

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

JUNE 6-7, 2008



KOLASIN, MONTENEGRO

**THE BALKANS IN
EUROPE: CHALLENGES
IN INTEGRATING
MULTIETHNIC STATES**

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PREFACE

Since 2000, the Project on Ethnic Relations's series on interethnic relations in the Balkans has become a unique, regional institution. Meetings among cabinet-level officials, members of parliamentary political parties, opposition and civil society from Albania, Bosnia, Croatia, Greece, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia bring to the table every significant political interest in the region. Neighbors from Hungary, Romania, the European Union, OSCE, NATO, and the United States also participate. Ethnic issues continue to dominate the political discourse in the Balkans. PER provides a unique venue for discussing sensitive issues in a neutral and protected space. Previously these roundtables have been held in Athens, Bucharest, Budapest, and Lucerne. For its tenth roundtable venue, PER picked Montenegro where we have established an excellent working relationship with the political class as well as with civil society of all ethnic backgrounds.

The roundtable in Kolasin on June 6-7, 2008 entitled *The Balkans in Europe: Challenges in Integrating Multiethnic States* was organized with the generous support of the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, the Charles Steward Mott Foundation, with some additional funding from the government of Romania through the PER Regional Center for Central, Eastern and Southeastern Europe, and with the indispensable cooperation of the government and parliament of Montenegro.

As we sat down to the table in Kolasin, we noted that this is a defining moment in the Balkans. It is a time when good news is finally overtaking bad news in the region. Slovenia, Romania, and Bulgaria are full members of both the EU and NATO. Albania and Croatia having signed Stabilization and



Participants at the roundtable.

Association Agreements (SAA) with the EU, received invitations to join NATO, and are working hard to make the entire neighborhood more livable. In Serbia, voters in the last parliamentary elections clearly showed the growing support of the country's accession to the EU and to improving democracy. In South Serbia, peace persists despite the slow speed of resolution of the area's problems. Montenegro is quietly making its way towards Euro-Atlantic structures by signing its own SAA and strengthening its unique interethnic accord. Macedonia has received its EU candidate status and is moving toward complete implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement. In a significant achievement, Bosnia also signed its SAA – this fact alone brings back optimism about the country's future. And then there is Kosovo where none of the bleak expectations for massive interethnic violence and exodus of minorities have materialized following the proclamation of independence. Kosovo is also increasingly becoming a place where the political leadership says it is willing to accommodate other ethnic communities through dialogue and cooperation.

Those from the Western Balkans who sat at the PER roundtable in Kolasin all felt that they should have a stake in what is happening in their neighborhood, and that the consequences of events that are unfolding around them are directly affecting each and every one of them. The participants from the United States and other parts of Europe as well as the representative of the European Commission, all pointed out that what everyone is looking for is a more stable and secure region, a region that has the same destination: joining the big European family of nations.

The meeting in Kolasin and especially conversations outside of the meeting room itself are noteworthy for the Kosovo participants', both Albanian and Serb, who continue to find new and constructive answers to the question of relations between them and their future in Kosovo since the proclamation of independence. The roundtable made possible a series of PER follow-ups in Kosovo where these conversations are continuing.

We would like to express our deep gratitude to Montenegrin Foreign Minister Milan Rocen, the chairman of the foreign relations committee of the parliament of Montenegro Miodrag Vukovic, Ambassador of Montenegro to the United States Miodrag Vlahovic and their colleagues and staff for their support and assistance in organizing and hosting the meeting. Our special thanks go to the Prime Minister of Montenegro Milo Djukanovic for his continuing support of this and other PER endeavors. Our thanks also go to the PER staff in the PER offices in Belgrade and Pristina and the PER Regional Center for Central, Eastern and Southeastern Europe for their

invaluable help in putting the meeting together. Special thanks go to our PER colleagues in Princeton for their indispensable work in planning and organizing this event.

We would also like to take this opportunity to thank the participants at the roundtable for their willingness to engage in frank and open discussions about difficult and often sensitive issues. It is PER's practice that remarks are not attributed to specific individuals. The participants have not had a chance to review the text of this report for which PER assumes full responsibility.

We are grateful to Professor Steven Burg of Brandeis University, a member of the PER Council for Ethnic Accord, who is the author of this report.

Livia B. Plaks, *President*

Alex N. Grigor'ev, *Executive Director*

Princeton, New Jersey

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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 the 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” and “Croat” are used as ethnic terms, whereas “Serbian” and “Croatian” are employed when referring to Serbia and Croatia, respectively. “Albanian” is used simultaneously as an ethnic term and also in reference to the country of Albania.

INTRODUCTION

On June 6-7, 2008, PER organized a regional roundtable in Kolasin titled *The Balkans in Europe: Challenges in Integrating Multiethnic States*. At the meeting, the participants addressed four major challenges facing governments in the region: securing minority rights, regional cooperation, meeting the standards for accession to the EU, and ensuring a peaceful outcome in Kosovo.

Montenegrin Foreign Minister Milan Rocen addressed each of these issues in his opening remarks. He emphasized that Montenegro recognizes its survival as being dependent on constructive dialogue, mutual recognition, and validation of its various ethnic and religious groups, and the consolidation of a democratic, multiethnic society. He reported that Montenegro has taken a number of steps to ensure the rights of its minorities, including accession to relevant multilateral international agreements, and incorporation of international standards into the Montenegrin legal and constitutional order. Montenegro has established legal protection for the expression, development, and public display of national, ethnic, cultural and religious distinctiveness; the right to use one’s own spoken and written language in private, public, and official matters; the right to receive education and information in one’s own language; the right to establish educational, cultural and religious associations; and the right to authentic representation in state institutions. Minister Rocen further reported that the exercise of these rights will be supported by state financing. Montenegro has “institutionalized” these rights through the establishment of minority councils for each of the country’s major minority communities: Croat, Bosnjak, Muslim, Roma, and Albanian; by establishing a minority fund financed by the state budget, and by the establishment of a new Center for the preservation and development of minority cultures. Finally, the Minister reported, Montenegro has adopted an “Action Plan” for implementing the European “Decade of Roma Inclusion, 2005-2015,” and established a Commission to ensure its implementation. The foreign minister also noted the importance of ensuring a peaceful, politically stable resolution of the Kosovo question for advancing the prosperity of the whole region.

SECURING MINORITY RIGHTS

The distinction between formal constitutional and/or statutory recognition and granting of rights to ethnic minorities, and actual implementation of such provisions in everyday practice was the focus of much of the discussion of the status of minority rights in the region. The host country, Montenegro, was cited by several participants as a positive example of constitutional principles being translated into statutory law, and government efforts to ensure practical implementation of the law in everyday life. Participants from the government of Montenegro, as well as minority representatives and international actors all cited examples from Montenegro as potential models for the region.

Others cited the Ohrid Framework Agreement in Macedonia as a model formula for ensuring minority rights, although views differed as to the extent to which the Agreement has been fully implemented, and questions were raised about the commitment of the incumbent government to doing so.

The challenge of ensuring appropriate and effective representation of ethnic minorities in political institutions received considerable attention in the discussions. One minority participant from Montenegro – while acknowledging that inter-ethnic relations in his country were good, that the state has paid attention to the minority situation, and that minorities support the common interests of all the citizenry – nonetheless called on the state to establish a second chamber in the parliament, where minorities would be represented and have a voice, what he called authentic representation, and a permanent presence on all issues relevant to minorities. In this way, he argued, minorities would achieve integration without assimilation. Without such a mechanism, or reserved seats in a single chamber parliament and proportional representation in parliament and in all state institutions and public services, he argued, one can hardly say there is no problem in interethnic relations, or that problems will not develop in the future.

But another minority participant from Montenegro argued against reserved seats, suggesting instead that if a group has a mother country elsewhere, that country can overcome any shortcoming in representation or even negative decision in parliament or government through bilateral agreement, such as the one between Croatia and Montenegro. When the mother country is relatively wealthy, he added, they might even subsidize minority development. At the same time, however, he acknowledged that the Roma minority, who have no such mother country to protect them, are a special case.

A participant from Serbia offered the experience of the Hungarians in Vojvodina as a lesson in the importance of institutions, but also of government

and leadership attitudes and policies. The Vojvodina Hungarians, he reported, take advantage of the 2002 law on minorities in Serbia, which created minority national councils. These councils are the highest organs of minority cultural self-government. The most important accomplishments of this system are the creation of mini-parliaments of the minority communities, providing forums for elected representatives of minority communities to work out solutions to issues of education, culture, media, and official use of minority languages. The minority councils also created the possibility to establish institutions in each of these areas. But success in Serbia, he argued, depends on the diligence of minority communities and the attitude of political structures, requiring a political will to act. The Hungarian Council, for example, exercises effective ownership over two Hungarian language periodicals, a daily and a weekly, through a system of dual ownership between the Vojvodina government (which finances activities) and the minority council (which manages activities). The attitude of Belgrade, in contrast, has changed over time, he said, from acceptance of minority councils under the late Prime Minister Djindjic, to less positive attitudes under the recent Kostunica governments.

A key to successful implementation of any formal legal or institutional structure is the provision of resources to enable minorities to exercise their rights. The Kostunica government, for example, delayed adoption of a law on the reelection of minority councils for 4 years. The first mandate of these councils has now expired, and there is no legal basis for continuing them.

Participants argued that governments should commit to a policy of “zero tolerance” for violation of ethnic minority rights. They also emphasized the need for attention to preventing or deterring discrimination, and especially violence. In this respect, several participants pointed out that ethnic conflict is not really “ethnic,” by which they meant it is rooted in economic and social inequality. The most effective path by which to put an end to ethnic conflict, one participant suggested, is to adopt the post-World War II European model. That model began with narrowly-focused economic cooperation through the European Coal and Steel Community for mutual benefit, expanded into new areas of economic cooperation with the establishment of

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the European Economic Community, and then extended to social and political integration in the EU. The European Union did not begin with conferences on ethnic issues, it was argued, but with work on common, shared interests. The countries of this region share a common view of their own futures, which is membership in the European Union, as exemplified by the interest of Slovenia in using its chairmanship of the EU to direct attention to the region.

Educational curricula were emphasized by several participants as potential instruments for teaching tolerance and mutual understanding. However, one participant was skeptical. History is learned in the family, he argued, not in schools. When history books are contradicted by family history, family history wins. Nonetheless, he agreed, history texts must tell the “real” history of the region, although it must be presented diplomatically, with sensitivity.

One participant acknowledged that problem solving is a tough business, with many risks. But, he noted that it is particularly difficult when we remain anchored in the past. He conceded that the past can neither be ignored, nor forgotten. But, as much as we can learn from it, he argued we cannot afford to be dominated by it.

An international participant noted that all the regional constitutions now enshrine positive principles with respect to minority protection. But there is, in his view, still a long way to go to achieve enforcement. He cited refugee return as one such area, particularly in Croatia. He called for a true reconciliation process within societies, and between neighbors, a process he suggested was now starting between Montenegro and Croatia. But he emphasized that reconciliation has to include learning tolerance and respect for the “other.” Language instruction to ensure ability to communicate across ethnic and cultural boundaries is, he argued, crucial to learning about “the other.” He expressed concern that the next generation in Kosovo will be unable to communicate with Serbs from Kosovo or people from Serbia or Bosnia since they only speak Albanian. Educational curricula are another important factor in this process. Providing appropriate history textbooks should be a very high priority, and both the EU and the Council of Europe, he reported, are ready to provide assistance for such efforts.

A participant from Montenegro reported the government is already engaged in the elimination of ethnic stereotypes from educational curricula, and is providing one million euros of financial support for the development of minority cultural institutions and services, including the use of minority languages in public institutions and services.

EU ACCESSION ISSUES

Much of the discussion focused on the challenges of carrying out the institutional reforms, and fostering the change in social values, that will be required to bring regional states into closer alignment with European standards and thereby facilitate accession to the EU. A regional diplomat suggested that regional leaderships are mostly pragmatic, self-interested leaderships driven by the desire to hold on to power, rather than visionary leaderships pursuing a lofty goal. The Montenegro referendum case was an exceptional example of visionary leadership. The Montenegrin leadership mobilized the citizenry, and created enthusiasm for faster, significant change in the direction of European values. Regional leaders manage by polls, he suggested, not values. The EU tends to be accepted as an organization, a structure, and a source of money, not as a union of values. Yet, he acknowledged, EU values represent the essential core of integration, the basis for eventually overcoming the legacies of war. EU values must be taught in schools, he declared.

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An international participant argued that the region should not view these tasks as externally imposed requirements, but first and foremost as changes to be undertaken by regional states in their own interest, as they are changes required to build up modern economies, modern democracies. Prior rounds of enlargement, he suggested, have made it clear that the forging of a national consensus in support of such change is essential to success. Strong visionary leadership is required to achieve this. He observed that such consensus appears to be present in Montenegro, but not yet in Serbia.

Some participants stressed the need to adopt a regional perspective on the task of conforming to the demands of the *acqui communautaire*, since many of the social and economic problems that stand in the way of meeting these standards are regional in character. One participant argued that the relationship between Serbia and Bosnia is affected adversely by the shortcomings of the Dayton arrangements, which hamper institution-building efforts in Bosnia. This participant pointed out the paradox that, while international actors insist on the principle of multiethnic solutions, in the Bosnian case, conflict resolution was based on ethnic division. Now, it is proving difficult to put what has been divided back together again.

Another participant noted that disparities between ethnic communities are sometimes caused by discrimination. And this sometimes translates into a view on the part of the minorities of the state as an unfair state. There are many things that can be achieved in the region; in Montenegro, the Montenegrins and the Albanian minority have been engaged in consultations,

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and the result is a well-known six point agreement (mediated by PER). But this participant stressed that implementation of some of these would have been impossible without cross-border cooperation; in this case, the support and cooperation of the state of Albania in providing assistance to the establishment of Albanian-language higher educational facilities. Similarly, he reported that in South

Serbia, one of the Kosovo Albanian leaders persuaded a key south Serbian Albanian leader to participate in the Serbian electoral process. In the previous election, the Albanian prime minister himself persuaded South Serbian Albanian leaders to participate in Serbian elections. These are important examples of the positive contributions that can be made by cross-border communication within ethnic communities.

Another participant suggested that cross-border cooperation might take the form of working groups, to address very specific practical problems in a more private setting, outside the spotlight of high-level meetings. Progress at the working level can make possible much more productive meetings at more senior levels. He suggested two common problems that seem well-suited to such working-level discussions and cross-border cooperation: First, refugee resettlement, since refugees don't recognize borders and often cross borders. By definition, resettlement is a domestic or internal problem of the receiving state, but also an international problem of the two states that are sending and receiving refugees. This is also a human rights and an economic development problem. The second issue is cultural recognition and protection of identity of minority communities. There are institutional arrangements that are working in some places in the region to achieve inclusion, representation, and responsiveness. It should be possible to learn from the positive experiences of neighbors in the region, possibly by arranging for working-level discussion of such arrangements. The third problem area is overcoming grievances of states, the most sensitive and most difficult area. There is a model in the larger region of a state that experienced what

Serbia has experienced, and could possibly provide some insights into how to overcome the grievances arising out of Kosovo independence. That state is Hungary – a member state of the EU, a well-developed democracy, partnering with its neighbor Romania. The Hungarians and Romanians might offer some moral and political lessons for Serbia and Kosovo.

A diplomat from the region suggested there is a lot of unused potential in the region for improved cooperation and integration, even though there are now many multilateral and bilateral arrangements. He suggested a “jig saw puzzle model of cooperation” – which he defined as joint work on solution of problems of common interest. He gave as an example the meeting of Dubrovnik, Trebinje, Niksic, and Herceg-Novi communities in a border region where there is a legacy of recent war, and their agreement on local cooperation. At the same time, their national governments will sign an agreement on cooperation in responding to natural disasters (e.g., facilitating rescue/firefighting air flights across borders by adopting joint plans of action). The EU, he declared, should follow these actions with either financial or verbal support.

Countries in the wider region, some not directly involved in the Bosnian or Kosovo wars, are also cooperating – on a motorway from Slovenia to Greece, the “Adriatic-Ionian Highway,” by coordinating their national infrastructure projects. Similarly, the Bar-Bijelo Polje railway improvement project and its potential extension to Belgrade offers another opportunity for regional cooperation. Such projects, he pointed out, generate employment, economic integration, business and cultural cooperation, and ultimately political integration. A participant from South Serbia stressed the importance of economic development and reducing unemployment for minimizing the involvement of young people in illegal activities.

Effective economic reform and development will require cross-border activities such as trade and investment that will, in turn, require inter-state cooperation and coordination. One participant noted that this process is already unfolding. Slovenia is now a major investor in the Serbian economy.

One very practical opportunity for cooperation was suggested by a participant from European institutions: Adaptation to the demands of the *acqui communautaire* involves the translation of thousands of pages of documents into the local language. Because Croatia is far ahead of other countries in the region, it could and should, in the view of this participant, share its translation thereof as a means of facilitating change elsewhere. Happily, a participant from Croatia informed him in a side conversation during a break in the meetings that this is already happening.

Participants also argued for greater consistency from the EU in its approach to the region. One participant suggested that the European Union seems to vacillate between two attitudes: One is to deal with the region as a whole, as “the Balkans,” with similarities among the states that merits a consistent approach. On the other hand, there is an individualistic, inconsistent approach, by which each country in the region is to be treated individually. The case of Croatia suggested, in his view, that different standards are applied to different states, as most regional actors think Croatia is as well-prepared for membership as other Balkan states already admitted to membership.

An international participant, however, insisted that, since 2003/04, the EU has followed the same approach used in the fifth enlargement, for the central European countries. It has, he argued, used the same instruments and methods, adding some additional elements related to stabilization, including refugee and ICTY provisions. But, he acknowledged, this approach has not succeeded in the Western Balkans to the same extent as it did with the Central European countries of the fifth enlargement. In Macedonia, candidate status was granted, but negotiations not yet started, in order to encourage further reforms and changes. Yet, this did not provide such an incentive. In Serbia, signing the SAA despite failure to fulfill ICTY demands, is seen as weakening EU incentives. On the other hand, not signing would have strengthened radicals and made cooperation with Serbia impossible for a long time. The same logic prevailed in the EU approach to reform in Bosnia, accepting a much reduced police reform. These are inconsistencies, he acknowledged, but he pointed out that situations are changing, they differ from country to country, and the governments of EU member states themselves are changing.

This participant suggested the perception of inconsistency is likely a product of recent changes in the criteria for accession. When negotiations with the Central European states took place, the Copenhagen political criteria of 1993 were not part of the EU Treaty, not part of the primary law. Therefore, the Copenhagen criteria were not the subject of accession negotiations. But, they were addressed in EU assessment reports. Since 2005, however, the Copenhagen criteria have been enshrined in the EU Treaty, and another chapter on judiciary and human rights was added to negotiations with Croatia and Turkey. Protection of minorities (individual rights, not collective), he noted, will be enshrined in the Lisbon treaty, and thus become subjects of future accession negotiations.

Many participants continued to characterize accession to the EU as a solution to the many problems of the region, including ethnic problems. But

other participants, particularly those from outside the region, stressed the importance of internal changes in the region as a prerequisite of accession. An international participant observed that countries in the region tend to look at EU integration as a panacea, before looking at the challenges of internal integration. But, he argued, it is internal integration that is a precondition for successful integration into the EU. Each society must strive for political and social inclusion.

A participant from an EU member state in the Balkans cautioned that entry into the EU will not be easy. He argued that the absorption capacity of the EU, as a new criterion for accession, will be a disincentive to further enlargement. However, a participant of the European institutions suggested one should not attach too much importance to this. First, he pointed out, it is not new; absorption capacity was already part of the Copenhagen criteria. And second, whenever enlargement is mentioned at the European Parliament, it is not the Western Balkans that is in question.

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An American participant underscored the fact that enlargement is not an answer to regional problems. It is an incentive for regional actors to do what needs to be done to solve their most serious problems in a manner consistent with European standards, but only an incentive. Dealing with minority issues is the least attractive issue for state leaders. They would much prefer to deal with economic, financial, administrative and other issues. In Macedonia, for example, leadership denied the existence of any ethnic problems right up to the outbreak of violence in 2001. The resulting Ohrid Agreement helped define a strategy for dealing with interethnic relations, and some significant progress was made. In recent years, however, the Macedonian government has been slow in completing the agreement’s implementation. Macedonian experience suggests that leadership, the government, must understand that ethnic issues need to be resolved and commit itself to that task as a matter of self-interest, and that to do so will both move the country closer to EU accession and contribute to prosperity.

A regional diplomat cautioned against expectations that accession to the EU will result in rapid economic advance of the region. He reported that an economic analysis revealed that only one of the post-15 states has reached the average standard of living of the EU: Ireland. Other more recent members are better off, but still behind. In 1910, Balkan countries averaged 52% of the average standard of living of what became the EU 15. Now,

Balkan countries are at only 39% of the EU 15 average. By 2025, the Balkans are likely once again to reach the relative level in standard of living of 1910. The same economic analysis concluded that actual membership in EU itself contributes only one-half of one percent of annual growth. The structural changes necessary to gain admission, in contrast, have a large and positive impact on economic growth.

Another, American, participant pointed out that if we focus on the effect of EU membership on interethnic disputes, the experience of Cyprus, Romania, Spain, Belgium, and France, all make it clear that membership alone does not solve ethnic problems. Even among the well-developed, stable democracies of the EU, membership alone is not a solution to inter-ethnic disputes. It is the commitment to the values and norms of democracy, equality, and recognition that solves, or even avoids, ethnic disputes. The Balkans needs value change; national political leaders must oppose the “wrong” values and support the “right” values.

Another participant questioned the effect of negative assessments by the EU of national efforts to meet the requirements of accession. When the EU issues a negative report, or assessment, and declares that inter-ethnic relations are a problem; and then does so again a few months later, who is to blame? What are these reports supposed to achieve, when a government obviously is not interested in acting? How are we to encourage a reluctant government to act?

A participant from the EU responded, pointing out that the approach being followed now is exactly the same as that followed with the Central European states. Negative reports worked then, he suggested, because governments were put under pressure from the media in their country, in the form of very serious discussions and analyses, as well as very serious discussion in the parliaments. Neither occurs in the Balkans. In the Czech Republic, for example, a negative report led to the immediate firing of the relevant minister and a vigorous debate in parliament. It is difficult to assign blame, he conceded, but parliaments certainly need to strengthen their role.

He questioned whether integration is the answer to inter-ethnic disputes. In his view, it is not, but it helps, by compelling states to adopt certain legislation, put in place certain institutions, and grant certain rights – what he characterized as the Europeanization of the issue; meaning resolution through discussion and a spirit of compromise. Twenty-seven states debating a policy on environment, for example, must in the end forge a compromise solution. The 27 will not accept another Cyprus-type problem, he warned, nor any country that has not settled its borders

Several participants cautioned that the EU and NATO must be careful not to create disincentives to change, as appears to be the consequence for Macedonia of the recent decision in Bucharest at the NATO Summit in April 2008. One participant noted that following the Bucharest meeting the decision, adopted under Greek pressure, not to extend NATO membership to Macedonia, the public in Macedonia viewed NATO and EU memberships as much farther in the future, because a new criterion had been established: a solution to the name question that is acceptable to Greece. The immediate outcome of such a decision, on the other hand, was greater mobilization of nationalist and anti-Western feelings and rhetoric in Macedonia. Without the clear prospect of membership for all countries in the region, this participant suggested, this phenomenon will spread.

An Albanian participant from Kosovo cautioned that we should not let “the perfect be the enemy of the good.” As in the case of the Serbian SAA agreement, the benefits sometimes outweigh the costs of “settling” for less than a perfect solution. Before countries in the region can get an EU green light, he agreed, major issues such as border disputes must be resolved. These cannot be dealt with post-integration. But, he insisted, countries cannot meet every single requirement of the Commission. A number of countries that acceded to the EU in the late 70s, he argued, were in much worse shape than the countries of the Western Balkans today. Depending on the country, the model of how to bring the country closer to the EU can and should differ. The EU cannot hold to a zero tolerance policy, which would delay accession indefinitely. Shortcomings that are not of a critical nature, he concluded, should be tolerated as long as they are addressed and resolved eventually.

A European participant responded by suggesting that “zero tolerance” is not the only basis for assessing progress toward compliance with European standards. If this were the only basis for issuing negative assessments of progress, he suggested, the EU would have to issue similar reports on all 27 member states.

KOSOVO

Many participants, including the Albanian and Serb participants from Kosovo, agreed that protection of the Serb minority communities in Kosovo and their inclusion in Kosovo institutions must be the focus of actions by the Kosovo and international leaderships. A Kosovo Albanian participant noted that the declaration of independence has not resolved all problems; not all of

Kosovo's citizens, primarily a number of the Serb community members, have welcomed independence and this raises the challenge of both convincing those members of the Serb community and seeing to it that Kosovo meets all of its commitments and the wider European requirements for the protection of the rights of ethnic communities.

For Albanian participants from Kosovo, the Ahtisaari package represents a blueprint for the protection of minority rights. One participant reported that the Kosovo government has already embarked on implementation of the Ahtisaari provisions, establishment of protected zones around Serb religious sites, and local governance reform to establish Serb majority municipalities. Reconciliation between majority Albanians and the Serbs, he asserted, is a standing priority task of each and every Kosovo institution.

Another Kosovo Albanian participant noted that several factors contribute to the ability of Kosovo to achieve this integration: the full commitment of the Kosovo Albanian leadership to this goal, the efforts of Serbian community leaders, and the support of the international community, including the upcoming donor conference. Belgrade can make a very important contribution to this process, he suggested, but is not yet doing so. In some instances, he reported, Belgrade has acted contrary to this goal, such as its appeal to the Kosovo Serbs not to participate in the Kosovo elections and its effort to divide Kosovo Serbs into the "patriotic" and "non-patriotic." The Serb effort to establish parallel structures, he argued, is also contrary to the goal of integration.

A Kosovo Serb participant responded to these statements by declaring that, unfortunately, Serbia and Kosovo are not going to agree on status in the near future, regardless of who is in power in Belgrade. No political leadership in Belgrade, he acknowledged, is ever going to recognize Kosovo as an independent state. But the Serbs want to live better, and Kosovo is only part of what they want. He pointed out that in the recent election in Serbia, politicians who based their whole campaign on Kosovo, regardless of perspective, lost votes. The unilateral declaration of independence and recognition by some countries, this participant suggested, has deepened the gap between the two communities. Forget about reconciliation for the moment, he urged participants from Kosovo. There will not, he declared, be any serious talks with serious partners about reconciliation in the near future. Unlike the past, he suggested, no Serbs are willing to talk to anyone representing Kosovo institutions. This is totally different from 2004, he pointed out, when Belgrade opposed Serb participation in Kosovo elections but some Serbs nevertheless did participate. In 2007, fewer Kosovo Serbs participated. Now, Kosovo Serbs cannot do anything on their own, he suggested, because

they have no elite leadership of their own. Whenever any leader emerges, he is undermined by Belgrade.

An American participant agreed that while ministers of the Kosovo government in their remarks to this meeting invited Kosovo Serbs to participate in Kosovo institutions, it is in fact impossible for that to happen in the absence of a Kosovo Serb elite. However, while it will take a very long time to develop a Kosovo Serb intellectual elite, he pointed out that an economic elite can be established in a shorter time frame. This is essential, he suggested, because it is impossible to establish discussions based on equality when people are not equal. The donor conference to be convened later on in the summer of 2008 should, therefore, provide resources for growth of the Kosovo economy. The international community can also assist in improving economic infrastructure and the rule of law; and providing small-scale investments focused on specific communities, such as Serbian enclaves, which offer the possibility of accelerating economic development and creating a Serbian economic elite in Kosovo, with interest in securing its role in Kosovo.

A participant from Serbia noted that the question whether to recognize Kosovo institutions raised by Kosovo Serbs has an equivalent in South Serbia. He suggested the Albanians of Presevo Valley are applying a pragmatic approach. Some Albanian political leaders, he reported, declared during the campaign they would not recognize, but once in office they exercise a very pragmatic cooperation with Serbian authorities. The recent elections in Serbia have left many minorities with no or few seats in parliaments, as is the case with the Roma. This participant suggested that serious thought has to be given to how to guarantee representation of minorities, especially given the deficiencies up to now in including minorities in institutions of power. The decision to eliminate the ministry for minorities in Serbia was, in his view, a serious mistake. He suggested it was unrealistic to expect minority interests to be taken into consideration by ministries and other government organizations with other priorities. The Serbian Government's Coordination Body for South Serbia, together with the international community, was able to resolve problems in 2001-2002.

A Kosovo Serb participant argued that Kosovo is too important a subject for Serbia to allow it to be dealt with by a Kosovo Serb, or any other Serbs outside of Serbia. Serbia will use Kosovo for its internal struggles, he declared. He noted that in May Serbia tried for the first time in 12 years to organize local elections in Kosovo, because, given the unilateral declaration of independence, Serbs no longer feel constrained to respect Resolution 1244. The mentality, he suggested, is "Since Albanians can violate it, we can violate it

too.” Local elections are a way to affirm that Kosovo remains a part of Serbia. But, in his view, this was a very dangerous step, because to hold these elections diminishes the prospect that Kosovo Serbs will ever participate in elections held by any Kosovo institution, which means no integration. This is a very dangerous moment, he argued, in which Kosovo Serbs are turning toward a separate life and, as a result, the presence of the international community is more important than ever before, as a buffer and as a mediator.

If the international community is no longer present, and things are left to Pristina and Belgrade to resolve on their own, he warned, then Kosovo Serbs will suffer and probably will disappear in five to six years, including the

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North. It is totally wrong to think the North is safe and secure, he admonished participants. The Serbs in the North are ready to move, he declared. Everything depends on the fate of the university, the medical center, and other institutions that have a strong influence on their daily lives.

Any shooting, any trouble on the line of division will lead intellectuals to leave, followed by their students, which will mean the loss of 30% of the Serbian population right away. Their departure will prompt an exodus of Serbs from Kosovo as a whole. They will go to Kraljevo and Nis. There already are 28,000 Kosovo Serb refugees in Kraljevo, and 30,000 in Nis. The arrival of additional refugees will be a trigger for these societies to blow up and set off riots, he warned, once again strengthening the nationalists in Serbia.

What is the way out, this participant asked. He suggested it would be good if the Kosovo government stopped talking about status. Since this is no longer an issue, they should stop putting up flags on every corner and gate, because, he advised participants, this is just provoking the Serbs in the same way Albanians were provoked in the 1980s. Stop promoting the Ahtisaari package, which Serbs do not like. Unfortunately, he observed, decentralization will not succeed.

To the surprise of some participants, he focused his suggestions for action on measures intended to improve conditions for the Albanian population of Kosovo. The only way to promote integration of the two communities, he declared, is for the Kosovo government to focus on the economy, on big infrastructural projects to create jobs for Albanians and to keep them focused on their real lives, and thereby create stability among Albanians. Improve roads,

railways, water supply, energy, and telecommunications, he argued. This will promote reconciliation sometime in the future, but not very soon. Do not count on reconciliation in the near future, he declared. From the perspective of a Kosovo Serb, he reported, to keep on insisting on reconciliation in just a few years suggests insincerity on the part of the Albanian leadership. Instead, education and social welfare, and large infrastructural projects should be the main focus, in order to defuse social tensions. In his view, social tensions are going to be the big issue in the autumn, and the Kosovo government has no answer to the problem of unemployment and resulting social tensions, which will inevitably become political tensions.

Serbia is not a problem for the Kosovo government, he suggested, as long as the international community is present and active. The Kosovo government should be working to strengthen the international community presence, not weaken or end it. Kosovo is not a priority for the US. In his view, the EU has only a single reason why it is focused on Kosovo, and that is the problem of refugees. Kosovo Albanians will not be going to Germany, Austria, Belgium or Switzerland – places where there is no more capacity to absorb them. They will go to northern Italy and to Greece, where they are already going, and Scandinavia. Europe needs to be ready to receive them in an organized manner. If they come in a spontaneous manner, he warned, there will be a tendency to look for opportunities in the underground, rather than in the legal economy, and that will be a problem, and it will make resolution of the status issue even more difficult. This perspective underscored the logic of the argument for the priority of accelerated economic development and job creation in Kosovo.

Another Kosovo Serb participant expressed serious concern over the economic and social situation in Kosovo. He suggested that weak institutions and weak political leaders in Kosovo will not hesitate to misuse the social and economic situation for their own political goals. Populism is growing in Kosovo, and populist leaders are focused on gaining power, not on any vision of the future of Kosovo. He predicted that come the fall and winter, the situation will become serious as disappointed young Kosovo Albanians begin to express their dissatisfaction with the situation, and some politicians will be ready to articulate that dissatisfaction for political purposes. The international community, he argued, needs to direct investment into the internal economy in Kosovo. But this will not be enough. The EU, he explained, must allow for an organized, economic migration to Europe. Young Kosovo Albanians should be allowed to come to Europe, via visa facilitation. Even seasonal work, he argued, can defuse the social tensions in Kosovo and create

space for the political leaders to deal with longer-term problems like unemployment. And, exposure to West European society may help foster European values among them, which they can bring back to Kosovo. He characterized the discontent of young Kosovo Albanians as a “ticking bomb.” This is also a problem for Kosovo Serbs. But, he explained, Serbs will be “collateral damage” in what will be a conflict among Kosovo Albanians. Kosovo Serbs are no longer direct actors in Kosovo politics, he declared.

A participant from the EU supported this view, declaring that the economy is the most important issue for the whole region, not just Kosovo. He pointed out that trade and investments have proven over time to be the most important and best vehicles for reconciliation. And he added an additional economic factor for consideration: the demography situation of the whole region is deteriorating very sharply, except for Kosovo and Albania. He suggested that Kosovo might become the source of the labor force that will be required in the future for the Serbian economy.

A Kosovo Serb asked whether the Kosovo government would use force or engage in dialogue with the Serbs. A Kosovo Albanian participant reassured the meeting that no credible Albanian actor in Kosovo advocates the use of force to get Kosovo Serbs to cooperate, integrate into formal institutions, or become part of the system. Therefore, he concluded, one has to think of other ways to achieve this. Despite some progress, the situation is not that good. Is there anything in Kosovo that Kosovo Serbs cannot do that Albanians can do? Yes, he declared, plenty of things. There are places one can go that the other cannot, he acknowledged, but also pointed out that this applies in both directions. Is there a genuine need that Kosovo Serbs have and cannot fulfill in Kosovo and therefore must go to Serbia? Yes, he answered, there are. People are thinking about this problem, and attempting to solve it. He agreed that the declaration of independence increased the gap between communities, but only provisionally. Now, there is a need to start dialogue between communities, to think about what is doable – integration, cooperation, becoming part of institutions. It is not possible to change what has happened – Kosovo is independent and will remain so.

Some participants suggested that Pristina and Belgrade should communicate and cooperate even in the absence of recognition, on issues of mutual interest. One Kosovo Albanian participant called for normalization of relations, or at least achievement of normal communication, between Pristina and Belgrade regardless of the lack of recognition of Kosovo by Belgrade. Another pointed to the relationship between China and Taiwan as a potential model for Serbia

and Kosovo. A Kosovo Serb participant suggested they should continue to talk via the unofficial back channel, and in five or six years time, when there is new leadership on both sides, they may be able to reach agreement.

A participant from an EU member state in the Balkans observed that, whether we like it or not, Kosovo is here to stay. Sometimes, he conceded, what he called symbolic ballet will take place – as in the European Parliament, when a group of MEPs opposed the public display of the flag of Kosovo. But, he suggested, both Belgrade and Pristina have to be prepared for constitutional compromise on what is a nation, and to ensure the neutrality of the state toward all its citizens regardless of ethnic but also political factors. The experience of Hungary and Romania, he observed, suggests that actors must “beware of professional patriots.” He pointed out that cooperation can be pursued through indirect dialog. On issues that could not be tackled bilaterally, Romania and Bulgaria arranged for trilateral cooperation with Greece or Turkey. Direct cooperation through regional frameworks works best, he suggested, on non-political, technical/functional issues, such as energy, infrastructure, organized crime, and civil protection (e.g., disaster relief, search and rescue on the Black Sea).

Participants recognized the difficulty of this issue for Serbia. One participant remarked that no strong Serbian leadership has been able even to hint at the fact that Kosovo was lost to Serbia nine years ago, let alone explain it to the Serbian people. But, at the same time, he acknowledged that no country can easily accept being dismantled. The wounds in this case are too deep, too recent.

Other participants discussed the potential importance of the Hungarian experience as a model, or guide, or even consolation for Serbia. A Hungarian participant acknowledged that the national frustration of the Hungarian nation over the loss of population and territory is real, but that European integration is a very important means by which to ease these frustrations. It required 70-75 years for Hungarians to achieve this, he noted. And he suggested it would be good if Serbia does not take so long, if integration is achieved more rapidly, and with it a reduction in frustration.

CONCLUSION

The discussion in Kolasin suggested that some Kosovo Serbs are ready to work through Kosovo institutions to protect and advance Serb interests in Kosovo, and a readiness – even an eagerness – on the part of Kosovo government officials for the Serbs to do so. The discussion also made clear the interest on both sides in advancing discussions and cooperation without necessarily engaging, indeed avoiding, the status question.

Participants made it clear that the Belgrade government up to now has been an obstacle to such cooperation, and expressed the hope that the new Serbian government, still being formed as these discussions took place, might avail itself of the opportunity to pursue a “two-track” approach to relations with Kosovo: continued refusal to recognize independence, but pragmatic cooperation in pursuit of common interests. Some areas of potential cooperation for mutual benefit identified by participants included restoring and facilitating more efficient regional transportation networks (roads, rail, air travel), facilitating trade and commerce between Kosovo and Serbia, and resolving documentation questions that affect all areas of interaction (from business transactions to educational certification).

The discussion also revealed continued “wishful thinking” on the part of regional actors concerning accession to the EU, and its effect on internal problems. The contributions from European participants, including participants from EU member states in the Balkans, made it clear that states will have to comply with all requirements, including political criteria, incorporated into the treaty and therefore subject to negotiation. Participants were reminded that criteria concerning minority policies and practices are part of the Lisbon treaty, and will therefore become subject to negotiation with adoption of this treaty. These are major differences between contemporary accession negotiations and those of the fifth round of enlargement, which granted membership to the Central European states. Perceptions of inconsistent or even unfair treatment by the EU of the Western Balkan states were thus shown to be unjustified. At the same time, participants, including European and EU-member participants, agreed that compliance need not necessarily be perfect. But, deficiencies in any area, and especially on political criteria, must be the focus of remediation efforts, and there must be evidence of progress and an expectation of continued progress, for deficiencies to be accepted. Neglect of such problems will make accession difficult, if not impossible.

Much of the discussion focused on economic conditions in the region, and their effect on social and political processes. There was broad agreement on the need for accelerated economic development as a means of addressing serious unemployment issues, and strengthening local economies for entry into the EU. But it was noted that the structural changes required to achieve such improvements should not be undertaken solely to satisfy EU accession requirements; they should be seen as beneficial in their own right, as necessary preconditions for the establishment of stable, democratic, market economies, regardless of accession.

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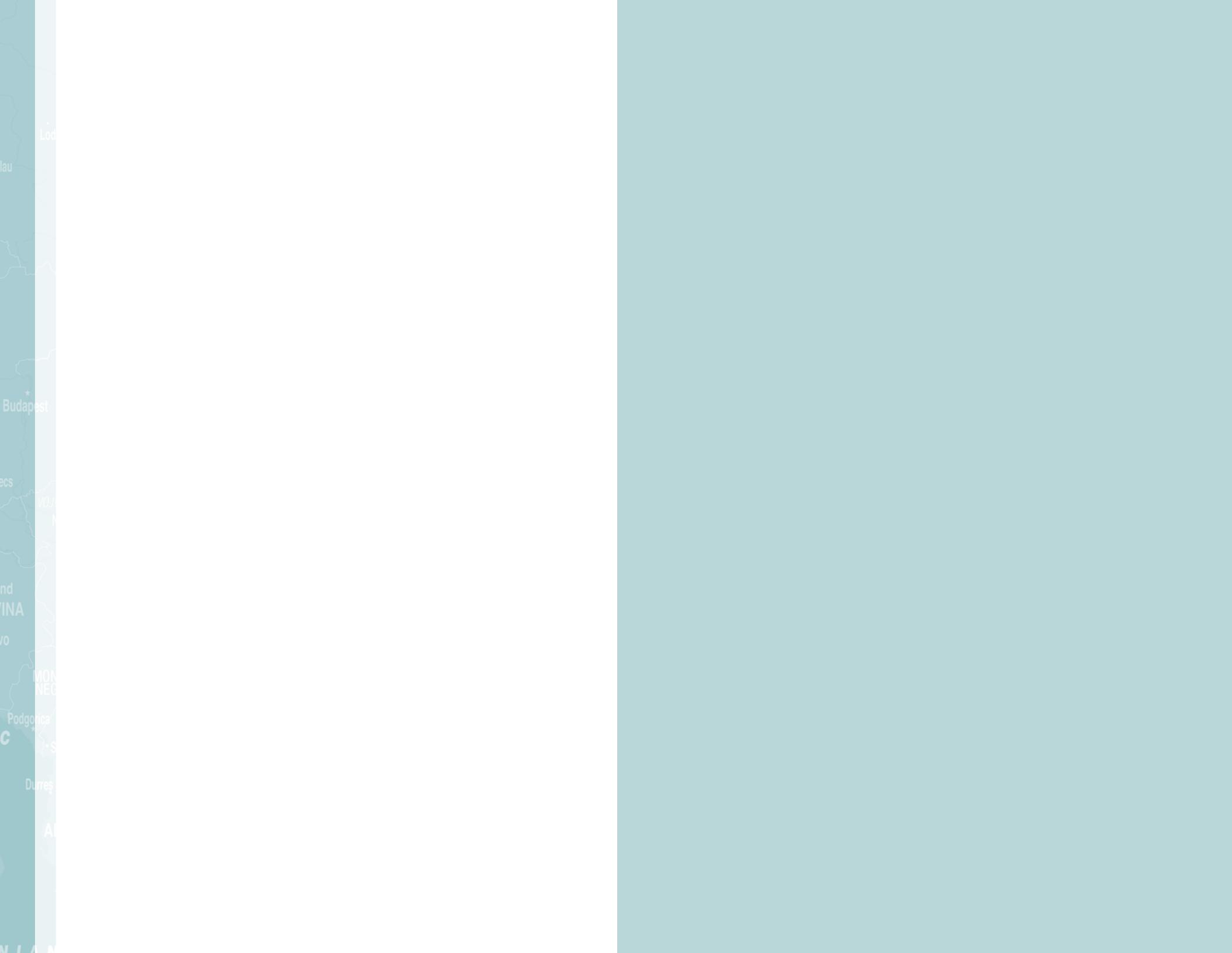
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