly, a resolution of Kosovo’s final status will require a large international conference and all that that entails. But perhaps, he suggested, we can talk today about the situation on the ground. Pristina does not want to legitimize the right of Belgrade to influence events in Kosovo. And Belgrade does not want to cede its rights in the territory by letting the Kosovo Serbs take far-reaching decisions independently. How can we break out of this vicious circle of denying legitimacy to the other side, he asked? What practical steps might be taken to break it? What might be done, without broaching the big questions, to break down the rigidity, where each side is afraid of giving away something that they cannot get back?

An international participant made the point that the discussion should not be about what is right or wrong, but about sharing power. The basis of power is resources, he said, which are always limited, so the issue is how to share resources. The sharing of resources does not only affect those directly involved, he added. “A powerless Serbia will be a problem for the equilibrium of the region, and for the rest of Europe.”

Status plus standards.

“Serbia is a state with dramatic internal problems, and we cannot find a solution for all other countries but Serbia,” he argued. “Serbia is a regional problem to the extent that without resolving the Serbian issues nothing positive will happen in the region. Serbia is a crucial piece of the puzzle. We need to help Serbia so that Serbia can help us,” he said.

“Standards before status” did not work, he continued. In waiting for standards, “some have exaggerated fears and expectations.” “Status before standards” also will not work, he added, because everyone will be afraid that status will become the only priority, and satisfactory standards will never be attained. So, the answer must be “status plus standards.”

He concluded by stating that if security cannot be improved on the ground in Kosovo, collective security cannot be achieved. Achieving security for individuals in Kosovo [Serbs] is better for the entire neighborhood, he said.

Addressing the question of what may be in store for Kosovo in 2005, a representative of the United Nations said that expectations should be more of “process” than of “outcome.” Now we should target the implementation of standards, he argued, which are mostly about establishing multi-ethnic structures in Kosovo. He also identified the further enhancement of administrative competence, accountability, decentralization, and progress on the economic agenda as priorities for the coming year. He added that UNMIK has been reforming and reorienting its work, and that in January 2005 there will be a major restructuring of the organization.

On the issue of Serbs being excluded by UNMIK, he said that, on the contrary, the daily struggle of the organization is to keep Serbs involved, since without this the process will get nowhere. He added that decentralization is a “Kosovo-led exercise,” not an initiative of Belgrade, and Kosovo Serbs are invited to be full partners. It is not that Belgrade is being demonized, he said, but it is being invited to take part with advisory status only.

In conclusion he emphasized that the Serb refusal to engage cannot be a way to “hold hostage” the natural progress of Kosovo in addressing the challenges ahead. The political leaders on both sides must be very courageous and daring, he said, or the practical matter of sitting down at the negotiating table will remain problematic. This requires that both sides move beyond “cultural fear.”

Referring to earlier statements that Serbia is a crucial problem for the region, a senior official from Montenegro observed that he agrees with this view, but noted that the formulation “a powerless Serbia will be a problem” is not entirely accurate. Rather, “a powerless or non-democratic Serbia will be a problem” better captures the core issue. The problem has always been about Serbia, he said, and we should not try to find solutions that will leave Serbia in an unresolved, “limbo” situation. “I believe that finding solutions for other situations can also be a way to find solutions for Serbia itself,” he said, but “unfortunately, many in Belgrade do not understand that point.”

On the relationship between “status” and “standards,” he argued that “status should be understood as one of the standards—status is part of standards.” The problem is that borders are not controlled, and this makes the entire region insecure and unstable.

He stated that it is in the best interests of Kosovo for the security of all people living there to be guaranteed, which is not the case today. He added that it is also in the best interests of the Kosovo Serbs to have a dialogue with the Albanians. The interests of the Republic of Serbia are

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not the same as the interests of Kosovo Serbs, he reiterated, and up to now Kosovo Serbs have been the victims of Serbian policy.

He noted that Serbian President Tadic recently expressed his belief that there is a strong European position

that Montenegro cannot go to the EU without Serbia. It may be the case that the Europeans have such a hidden agenda, he said. “But the catch is that Serbia itself cannot go to the EU without Kosovo,” he continued. “That is the point: that we cannot go to the EU without each other.” Serbia is the key country, he said in conclusion. “Let us help Serbia in order for Serbia to help us.”

Returning to the earlier suggestion that an international or regional conference should be held to resolve the status of Kosovo, a Kosovo Albanian leader stated that “in principle the idea is open to discussion,” but argued that he does believe it is likely a solution will be found that way. It is good for people to have a say, he added, but no country should have a veto. The positions of the governments and opposition parties of all the countries in the region are clear and predictable, he argued. Thus, he said, the best approach is to start with the circumstances on the ground: “I don’t believe a solution can be found by listening to the opinions of other countries.”

On the question of “standards and status,” a second Albanian political leader from Kosovo argued that Kosovo is much ahead of many members of the UN with implementing “standards.” “If some of the conditions we are talking about were applied to other members, they would be disqualified,” he said. We do not perceive achieving “standards” as a condition, but as a necessity, and something that is in Kosovo’s own interests, not something being done for Brussels or Washington, he concluded.

BELGRADE-PRISTINA DIALOGUE: IS IT POSSIBLE?

Note: Since the roundtable in Bucharest, developments in Kosovo have further complicated the possibility for dialogue between Pristina and Belgrade. On December 3, 2004 Ramush Haradinaj, a former leader of the Kosovo Liberation Army and President of the Alliance for the Future of Kosova party (AAK), was confirmed as Kosovo’s new prime minister. Belgrade maintains that Haradinaj, who is reportedly under investigation by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia in the Hague, is a war criminal, and has refused to meet with the prime minister or any members of the new government in protest against his appointment.

The chair of the meeting asked a government official from Serbia and Montenegro what he could say on the subject of high-level communication between Pristina and Belgrade.

The participant responded that the group of high-level officials flying from Belgrade that was prevented by inclement weather from attending the discussion asked him to pass along the message that they were prepared to meet to continue the dialogue unconditionally—“at any time, any place, and on any subject.” [The group would have included the Head of the Coordination Center for Kosovo and Metohija, the Minister for State Administration and Local Self-Government of Serbia, the Legal Adviser to the Prime Minister of Serbia, and the Head of the List for Kosovo and Metohija in the Assembly of Kosovo.] For Belgrade the only solution is dialogue, he said, between Albanians and Serbs.

He added that he wants to emphasize that Belgrade is trying to follow a “European line” regarding Kosovo or Serbia and Montenegro: Belgrade is absolutely against changing or renaming borders, and this position is in accordance with United Nations policy.

On the subject of Serbia, he said that while he does not deny that his country has problems, “that is not the topic of this day’s discussions.” We must have respect for the decision of the Kosovo Serbs not to participate in the parliamentary elections: they refused to participate because they were not “happy and safe” in Kosovo. I don’t deny that Serbia has problems with the Hague issue, he said, but it is far from the truth to say that Serbia is the only problem in the region.

The problems we have been discussing can only be solved in the broader context of the European Union. “All interests meet each other here,” he said. In the future we will consider ourselves “member states,” not “national states.”

The chair of the meeting asked this participant what would be the top priorities for talks between Belgrade and Pristina, short of solving the big problems.

“Security and decentralization,” he answered.

The chair next turned to the Kosovo Albanians at the table: “Why would you not include Belgrade in such talks?”

A Kosovo Albanian leader replied that he does not see “a political force in Belgrade ready to take the risk of living with the reality” of any agreements that are made. In addition, he argued, “starting a dialogue on status will just slow everything down and dilute the issue.” Direct recognition of Kosovo’s independence—after a lot of work—would be the most practical answer, he asserted. “Independence is the only key to stability in the region.” “Without it, there will always be violence by Albanians on the one hand, and the illusion that Kosovo will again be part of Serbia on the other.”

Dialogue with Belgrade will happen, he said, and it will be an indefinite process. If Kosovo’s independence is recognized there will always be common issues to resolve, and the two sides will work on these issues through dialogue.

The chair of the meeting asked this Kosovo participant what would be the top priorities from the position of Pristina for talks with Belgrade.

“Decentralization,” the participant replied. But we cannot keep decentralization hostage of the participation of some of the parties. There is currently an UNMIK working group on this issue, he said, and this is a good basis. Belgrade can always make suggestions, but it cannot have a veto.

WHAT COMES NEXT?

A U.S. participant began the second half of the day’s discussions with the observation that the Kosovo Albanian side might want to give some consideration for the trauma of the loss of territory for Belgrade. One can

argue that they deserved it, and that might be right, but Belgrade’s difficulties are rooted in the fact that this is very painful to accept, he said. As a practical matter, he continued, you may want to think of adding a “charm offensive” with Belgrade, letting them know you understand how difficult it is. The fact is, he said, that the pain is very real. “Somewhere in your plan ought to be a consideration of how to talk to the Serbs about this.”

A Kosovo Albanian participant responded by saying that “you mentioned the loss of a piece of territory. Belgrade is not losing a piece of territory but rather its domination of a piece of territory that belongs to somebody else.” The key problem is that the Serb regime wanted the territory without the people, he asserted.

Another U.S. participant pointed out that during the PER-organized June meeting of Kosovo Albanian and Kosovo Serb leaders held at the U.S. office in Pristina, it was agreed that an offer of security must be made for the Serbs. Then came the elections, and the Serbs’ boycott. Now, he asked, what is “Plan B” for engaging the Kosovo Serbs in the government—how do we make sure the voice of Kosovo Serbs is heard in these institutions that are supposed to be multi-ethnic, and that they have security now, and not four years from now?

A Kosovo Albanian participant replied that the new government will have a ministry of returns and communities, and hopefully this ministry will be led by a Serb. [In addition, Kosovo’s constitutional framework provides for one more ministerial position for a Serb in the Kosovo government.]

Another Kosovo Albanian leader observed that Europeans, Americans, and others often ask, “What are you willing to give Belgrade for your independence?” “First,” he said, “I would say that Kosovo is not the property of Serbia, so that we must pay Serbia something for it. It never was. Serbia must respect the new reality that is being created.”

On the subject of security, he recalled that a friend recently asked him if President Tadic would be safe if he came to Pristina. “I said that there is more security for Tadic in Pristina than for me or any other Albanian if I went to visit him in Belgrade.”

Regarding Serb participation in the new government of Kosovo, he said that this can be dealt with within the constitutional framework. There is Oliver Ivanovic and his List for Kosovo and Metohija as well as the other

Serb list headed by Slavisa Petkovic. The Serb boycott of the elections was not a help to Belgrade, he said.

A Serbian official from Belgrade remarked that “we are fully aware of the fact that Kosovo cannot be as it was before 1999—there is no need to remind us of this.” But it is also true that borders cannot be changed or renamed, he added. It is the wrong message to say that if Kosovo does not become independent there will be a new wave of violence.

An international participant suggested that it would be useful to elaborate on some topics already raised. It has been said that “we have to help Serbia so that Serbia will help us.” How, then, can we help Serbia? One crucial step is for Serbia to accept the mistakes of the past. This is painful and difficult, he said, but it is necessary.

Next, he reminded the participants that “standards” are important for everyone, and not only Kosovo Serbs.

Finally, he referred to the earlier suggestion that “we have to build on new realities.” Of course, he acknowledged, we have to build on realities. The problem is with the word “new,” he said. As soon as we admit this

The international community must provide motivation and incentives for both sides to do the right thing.

view, then “someone could wait for *newer* realities.” It is obvious that the Kosovo Albanians want to build on *these* realities, “but the Serbs say let’s wait for the emergence of a different reality.” This is why we are in a stalemate, he said.

The international community, led by the United States and the European

Union, must provide motivation and incentives for both sides to do the right thing—this is the only way to break the stalemate, he argued.

A participant from the United States remarked that the ultimate long-term solution for Kosovo is integration with European and Euro-Atlantic structures. But for this, he said, “we have to close the chapter on violence.” This means that crimes must be admitted, and Bosnian Serb wartime leaders Ratko Mladic and Radovan Karadzic must be handed over to the Hague Tribunal. The international community is interested in seeing a multi-ethnic solution for Kosovo, he continued, not mono-ethnic sub-states. This is a consistent policy, he stressed, and has been applied

from Croatia all the way down through the former Yugoslavia. He added that he agrees with the comments made earlier by a representative of the United Nations as to UNMIK’s priorities for Kosovo—these are exactly the things the U.S. supports. There is absolutely no difference between the international community and UNMIK in this regard, he said.

Addressing the issue of “standards,” he said that rumors of the “death of standards” are, to paraphrase Mark Twain, “greatly exaggerated.” On the contrary, he said, the implementation of standards and the standards review process form the basis for the way forward. UNMIK is currently in the process of prioritizing standards, and the most critical are those that promote a multiethnic Kosovo. It is not a given, he added, that the standards review will have a certain outcome. The future of Kosovo is “standards based,” he said—it will depend on the standards review.

Finally, he referred to the suggestion that a repeat of the March 2004 violence is inevitable. “This cannot be true,” he emphasized. “If so, all our efforts would be in vain. It cannot and must not happen,” he said. “I hope leaders will return to Pristina and work with their constituencies on that,” he concluded.

CONCLUSIONS

A U.S. participant, by way of closing remarks, emphasized that solutions can only be found through dialogue. The neighborhood is making progress, she said. Both sides must think of the long-term perspective: what if you are left out of the changes that are transforming the region? It is also necessary to take a regional approach to the problem, she added. If there is more violence, the whole region will be affected in a very negative way.

An international participant observed that the two sides bring different, and conflicting, operating principles to these discussions: the sanctity of borders on the one hand, and the right to self-determination on the other. If these positions are so rigid, he asked, is there room for dialogue? Neither of these principles is unbridgeable, he said. There are examples both of stateless nations, and of changed borders. So, he suggested, “by being rigid, you may fail.” He also reminded the participants that returns are key to recreating Kosovo’s multiethnicity.

A Kosovo Albanian leader noted that the current reality was created by both Kosovars and internationals. “Belgrade wants to re-Serbianize the process,” he said, “whereas we want a westernization of it.” “This is the vision for the whole region.”

To conclude the day’s discussions, the chair of the roundtable suggested that despite the evident problems, an opportunity also existed to open a dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina on a key question: a security package for the Serbs, including decentralization. He hopes, he said, that neither side will exclude the possibility of working on these issues through dialogue in the very near future.



From left to right: Francesco Bastagli, Roland Salvisberg, Miodrag Vlahovic, Charles English, Agron Buxhaku, Skender Hyseni, Hashim Thaci, Alex Grigor'ev, and Bogdan Aureescu.

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From left to right: Allen Kassof, Livia Plaks, and Adrian Severin.

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