

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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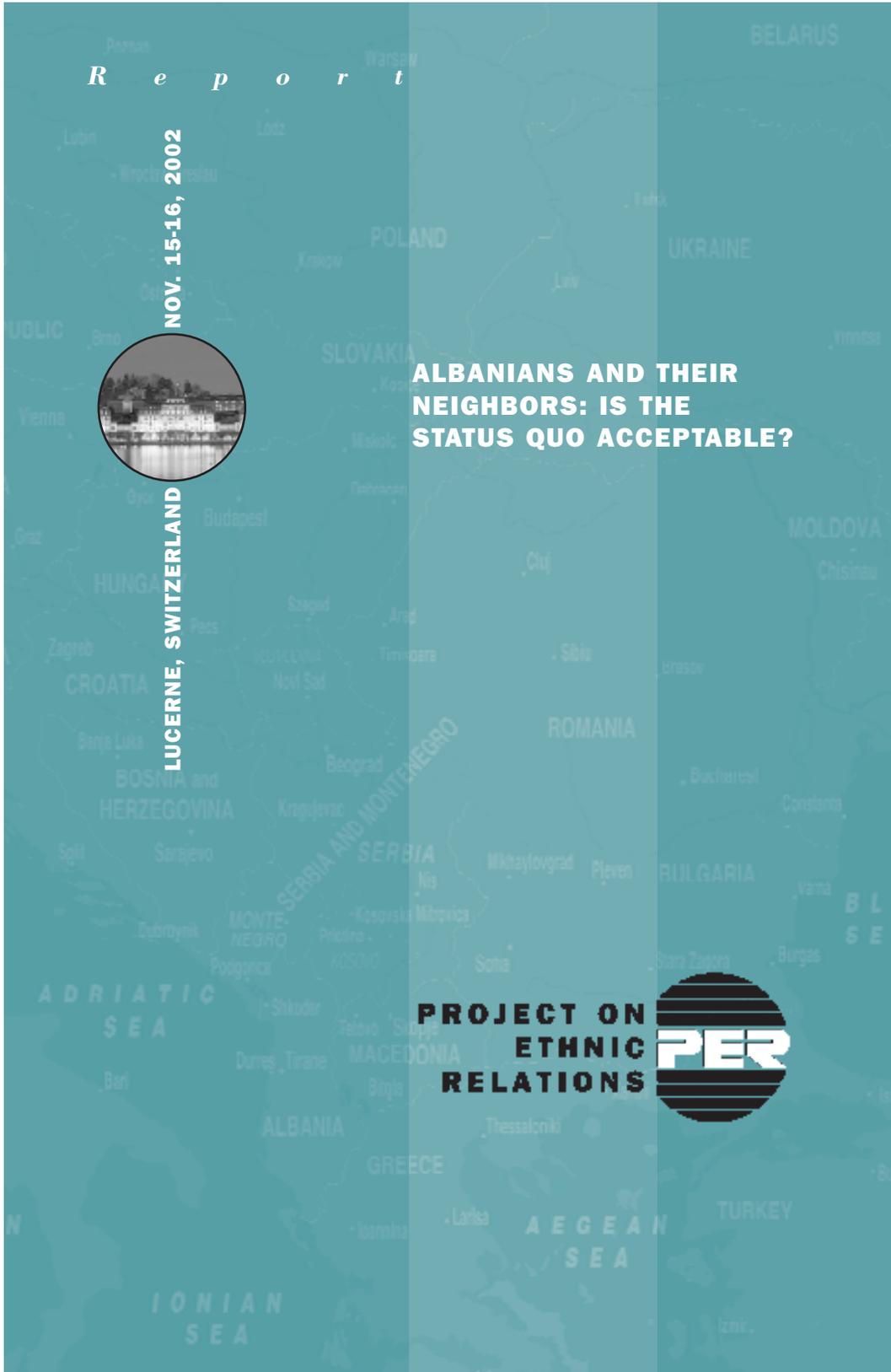
NOV. 15-16, 2002



LUCERNE, SWITZERLAND

**ALBANIANS AND THEIR
NEIGHBORS: IS THE
STATUS QUO ACCEPTABLE?**

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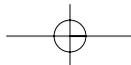
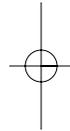
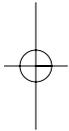


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PREFACE

The interest of the Project of Ethnic Relations (PER) in the issue of Albanians and their neighbors goes back many years. In 1992, PER convened its first seminar for leading Albanian intellectuals from the region, to learn about their views on the interethnic situation in the Balkans. It was one of several consultations PER held with major ethnic communities in the Balkans at that time. In 1995, at a PER roundtable in Belgrade, PER brought together vice presidents of the Socialist Party of Serbia and the Democratic League of Kosovo, thus breaking a four-year self-imposed boycott by Kosovar Albanians on contacts with Belgrade. In 1997, PER brought Kosovo Albanian leaders and Belgrade officials to a landmark meeting in New York City, where they worked out a platform for future negotiations, but this process was interrupted when armed clashes broke out in 1998.

After the 1999 Kosovo war, PER renewed its efforts in the form of a series of regional discussions for senior politicians from the Balkans under the heading "Albanians and Their Neighbors." The first roundtable was organized in April 2000 in Budapest, with the assistance of the Government of Hungary. The second meeting took place in Athens in December of that year with support from the Greek Government.

The third roundtable, which is the subject of this report, took place in Lucerne in November 2003, with the support and cooperation of the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs.

Since 2000, PER has also been holding regular follow-up local roundtables in Kosovo, Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro, with the aim of promoting practical measures toward interethnic accord.

These roundtables, of course, are not meetings among Albanians alone. As the list of participants appended to this report shows, they are settings for high-level



From left to right: Dusan Mihajlovic, Ivan Djordjevic, and Nebojsa Covic.



From left to right: Skender Hyseni, Nexhat Daci, Paul Jones, Ramush Haradinaj, and Bajram Rexhepi.

discussions between Albanians and their neighbors—as well as key players from the international community.

Our purpose in organizing these meetings is to provide a forum where difficult and contentious issues can be discussed in a neutral space, separated from the immediate urgencies of daily political life.

The future stability and prosperity of South Eastern Europe will depend in large measure on whether the peoples of the region will find peaceful and friendly ways to accommodate their ethnic differences, especially between Albanians and their neighbors.

Many important discussions took place at the Lucerne meeting—around the table and during breaks and meals—but two events were particularly noteworthy.

The first was the unexpected public apology by Serbian Deputy Prime Minister Nebojsa Covic to the prime minister of Kosovo, Bajram Rexhepi, for accusations that Covic had made earlier. Covic had charged Rexhepi with participating in atrocities against Serbs during the 1999 war, but said at the Lucerne meeting that he had been incorrectly informed. The apology was accepted and was followed by a handshake between the two men. This dramatic change in atmosphere led that evening to the first, albeit brief and informal, face-to-face meeting of Pristina and Belgrade officials at which Rexhepi, Covic, Kosovo Assembly President Nexhat Daci and Serbian Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Internal Affairs Dusan Mihajlovic discussed the idea of future dialogues. As of this writing, efforts continue to carry the process forward.

Another important event was the first public discussion between Radmila Sekerinska, the Macedonian deputy prime minister, Gorgi Spasov, the general secretary of the Social Democratic Union of Macedonia, and Ali Ahmeti, a Macedonian Albanian who in 2001 headed the armed action against Macedonian government forces but who now, following the signing of the Ohrid agreement and the subsequent elections, heads the Democratic Union for Integration, an ethnic Albanian party that is part of the governing coalition.

The reader will find accounts of these and other exchanges in the report.

We express our appreciation to the participants for their stimulating discussions and for their frank analyses of the situation in the Balkans.

PER is deeply grateful to the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (EDA), especially to former EDA head Federal Councilor Joseph Deiss, Ambassador Marc-André Salamin, Alexander Hoffet, Didier Chassot and Roland Salvisberg, for their indispensable cooperation and support in making this meeting possible.

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. However, representatives of the media were present, by request, during the

initial presentations of Albanian Prime Minister Fatos Nano, Federal Councilor Joseph Deiss and UNMIK Head Michael Steiner. This report quotes some of their remarks directly.

Alex N. Grigor'ev, PER Program Officer, who was also a conference participant, was responsible for organizing the meeting and is the author of this report. 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
May 2003



From left to right: Marc-Andre Salamin, Alex Grigor'ev, Joseph Deiss, Allen Kassof, Michael Steiner, Livia Plaks, Fatos Nano, and Klaus Schumann.

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 “Kosovar” is used to describe Kosovo’s inhabitants, whether Albanians, Serbs, Roma, Turks, or others.

For the sake of simplicity, “Yugoslavia” or “FRY” are used for the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, “Macedonia” for “FYROM” or “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia”, and “Bosnia” for Bosnia and Herzegovina.

“Serb” and “Croat” are used as ethnic terms, whereas “Serbian” and “Croatian” are employed when referring to Serbia and Croatia.

Finally, for stylistic clarity in this report, participants from the countries of the Balkans are variously identified as Southeast European, Balkan or regional. The other participants are identified as U.S. or European. This terminology, of course, does not imply that the Balkan countries are not a part of Europe.



Participants in the roundtable.

INTRODUCTION

The roundtable entitled “Albanians and Their Neighbors: Is the Status Quo Acceptable? Alternative Futures” held in Lucerne, Switzerland on November 15-16, 2002 was the third in the series on “Albanians and Their Neighbors” initiated by the Project on Ethnic Relations (PER) in 2000. The first two meetings were held in April 2000 in Budapest and in December 2000 in Athens.

Five key events that had taken place since the second PER roundtable greatly influenced the Lucerne discussions:

- Macedonia experienced the outbreak of civil war in 2001. This was followed by a truce brokered by the international community, resulting in the August 13, 2001 Ohrid Framework Agreement, parliamentary elections in September 2002 and the participation in the present coalition government of a new Albanian political party, which includes former chiefs of the now-disbanded ethnic Albanian National Liberation Army.
- Former Yugoslav president Slobodan Milosevic was arrested on April 1, 2001 and transferred to The Hague on June 28, 2001.
- Kosovo had a landmark election, in November 2001, in which the people chose their new, multiethnic assembly and government, with Ibrahim Rugova as president of Kosovo and Bajram Rexhepi as prime minister. Serbs and other minorities constitute a quarter of the new Kosovo legislature and are included in the new government.
- A March 14, 2002 agreement, which is subject to a referendum after three years, sets the framework for replacing the FRY with the new state union of Serbia and Montenegro, a loose association of these two ex-Yugoslav republics.
- Even though they took place outside the Western Balkans, the tragic events of September 11, 2001 in the United States had implications for this region. U.S. engagement in the Western Balkans continued, but this mission became secondary to the fight against international terrorism and Al Qaeda.

For the Lucerne meeting, PER once again brought together every top ethnic Albanian politician from the Balkans and their counterparts from Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia, along with senior officials from Romania, Switzerland, Turkey, the United States, the Council of Europe, the European Union (EU), the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe (SPSEE) and the United Nations (UN).

The discussions focused on the situation in Kosovo and possibilities for opening a dialogue between Pristina and Belgrade; the situation in Macedonia and implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement; relations between the Albanian minority and the majority in Montenegro; the regional role of Albania; the state of intra-Albanian relations; and Euro-Atlantic integration and the European future of the Balkans. The participants were asked to

consider several key questions: Is the Balkan status quo acceptable? If not, what has to be changed? What are the alternative futures for the region?

THE BALKANS: A VIEW FROM EUROPE

The meeting was opened by Joseph Deiss, a Swiss Federal Councilor and the head of the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, who spoke about Switzerland's commitment to South Eastern Europe. The region is one of the priority areas in Swiss foreign policy, he said, adding that, in 1995-2001, Switzerland committed more than 1 billion Swiss francs in various cooperation, peace, and military programs around the region. In 2002 it spent another 200 million Swiss francs, he said. The Swiss "commitment to the Balkans is based not only on the sense of solidarity with the people who have suffered immense harm in the last decade" but also on the fact that more than 350,000 people from former Yugoslavia currently live in Switzerland, Mr. Deiss said. "What happens in the Balkans has an impact [in Switzerland]." He added that the Swiss government "will not tolerate using Switzerland as a base for activities in support of extremist groups and movements."

According to Mr. Deiss, the Swiss interest in stabilizing the region and helping it become prosperous coincides with the overall European and U.S. interest there: "peace, democracy and a social market economy in the Balkans." All out-of-region participants should encourage enhanced regional economic and security cooperation, he said, adding: "Without this will of working together, there will be no peace and prosperity. ... A war is not won unless the defeated enemy is turned into a friend."

Mr. Deiss said he saw a number of positive trends in the region, adding that "the situation looks better and more promising than three years ago. A threat of large-scale armed conflict has been eliminated, free and fair elections have taken place regularly in the region. Far-reaching reforms (political, democratic, economic) have been launched ... and have already been showing measurable results. The civil society is becoming more and more involved. ... The region is on the right track." This does not, however, mean that there are no problems or pending issues, he said: "Violations of human and minority rights are still all too frequent; the number of refugees and IDPs [internally displaced persons] remains far too high. The culture of rule of law is not yet established. ... Organized crime and corruption are still commonplace and widespread." Many war criminals remain unpunished and efforts to bring them to justice are still inadequate. Cooperation with ICTY is poor.

"Administrations are still very weak," the Swiss federal councilor continued. "They lack necessary human and financial resources, [are] poorly equipped and are subject to political and criminal pressures. There is too much politics and not enough government."

Mr. Deiss called on the international community to continue with its assistance to the region in order to prevent setbacks: "Our commitment is more important now than ever before."

JOINING EUROPE

The theme of joining Europe was taken up by a senior EU official. The EU is coming much closer to the region, he said, and in 2004 the region will be practically surrounded by the EU.

The EU sees the region as a whole, he continued, but each country will be rewarded individually for its progress. He noted that the Balkan countries need more preparations before they join the EU, because EU officials do not want to repeat the experience of Spain, Portugal, and Greece, which were not fully prepared to be EU members at the time of joining the Union.

The EU sees the region as a whole but each country will be rewarded individually for its progress.

Europe has standards, the senior EU official said. These standards include the rule of law, building up the culture of the rule of law and a multicultural approach to resolving outstanding political issues, he said. "European integration might help, investments might help, but they will not come if there is no internal political will to solve the interethnic problems," the official said. He suggested talking more about common European values and standards and less about *acquis communautaire*. One of the central challenges is the problem of organized crime and corruption. No citizen of the EU will accept the five Balkan countries into the union unless this problem is overcome, the EU official concluded.

There was criticism of EU policies in the region by a politician from a candidate country, who said: "The EU Stabilization and Association agreements are fine, but they are missing the main idea, which is regional cooperation. The EU is dealing with each state separately. Regional and sub-regional integration is crucial in order to overcome regional problems." He encouraged the EU to consider the region as a whole.

Another EU official responded: "EU will not take the countries over to resolve their problems. Countries must resolve their problems themselves, before they enter the Union. One of the conditions of coming closer to the EU is to make order in your own home. Countries should resolve their problems because they need or want to." This speaker reminded the participants of the notion of the EU as a family of different nations: "Countries with very different and conflictual histories must have a common vision of the future and understanding of their past if they are going to be useful and constructive members of the EU. ... When countries want to join the EU they share its values, they understand its history, they are prepared to ... improve the effectiveness of the Union." The EU official said the role of the European Parliament in the enlargement process should not be neglected. In dealing with candidate countries, the parliament will stress the issues of conditionality and full implementation of the agreements, the official said, adding that the ability to implement the laws of the union would be seen as most important.

In conclusion, the official said that the EU is very tough in negotiating with the candidate countries.

Participants from the aspiring countries made clear that they understand the points the EU official had made. A member of the Serbian ruling coalition said: “The status quo for the Balkans is not acceptable. ... Our short-term goal is stabilization of the region and prevention of new conflict and development of economic and cultural ties within the region. We need to establish joint standards regarding citizenship, human and minority rights, control of migration flows, illegal actions. [We also need to] enable greater free movement of persons, introduce a complete rule of law, and curb organized crime, smuggling, trafficking.”

Views from Brussels were expressed on how the unresolved status of Kosovo could affect EU enlargement for Serbia and Montenegro. One EU official reported that there is a sense of impatience coming from Brussels and concern due to continuing uncertainty about the status of Kosovo and other situations in the region. “This is likely to complicate the process,” he said. “Cyprus’s experience in this regard might be useful for the Balkan countries.”

Another EU official emphatically stated that the unresolved status of Kosovo should not prevent the EU from concluding an Association and Stabilization Agreement with Serbia and Montenegro. We must prevent that issue from becoming an obstacle to integration of the region, the official said.

In this context, a U.S. participant, who has been present in all three PER roundtables in this series, noted that the balance in the discussions between

One does not go overnight from a war and expulsion to the language of the European Union.

Albanians and their neighbors has shifted from recrimination to statements of common purpose. He said it took some time to achieve this, primarily because the wounds from the recent wars are still very deep. “One does not go overnight from a war and expulsion to the language of the European Union,” he said. “What is encouraging is to see how much has changed.”

An EU official encouraged the Balkan politicians to do exactly that—leave behind the issues of history and myths for good. “The question of a greater Albania is interesting,” he said, “but I am more interested in greater markets for energy, investment, and infrastructure. ... Economic development is not happening in the region.” He called for an approach based on economics rather than on ethnicity or some historical criteria.

Despite some participants’ criticism of its work, an official from SPSEE said his organization can still provide plentiful assistance within its programs. As the Stability Pact official noted, the organization is set to help the Balkan countries achieve their objectives toward EU and NATO membership. The intra-regional trade project is building on the successful completion of the regional free trade

agreements with the view of a deeper economic integration within the region, the official said. As of the date of the meeting, 11 out of 19 free-trade agreements envisioned in the region have been signed, and the rest were in the process of being finalized, said the official, adding that SPSEE is helping countries to improve the climate for foreign investments and to revitalize the regional energy market. There are projects on assisting the media in South East European countries, on training teachers and developing teaching resources and new objective history textbooks.

A U.S. diplomat attending the meeting said the American government also supports the EU and its role in the region. According to the diplomat, the United States will cooperate with the EU and will encourage cooperation with the EU in every part of the region. The diplomat said the United States remains committed and engaged in the region, politically, militarily and economically. Europe must be whole and free, and that includes the Balkan area, the diplomat said.

Many international and Balkan participants stressed that the continued involvement of the U.S. in the Balkans is crucial. One of the Europeans noted: "We should recognize that the involvement of the U.S. does not mean a group of soldiers or policemen, it means a political involvement, a concern in Washington about the region. From this point of view, I am afraid, we are witnessing disinvolvement."

IMPROVING REGIONAL SECURITY

Addressing the field of security, a representative of SPSEE said the organization is concentrating its work on solving the problems of a surplus of small arms and light weapons; migration, asylum and refugee return; organized crime; and border security management and regional cooperation in border management systems.

The SPSEE's work notwithstanding, one participant noted, NATO remains the main guarantor of security in South Eastern Europe. [The Lucerne meeting took place some days before the NATO summit in Prague, where Romania, Bulgaria and Slovenia, among other countries, were invited to join the alliance.] A senior NATO official compared the goals of the Prague summit with those of the summit in Washington that was held in April 1999 and was overshadowed by the NATO air campaign in Kosovo. He said that significant progress was achieved in the time between the Washington and Prague gatherings: the alliance is in the second stage of building security in Kosovo; management of the conflict in South Serbia was successful, due to the cooperation of the Serbian government, local Albanian leaders and the international community, represented by NATO and OSCE; and successful conflict management has taken place in Macedonia as well. The very fact that the head of the ex-NLA was taking part in the Lucerne meeting rather than sitting in the mountains of Macedonia testified to the determination of the international community—and also to the will of both ethnic communities in Macedonia—

to establish peace in their country, the NATO official said. He said it really mattered that NATO and the local actors worked together and changed the course of events. He said there was a good division of labor in Macedonia and South Serbia but added that serious problems still remain.

The NATO official reaffirmed the alliance's commitment to the Balkans. He said he wanted to bring a strong message in Lucerne that NATO will stay in the region to preserve the peace process there, and that it will not tolerate any renewed violence or extremism. But NATO does not want to create a dependency culture in terms of security, the official said. He added that some real progress in Kosovo and fulfillment of the benchmarks is badly needed.

NATO is also looking for border management and security cooperation in the Balkans and will assist in creating better conditions for this cooperation, the NATO official said. He called on Belgrade, Tirana, Pristina, and all other regional actors to start common discussions on this issue. He said this is very important if the countries of the region are to realize their common goal of joining the alliance. NATO's 2002 enlargement process is not the last one, said this participant, adding that the alliance will keep looking at the region of South Eastern Europe with ideas for further enlargement and cooperation within the Partnership for Peace.

KOSOVO: WHAT'S NEXT?

Discussion of Kosovo was a dominant theme of the meeting. The participants in this discussion included all relevant actors: the chief of the U.N. mission in Kosovo, the prime minister of Kosovo, the speaker of Kosovo's assembly, leaders of Kosovo's parliamentary parties, the deputy prime minister of the Serbian government responsible for Kosovo, other officials from Belgrade and leaders of the Kosovo Serbs.

The debate focused on two main topics: How and when might the dialogue about the future status of Kosovo start? And, more specifically, can a dialogue start between Belgrade and Pristina—and if so how and when? This part of the discussion revealed, on one hand, a continuing frustration on the part of all ethnic Albanians in the region—and others—regarding the continuing lack of clarity about the status of Kosovo, and, on the other hand, a growing expression of mutual respect and goodwill among people holding diametrically opposed views, namely the Pristina and the Belgrade officials. There was a display of both hope and caution: Hope that there finally could be a positive move toward resolution of many outstanding issues. Caution, because moving too fast could upset the fragile balance in the region.

The first speaker on the topic of Kosovo was the Special Representative of the U.N. Secretary General and Head of the U.N. Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK). He identified three stages of the international engagement in Kosovo:

The first stage was NATO-led, according to the UNMIK head. This stage involved a campaign to halt massive human rights violations, and it was completed successfully.

The second stage was opened with U.N. resolution 1244 and was led by the U.N., according to the UNMIK head. In this stage, the main task of the international community has been the transformation of Kosovo into a functional society, he said. This stage started in 1999 and will end with almost complete implementation of the benchmarks that were set up and with the resolution of the status issue. After this, the UNMIK head said, an EU-led stage will start.

But until UNMIK fulfills its mandate and implements the benchmarks, and until the final status is resolved, the continued engagement of the United States in Kosovo and the Balkans is needed, the UNMIK head said. After that, he said, the EU should take the lead. He cautioned that "status will not solve the difficult substantive issues in Kosovo. These issues will be solved only with a concrete pre-accession strategy of the European Union." This participant called for applying a model that the EU has applied in the past: "The EU was very successful in drawing Greece, Spain, and Portugal closer. ... In the Balkans, surrounded by the European Union, we have to develop a similar strategy." These are not only the answers for Kosovo, but also the answers for the other countries of the region, he said.

The Balkans need to become attractive for Europe.

Implementation of the benchmarks is a precondition for investments and investments are preconditions for more jobs, this U.N. official said. "The Balkans need to become attractive for Europe. ... If this does not happen, Kosovo will remain an enclave; the Balkans will remain an enclave."

The head of UNMIK warned that the debate on the status issue is by-and-large a false debate. He noted that U.N. resolution 1244 already provides for substantial self-government and a wide range of options at the end of the process. "We do not know what the future status will look like. But we know what it will not look like. There will be no return to the status quo before 1999. There will be no division of Kosovo and cantonization. On the other hand, there will be no free-lance independence without strings attached," he said. He called on politicians to focus on the real challenges before talking about a possible future status for Kosovo. These real challenges include establishing the rule of law, providing security and providing for the functioning of institutions and the economy, he said, adding: "The real issue for the people is the economy. People want jobs; they want to survive."

In the Kosovo case, the process matters, said this speaker, adding that this process has a name: "standards before status." He said these standards include establishment of functioning institutions, the rule of law and the basis for a market economy. And, most fundamentally, a realistic future for life in

Kosovo should be offered to the Serbs and other smaller communities, by making refugee returns possible and by providing an environment with real political participation by the minorities, the official said. The Kosovo Albanian majority population must act responsibly within the institutions, he said. If Kosovo Albanians reject territorial solutions they must make other solutions work, the UNMIK head said—they must prove in the institutions that the minority protection mechanisms are working and that the minorities are treated with the respect they deserve.

There are several stages for resolving the future status of Kosovo, according to the UNMIK head. He said the first stage must include direct talks between Pristina and Belgrade.

This idea was supported by the majority of international officials present. The head of the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs said that “Belgrade and Pristina need to embark without delay on a direct dialogue.”

According to the head of UNMIK, the talks between Belgrade and Pristina should first focus on issues of common interest, economic questions, and then on the issue of the final status, no matter how long it takes. In the end, the issue will end up at the U.N. Security Council.

Other international officials expressed their clear commitment to UNMIK’s strategy of standards before status, supporting efforts to ensure that all refugees who want to go home are allowed to do so and supporting participation of all ethnic communities in the provisional institutions of local self-government and in the political life of Kosovo.

One of Kosovo’s most senior officials stressed that the situation there has improved with the establishment of institutions. He also said that the issue of returns is an important issue for the Kosovo government, simply because the people in question are Kosovo’s own citizens, who are temporarily outside of Kosovo. He said it is an obligation of the institutions of Kosovo to encourage their return. He called on the Kosovo Serb community and the Serbian government to support the government of Kosovo on this issue. “We want to integrate the Kosovo Serb community into Kosovo,” he said. He asked Belgrade to start sending clearer messages regarding Kosovo and Kosovo Serbs. Until now, the messages from Belgrade regarding the elections in Kosovo, Serb participation in the institutions or a possible return of the Yugoslav army to Kosovo were either not clear or conflicting, he said. According to this Kosovo politician, because of these conflicting messages, Serbs in Kosovo are discouraged and often do not want to cooperate with the Kosovo institutions.

But a Kosovo Serb responded that “The present situation can be significantly improved if the Serb population is encouraged” by Kosovo Albanians.

Other priorities of the Kosovo government include preservation of multi-ethnicity and establishment of the rule of law, a participant said. According to one Kosovo participant: “It is our strong determination here in Kosovo to build our democracy based on free and fair elections, free media,

revival of the economy through privatization coupled with investments from outside, the fight against corruption, crime and cross-border criminal activity—through reconciliation and meaningful integration of minorities and close cooperation with neighboring countries in the region on the whole range of issues of common interest. All that is toward our major goal of European integration and NATO integration.”

But Kosovo Albanian officials said that Albanians are increasingly frustrated with the situation. One of them said that the frustration comes from the fact that “the hands of the Kosovars remain tied.” He disagreed with the U.N. administration that the Kosovo institutions could possibly fulfill the benchmarks set by UNMIK without receiving more responsibility. “The institutions cannot exercise their constitutional responsibilities,” he said, “because in the most sensitive fields that would provide for ethnic equality—in the field of human rights, the field of economy and social and health fields—in the most part the Kosovo institutions lack competency to act. In a lot of cases, they are denied access altogether.” The Kosovo Albanian official said the unfair situation results in unwarranted criticism of the Kosovo institutions. He maintained that the Kosovo “institutions are deeply determined to create a democratic, civil society, which respects law and the rights of all ethnicities in Kosovo” but that these institutions need to be given more power, more responsibilities, more competencies. “The responsibilities should be transferred as soon as possible to the Kosovo institutions so we do not have to deal with the cases of violence any more,” he said.

This participant brought up the problems of Kosovo’s northern areas, the divided city of Kosovska Mitrovica and Serb enclaves. He said: “Neither UNMIK nor KFOR have accomplished their task in preserving the territorial unity of Kosovo, something that has been prescribed by the [Kosovo] Constitutional Framework and [U.N.] resolution 1244. Parallel systems and the Serbian government system, financed by the Serbian budget, exist in one third of Kosovo.” He called on UNMIK to eliminate these obstacles by the end of 2003.

According to this speaker, the Kosovo institutions have managed to fully integrate all non-Serb minorities into Kosovo society. The Albanians have demonstrated good will in agreeing on an arrangement that has produced “a unique case in history where a 10 percent population holds more than 30 percent of the seats in the parliament” and is included in the presidency of the assembly, he said.

The Kosovo government, this participant continued, does not enjoy authority in the field of economy and social security. This is very painful, he said, adding: “We need more competencies within the economic sphere and we are ready and prepared to take responsibility for all citizens of Kosovo.”

A Kosovo party leader added that, in order to build institutions with full responsibilities and representation, an internal dialogue within Kosovo is needed, along with a more serious dialogue with UNMIK and SRSG.

High unemployment and the lack of any meaningful economic development in Kosovo were mentioned as major sources of frustration by many speakers from Kosovo, Albanians and Serbs alike. According to one party leader from Kosovo, 60 percent of Kosovars are unemployed, and the figure among those under 35 is dangerously high, at around 75 percent. These people should be offered other options rather than just emigration from Kosovo, the party leader said.

Another Kosovo party leader warned that the issues of economic renewal of Kosovo need to be addressed as soon as possible if the international

The issues of economic renewal of Kosovo need to be addressed as soon as possible if the international community does not want to see unrest there.

community does not want to see unrest there: "The youth are losing any perspective for their own country. If we continue to justify the lack of economic support in Kosovo by the unresolved issue of status, we will not move anywhere," he said. He questioned the policy of not letting Kosovo institutions participate in regional projects and international organizations, especially if the goal of the international community is to improve the lives of the people of Kosovo. This participant said he does

not think that the status issue must be resolved before Kosovo is included in regional economic projects. He called for making Kosovo an economic entity in relations with international economic and financial institutions.

It was also made clear in Lucerne that another major frustration of the Kosovo politicians is that the territory remains a continuing black hole in the map of the Balkans. They noted that Kosovo is not included in any of the integration processes that are underway elsewhere in the region. Just like everyone else, the Kosovars also want to become a part of the EU at some point in future, these politicians said. Kosovo politicians said they understand that this is a long-term goal, but preconditions for it can be set up today. They said these pre-conditions include keeping a stable situation within Kosovo and its neighborhood and the relaxation of interethnic tensions in Kosovo and with its neighbors.

The Kosovar Albanians said they are convinced that, until the status of Kosovo is defined, there will be no stability in the region. They also said that the discussion on status might need to start sooner, rather than later, for many reasons, not the least of which are global changes. "The unresolved issue of status hinders economic stability," said one Kosovar. "Without economic stability there is no political stability and vice versa." Once the issue of status is solved, the leadership of Kosovo envisions the end of the period of disintegration and a faster regional movement toward European integration. "This is our dream that we would like to make real," one of them said.

An official from Belgrade disagreed with the Kosovo Albanian politician who said that the messages from Belgrade to the Serbs in Kosovo are ambiguous. "We have encouraged the Serbs to take part in the parliamentary elections and to take their place in the institutions of Kosovo," said the Belgrade official, adding: "The voice of [Deputy Prime Minister Nebojsa] Covic is the only voice coming from Belgrade. No matter what other political differences exist [in Serbia], they will not affect Belgrade's policies in Kosovo." There should be no surprise about those differences in opinion, because they are normal for a democratic society, the Belgrade official said. He also said that the record of the two-year-old democratic government in Belgrade is impressive. As an example, he reported that there are no Albanians in the prisons of Serbia.

This Belgrade official cautioned against presenting the picture of Kosovo as one of significant improvements and pointed out that, since June 1999, there are 250,000 internally displaced persons and refugees from Kosovo.

(This figure was disputed by a senior Kosovo official who said that "only 50 percent of this number is correct," and "out of them 40 percent are Serbs from Croatia and Bosnia.")

In Serbia alone, there are 226,000 internally displaced persons, the Belgrade official said, adding that the situation is not improving. A Serb participant from Kosovo agreed, saying: "Three and a half years after the war we still have no significant returns of Serbs to Kosovo."

According to the Belgrade official's information, the rate of return of refugees to Bosnia and Herzegovina is almost 50 percent. "In Bosnia, there are hardly any political problems for the returnees; the problems are mostly economic," he said. In the case of Croatia, the rate of returns is 17 percent, he said, adding, "In the case of Kosovo, the number is 0.056 percent." The official said that, for Belgrade, "this benchmark criterion is above any other benchmarks. ... Standards should not be only established but also implemented." The refugees live in misery, and their fate should be a priority, said the Belgrade official, adding that this is not just a debate about standards. This official also said that no talks about the final status of Kosovo should be held until there are satisfactory solutions to these existential problems.

A top Kosovo official agreed that there is a need to make progress in order to create conditions for the return of Serbs. It is an obligation of UNMIK, but also a duty of the Kosovo government to create conditions on the ground to make the returns possible, the official said. He said that, so far, UNMIK has been dealing with these issues while communicating with Belgrade's Coordination Center for Kosovo only. He said the local Kosovo Serbs should be increasingly involved in resolving this issue.

A Serb participant from Kosovo complained that little has been done in Kosovo in terms of establishing the rule of law. He suggested that the head of UNMIK should use his powers in the same way the high representative in Bosnia does. "Whenever our rights are in danger, the SRSG [the special representative of the U.N. secretary general] rarely does much," this Serb said.

An important element in establishing the rule of law would be to prosecute individuals who have committed crimes, including war crimes, the Serb from Kosovo said. “The Hague tribunal is not for the Serbs only but for all who have committed crimes in the territory of ex-Yugoslavia. Everybody who has committed crimes should find their place in The Hague. This will be a very important message for both Serbs and Albanians: for the Serbs that they are protected, and for the Albanians that they, too, are guilty for what has been happening,” this participant concluded.

Another Kosovo Serb added: “The large military force of KFOR and UNMIK is still incapable of adequately securing and protecting the rights of the Serb and other minorities in Kosovo.”

Concerning the future of Kosovo, most of the participants agreed that it was still too early to resolve the territory’s final status, though their basic positions remained unaltered. The Albanians favor independent Kosovo, while Belgrade wants Kosovo to be attached to Serbia in some fashion.

Some participants called for a speedy resolution of the final status of Kosovo which, in their words, “is the answer to many concerns and anxieties of present-day Kosovo.”

“Independence of Kosovo is by all means a key to a lasting sustainable peace and for security in the entire region,” said one of the Kosovo Albanian participants. “While I do support Mr. Steiner’s benchmarks before status approach, I feel that I need to underline that a delay for too long of the resolution of the final status may contain a risk for major setbacks. As a consequence, the unclear status may be turned into an instrument of keeping Kosovo and the neighboring countries in a permanent, retarded position. The consolidation of democracy and the economy in Kosovo and its neighborhood [as well as] foreign investments’ flow in Kosovo—and also in Serbia, Montenegro and Albania—are hardly conceivable as long as the Kosovo card is out there.”

A Kosovo Serb participant, however, disagreed. “It is dangerous to talk about an independent Kosovo,” she said. “An independent Kosovo is not a solution.”

A U.S. diplomat underlined the heavy responsibility involved in discussing these issues, including Kosovo’s final status. He expressed the concern that, if not handled carefully, the issue of the final status of Kosovo might bring on a nationalistic backlash in Serbia. “For more than a decade, Serbia has been the source of regional instability and violence. This is no longer the case. Over the past two years, Serbia ended this role,” the diplomat said. “There are still strong nationalistic feelings in the country. The sources of that strong nationalistic feeling are ICTY, the huge refugee problem and Kosovo itself.” According to this American, the key is to address the needs and problems of the Serb minority in Kosovo satisfactorily before approaching any decision about final status. “If these problems are addressed, the decision about the final status becomes easier. We cannot base the decision on the shortness of time. If we do that, it will be a catastrophe,” he said. This participant agreed that a lot of

progress has been made toward improving conditions for minorities in Kosovo, but he said this is not yet the perception of the Serbs—and perceptions are crucial. The gap between the reality and the perception is growing, he said, but he added that reports on security situation improvements should not prompt a reduction in the numbers of KFOR troops in Kosovo. The close ties between the Kosovo Serbs and Belgrade can never be broken and need to be recognized, and this recognition will help to deal with the situation, he said. The U.S. diplomat also said that these ties will be transformed into something new only when the Serbs are a part of the new processes in Kosovo, when they see respect toward them within the new Kosovo institutions, when the Serbs can move freely and feel more secure and when there are meaningful returns. This diplomat also said that another important factor is a dialogue between Pristina and Belgrade.

Another U.S. diplomat added, however, that the Serb community needs to show greater commitment to Kosovo's institutions. If there is any hope for improving Kosovo's economy, he continued, the international institutions need to become more active. This participant said he was encouraged by the fact that, just before the roundtable in Lucerne, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development decided to start three new projects in Kosovo.

IS A DIALOGUE BETWEEN PRISTINA AND BELGRADE POSSIBLE?

[At the December 2000 meeting in Athens, PER brought up the issue of direct contacts between Belgrade and Pristina, but this idea was resisted by top officials of the U.N. administration in Kosovo. By the time of the November 2002 meeting in Lucerne, however, there was some forward movement, and PER encouraged the participants from Pristina and Belgrade to consider opening talks on technical issues of mutual concern.]

A senior international official said: "Yes, there is a change in the atmosphere. The time is ripe. We have gone through the [Kosovo general] elections and another important election is forthcoming, but then the field is free." A Serbian participant also agreed that "the atmosphere has greatly changed." In his words: "People that live together have to talk. They have to talk about how to resolve their problems after what they have passed through." He also said that "a sustainable solution to the Kosovo issue is possible only when compromises are made on both sides. An imposed solution by the international community that is not accepted by either side will cause a renewal of the conflict and will create more uncertainties in the Balkans." This should be avoided at all cost, he added.

Many Kosovo leaders claim to be ready for "an open dialogue" with all of Kosovo's neighbors, but they are somewhat more cautious on opening contacts with Belgrade. Naturally, they said, good cooperation, especially in the economic field, exists with the government in Tirana. First and foremost, the Kosovo leaders said, they are interested in establishing a dialogue and

cooperation with the governments of Macedonia and Montenegro, with which they share “more common interests than differences.” A top Kosovo government member specified that bilateral cooperation between Kosovo and Macedonia, and Kosovo and Montenegro might include issues of concern to the ethnic Albanian populations in those countries, for example, the educational help that can be provided by the University of Pristina. One of the Kosovo politicians said that Pristina is interested in improving trade relations with Skopje: “We are still discriminated as far as trade. Very often imports that come to Kosovo go through third countries. Sometimes we have bananas in Kosovo that come as products of Macedonia. We hope to have support of UNMIK, Stability Pact and EU for a free trade agreement between Kosovo and Macedonia.” The Kosovo politicians said they appreciated the fact that Macedonia has recognized the UNMIK travel documents, and no visas are needed for Kosovars to visit Macedonia. The process of recognizing Kosovo license plates is in the works, and the territory’s vehicle insurance will be recognized soon. There is an agreement between the UNMIK police and the state police of Macedonia to battle organized crime. A top Kosovo politician declared in Lucerne that “neither the Kosovo government nor the political parties have tendencies or aspire to seize a single square centimeter of the Macedonian territory. Such allegations have no serious ground.” Another Kosovo politician said that the Kosovar Albanians will never forget the help of the Macedonian government during the Kosovo war—and the shelter that they provided to the hundreds of thousands of Kosovo refugees.

In the words of one of the Kosovo senior officials: “We have to think more about economic progress and cooperation rather than about conflicts, the past and history.” It is also “the time, in the near future, to make contact with the Belgrade government—at the beginning, on issues of common interest. Perhaps later [there could be discussion of] tough political issues.” Another senior Serbian official agreed: “We should open a dialogue on the issues that we do not disagree on.”

We have to think more about economic progress and cooperation rather than about conflicts, the past and history.

According to a Kosovo official, certain conditions should be met before relations with Belgrade can be relaxed.

As a precondition for such a dialogue, the presence and support of the international community will be necessary, said the official. In fact, he said, Kosovo politicians call for an active political role from the U.S., EU and UNMIK structures in any discussion with Serbia. This Kosovo official seconded his colleagues from Pristina that, in any discussion with Serbia, “the international community should be involved, and first and foremost, the United States of America.” He said he thinks that the two sides will not be capable of resolving their differences in a totally bilateral fashion. Others agreed. “After the war we lost all trust in each other; we need help in

rebuilding that trust,” said one of the top Kosovo leaders. The Kosovars have no illusions; they are prepared for the dialogue to be painful, this leader said. Everyone knows that, even though the dialogue will most likely start on technical issues, one day, the sides will have to discuss the issue of Kosovo’s final status, the Kosovo leader added.

A senior international official in Kosovo noted that “Very soon, there will be no more excuses to avoid a direct dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina. It will become unavoidable and necessary.” Such a dialogue has several important functions but no immediate results should be expected, he said, explaining that the dialogue has a value in itself. The international community will leave sooner or later, and it needs to create sustainable structures—not only sustainable institutional structures—but also sustainable structures of dialogue, this official said. The dialogue should be organized in a way that it functions on its own, he said. Under U.N. resolution 1244, one of the responsibilities of the Special Representative of the U.N. Secretary General is to facilitate the talks on the status of Kosovo, and the current Special Representative has promised to start the process soon, he said. According to this international official, such dialogues should take place in the region, not outside of the Balkans in an artificial environment. One of the obstacles to such a dialogue is the unresolved political infighting in Belgrade, the official said. According to him, one result of the political squabbles in Belgrade is that there is no sound strategy toward Kosovo that is supported by everyone in Belgrade.

A Serbian official replied that it is true there were alarming situations in Belgrade, especially during the last elections, when extremist, radical groups, and their presidential candidate, won much more support than the democratic government had originally expected. However, this official said he is convinced that “This is something that is present in society temporarily. The energy and the wishes of the people are in a different place. ... The idea of a Greater Serbia has been punished badly. We paid a dear price. This should be a lesson to all those who are thinking of similar projects today. We have to abandon such ideas. ... People look upon us to see how to behave; we should take the lead.” Despite the significant political differences in Belgrade, this official said, after a recent meeting of the Serbian ruling coalition, a member of that coalition reported it “will no longer tolerate anyone who is trying to create obstacles in implementation of the Kosovo policy.”

The Serbian participants stressed that one of their urgent priorities in such a dialogue with Pristina is refugee return. However, they added, refugees are still afraid to return to Kosovo. They said that reconciliation between the two nations cannot be achieved through proclamations, resolutions, decisions and other documents, because reconciliation is a process. A Serbian official said that there is a need for more serious reconciliation initiatives. He considered the PER meeting in Lucerne “an exceptional opportunity to launch such an initiative.” A climate should be created in which it would be difficult for extremist elements on both sides to operate, he said, explaining: “Once we have reconciliation we will be talking to friends, not enemies.”

Belgrade officials speaking at the roundtable said that the climate does not exist for speaking about the final status of Kosovo. A member of the Serbian ruling coalition said that, when talking about Kosovo, there should be no prejudgments about final status, and talks should be within U.N. resolution 1244. There should be a dialogue about the standards or benchmarks and their implementation first, then a dialogue on the issue of the final status, this official said.

A top Serbian official suggested that one of the major problems that Belgrade and Pristina could start a dialogue on now is crime. He said that the only multiethnic phenomenon in the region of South Eastern Europe today is organized crime. Another possible issue for discussion is the issue of decentralization, he said. The fact that the Kosovo Albanian political parties agreed to discuss (with cooperation of the Council of Europe) the issue of decentralization is a very good sign, according to this Serbian official, because decentralization is a precondition for maintenance of the survival of all ethnic national communities and strengthening of interethnic relations. This official proposed to the officials of the Kosovo and Serbian governments to meet as early as January 2003: "We need to talk and talk and find solutions through dialogue and find solutions to heal our fresh wounds and scars from the recent past."

A top Kosovo official replied that there is political will in Pristina to discuss so-called technical issues as well. However, this official said, there is an organizational problem on the Kosovo side, because Pristina does not yet have a group that would deal with such issues, so it needs to create a working group or a delegation. This issue should be discussed within the Kosovo institutions, the official said. A delegation or an individual should be appointed to deal with the issues of dialogue with Belgrade, the official said.

Among possible issues for discussion between Belgrade and Pristina, this Kosovo official mentioned the following: improvements in economic cooperation, legalization of the gray economic cooperation, establishment of direct contacts between enterprises and cooperation in the sphere of energy and trade. Most of Kosovo's cadastral documentation is in Belgrade, even though Belgrade does not even need it, he said. The official said this documentation should be returned to Kosovo, and that the issue of loans that were made on behalf of Kosovo has to be cleared up. Another matter for discussion is that of pensions, and the fight against organized crime is crucial for Kosovo's future as well, the official said. Decentralization is a necessity and a precondition for democratization and could be discussed with Belgrade, he noted. After all, the Kosovo official said, both sides share a common strategic goal of European integration.

To this a Serbian official noted: "You can see that the differences are not so great when we are discussing issues and talking to each other. I am convinced that we will be able to implement what we agree on. Of course, we will need assistance from the international community, including UNMIK and the US. I think that this assistance will be there." He mentioned that there is donor fatigue and suggested the joint organization of a donor's conference for

Kosovo. This will help in overcoming the fears of those who want to invest in Kosovo and those who live in Kosovo, he said.

A participant representing a leading European human rights body introduced another topic for a future dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina. He reminded the participants that, with the accession of Serbia and Montenegro to the Council of Europe, Kosovo will become the only non-Council of Europe enclave in the Balkans. Implementation of the core European conventions—the convention on human rights, the anti-torture convention, the framework convention on the protection of national minorities—is badly needed in Kosovo, this participant said. These documents are already part of the legal acquis of all countries around Kosovo. The main concern of the Council of Europe is that there should be equal rights for all European citizens, he said. The Council of Europe encourages starting a dialogue on these issues among Belgrade, UNMIK and the provisional institutions of self-government in Kosovo, he said.

Encouraged by the positive atmosphere following exchanges between the officials from Belgrade and Pristina, PER arranged for an impromptu session, outside of the main meeting room, in which Kosovo Prime Minister Rexhepi, Kosovo Assembly President Nexhat Daci, Serbian Deputy Prime Minister Covic, and Serbian Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Internal Affairs Dusan Mihajlovic participated together with PER staff. This event, which lasted for about 40 minutes, later became a matter of controversy in the press, but in fact was quite straightforward. The four participants suggested items that might be included in possible future talks on matters of mutual concern, for example, the return of displaced persons and refugees, mutual assistance in tracing missing persons, exchange of information concerning war crimes, the establishment of taxation arrangements, coordinated efforts against organized crime and trafficking, the encouragement of trade and commerce, better border control and improvement in telecommunications. Both sides acknowledged that such exchanges would have to take into account the provisions of U.N. resolution 1244 and would not take up the issue of the final status of Kosovo.

Upon hearing about this meeting in a report presented at the main session, an American commented: “Nobody who is realistic would imagine that it will not take a long and painful path, but this [meeting] represents a major opportunity for Serbia and Kosovo.” An international official working in Kosovo said that “UNMIK is extremely pleased to hear that a discussion took place between Dr. Rexhepi and Dr. Covic. This is what would make possible the transfer of more powers from UNMIK to the Kosovo institutions.” A Kosovo Albanian politician said that he was encouraged by what happened in Lucerne. He said he thought that it should make it possible for the Serbian government to find strength and to apologize to the people of Kosovo for everything that has happened in the past. His colleague from Pristina added: “I appreciate the apology of Mr. Covic. It is symbolic but it is a sign of things to come that the tensions are decreasing and the prospects for the future are good.” A Tirana politician added, however, that this apology does not equal an apology from the state

of Serbia: “A clear apology from Serbia to the region is necessary. How could this democratic government not provide an apology for the three wars initiated by Belgrade? Absence of such an apology will continue to make it difficult for Serbia to live in its own neighborhood and to have friends there.”

MACEDONIA: CHALLENGES OF BUILDING A POST-CONFLICT MULTIETHNIC DEMOCRACY

The Lucerne roundtable provided an opportunity for the first public exchange between the two major partners in Macedonia’s ruling coalition government: the Social-Democratic Alliance of Macedonia (SDSM) and the Democratic Union for Integration (DUI).

Many participants questioned whether Macedonia was the kind of successful model of interethnic governance that it had been portrayed as since it gained independence in 1993. One of the international participants cautioned that it is too early to say whether Macedonia is still a success story. Another international participant, however, disagreed, saying: “We were not wrong in the past and hopefully not in the present. The way in which Macedonia has reached independence and started building its statehood is so different from its former Yugoslav neighbors. It was a model for the neighborhood. But models are not perfect. This model included tensions that led to a crisis. Today it is a model again and hopefully could stay as such.” If Macedonia is a model, according to this speaker, it should be exported to the rest of the region. But to make this model successful in Macedonia itself, the speaker said, the international community needs to bring larger resources to Macedonia than it has up to now. Some participants thought that the arrangement in Macedonia could be useful for Kosovo, others felt that the situation in Kosovo cannot be compared to the one in Macedonia.

A leader of the ethnic Albanian ruling coalition party, who described himself as belonging to the student movement of 1981, discussed his view of the situation: “In Macedonia, we [Albanians] demanded respect for the constitution and acknowledgement of human rights of the Albanians. However, there was no sympathetic ear to our claims. ... We did not want either a greater Albania or a greater Kosovo. ... We only asked for the rights that belonged to us. In Macedonia, we have asked for a university in the Albanian language. ... We did not want to damage our Macedonian fellow citizens or change the borders. We wanted just the rights that belonged to the Albanians.” He said that his party stands for integration and increasing mutual trust among the ethnic groups in Macedonia.

This ethnic Albanian coalition party leader said that the agreement that has been reached between the Albanians and Macedonians in Macedonia has been possible only due to the help of the international community. He acknowledged the very helpful role that NATO played during the crisis. NATO saw the possibility that the conflict in Macedonia could turn into another Bosnia or Kosovo, so they intervened and helped to start a dialogue resulting

in an agreement, this speaker said. He admitted that the Ohrid agreement is a compromise and thus is not ideal. However, he said, the Ohrid agreement is a historic decision by both of Macedonia's major ethnic communities, who have decided to build their future and their country together. "This means that the Albanians do accept Macedonia as their country, a country in which they are not discriminated against and will be equal in all aspects of life, and that the law will apply to the Macedonian and the Albanian citizens equally," he said.

This participant agreed that the process of building a new Macedonia will be painful. But if history is any guide, especially the experience of the Franco-German rapprochement, the effort will be successful as long as the sides are truly committed and stick to the agreement, he said. The Albanians want a full implementation of the Ohrid agreement, he added. The agreement, despite some statements in Macedonia to the contrary, is beneficial to all other communities, including smaller ones—the Turks, Serbs, Roma, Vlachs, "even the evangelical community to which the president of Macedonia belongs," he said, adding: "We should learn to live in these new realities and recognize one another, and should not view the history of each other as a threat, and jointly build our state."

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This theme was picked up by an ethnic Macedonian politician, who asked the participants to notice that the coalition partners are speaking the same political language. "This is the biggest improvement since the war in Macedonia," the politician said. "The most important thing is that [the Ohrid agreement] is the first such important document since the Macedonian independence that is accepted and fully supported by all ethnic communities of Macedonia."

This agreement, the Macedonian said, has changed many things in Macedonia, among them the very nature of Macedonian democracy from a majoritarian system to a system of consensual democracy. This new system will not allow a minority to be outvoted by the majority when a decision is of concern to the minority, and thus it is a model for the protection of cultural and educational interests of a minority by virtue of the constitution and the laws, he said. He added that the Ohrid agreement provides for full decentralization of the state and for proportional participation of all ethnic communities in the state administration. There are many questions about implementing the Ohrid agreement, and some scholars suggest that such a model of democracy is possible only in a highly developed country, this politician noted. He said he is aware of that challenge, but does not see any other choice for Macedonia. For him, this agreement represents the only guarantee for long-term peace and stability in Macedonia. He listed what he saw as some very important preconditions for the implementation of the agreement:

1. The climate for reconciliation should be improved. This process was started with the law on amnesty. The establishment of the new government has proved that the Macedonians and Albanians are capable of reconciliation. The DUI party should be fully integrated into state institutions.
2. The credibility of the state institutions should be established. It should be shown that the institutions are able to provide a rule of law in Macedonia and fight corruption.
3. The country needs a new kind of moderate and cooperative elite.
4. People should feel secure in Macedonia. The capability of Macedonia's multiethnic police should be improved, and peace and security should be provided to everyone in Macedonia.
5. A better moral leadership is crucial: The leaders should keep their promises and respect agreements.
6. The economy must be improved and the high level of unemployment lowered.

The help of the international community is crucial in meeting all these preconditions, this participant said. The international community should have more confidence in Macedonia and encourage politicians who strive for improving stability in the country and the region, he added.

Implementation of the Ohrid agreement remains a difficult task, and there are still many extremists on both sides who are not satisfied with the agreement, this ethnic Macedonian participant said. He mentioned the former ruling Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization-Democratic Party of Macedonian National Unity (VMRO-DPMNE) and the Democratic Party of Albanians (DPA) in particular. He said it was important to protect the agreement from the attacks of those who do not want to take responsibility for the future of Macedonia. According to this participant: "There are even those on the Albanian side who are trying to demonize the Macedonians. One of the ethnic Albanian participants said at the meeting that there are Macedonians who are demonizing the Albanians.) They are saying that the Macedonians are worse than the Serbs and hate Albanians and even that the Slavs are not capable of democracy. We will succeed in implementing the Ohrid agreement if we stop demonization and satanization of both sides." He added: "In fact, the signals that Macedonia receives from Tirana and Pristina are much more positive than the signals from the ethnic Albanian politicians who lost elections in Macedonia.

One of those politicians was in the room. He cautioned against seeing the situation in Macedonia in idyllic terms, as an oasis of peace, and treating the past war as an accident. He stressed the fact that there is a great ethnic gap between the two communities in Macedonia and the crucial indicator of that is the rate of mixed Macedonian-Albanian marriages, which is lower than 1 percent of the total marriages in the country. According to this politician, the differences between Albanians and Macedonians go deep into their origin,

ethnicity, religion and even culture. He said he is worried that, so far, the system in Macedonia has been producing cultural opportunities for Macedonians only, not for Albanians. He complained that there are no institutions to foster Albanian culture. "As long as the Macedonian budget is channeled only into production of cultural values for the Macedonians and provides atrophied opportunities for the others, the ethnic distance will remain," he said.

This opposition politician said he was worried that the Ohrid agreement will be turned into an accord of political forces without real implementation. "There is a serious risk of providing rights that are not going to be utilized. This has a certain history in the Soviet bloc," he said. He maintained that it was "ridiculous" that Albanians have the right to use their language in parliament in oral, but not written communication. "The Albanian language is not equal to Macedonian according to the Ohrid agreement," he said, adding: "We [Albanians in Macedonia] were treated unjustly by the international community. In Ohrid we did not gain as many rights as the Serbs automatically received in Kosovo without any negotiations. After Ohrid we have received the right to use the Albanian language with a hundred conditions applied. ... These conditions do not exist [for the Serbs] in Kosovo."

This participant also expressed his doubts about implementation of government plans for equitable representation of Albanians in state institutions. In order to secure adequate representation of Albanians in government jobs, about 18,000 of them must be employed, either at the local or the national level, he said. "Are there any means for employing this number of people in the next two or three years?" he asked. The bottom line, this politician said, is that, with the signing of the Ohrid agreement, all these difficult issues did not disappear.

An international official working in Macedonia said that both optimistic and critical assessments of the situation in Macedonia are legitimate. This means that conflict management in Macedonia needs to continue, said the official, adding that symbols are important, too. "It is time for the Albanians to start showing respect to the flag of the Republic of Macedonia and for the Macedonians to accept the ethnic Albanian flag as belonging to an ethnic group and not as a proclamation of a greater Albania," the official said.

A U.S. participant said he was optimistic about the Ohrid agreement's implementation, because of the way the agreement came about. The international community "did not write this agreement, [it has] just facilitated it," the participant said. "This is a Macedonian agreement. This is its difference from Dayton or other peace agreements."

A European participant commented that, for him, the implementation of the Ohrid agreement was better than the agreement itself. The agreement has some weaknesses, and there might have been good or bad outcomes, but the implementation produced positive outcomes, he said. He gave the credit for such positive outcomes to the multiethnic political elite and the population of Macedonia. The problem is not only how to keep peace by keeping an international presence there, the issue is how to make the communities live together, how to make a multicultural society function, the participant said.

Another European said the accusations that the internationals are running the country for the Macedonians are not entirely unfair. In the future, this participant said, the international community needs to become “more of a backup service and render advice to the government but leave the business of running the country to those who are responsible to govern this country, both ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians.”

One more European official pointed out that Macedonia was the first country with which the EU signed a Stabilization and Association Agreement. Macedonia is not only a test of whether an Ohrid-type agreement can work, it is also a test of whether a stabilization and association agreement can work, said the official, adding that implementation of these agreements should be pursued simultaneously. The Macedonians should clearly understand what they sign because the EU will require its implementation, he said.

The role of the international community in Macedonia should change, said another international official. It is too early to withdraw the international presence, especially the international military presence, but the international community should shift into supporting the local government in providing for their own security and taking responsibility for this security, the official said. This should be the aim of both communities, the official added.

A U.S. official said that that his country believes there should be a continuing NATO role in Macedonia, but its emphasis should shift, and the Macedonian government should take more responsibility for security in the conflict areas.

Another U.S. diplomat said he saw the value of the Ohrid framework agreement in the fact that it settled once and for all the issue of borders and the sovereignty of Macedonia. The elections of Sept. 15, 2002 showed that almost the entire Macedonian population supports the Ohrid agreement, he said. He noted that, of the 120 seats in the parliament, 118 went to the parties that campaigned in favor of supporting the framework agreement and only two went to the parties that have consistently failed to support it. This participant said he also saw hope for Macedonia in the fact that, even during the conflict, the dialogue between the Albanians and Macedonians had not been broken. Among major challenges for the government he named the need to develop, together with the OSCE, multiethnic community policing through a Western model—and not through the socialist former Yugoslav model, wherein a policeman represented the state and might not have a connection to the community in any manner, shape or form. “Another challenge for the government is to deliver a government free of corruption. The pace of corruption is breathtaking in Macedonia,” the diplomat said.

A participant who had been a leading international negotiator during the Macedonian conflict said that, even though he was optimistic about Macedonia’s future after the Ohrid agreement, he felt the international community was passing through a very painful process in trying to define who is the international player in charge of managing the situation in the Balkans. He expressed extreme concern about what he considered to be procrastination on discussions—inside the EU, between the EU and NATO and inside of the

OSCE—for the promulgation of the NATO presence and the leadership of the EU in conflict management in Macedonia. The international community should be very careful in Macedonia, and do as much as it can to help, because there is a real chance to make that country a success story, this participant said.

He reminded the other participants that the situation in Macedonia is still very complicated. There is a contradiction between the wish of the government to control the entire territory of the country and the desire of the Albanians to see a full implementation of the Ohrid agreement, and this still creates tension, he said. This participant was critical about the speed of the implementation of the Ohrid agreement, especially about effective law enforcement. He said there is a need for a comprehensive implementation of the agreement if future problems are to be avoided.

This international official said that another important element in implementing the Ohrid agreement is the introduction of strong positive discrimination policies aimed at helping Albanians in Macedonia. He commented on a previous statement by an ethnic Albanian participant from Macedonia, who mentioned that the center of ideological attraction for all Albanians who lived in ex-Yugoslavia was Pristina. This has changed with the independence of Macedonia, when new borders were erected between the Macedonian Albanians and Kosovo, the international official noted. This is why he said he considers it to be in the interest of the Macedonian government to assist in the creation of a strong Albanian cultural, academic and NGO environment in Macedonia. If there is no Macedonian Albanian model, the young people will naturally be more attracted to a much stronger Kosovo cultural model, he said.

A senior Macedonian official discussed the difficult issues of implementation of the Ohrid agreement. She said she saw two main goals of the framework agreement: The first goal was to change the political reality, to change the laws and the constitution of the country, to change the things that were problematic in relations between the ethnic Macedonian and ethnic Albanian communities; the second goal was to change perceptions of one community about the other.

It is true, this participant admitted, that Macedonia has missed several deadlines for implementation of the Ohrid agreement. She said there could have been faster approval of the constitutional changes and the law on local self-government. But she noted that even experts on decentralization and police reform considered the timetable set in the Ohrid agreement to be unrealistic, given Macedonia's regular institutional procedure. Even in a stable monoethnic country, the process of decentralization is very difficult, this official said. She noted that Macedonia will have to work on several issues simultaneously: transferring competencies from the central to the local government and changing and reforming the public administration. All of this has an important interethnic aspect, she added. Because Macedonia has weak institutional strength to pursue this reform, the official said, it needs strong international and regional help.

Despite all this, the Macedonian official said she was not worried about the agreement's implementation. In her own words: "We have no alternative to implementing the Ohrid agreement." She cited the Macedonian prime minister, Branko Tsrvenkovski, who said that the Ohrid agreement is not only in the national interest of the state but also in the interest of ethnic Macedonians who want to live in a stable and normal country.

Nonetheless, this official anticipated a major set of problems in changing the perceptions of the population. Perceptions are important and the ethnic Albanian citizens of Macedonia should perceive themselves to be equal citizens in their country, she said. "It does not matter what the reality was in the past. The only thing that matters is that the Albanians had the perception they had," she said. "Changing this perception is crucial. This is the big issue." The need to address perceptions is why it was important to change the constitution of Macedonia, she said. Unfortunately, the fact that two weeks were spent debating the preamble to the constitution showcased the worst side of Macedonian politics, she added. The preamble does not affect rights of citizens or the laws but it had brutal symbolic importance for Albanians and Macedonians, according to this participant. She identified it as "a typical fight of symbols," and added that Macedonians had to accept the fact that the Albanians cared that they were mentioned in the preamble in a manner different from the Macedonians. "We had to accept this and it is a very important conclusion," she said. Still, she said, the Albanians and the international community must accept the fact that the perceptions of the Macedonians are equally important.

This is why the issue of the name of Macedonia is important, she said. The Macedonians have a perception of not being fully recognized as a country or as a nation, she explained, so it is difficult for them to deal with the issue of another community's ethnicity. A European official commented that more and more countries realize that issue of the name of Macedonia, as viewed by Greece, is not the most important thing in the world. He expressed his hope that, during the Greek presidency of the European Union in the first half of 2003, that country would demonstrate the courage to solve this problem.

There was a debate between an ethnic Albanian politician from Macedonia and a Macedonian about the issue of naming a school in Macedonia. The school, originally named after an ethnic Albanian cultural figure and then simply called "Progress" in Albanian, was renamed in 1968 after a Macedonian national figure. The school is multiethnic, and about 80 percent ethnic Albanian. In early 2002, the teachers of the school changed its name to commemorate a deceased ethnic Albanian colleague who was respected locally. The ethnic Albanian politician questioned why the ethnic Macedonian students do not want to accept identification through Albanian symbols. To him, this signifies a deep gap in the mentality of the population. But for the ethnic Macedonian politician, this case is about how a very small thing becomes big in Macedonia. She also pointed out: "You cannot say that there are only 23 percent Macedonians in that school, and therefore they should agree on the name of a school. You should not use such vocabulary. We Macedonians have learned this the hard way." She said she sees a larger picture behind this local case: The spirit

of the framework agreement and of decentralization is about making ethnic Albanians responsible for negotiating deals on problems that matter to Macedonians in their local communities. "The name [of the school] might be acceptable to the Macedonians," she noted, "but this has to be discussed and they have to be convinced that this is something good. If the spirit of the framework agreement is to share responsibility for the state and national issues, it should also come down to the local issues and local problems."

PRESEVO VALLEY: A SUCCESSFUL CASE OF CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

To those who are skeptical about the possibility of reconciliation between Serbs and Albanians, a high-level Serbian official pointed out that there was a very positive experience of crisis management in the Presevo Valley of South Serbia. "In South Serbia, the Serbs and Albanians, who have looked at each other at gun point, now have achieved a lot to the benefit of both communities. Now there are a multiethnic police force, an improved security situation, freedom of movement, major investments for rebuilding the infrastructure," the official said. "The region is demilitarized. A new multiethnic local government represents the ethnic picture there. The return of internally displaced persons was successful. A lot still has to be done there, but many Serbs and Albanians in South Serbia have reconciled. ... In South Serbia both Serbs and Albanians won." According to this official, Belgrade handled the crisis in South Serbia "with full respect and understanding of democratic principles." A Kosovo official said that he, too, "appreciated the progress achieved in Presevo."

A local elected official from South Serbia said, "The agreement over Presevo has stopped the violence and established an atmosphere in which [it is possible] to resolve the outstanding issues. It is indisputable that we have started a political process. So far, however, only a few problems have been solved. This is why we need a deeper involvement of the Serbian government and of the international organizations." This official said he believed that the success of the conflict management efforts in Presevo Valley was due to the Serbian government's acceptance of international assistance. "It resulted in a positive trend, and there were positive effects from it. What was crucial here was the triangle of the new relationship of the new government in Belgrade, the international community and the political factors of the Albanians in South Serbia." He also said, "The bodies in Kosovo supported all positive developments in the Presevo Valley."

Although the trend in Presevo Valley is positive, the population is still not satisfied with the dynamics of change and the results achieved in certain fields, the local official from South Serbia said. These sensitive fields "that still await solutions" include education, culture, the official use of the Albanian language and Albanian symbols and social security. He said he would also put special stress on "the economic development of the area, that has been ignored for a long time." But this politician said he is optimistic there will be solutions, because he does not doubt the existence of "a positive will to negotiate on both sides."

He compared the situation of Albanians living in Presevo Valley with that of Albanians living in Montenegro: “The rights that the Albanians in Serbia are entitled to are much less numerous than the rights of Albanians in Montenegro,” though they live in the same country, he said. According to this local official, one of the reasons is that, even though there are more Albanians in Presevo than in Montenegro, they are just 1 percent of the population of Serbia.

MONTENEGRO: THE DIALOGUE CONTINUES

Montenegro is a small republic and, as one of its politicians said in Lucerne, “hopefully a country.” Its second largest minority, comprising 7 percent of the population, are the Albanians, who “are trying to be a part of democratic processes in Montenegro,” according to one of their leaders. The Albanians of Montenegro said they recognize and appreciate the efforts that their Montenegrin co-citizens and the government made to shelter Kosovo Albanian refugees during the war in Kosovo.

An official of a ruling party said that there is good cooperation between his party and ethnic Albanian parties. “DPS and SDP have absolute power in the parliament. Nevertheless, we have invited Albanians to stay [in the government],” the official said. “The minister for minorities has always been an Albanian and this trend will continue in the future.” The ruling parties and ethnic Albanians agree that the minority issues in the new state of Serbia and Montenegro should stay at the republican level, where they can be easier dealt with through the unique Montenegrin experience, this official said.

The discussion revealed that the ethnic Albanian political parties in Montenegro consider themselves to be in a precarious situation. Although they are a part of the governing coalition, the other parties in that coalition, the Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS) and the Social Democratic Party (SDP) are also the main political rivals of the Albanian parties—because they take votes away from the Albanian parties in the areas where ethnic Albanians live in Montenegro. Nonetheless, the Albanian parties made a clear choice in 1998 and, participants said, they have always supported the democratic forces in Montenegro and the movement toward the independence of the republic. In the words of one of the Americans: “Out of several sets of relations of Albanians and their neighbors in the region, Montenegro has presented an important and least-problematic case. The relations have been amicable, without major problems on the ground.” Others agreed that Montenegro represents a unique case of close collaboration and cooperation between the ruling mainstream political parties and the ethnic Albanian parties. As a politician from Tirana put it: “Montenegro’s example shows that, when Albanians are asked for cooperation and not for subjugation they offer it wholeheartedly.” Or as an American said: “They have not always seen eye to eye but they had serious dialogue, and certain positive outcomes have been produced.”

[An example of such dialogue was last year's case of establishing a sort of positive discrimination in favor of Albanian parliamentary candidates in Montenegro. The areas where the Albanians are in the majority are set by law to delegate five seats to the Montenegrin parliament. This means that a deputy filling such a seat needs many fewer votes than in a regular Montenegrin electoral district. The ethnic Albanian parties were able to win two such seats, and the rest went to candidates from the ruling coalition, including one who is an ethnic Albanian deputy. In 2002, the parliament decided to reduce the number of special seats to four, but an agreement with the Albanians was needed.] A Montenegrin participant said the agreement to discriminate in favor of Albanians was only possible through the personal involvement of the U.S. Ambassador to Serbia and Montenegro. An ethnic Albanian politician said: "I am not satisfied that the Albanians got two out of four seats in the parliament of Montenegro, but I am convinced that, even with two seats, we can do more for democracy if we are with the winners than if we would have had four seats but would have had to work with the losers."

[Since the December 2000 meeting in Athens, when the ethnic Albanian parties from Montenegro first voiced their demand for a special status and constitutional changes, PER has worked actively in Montenegro to promote dialogue between Montenegrin and ethnic Albanian leaders. There have been three roundtables, which included members of parliament representing all parliamentary parties from Montenegro.] In the words of an American participant, "PER helped the Montenegrin parliamentary parties, including the two ethnic Albanian parties, to devise a tentative agreement on a number of points of interest having to do with improving lives of Albanians in Montenegro." The participant said those points included: (1) opening of a maternity hospital in Ulcinj; (2) returning to a part of Podgorica, Tuzi, the status of a separate municipality; (3) opening a department for Albanian-language teachers at the University of Podgorica; (4) recognition of diplomas issued for Albanian graduates in Tirana and Pristina; (5) opening an additional border crossing to Albania near Ulcinj; (6) consulting with local authorities in appointing the chief of police and the head judge in Ulcinj. "One of the goals of the international community was to create new opportunities for the Albanians in Montenegro," the American participant said. Implementation of two of the points—the Albanian language faculty and the municipality of Tuzi—has been slow due to a lack of active engagement and creative compromise on the part the ethnic Albanian parties themselves, said a U.S. participant, adding: "The Ministry for Ethnic and National Communities, now led by a young and more active minister, should show initiative and involvement that were lacking before. The ministry should start working on drafting a minority rights law for Montenegro in order to secure those rights in case of government changes in the republic."

An ethnic Albanian leader from Montenegro agreed with this assessment. He said that one of the internal problems hindering "creative compromise" is that the Albanians are split into three political parties with their own separate programs. But he noted that, before the elections of 2002, they managed to

unite in a coalition. This participant said he saw some hope for more efficiency coming from such a coalition. He added that the parties in the coalition agree and are “ready to make Montenegro a stable state for its citizens.”

According to one ethnic Albanian politician, implementation of the above-mentioned six points “will improve the position of the Albanians but will not define their status in Montenegro.” This participant said ethnic Albanian politicians were reluctant to voice their demands at the time when there was significant pressure from Milosevic’s Belgrade on Podgorica, but after Milosevic disappeared, the Albanians of Montenegro felt it was the time to talk about their frustrations and to voice demands. “Albanians want their status in Montenegro regulated. They do not want to depend on the change of government,” the politician said. “We want to preserve our identity. Our culture and tradition are different [from the majority population’s]. We are demanding a minority veto. We want a personal autonomy that would make it possible to protect collective rights of Albanians in Montenegro. ... We also propose a bicameral parliament in Montenegro, with a chamber of citizens and a chamber of national communities. This is important not only for the Albanians but for other minorities in Montenegro [as well].”

An ethnic Albanian politician expressed his frustration about his community’s representation in the government and public services. “The Albanians are present in the government and public services at the level of 0.5 percent, even though they constitute 7 percent of the population,” he said. However, he said, they do not see this frustration as a reason for interrupting their cooperation with the government. “We need the situation to be changed but in a democratic way. We are ready to continue this work and [continue] a partnership with the democratic government of Montenegro, which we became a part of in 1998.”

One important point on which ethnic Albanians in Montenegro find themselves in disagreement with the mainstream political parties involves the preamble to the constitutional charter of the new state of Serbia and Montenegro. In that preamble, Kosovo is mentioned as a part of Serbia. A Montenegrin ethnic Albanian, who was a part of the federal constitutional commission that drafted the charter, left the commission after it voted to include the clause on Kosovo. “How can you speak on behalf of the Albanians if you support the new preamble to the constitutional charter of Serbia and Montenegro, and thus do not support the independence of Kosovo?” he asked. An American then asked this ethnic Albanian: “Why is the status of Kosovo the most important issue to the Albanians in Montenegro?” The Albanian from Montenegro replied: “Because two million Albanians in Kosovo cannot be treated as a part of Serbia after the Kosovo war. ... There is still no word of apology from Belgrade for what has been done in Kosovo and other ex-Yugoslav republics. Having the Kosovo issue solved justly will help with good interethnic contacts with Montenegrins. We are aware of the fact that we are not the only minority in Europe. There will be fewer tensions in the region.”

As one participant pointed out, one of the main claims of the ethnic Albanian politicians in Montenegro is “authentic representation,” a desire by the Albanian politicians to require that their community can “enter the parliament through their authentic representatives—ethnic Albanian parties.” So far, this participant said, not a single Montenegrin politician has wanted to endorse or consider the idea of guaranteeing that the Albanian party represents Albanian neighborhoods. A Montenegrin politician explained his reason for opposing the idea, saying: “There are two approaches of dealing with minority related issues: one through national parties, another through majority parties. The DPS-SDP coalition has received as many votes as Mr. Dinoshaj’s coalition of ethnic Albanian parties] in ethnic Albanian areas. This is why I can also speak on behalf of the Albanians.”

ALBANIA: MOVING CLOSER TO EUROPE

An important subject of the meeting had to do with Albania and the influence of Tirana in the region. The politicians from Albania said it was wrong to think that their country promotes the notion of a greater Albania. Albania’s interest is in promoting regional development and improving the welfare of its citizens, and not in nationalistic issues, the Albanian politicians said.

This part of the discussion began with a statement by Albanian Prime Minister Fatos Nano, who was “happy to report on a decision by the European Council that has opened a way for initiating a Stabilization and Association process with Albania. It is a milestone for our development and history,” he said. “After more than 500 years of separation, Albania is coming back to the European family where it naturally belongs. This is a tremendous reward for our political class and the Albanian people. This is a result of a new political reality in the country.”

After more than 500 years of separation, Albania is coming back to the European family where it naturally belongs.

This new democratic reality has come from a landmark agreement reached between the opposition and the Socialist Party. Both sides have realized that this “is the only way to build a prosperous and democratic society,” the prime minister said.

This is very good news, said an Albanian opposition politician, who recalled: “There have been serious concerns about internal stability in Albania. Everyone has in mind pictures from 1997 and 1998, when extreme political polarization led to violence in the streets. By now, everyone has realized that this is not a proper way of acting, not a proper climate, not a proper way to democracy and Euro-Atlantic integration. ... There should not be any concern about Albania returning to its past.”

The agreement reached in Tirana has allowed the country to elect a new president and to avert a constitutional crisis. “However,” this speaker continued,

“the [political] debate is not being held at full capacity, not directed as much as it should be toward real reform issues, toward consolidating the institutions in the country.” He said the Western notion that a political leader is not above the law must be duplicated in Albania.

Another opposition leader said he still considers the latest voting in Albania “a rigged election,” but he nevertheless stressed that, while “defending the will of the people,” he chose “the democratic means of fighting,” and he saw this choice producing results. He confirmed his support for the prime minister of Albania to make the rule of law function, to continue working together on a new electoral law, to fight corruption and to make the government more transparent. A lot still remains to be done in Albania, he said. For example, to a question posed by one of the international participants about the missing weapons looted from army warehouses in Albania in late 1990s, an Albanian official said that he honestly did not know the fate of 30 percent of those weapons.

Several international participants acknowledged Albania’s progress, including a representative of the Council of Europe, who said his organization “has accompanied Albania in the last 12 years since their start of transition to democracy.” In the latest reports on Albania’s implementation of the European Convention against racism and intolerance and the Framework Convention on the Protection of National Minorities, the council recognized that “there is no ethnic discrimination in Albania and there is no violence against other ethnic groups. There are stereotypes against the Roma, but unfortunately it is shared with countries across Europe. But the Council of Europe recognizes Albania’s record on tolerance.”

Participants from countries neighboring Albania expressed their appreciation for Albania’s progress as well. A Yugoslav official said: “There is good news in Serb-Albanian relations as well. I am proud of the fact that the Belgrade and Tirana governments fully normalized their diplomatic relations. Belgrade and Tirana now look at each other as trustworthy neighbors. They share their devotion and interest for the region.” Another Belgrade official said that Tirana and Belgrade see the problems in the same way. “Tirana and Belgrade are sources of stability in the region,” the official said.

Regionally, Albania is playing a responsible role, subscribing to U.N. resolution 1244 on Kosovo, according to some participants. The Albanian government encourages the transfer of power to the democratically elected Kosovo institutions, Albanian officials said. They said, “This is the only way to ensure that Kosovo remains stable and builds its democratic standards and the rule of law, and eventually paves its way toward European integration.” Tirana supports the “standards before status” approach of UNMIK but thinks that, if left unresolved, the status of Kosovo “will continue to create tensions both in Pristina and Belgrade,” the prime minister of Albania said. He said he sees “Kosovo’s future together with all Balkan neighbors in the European Union.” In Macedonia, Tirana supports the Ohrid agreement, he said.

ALBANIANS AS NEIGHBORS

This part of the meeting was opened by a seasoned South East European politician who has not only led his country's foreign policy but also presided over an important international body. This participant started by saying that he wanted to ring "a bell against political correctness" and ask the participants to be sincere. He said it was dangerous to avoid discussing real issues. Among those issues is the so-called "Albanian issue," he said. "The Albanian issue is a coherent issue and we should deal with it in a coherent way. ... What are the internal relations within the Albanian cultural community in the Balkans? Opening the Albanian issue will not open a Pandora's box and will not produce a greater Albania." In fact, he said, the international community might want to encourage a mode of interaction among different Albanian communities that will bring them closer to European integration. As to discussing "the Albanian issue," this politician said, stress should be placed on encouraging a build-up of "multicultural societies within the existing Balkan states. This is also linked to the return of refugees, which is a substantial part of multiculturalism." In such a discussion, he said, stress should be put on issues of upgrading the rule of law, strengthening citizens' trust in the state institutions' capacity of producing justice and protecting rights of citizens.

In the recommended spirit of sincerity, two questions were posed, one by an American, one by a West European. The American asked: "The conversation that we had today has suggested that the great specter of Albanian nationalism has disappeared. I think this is too simple. I do not know what is left, but a great discomfort by many in the region must have been placed somewhere. Perhaps it is not a greater Albania, but something else is bothering people out there. Could we define the subject more clearly?" The West European was just as straightforward: "Where has the idea of a greater Albania gone?"

A veteran of Albanian politics in the region was the first one to accept the challenge. He did so by trying to present the picture of political interaction among the different Albanian communities in the Balkans as polycentric. "All [ethnic] Albanian [political] centers make decisions autonomously: Tirana, Pristina, Tetovo, etc. None of the ethnic Albanian members of the Macedonian parliament are directed from Tirana or Pristina; the same is true for the members of the Kosovo Assembly," he said. "There are a lot of harsh comments coming from Tirana about our policies [in Macedonia]. When I was boycotting the parliament in 1995, Mr. Berisha was harshly criticizing me for politics of self-punishment. When we [*sic*] began the war in Macedonia, there was harsh criticism from Tirana toward me and Mr. Ahmeti [including calls] to end the conflict. And [Tirana] warned us against not taking into account the European standards." This participant disagreed with the notion that the Albanians are dreaming of a greater Albania: "What the Albanians fight for are their own rights and not the violation of the rights of others."

This politician also highlighted differences among the Albanians who live in Albania and those who live in Kosovo or in Macedonia: "There are nuances, and they have to do with the functioning of the institutions. The institutions

that have produced genuine Albanian culture and cultural values have existed and do exist in Albania. ... There are many individuals in music, literature, and other kinds of arts who have reached the European level of achievement.” However, he said, “In Kosovo, there are no such institutions—there are semi-institutions with a lower level of production of cultural values. In Macedonia, there were no institutions. There is the production of a subculture. In Macedonia and Kosovo, the Albanians are in a sub-culture zone.”

A Kosovo Serb rebuffed the previous participant. According to her, the polycentric nature of Albanian politics in the Balkans is just one side of the coin. The other side is that Albania is still struggling with its own internal problems and cannot serve an influential role in regional Albanian politics. She said she thinks that “Pristina has become the center where the projects of the Albanian community are being manifested from.”

A politician from Tirana agreed that there are significant differences among the Albanian populations. “However, one can find similar differences between the Montenegrins and the Albanians or between Macedonians and Vlachs or the Turks or the Roma. The real distinction that makes things different is the size of the Albanian community,” he said. “The size provokes existential fear within the Macedonians, who, unlike their neighbors, did not have their own state for centuries. They have not developed the sense of their own state and the security that it brings. This produces irrational behavior.”

The Albanian political veteran who spoke previously noted that the role of the Islamic religion is also different within different Albanian communities. “In Kosovo and Albania, the Albanians are mostly agnostic. More Muslims go out to celebrate Christmas than Catholics. In Macedonia, the Albanians have a tendency to follow Islam in larger numbers than in Albania and Kosovo. This is a result of the lack of a system that produces culture and the lack of institutions. The substitute for this is religion.” He said that, when the Albanians tried to start a university in their language because they did not have one, the Macedonians brought in police forces and bulldozers and destroyed some buildings of the university. But, at the same time, the Macedonian government has allowed the functioning of an Islamic faculty, he said. He claimed that there is a political tendency to put a stop to the cultural development of the Albanians in Macedonia, in order to make them have to learn more about Islamic values, which are not compatible at all with the values of the region in which they live.

Another ethnic Albanian said that “the Albanian cultural space” is a “natural right [of the Albanians] and cannot pose any danger to anyone where Albanians live.” That is why there are a hundred university students from the Presevo Valley in Tirana today, this participant said. When the Serbian government decided to refuse accepting diplomas issued by the University of Pristina, the Albanian government made it possible for Albanian students from the Presevo Valley to study in Tirana, the ethnic Albanian said. Today, there are students from that area of Serbia not only in Tirana but also in Pristina, and

even in Tetovo, said this participant, adding that there should be wider cross-border cooperation on the issue of Albanian education.

An opposition politician from Tirana offered another viewpoint. “If you look at the concept of a greater Albania as a concept of the Albanians [scheming] to have the lands of the others, it has never existed as such. No one can find the bones of Albanian soldiers in the lands of our neighbors. But if someone understands a ‘greater Albania’ as a desire of the Albanians to gather territories where they are in majority, that desire does exist,” he said. “Yes, the Albanians are one nation, one culture, though divided between several countries. It is quite human to have stronger cooperation among the Albanians. ... From 1870, the division of Albanians has been one of the greatest injustices—which has been repaired now because now we are free,” he said. Still, this participant said, he has accepted the fact that the issue is much more complicated than that: “If you ask the Kosovo Albanians today if they want to join Albania, they will say no, they [just] want to be independent.” He said that the Albanian politicians in Tirana wholeheartedly respect this desire of the Kosovo Albanians. This is why, he said, “The idea of a greater Albania is a fictional idea. ... There are small groups of people who still support it. Among them are stupid people and also some high-class intellectuals. But these people after entering into politics in Kosovo lost. ... In Albania there are no high-class intellectuals who support this idea. There is no reason to fear the idea of a greater Albania,” he concluded.

These statements prompted a Macedonian politician to say that Albanians everywhere in the region should understand the worries of their neighbors. If there is even a hint in a statement that a border change is possible, or a hint of a greater Albania or whatever one would call it, there is immediately a Pavlovian reflex that affects the situation of the Albanians in Macedonia, she said. There should be a clear message that ethnic issues are not necessarily a danger to the stability and political unity of a country, she added. She made another observation: “The problem of a greater Albania is not in the fact of whether it is real or not. The problem is that the myth exists, the perception exists. We cannot neglect the effect of that scary story in the Balkans. As soon as the Albanians mention the issue of the borders or the flag, it is perceived as a part of a greater Albania plot.”

Another opposition politician from Albania reacted to these words of caution: “Tirana should do its best to allay the fears that are present in the Balkans. Perceptions do matter.”

A ruling party politician from Tirana tried to explain his government’s view of this controversial subject: “The relations between Albanians are still weak. The long-term separation has still not been overcome. ... [But] Tirana does not need regional ties on pan-Albanian values. We are for an EU-shaped regional cooperation on universal values. ... We have learned how to share sovereignty regionally, based on EU-standards, on free trade agreements. ... We need a Schengen standard for free movement of people in the region, a common

Balkan market. We need to overcome traditional mentalities. A regional approach is the only one that is going to work.” This politician said there is a consensus among Albanians in the Balkans, and this consensus is that Euro-Atlantic integration is what is needed.

His colleague from the other side of the political divide in Albania added that the idea of “a greater Albania is a propagandistic device that was created by others [and not by the Albanians]. Even our neighbors agree that this is not a major project of Albanian parties across the region. The burden of proof lies with the accusing party. ... The chimera of a greater Albania is fiction. ... There are no projects to change borders and to unify lands. However, relaxing of the border regime between Albania and Kosovo, helping to improve trade between the two and to prevent the citizens from criminal activities would help to strengthen stability in the region.”

A U.S. diplomat working in the region said “I can hardly find a pan-Albanian sentiment in Tirana.”

His colleague added that, after two-and-a-half months spent in the Balkans, “the subject of pan-Albanian nationalism has never risen. ... Pan-Albanian nationalism is a thing of the past. The thing of the current [moment] and the future is ... meeting standards and mastering an interethnic society.” He said he was glad that he and his Albanian colleagues are working on real issues.



From left to right: Adrian Severin, Reinhard Priebe, Marc-Andre Salamin, Alex Grigor'ev, Allen Kassof.



From left to right: Livia Plaks, Mircea Dan Geoana, and Radmila Sekerinska.

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

Republic of Albania

Sali Berisha, President, Democratic Party; Member, Parliament;
former President of Albania

Fatos Nano, Prime Minister; President, Socialist Party

Genc Pollo, President, New Democrat Party; Member, Parliament

[Former Yugoslav] Republic of Macedonia

Ali Ahmeti, President, Democratic Union for Integration;
Member, Parliament

Agron Buxhaku, Spokesperson, Democratic Union for Integration;
Vice President, Parliament

Radmila Sekerinska, Deputy Prime Minister; Vice President,
Social Democratic Union of Macedonia

Gorgi Spasov, Secretary General, Social Democratic Union of Macedonia;
Member, Parliament

Arben Xhaferi, President, Democratic Party of Albanians;
Member, Parliament

Romania

Mircea Dan Geoana, Minister of Foreign Affairs

Viorel Hrebenciuc, Vice President, Chamber of Deputies, Parliament;
Vice President, Social Democratic Party

Adrian Severin, Member, Council for Ethnic Accord, Project on Ethnic
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Didier Chassot, Desk Officer for Southeast Europe, Political Affairs
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OTHER PER PUBLICATIONS

- *Romanian-American Symposium on Inter-Ethnic Relations (1991)*
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