

Debalkanizing the Balkans

By Alex N. Grigor'ev

As the United States debates whether and when to withdraw from Iraq, in another part of the world the United Nations is seeking to determine the future status of Kosovo for which NATO, led by the U.S., went to war in 1999.

If handled properly, a resolution of the Kosovo question would not only settle a long and intractable dispute between Serbs and Albanians over this ethnically divided province but, more importantly, transform the wider Balkans from a source of instability into a source of security. This development would make the need for long-term U.S. military involvement in the region a thing of the past.

A lasting solution for Kosovo, however, can only be found by also taking into account other urgent issues facing all of the countries of the region—and, most crucially, Serbia.

The process of settling Kosovo's status began Nov. 15 with the appointment of former Finnish President Martti Ahtisaari, a veteran trouble-shooter, as the U.N. Secretary General's Special Envoy for Future Status Process for Kosovo. Mr. Ahtisaari started his new assignment by touring the regional capitals (Pristina, Belgrade, Podgorica, Skopje and Tirana) and the capitals of the Contact Group members (U.S., Russia, Britain, France, Germany and Italy).

Mr. Ahtisaari has the extremely difficult task of working out a solution acceptable to both Belgrade and Pristina. At present, this seems nearly mission impossible: Pristina says it will accept nothing short of independence, and Belgrade asserts that the solution must lie within its newly created formula of "more than autonomy but less than independence." Thus emerges an eternal dilemma of international relations: the right of self-determination versus the inviolability of borders.

The outcome of these conflicting principles in the case of Kosovo is still unclear, but the start of a process to resolve them is a welcome change. Six years in political limbo has hurt prospects for growth and foreign investment and hindered the development of democracy and institutions.

Albanian frustration is overwhelming; one encounters it at every level when visiting Kosovo. Not surprisingly, ordinary Serbs experience it as well. More and more of them consider Kosovo lost, and many would like to move on with their lives. Most of Serbia's politicians would deny this, but they cannot deny that the uncertainty about Kosovo has a negative effect on Serbia's development. Instead of concentrating on improving people's daily lives, consolidating democracy and passing a new constitution, or fully dedicating itself to the quest for EU membership, Belgrade spends a bulk of its time and energy on this dusty province of two million souls.

In the late 1990s, the Serbs and Albanians fought for Kosovo. Today, the mood is different. Recently I had dinner with two very good friends, both exceptional intellectuals—one an Albanian from Pristina, the other a Serb from Belgrade. The conversation quickly turned to Kosovo and its right to independence. The Serb opposed it but said he would accept it when both Serbia and Kosovo become candidates for EU membership; then sovereignty for him will carry very different implications. The Albanian would accept nothing less than full independence. To my question of whether they are willing to fight and die for Kosovo, the Albanian gave a categorical yes. The Serb tried to explain that this is not the issue—that people should not be forced to fight or die for territories and that countries have the right to keep their borders intact. I took this as a no.

There are plans for Belgrade and Pristina to meet at the same negotiating table. Such a meeting, like all previous encounters between Serbia's and Kosovo's senior politicians, will produce very little, as was the case in Thessaloniki and Vienna. At such meetings they usually silently agree to disagree and try to score points

with the international community, not find common ground.

Whatever the ultimate result of the negotiating process, it is essential that it be conducted quickly and that it provide a clear solution accepted by both Belgrade and Pristina. Long, tiresome and confusing talks—resulting in half-measures or postponed solutions—will not resolve the problem but will only complicate the situation. Life in Kosovo after 1999 is proof that such half-measures do not work in the long run.

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One population, however, that deserves special attention is the Kosovo Serbs, a victimized minority group that feels threatened by its Albanian neighbors. Since the U.N. replaced the Serbian government in Kosovo, they have suffered physically and emotionally, economically and politically. Very few have returned to their homes after roughly 200,000, or two-thirds of the pre-war Serb population, fled the province after the 1999 war. Bringing their lives back to normal, giving them a sense of security and of a future in their own home, is as difficult—and as important—a task as negotiating the status of Kosovo itself.

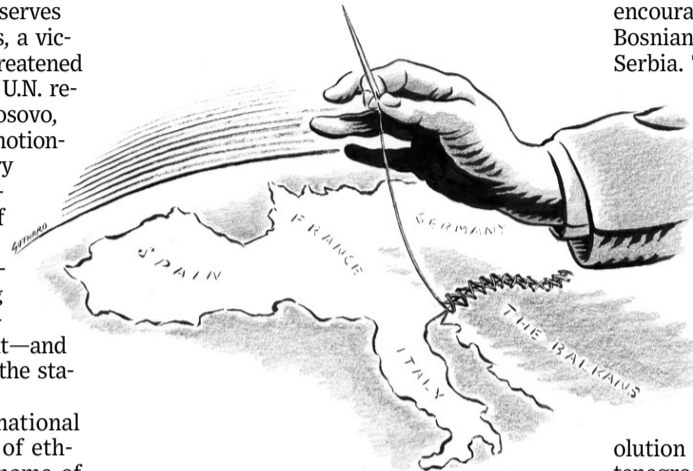
Too often in the past, the international community has recognized results of ethnic cleansing or expulsions in the name of greater security or peace. Too often minority rights were neglected in the service of a seemingly higher cause. One need only look at the borders of the entities in Bosnia, certain areas in Croatia or the Abkhazia region of Georgia. Such solutions did bring an end to violent conflicts but were far from being fair for all sides and in fact did not bring about a fair peace.

A better solution is found in neighboring Macedonia, where, after a short but bloody civil war in 2001, the majority ethnic Macedonians and the minority Albanians found a way to accommodate each other's interests, reform the constitution and establish inclusive, fair and democratic interethnic governance acceptable to all communities of the country. The interethnic government of Vlado Buckovski is not a coalition of opportunity but a coalition of commitment.

Today Macedonia is the region's leader in the EU integration process, having recently received candidate status from the EU. This is a significant achievement for Macedonians

and for the country's Albanians, and an encouraging sign for the other Balkan countries. It shows what happens if one becomes serious about EU integration including accommodation of all ethnic communities.

Kosovo will not be the only issue of concern in the Balkans this year. In Montenegro, the government of Milo Dukanovic is preparing for a referendum on independence from a joint state with Serbia to be held no later than the end of April. Postponing a resolution of Montenegro's future today will only prevent it as well as Serbia



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from moving forward. The people in Montenegro no less than those in Slovenia or Croatia deserve a right to decide what kind of country they will live in.

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Taken together, the possible independence of Kosovo and Montenegro would be a devastating blow to Serbia's democracy and its national pride. The likely consequences are all far from being encouraging. A major challenge of the Kosovo negotiating process will be making sure that Serbia does not end up feeling like the loser. Creating an eight million-strong pariah state in the middle of the Balkans will damage all hopes for a lasting peace in the region.

There is no way to prevent the impending shocks to Serbia but there are ways to soften their impact. Whether it is the establishment of special ties between Belgrade and the Serbs in Kosovo, the provision of serious safeguards for the rights of the Kosovo Serbs, the creation of special rights for the Serbian Orthodox monaster-

ies in the province, forgiving Serbia's \$15 billion foreign debt, obtaining serious financial and institutional help for the country's EU candidacy, or all of the above, Serbia can't leave the negotiating table empty-handed. It will not be easy but the solution to the Kosovo problem is as much about Serbia as it is about Kosovo.

Will a resolution of the Kosovo status and the referendum on Montenegro's independence alone provide for a lasting peace in the Balkans? Regrettably, the answer is no. In fact, an independent Kosovo might encourage separatist tendencies among the Bosnian Serbs or the Albanians of south Serbia. The Kosovo settlement has to include firm international guarantees of the inviolability of Macedonia's present borders. These issues cannot be isolated from the other problems of the region. A lasting solution would require an international conference on the Balkans to be held after the referendum in Montenegro and the resolution of Kosovo's status. All the regional capitals, with their neighbors and the major international powers as guarantors, must pledge that the res-

olution of the status of Kosovo and Montenegro represents the last remaining piece of the Yugoslav puzzle, that no further border changes will be acceptable in the region by anyone, that the framework of the Dayton agreement in Bosnia needs to be respected by all, and that there will be a serious and concentrated effort to bring all the countries of the Balkans into the EU. Such an effort should include not only pledges of general political support but smart and significant financial assistance, meaningful help in completing institutional reforms, including those aimed at creation of sustainable interethnic democracies, and a clear and understandable EU admission schedule.

This is not an easy task, but only making the Balkans a part the EU will make the Balkan wars a thing of the past. This is in the interests of the peoples of the Balkans; it is in the interests of Europe, and it is in the interests of the United States.

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The Washington Post / By George F. Will

Republican Dinosaurs

Washington

Before evolution produced creatures of our perfection, there was a 3-ton dinosaur, the stegosaurus, so neurologically sluggish that when its tail was injured, significant

time elapsed before news of the trauma meandered up its long spine to its walnut-size brain. This primitive beast, not the dignified elephant, should be the symbol of House Republicans.

Yes, one should not taint all of them because of the behavior of most of them. Why, perhaps half a dozen of the 231 Republican representatives authored none of the transportation bill's 6,371 earmarks—pork projects.

And now among House Republicans there are Darwinian stirrings, prompted by concerns about survival.

In Washington, such concerns often are confused with and substitute for moral epiphanies. Tom DeLay will not return as leader of House Republicans, whose new fastidiousness is not yet so severe that they are impatient with Ohio Rep. Bob Ney's continuing chairmanship of the Committee on House Administration, in spite of services he rendered to Jack Abramoff. Mr. Ney has explained, by way of extenuation that he did not know what he was doing.

Amid earmarks, lobbyists and incontinent spending, are congressional conservatives headed for extinction?

Anyway, catalyzed by Mr. DeLay's decision to recede, House Republicans, perhaps emboldened by the examples of Afghanistan and Iraq, are going to risk elections. When they elect their leaders, they should consider the following:

The national pastime is no longer baseball, it is rent-seeking—bending public power for private advantage. There are two reasons why rent-seeking has become so lurid.

The first reason is big government—the regulatory state. This year Washington will disperse \$2.6 trillion, which is a small portion of Washington's economic consequences, considering the costs and benefits distributed by incessant fiddling with the tax code, and by government's regulatory fidgets.

Second, House Republicans, after 40 years in the minority, have, since 1994, wallowed in the pleasures of power. They have practiced DeLayism, or "K Street conservatism." This involves exuberantly serving rent-seekers, who hire K Street lobbyists as helpers. For House Republicans the aim of the game is to build political support. But Republicans shed their conservatism in the process of securing their seats in the service, they say, of conservatism. "K Street conservatism" com-

pounds unseemliness with hypocrisy.

Until the Bush administration, with its incontinent spending, unleashed an especially conscienceless Republican control of both political branches, conservatives pretended to believe in limited government. The last five years, during which the number of registered lobbyists more than doubled, have proved that, for some Republicans, conservative virtue was merely the absence of opportunity for vice.

Who should House Republicans pick to replace Mr. DeLay? Roy Blunt of Missouri, the man who was selected, not elected, to replace DeLay, is a champion of earmarks as a form of constituent service. If, as one member says, "the problem is not just DeLay but 'DeLay, Inc.,'" Mr. Blunt is not the solution. So far—the field may expand—the choice for majority leader is between Mr. Blunt and John Boehner of Ohio. A salient fact: In 15 years in the House, Mr. Boehner has never put an earmark in an appropriations bill.

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Party Politics

With Tom DeLay out of the picture, who will lead Republicans in the House of Representatives? Brendan Miniter examines Ohioan John Boehner's chances.