

PROJECT ON ETHNIC RELATIONS

The Project on Ethnic Relations (PER) was founded in 1991 in anticipation of the serious interethnic conflicts that were to erupt following the collapse of Communism in Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. PER conducts programs of high-level intervention and dialogue and serves as a neutral mediator in several major disputes in the region. PER also conducts programs of training, education, and research at international, national, and community levels.

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R e p o r t

MAY 20-22, 2004



LUCERNE, SWITZERLAND

ALBANIANS AND THEIR
NEIGHBORS: MOVING TOWARD
REAL COMMUNICATION



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PREFACE

Relations between Albanians and their neighbors dominate politics in the Balkans and pose a continuing problem for European and Euro-Atlantic stability. More than a decade after the wars in ex-Yugoslavia first erupted, the so-called “Albanian Question” remains unresolved, with interethnic struggles in Kosovo, South Serbia, and Macedonia.

The series on Albanians and Their Neighbors, launched by the Project on Ethnic Relations (PER) in 2000, is a unique regional undertaking that brings together almost every significant ethnic Albanian political actor from the Balkans with non-Albanian counterparts from Serbia, Montenegro, Macedonia, Greece, and the international community. This is a report of the fourth gathering, which took place in Lucerne, Switzerland in May 2004. (Three earlier meetings took place in Budapest and in Athens in 2000, and in Lucerne in 2002.)

These PER meetings provide the venue where many of the most critical high-level discussions and negotiations take place between Albanians and their neighbors—as well as with key players from the international community. Since 2000, PER has also convened regular follow-up roundtables in Kosovo, Macedonia, and Montenegro, with the aim of promoting practical measures toward interethnic accord. (Reports on these PER efforts are available at www.per-usa.org.)

The May 2004 roundtable was noteworthy for the participants’ newly constructive approach to the question of Kosovo and positive reports on interethnic accommodation in Macedonia and Montenegro. The round-table also made possible an additional PER effort: a face-to-face meeting in Pristina the following month between Kosovo Albanian and Serb political leaders, their first since the violence in Kosovo in March 2004.



From left to right: Charles Brayshaw, Micheline Calmy-Rey, Allen Kassof, Milo Djukanovic, Reinhard Priebe, Kathleen Stephens, Radmila Sekerinska, and Livia Plaks.

PER is proud of its association with the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (EDA). The fourth regional roundtable was co-organized with and funded by the Department's Political Division IV (Human Security).

We are deeply grateful to EDA officials for making this event possible, especially Swiss Federal Councilor Micheline Calmy-Rey, who heads EDA, Ambassadors Peter Maurer and Stephan Nellen, Yvana Enzler, Thomas Greminger, Roland Salvisberg, Didier Chassot, and Raffael Vonovier.

In order to encourage frank discussion, it is PER's practice not to attribute remarks to specific individuals but to provide summaries of the discussions. We express our appreciation to the participants for their stimulating discussions and for their frank analyses of the situation in the Balkans.

Professor Steven L. Burg of Brandeis University, who was a conference participant, prepared this report. Another participant, PER Senior Program Officer Alex N. Grigor'ev, contributed as well.

PER takes full responsibility for the report, which has not been reviewed by the participants.

Allen H. Kassof, President

Livia B. Plaks, Executive Director

Princeton, New Jersey

August 2004

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 official Serbia) 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.

For the sake of simplicity, "Macedonia" is used for "FYROM" or "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia."

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



From left to right: Hashim Thaci,
Milo Djukanovic, and Ferhat Dinosha.



Reinhard Priebe and Sali Berisha.

INTRODUCTION

In the aftermath of the eruption of violence in Kosovo in March, the Project on Ethnic Relations (PER) and Political Affairs Division IV (Human Security) of the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, organized its fourth regional roundtable on “Albanians and Their Neighbors,” in Lucerne, Switzerland in May 2004. This meeting brought together leaders from the entire political spectrum of the region’s Albanian communities with their neighbors (Albania, Greece, Macedonia, and Serbia and Montenegro), officials from international institutions (EU, NATO, UN, and the Council of Europe), and from the United States.

The event, originally scheduled to take place in March, had been postponed because of the violence in Kosovo.

The regional roundtable mainly focused on the questions of Kosovo and interethnic relations in Macedonia and Montenegro, and encouragingly, key participants were willing to take a more constructive approach than in previous discussions. Albanian political figures largely agreed that the question of the final status of Kosovo must be decided while implementing the standards sought by the United Nations and other international actors as a precondition for starting talks on resolving the status question. Differences over the relative priority of status versus standards characterized much of the discussion of the situation in Kosovo. Other topics under discussion included assessment of the March violence and its causes, establishing security for the Serbs, Roma, and other non-Albanians, and Serb politicians’ return to participation in the work of Kosovo institutions.

The discussions in Lucerne emphasized the growing contrast between positive developments between Albanian minorities and majorities in Montenegro and Macedonia, and relations between Albanians and Serbs in Kosovo. Discussions organized by PER in Montenegro and by PER and the Swiss Embassy in Skopje, Macedonia have contributed to the development of positive working relations between Albanians and Montenegrins, and Albanians and Macedonians. The Montenegrin and Macedonian experiences make it clear that future intensive discussions between Kosovo Albanians and Serb leaders, among Kosovo Albanians leaders, among Serbian leaders, and eventually between Kosovo and Serbian leaders must be focused on specifics, and that positive develop-

ments will most likely arise from within such processes, not when imposed from the outside.

During the roundtable, leaders from Montenegro and Macedonia detailed the positive developments in interethnic relations in their respective countries. Both Montenegrin and ethnic Albanian representatives from Montenegro noted that the PER-initiated “Ulcinj process” was a success because it has shifted the interethnic dialogue from the constitutional and moral issues to the specifics of clear and practical requests made by the Albanians. Senior political leaders from Macedonia also presented participants in Lucerne with a detailed picture of a real conflict transformation in their country since the Ohrid Framework Agreement, and reflected on some of the reasons for their progress. The lessons of the Macedonian experience are that more progress was achieved when discussions became more specific and agreements were implemented. The participants from Macedonia also emphasized that it was important to achieve local ownership for the process of conflict transformation and to give both Macedonians and Albanians a vested interest in its successful outcome.

During the second day of the roundtable, the Kosovo Albanian participants issued a statement that contained a summation of principles to help guide them in the future, including commitment to dialogue, condemnation of the March events in Kosovo, a reform of local government that would include minorities, and a continuing commitment to a society based on the principles of representative democracy.

(At a PER follow-up meeting in Pristina in June, a month after the Lucerne roundtable, key Kosovo political leaders and leaders of the Kosovo Serb community agreed to sit down together for the first time to assess the possibility of devising a set of political principles that would satisfy the security needs of the Kosovo Serb community after the violence in March. This unprecedented gathering took place at the residence of the head of the U.S. office, with her participation as well as that of the personal envoy of the EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy.)

KOSOVO: STATUS AND STANDARDS

The Lucerne meeting opened with a discussion of the definition of what a “successful” multiethnic state might look like in terms of its political

institutions and social and economic policies. While Balkan leaders often look to the EU for models, a representative of the EU pointed out that EU member states have adopted many different approaches to ethnic issues.

A solution for Kosovo cannot be imposed by the international community; it must come as the result of dialogue between the parties themselves.

The most widespread response, he suggested, has been “the idea of local government as an arrangement that facilitates coexistence between ethnic groups.” He cited South Tyrol/Alto Adige as an example of the success of local governance as a response to ethnic issues. He also pointed out, however, that “the membership of both Austria and Italy in the EU was absolutely essential” to this positive outcome. Another European official cited reconciliation in the French-German border region as further evidence of the possibility of success. In the view of the EU representative, post-Ohrid Macedonia is an example of a successful approach, and a potential model for ordering interethnic relations in Kosovo. But another EU representative noted that “a solution for Kosovo cannot be imposed by the international community, it must come as the result of dialogue between the parties themselves.” A senior Albanian political figure warned, however, that for any strategy of cooperation to succeed, others must overcome a “fear of Albanians.”

A participant with experience as both a national political leader in a Balkan state and as a senior official in European institutions expressed some frustration with the lack of what he called “significant progress” in the Balkans. He noted that dialogue has been obstructed by uncertainty about what such dialogue should be about, and by “fear of confronting difficult issues.” He suggested that perhaps an “international conference” is required to provide “confidence and security” for a dialogue and, importantly, to create pressure on local leaders to overcome resistance from below. The EU should, he argued, develop a clear policy on multi-ethnicity for inclusion in the *acquis communautaire*. A European diplomat suggested that “there must be efforts to establish informal,

frequent meetings of regional actors,” as well. In the words of a participant from Albania, “If you want to go fast, go alone; if you want to go far, go together!”

A Serb participant criticized the lack of improvement in conditions for Serbs in Kosovo. “After five years, the minimum expectation was that Serbs would be free to travel safely, go to school, etc. But this has not happened.” And, a Serb participant from Belgrade suggested that the “realities” are that “refugees are growing in number, not declining; there are no returns of Serbs to Kosovo.” He asked whether the EU was really still looking to enlarge beyond the recent round of admissions, or were the Balkans to be “left out.” He argued that “the Balkans are now more distant from EU membership than ever before; it is a ‘losers’ club.’”

A Romani participant noted that “as far as the Roma are concerned, the issue of success [in Kosovo] is the issue of returns [of the refugees].”

An Albanian political leader from Kosovo suggested that differences in “international political status” in the region were an obstacle to dialogue. This veiled call for independence for Kosovo was taken up openly and explicitly by another Albanian political figure from Kosovo, who argued for independence by suggesting that “the dissolution of Yugoslavia is not yet complete” and “the issue of self-determination has not yet been resolved,” and by calling for “international mediation” of dialogue on these issues. These views provoked strong criticism from Serb participants from Kosovo and from Belgrade. Another Albanian leader from Kosovo, however, argued that “We have to differentiate between internal conditions and issues in Kosovo and the question of status.”

Albanian political figures from Kosovo, while differing on some issues, generally agreed that the question of final “status” must be resolved as part of the process of establishing the “standards” sought by the United Nations and other international actors as a precondition for resolving the status question. Differences over the relative priority of status versus standards characterized much of the discussion of independence for Kosovo. One participant, concerned about the fate of other minorities in Kosovo, warned that “It

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is unacceptable to believe that the status and security of minorities would be served by resolving the status of Kosovo first; standards and protection must be established first, as the March events suggest.” A Kosovo Serb participant echoed this view, insisting that “what is required is effective protection, security for Serbs...before talking about larger principles of human rights.” But a Kosovo Albanian leader argued that “rights have a universalistic nature and cannot be used to push against and abuse rights of the ‘other.’” He warned that “the rights of the vast majority cannot be ignored.”

Disagreement over the relative priority of standards and status was reinforced by differences in assessments by the participants of the March unrest in Kosovo. In mid-March 2004, Kosovo suffered two days of deadly violence by unidentified ethnic Albanian extremists and others directed against local Serbs in cities and towns all across the province. The violence resulted in hundreds of injuries and numerous deaths, the destruction of more than a hundred Serb homes, the burning of many Serbian Orthodox religious buildings, and the displacement of more than 3,000 ethnic Serbs. The violence was contained by KFOR troops and local police forces. Troops and police were among those injured in the violence.

Without exception, participants in the Lucerne meeting condemned the violence. But they differed with respect to its causes and implications. Significantly, a senior politician from Tirana was the first to call on Kosovo Albanians to apologize for deaths and destruction of churches during the March tragedy.

Both Albanian and Serb participants from Kosovo acknowledged that the March events underscored the need for greater security. An ethnic Albanian political figure from Kosovo, however, warned that “the March events cannot be used to impose a solution that is unacceptable to the vast majority of the population,” while nonetheless conceding that “a lot must be done to improve interethnic relations.”

An international participant observed that “the role of the media in the March events was crucial and appalling” and noted that the recognition of the need for improvement in interethnic relations expressed in the Lucerne meeting was “a step forward and has to be repeated in the media.” Kosovo and Belgrade Serbs assigned far greater importance to the need for “practical protection, security for Serbs,” and for “guarantees

for the security of their futures and their children’s futures” in Kosovo. A Belgrade participant suggested that “Our goal is to help those Serbs and Montenegrins who are still in Kosovo to stay there. I do not focus on monasteries. I focus on people. We want those people in Kosovo to have guarantees and feel that they are a part of the power structures there.” An Albanian political figure pointed out that Kosovo institutions “have not only condemned the violence, but have even allocated money to rebuild houses that were burned.” Another ethnic Albanian politician from Kosovo acknowledged that “the March events are a grave event for Kosovo, [and] the perpetrators should be punished.”

Both an ethnic Albanian and a U.S. participant noted that one consequence of the March violence was a dilution of the Kosovo Albanian claim to victimhood. But another Kosovo Albanian politician offered a different perspective, emphasizing that “what happened in March is not a revolt against the international community or the Serbs, it is an outpouring of the frustration of a 75 percent unemployed population.” While Kosovar Albanian participants stressed internal factors in the March events, a Belgrade Serb participant chose to direct attention to the role of the international community. He suggested that the March events made it clear that the current approach was “not capable of preventing what happened” and that the international community therefore faced a decision whether to adopt stronger measures, or what he called “the instruments of the Berlin Congress or the EU.”

ALBANIAN-SERB DIALOGUE

Differences also emerged in discussions of the process by which the Albanian and Serb communities of Kosovo might be reconciled. The “Plan for the Political Solution to the Situation in Kosovo and Metohija” adopted by the parliament of Serbia only a month before the Lucerne meeting was put forward by some participants from Belgrade as a basis for initiating a discussion of the internal order in Kosovo. That plan called upon the UN Security Council to adopt a measure establishing territorial autonomy for the Serb and other minority populations of Kosovo. It called for the establishment of five such “territorial entities,” to be composed of areas in which Serbs constituted a compact majority before 1999, as well as the territories required to link these points of settlement in coherent regions “in which life and sustainable development, necessary for the repa-

triation of refugees to be a success, are possible” and in which the local population would exercise extensive rights of self-government. The Belgrade plan, the Lucerne participants noted, did not specify the final status of Kosovo. But they insisted that any discussions between Belgrade and Pristina would have to address “constitutional issues.”

Both suggestions were rejected out of hand by Albanian participants from Kosovo. One Albanian political leader from Kosovo suggested that the Serbian statement “is illegitimate, is ethnically and politically motivated,

and provides a territorial basis for solution”; that is, the Belgrade plan was seen as a call for partition. Another Albanian from Kosovo said that the Serbian plan is not legitimate simply because it came from Belgrade. “Legitimacy comes from the people,” he stated. While a Belgrade participant suggested that

the Belgrade document “represents a moral consensus in Serbia on the Kosovo issue,” an ethnic Albanian participant suggested that “any plan that enjoys a consensus in Belgrade is nationalistic by definition. Consensus is not a good thing, and the lack of consensus in Pristina is not such bad news.”

An Albanian political figure from Macedonia suggested that Albanian leaders in his country had agreed “not to territorialize demands, not to attack the state or infringe on the rights and values of Macedonians.” Now, however, “the element of territory has been put on the table by the Serbian state.” Earlier in the discussion, he had warned that “If we pursue a territorially based solution of minority status in Kosovo, then this approach will also be pursued in Macedonia.” A Kosovo Albanian leader accepted that dialogue between Pristina and Belgrade was necessary, and would take place “in due time,” but required that the “constitutional legality” of Kosovo institutions had to be changed so that the competencies of Albanian institutions match the legitimacy of Albanian leaders.

One participant from Belgrade expressed disappointment with these reactions to the Serbian position, reiterating that the Serbian parliamentary statement did not offer a territorial solution or even prejudice the question of final status. Another Belgrade participant suggested that the Kosovo

Albanian participants were in effect saying “there can be no dialogue as long as Kosovo is not independent.” Citing the positive example of post-Ohrid relations in Macedonia, he asked of the Kosovo Albanians “are they ready for dialogue now, before independence?” A Kosovo Albanian party leader replied, “We consider our status to be our right, not subject to dialogue,” a reply that suggested intransigence and prompted a Kosovo Albanian political figure to ask for a brief recess.

After the break, the Kosovo political figure suggested that the question was not whether dialogue would take place. Rather, “we need to determine what such dialogue should be about.” The Serbian parliamentary action, he argued, “has damaged the position of those in Kosovo who have wanted to initiate or enter into dialogue.” He suggested that the resumption of technical discussions depended entirely on the Serb side. As far as local governance is concerned, such reform “should come from below, inside Kosovo. Serb community grievances and concerns should be taken duly into account. What prevents Kosovo institutions from taking their own initiative on this issue? Nothing! Something will come out, but this is a very delicate issue.” He warned, however, that “unilateral moves require careful thought and consideration for the consequences in Kosovo, in Serbia, and in the region as a whole.”

An international participant responded to this by pointing out the critical role of the international community in any effort to resolve issues in Kosovo.

While Kosovo Albanians may claim certain “rights,” he argued that rights do not become operative until recognized under international law. The international community can act unilaterally and, in his view, should act. The

international community should impose solutions through arbitration when local actors prove unable to reach agreement. He recognized, however, that at present, the necessary international consensus for such action does not exist. But another international participant argued that “we do not need new institutions. We need the will to talk to each other.” The Kosovo political figure echoed this view, arguing that “Albanians and Serbs of Kosovo must sit down and talk to one another in Pristina!” A Belgrade Serb acknowledged that “There is a lack of knowledge that we share about each other.”

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International participants in the meeting, as well as Serb, Albanian, and regional actors, did express support for local self-government as a mechanism for addressing interethnic issues in Kosovo. However, it remained unclear how such mechanisms might be established. An international participant reiterated the readiness of the EU to “act as a catalyst.” Another international participant suggested that technical working groups should resume work immediately, and that the Ohrid model should be considered for strengthening local self-governance in Kosovo. But he cautioned that “concerning final status, the international community will never impose a solution that does not have substantial local support.” A Kosovo Albanian political figure, in contrast, suggested instead a more direct path to a final settlement: “It is time for a Serbian DeGaulle to step forward, ready to accept independence for Kosovo.”

Leaders from elsewhere in the Balkans insisted that whatever the outcome in Kosovo, it should not be viewed as a precedent for relations in their own countries.

REGIONAL MODELS: MONTENEGRO AND MACEDONIA

Participants from Montenegro and Macedonia noted the positive developments in inter-group relations in their respective countries. Several participants raised the possibility that neighbors who had succeeded at establishing stable interethnic relations might lend their “good offices” to efforts to facilitate dialogue between Pristina and Belgrade. A participant from Tirana expressed his admiration to a senior Montenegrin official: “With your work you have introduced civilized models of [interethnic] relations into our world.”

Developments in interethnic relations in Montenegro were addressed by Montenegrin and Albanian participants from Montenegro.

Participants from Montenegro presented the meeting with a detailed account of specific decisions, actions, and pending actions resulting from PER’s “Ulcinj process” that address the needs and demands of the Albanian population of Montenegro. A key characteristic of the Montenegrin model is the full participation of the Albanian population in Montenegrin institutions. Their electoral weight and positive discrimination by the electoral law create important incentives for Albanian leaders to participate, and for their Montenegrin governmental partners to cooperate with them.

After several years of effort, in October 2001, PER finally succeeded in brokering an agreement between leaders of Montenegro’s Albanian minority and leaders of the republic’s ruling coalition parties and the parliamentary opposition. By asking the Albanians to make their requests specific and practical, and to defer constitutional questions, PER facilitated the emergence of a consensus among all participants. Six Albanian proposals were adopted: to establish a maternity hospital in Ulcinj; to return to Tuzi, a region of Podgorica with a predominantly Albanian population, the status of a separate municipality; to open an Albanian-language faculty at the University of Montenegro; to recognize diplomas issued to Albanian graduates in Tirana and Pristina; to open a border crossing between Albania and Montenegro close to Ulcinj; and to appoint ethnic Albanians as the chief of police and as head judge in Ulcinj.

A government commission, chaired by the Minister for the Protection of Rights of Persons Belonging to Ethnic and National Communities of Montenegro, was established to carry out these commitments. The Lucerne meeting heard positive reports from both a Montenegrin political leader and an ethnic Albanian political leader from Montenegro inventorying the fulfillment or near-fulfillment of all these commitments, as well as other positive steps in interethnic relations. An Albanian-language faculty has been opened in Podgorica as part of the University of Montenegro. Beginning next academic year, a teachers-training program, taught predominantly in Albanian, will begin at the faculty. This is expected to develop in the future into a center for Albanian Studies of the University of Montenegro. Border crossings with Albania near Ulcinj and near Gusinje have been opened. Construction of a maternity ward in Ulcinj is expected to be completed this summer. The issue of the status of Tuzi is expected to be resolved with the adoption of the law on the capital city and the law on decentralization by the parliament before the end of the current session. An Albanian leader from Montenegro stressed that while resolving the issue of the municipality status of Tuzi, it should be made clear that if a sub-municipality is established within the capital, it should have all real

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powers of other municipalities in Montenegro. Degree certificates from Kosovo certified by UNMIK are now accepted as valid in Montenegro, and a joint Montenegro-Albania commission has been proposed to resolve the issue of mutual recognition of degrees. Finally, the practice of consultation with local authorities on appointment of top officials has been adopted, and should be formalized with the passage of new laws on local self-government and minority rights.

A participant from Montenegro said that it was unacceptable that the draft minority law approved by the government has not yet entered the parliamentary procedure.

Some Albanian participants in Lucerne nonetheless continued to insist on linking progress on internal relations in Kosovo to resolution of its international status. One political actor from Kosovo, for example, while recognizing that Montenegro represented a positive model, suggested that “in order to establish ethnic tolerance [in Kosovo], it is necessary to end fear, and fear is fed by uncertainty about the final outcome.” This participant insisted that discussions focused on internal conditions in Kosovo could proceed “only if the Kosovo government and leadership are granted increased competencies; only if such discussions are moderated by the international community; and only if Kosovo political forces establish a consensus before entering into dialogue.” And, “independence is the central element of a solution.”

In Macedonia, when discussions became more specific, more progress was achieved.

Ohrid Framework Agreement was negotiated by leaders of the major political parties in Macedonia in the wake of violent interethnic conflict, with the assistance of international mediators, in August 2001. The Agreement provided for constitutional reform that redefined the Republic of Macedonia as a state of all its citizens; for equitable representation of minorities in public institutions; and for decentralization of the state, including a significant expansion of local competencies.

Senior political leaders from Macedonia presented participants in Lucerne with a detailed picture of positive developments in their country since Ohrid, and reflected on some of the reasons for their progress. One senior ethnic Macedonian official pointed out that the November 2002 meeting in Lucerne facilitated by PER provided the first opportunity for dialogue following the violence in Macedonia.

The “Mavrovo process” chaired by PER and the Swiss Embassy in Macedonia that has periodically brought together Macedonian political leaders from both the ruling coalition and the opposition, since then “accelerated cooperation based on good faith, trust, mutual respect, and fulfillment of agreements.”

A major sign of progress in this respect is that the question of establishing an Albanian-language university in Tetovo “has just about been resolved,” and that that agreement has been reached without international participation. Macedonians faced the same questions of where and how to start their internal dialogue as have been posed by Kosovo Albanian and Serb participants in the present discussion. This senior official suggested that one of the lessons of the Macedonian experience is that “one has to address both large issues and small issues.” In Macedonia, “when discussions became more specific, more progress was achieved.” Not only the adoption of agreements, but their implementation is crucial. Implementation of decisions on establishing mixed police units; on use of the Albanian language in the media, parliament, and public documents; and on increasing the representation of ethnic Albanians in public institutions is well underway. The latter is “still a major, major problem, but progress has been made, especially in the army and the police.” This official pointed out that increasing the number of Albanians in administration while reducing the overall number of employees is a sensitive issue, “requiring careful explanation to Macedonians losing jobs while new Albanians continue to be hired.” The major outstanding issues include decentralization of government and use of ethnic symbols. “Implementation of the Ohrid agreement does not mean the end of interethnic issues.” Moreover, “Interethnic states are more costly and less efficient; there is a greater need for negotiation of issues, more costly solutions.” Nonetheless, as an international diplomat and close observer of Macedonia noted, “Albanians now have a greater stake in the progress of the state, and the [Albanian] Democratic Union for Integration as a coalition partner has a greater stake than the Albanian parties in previous governments.”

A senior ethnic Albanian official from Macedonia suggested that the reason the Ohrid agreement is succeeding is that “it provides for democratization of government institutions through decentralization. Decentralization provides a means for addressing the needs of the populace.” The adoption of a decentralization strategy required “courage” on the part of Albanian and Macedonian coalition partners. The “appropriate representation of minorities in state institutions,” he suggested, “creates loyalty to those institutions.” Another Albanian leader from Macedonia reported that “we have established very direct, open relations with one another, among those who exercise political, economic and other responsibilities. We had the courage to do so. The whole process was completely transparent; we did not try to hide our mistakes.” As a result, “it is clear that since the previous Lucerne meeting we have achieved increased mutual understanding.” However, he also noted that progress in Macedonia was aided by positive developments among its neighbors. And, the ethnic Macedonian official acknowledged that future progress will depend greatly on the ability of the government to deliver improvements in the quality of life of the population rather than just concentrating on equitable representation and other ethno-political issues. An international participant offered another perspective on why things are going well in Macedonia: “Macedonian leaders take the advice of international actors such as the IMF, understanding that domestic reform is related to EU eligibility, that democratic institutions function better.”

A discordant note was struck, however, by another ethnic Albanian political figure from Macedonia, who suggested that multi-ethnicity in Macedonia was “an illusion.” “While elites may have good relations,” he argued, “at the level of the people there are no such good relations.” He pointed to the low levels of ethnic inter-marriage as evidence of interethnic fear. Nonetheless, even this dissenter acknowledged that ethnic Albanians in Macedonia accept the statehood and integrity of Macedonia, suggesting that differing assessments of the degree of progress may be, in part, a function of domestic political competition in Macedonia. The senior Macedonian officials responded to these critical remarks by conceding that “everything is not perfect,” but pointing out that “things are much better and interethnic violence is receding.” One of them suggested that “we need to overcome obsession with the past and to focus on the future; to forget about historical failures and missed opportunities.”

ALBANIANS AND SERBS DIG IN THEIR HEELS

Most of the second day of discussions was devoted to consideration of a statement drafted by Kosovo Albanian participants in the meeting. The following is the text of the statement, introduced as a “Statement of the Kosovar Albanian Participants:”

Based on the two days of discussion at this roundtable as well as on our own discussions and consultations in Lucerne, and on positive models and approaches that have been already implemented in the region, and given that independence of Kosova is the key for all positive processes in Kosova and the region, we came together to sum up the following principles that may guide us in the future:

1. We are committed to dialogue.
 2. We consider that the March events marked a grave moment for Kosova, and we condemn them in the strongest terms but we encourage all stakeholders to try to address the root causes of such revolt.
 3. We think that only a functional and inclusive government with adequate capacities can provide for all citizens of Kosova at all levels of government. In this regard, we express our readiness to support the reform of local government. The principle of such reform should be genuine delegation of power, with full inclusion of minorities in the process.
 4. We remain committed to building a functional society based on the principles of representative democracy, embracing all relevant international principles for the rights of communities.
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A senior Kosovo Albanian political leader followed up on this statement by arguing that “the institutions of Kosovo need more support from the international community in order to represent the interests of the people of Kosovo.” He called for establishment of a working group with participation from the international community, UNMIK, the provisional self-governing institutions of Kosovo, and NGOs to address these issues.

Decentralization proposals can be viable only if agreed to by all major elements of Kosovo society — through inclusion of all interested parties in Kosovo.

He also reiterated his earlier statement of readiness for dialogue between Albanians and Serbs in Kosovo, citing as a positive example the participation of Albanians in Montenegro in the political life and democratic processes there. He argued that “decentralization proposals can be viable only if agreed to by all major elements of Kosovo society – through inclusion of all interested parties in Kosovo. The key to this is the return of Serb community representatives into government institutions and process.” This call for the Serbs of Kosovo to end their de facto boycott of Albanian-dominated institutions was also taken up by other Kosovo Albanian participants. As one political figure put it, “Kosovo institutions need an opportunity to demonstrate their readiness and will to conform to international standards and values.” Another political figure, however, insisted that “independence of Kosovo represents the political will of the people and is a key to the solution.”

Serb participants from Belgrade and from Kosovo objected to the Albanians’ dismissal of the Belgrade statement. One Kosovo Serb argued that the proposal for decentralization, characterized by Albanian participants as a Serbian strategy of territorialization, was initiated by Kosovo Serbs, not Belgrade, and did not threaten the territorial integrity of Kosovo. Another Serb argued that “The Serbian plan is in principle the same as Ohrid. If the Ohrid plan is a positive model, then the only thing wrong with the Serbian plan is that it comes from Serbia.” A Serbian official suggested that the call for territorial autonomy contained in the Serbian plan reflected an effort “to ensure security for Serbs and other minorities in Kosovo,” and that the plan remained open to discussion. At the same time, however, this official suggested that the new government of Serbia was intent on proceeding with a constitutional reform that “will address

the territorial and organizational structure of Serbia, with the strategic goal of introducing a broad decentralization of power. This regionalization model for Serbia takes ethnicity into account.” He did not elaborate on the implications of this for Kosovo. It seemed to suggest that a unilateral Serbian initiative on Kosovo was imminent. However, this was contradicted by a Belgrade political functionary who insisted, reiterating a point he made earlier, that the final status of Kosovo would have to be determined by the international community and the United Nations Security Council. This seemed to suggest that at least some elements in the Belgrade leadership intended to throw responsibility for any solution involving independence for Kosovo onto the international community.

A senior Kosovo Albanian political leader then restated his support for dialogue. “It is important for dialogue on practical issues to take place,” he pointed out, “but this does not preclude higher-level dialogue between institutions.” This influential figure consistently supported the initiation of Albanian-Serb talks. Now, he was supported by a leading political figure from Albania, who argued that “dialogue cannot start with ‘independence’; the less talk there is about independence and about Serbian sovereignty over Kosovo, the better.” The Albanian political leader called on Kosovo Serbs “to renounce parallel structures and integrate themselves into Kosovo institutions.” While “independence is the most feasible and perhaps only solution,” he noted that independence was “contingent on interethnic harmony and equality.” Another participant from Albania underscored the need for greater cooperation and dialogue between Albanians and Serbs in Kosovo by suggesting that “the fact that the Kosovo Serbs were not made part of the discussions that led to the ‘Statement of the Kosovar Albanian Participants’ was a serious shortcoming.”

An international participant suggested that “the best way for Kosovo Albanians to make their case is by showing the daily capacity to run a modern, pluralistic society and state. We can ask Serbs to do the right thing, but we must also offer them a decent vision of the future.” He suggested that the international community needed to play a more

The best way for Kosovo Albanians to make their case is by showing the daily capacity to run a modern, pluralistic society and state.

constructive role: “The EU must come up with a strategy and not just keep repeating statements about standards, etc. The Albanian participants have presented a coherent message, but the international community delivers a divided and incoherent message.” A participant from the United States suggested that an effort to coordinate international responses to developments in Kosovo was already underway. According to this participant, “the Contact Group has started meeting in Pristina every six weeks, focusing on standards; what has been done, what needs to be done, what can be done right now to make progress.” This participant noted that “the Security Council has endorsed a timetable for reviewing progress on standards by 2005, with an eye toward deciding the final status of Kosovo at that time.” In the view of a Serbian political analyst, however, the international community had to be prepared to go further. He warned that “no government in Belgrade or Kosovo could sign an independence agreement without simultaneous entry into the EU!”

NEXT STEPS?

The discussions in Lucerne underscored the growing contrast between positive developments in relations between Albanians and their neighbors in Montenegro and Macedonia on the one hand, and relations between Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo. Discussions organized by PER in Montenegro and Macedonia have,

The Montenegrin and Macedonian experiences make it clear that discussions have to be focused on specifics, and that positive developments are most likely to arise from within such processes, and cannot be imposed from outside.

in the view of participants involved in them who shared their observations during discussions in Lucerne, contributed to the development of positive relations between Albanians and Montenegrins, and Albanians and Macedonians, and are expected to continue to make a positive contribution to interethnic relations in these states. While circumstances in Montenegro and Macedonia differ in important ways from those in Kosovo and Serbia, the discussions

in Lucerne made clear the need for more intensive discussions among Kosovo Albanian and Serb leaders, among Kosovar Albanian leaders, among Serbian leaders and, eventually, between Kosovar and Serbian

leaders. The Montenegrin and Macedonian experiences make it clear that such discussions will have to be focused on specifics, and that positive developments are most likely to arise from within such processes, and cannot be imposed from outside.



From left to right: Milorad Todorovic, Aleksandar Simic, and Oliver Ivanovic.

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