

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.

PER is supported by the Carnegie Corporation of New York, with additional funding from the Starr Foundation, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, and the Council of Europe.

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R o m a n e p o r t

APRIL 7-8, 2000



BUDAPEST, HUNGARY

ALBANIANS AND
THEIR NEIGHBORS:
UNFINISHED BUSINESS

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PREFACE

On April 7 and 8, 2000, senior Albanian politicians from Albania, Kosovo, Macedonia, and Montenegro met with leaders of the democratic opposition in Serbia and leaders of the Kosovar Serb community; other political leaders from Macedonia and Montenegro; and representatives from Bulgaria, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Romania, the United States, the Council of Europe, the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe, the OSCE, the European Union, NATO, and the United Nations.

This unprecedented meeting, which was held in Budapest, Hungary, marked the start of a major initiative by the Project on Ethnic Relations on “Albanians and Their Neighbors.” It is aimed at maintaining a region-wide, high-level dialogue on the most explosive ethnic-political issue in Europe today. This report captures and records the main theme of this opening discussion: the conflicting hopes and fears of diverse ethnic communities during a period of rapid and often violent change in the Balkans.

Three issues dominated the meeting: the current and future status of Kosovo and its impact on the politics of the region; interethnic arrangements in Montenegro and Macedonia and the relations of Albanians with the majority populations in those republics; and whether Albanian leaders in the region aspire to the creation of a “Greater Albania.”

The Kosovo issue reflected the sharpest divisions. Kosovar Albanian leaders were unanimous in their support for separation from Serbia and Yugoslavia and for full sovereignty and independence; they asserted that only such clear action could bring stability to the region. Most neighbors (including the participants from Albania) and representatives of the international community were either opposed to any change of borders, or were reserved about making any decision in the foreseeable future. They were particularly concerned about the implications of border changes for such countries as Macedonia, for the democratic movement in Yugoslavia, and for the status of Montenegro.

Albanians in Montenegro and Macedonia currently participate in their respective governing coalitions, but demands by the Albanians for “special status” have raised serious questions about the stability of these arrangements, and serious dialogue on the interethnic issue has so far been lacking. Failure to arrange mutually satisfactory compromises would have very serious consequences for the continued survival of

Macedonia and would greatly complicate the already dangerous confrontation between Serbia and Montenegro. While the Albanian leaders rejected any notion of a “Greater Albania,” they defended the legitimacy of building active ties among all the Albanian populations of the region and of fostering new structures for political cooperation across borders.

The discussions revealed that, acute as the Kosovo crisis may be, it is only the most dramatic manifestation of a deeper regional problem: the uncertainty about how Albanians and their neighbors will accommodate to changing demographic and political realities. All participants agreed, however, that one of the major obstacles to peace in the Balkans is the presence of the Milosevic regime. They were unanimous in insisting that there could be no lasting solution to interethnic conflicts in the Balkans until Milosevic has once and for all disappeared from the political scene. It is also important to note that, although some of the opposition leaders from Serbia decided not to attend, three out of the four major opposition alliances did send leading representatives.

At the time of the meeting, Hungary was co-chair of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe working table on democratization and human rights, making Budapest a particularly appropriate venue for the meeting. We gratefully acknowledge the assistance and generosity of the government of Hungary, particularly Zsolt Nemeth, State Secretary in the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and his staff, for assuring the security of the site and for warmly welcoming the participants.

Ferenc Melykuti, director of PER’s Budapest office, played an indispensable role in preparing for the meeting and in its efficient conduct.

Professor Susan L. Woodward, who was also a participant in the meeting, prepared this report, which was edited by Robert A. Feldmesser, PER’s senior editor, and Alex N. Grigor’ev, PER program officer, who was also a participant.

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

Allen H. Kassof, *President*
Livia Plaks, *Executive Director*
Princeton, New Jersey
August 2000

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, the Serbian names of places are used—for example, Pristina and not Prishtina, Kosovska Mitrovica and not Mitrovice. However, the spelling “Kosova” is used in the names of Kosovar Albanian political parties and organizations. The term “Kosovar” is used as an adjective for Kosovo and its inhabitants, whether Albanians, Serbs, Roma, or others.

For the sake of simplicity, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia or Serbia-Montenegro is referred to as “Yugoslavia;” the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia as “Macedonia;” and Bosnia and Herzegovina as “Bosnia.”

Finally, “Serb” and “Croat” are used as ethnic terms, whereas “Serbian” and “Croatian” are employed when referring to Serbia and Croatia, and this report uses “Bosnjaks” to denote ethnic Muslims living in the territory of the former Yugoslavia, who are otherwise generally referred to as “Bosnjaks/Muslims.” The term “Gorans” is used to identify the ethnic group from Kosovo referred to as “Goranci” in Yugoslavia.



From left to right: Ibrahim Rugova, Skender Hyseni, Bobi Bobev, Hashim Thaci, Martin Ivezaj, Miodrag Vukovic.



From left to right: Momcilo Trajkovic, Hidajet Hyseni.

INTRODUCTION

NATO's 78-day Operation Allied Force against Yugoslavia, concluding in the Kumanovo Agreement of June 9, 1999, achieved a decade-long demand of the Albanian population of Kosovo: that Yugoslav security forces and Serbian military police leave the province. It did not, however, resolve the political status of Kosovo, and its role in the defense of the rights of the Albanian population opened a question of much older provenance—the relation between Kosovo and the Albanian national question. In recognition that the situation of the Albanians in the region and their relations with their neighbors is the “hottest issue in the Balkans today,” the Project on Ethnic Relations (PER) held a conference in Budapest, Hungary, April 7-8, 2000. Representatives of all Albanian populations in the region, including almost every leading Albanian politician, met together with representatives of Bulgaria, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Macedonia, Romania, Serbia, and Montenegro. Leaders of the Serb community in Kosovo and of the Serbian democratic opposition forces also participated, along with official representatives of the United States, the United Nations, the Council of Europe, the European Commission, NATO, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), and the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe (SPSEE). It was, in the words of a PER staff member, “one of the most difficult meetings to organize” in the ten years of its existence.

Nevertheless, the tone of the open and frank discussion among the participants revealed an impressive commitment to learn from the mistakes of the 1990s and to deal with the hard issues before they led to new violence. The meeting was an act of courage on the part of many to communicate across political divisions, in the still raw atmosphere of the traumatic events of the preceding two years. One Albanian participant said that it was “the first time such a sensitive issue is being addressed with Albanian participants.” A Kosovar Serb agreed, saying “it is a rare opportunity to listen to views so diametrically opposed to one's own.” And a Montenegrin expressed the goodwill at the meeting by saying, “It is better to talk for one thousand days than to fight for one.”

THE ISSUES

The participants at the Budapest meeting agreed that international support for the rebellion of the Albanian population of Kosovo against Belgrade's repression had moved the political agenda away from the issue

of Serbian rule to the next stage: the status, rights, and future of Serbs and other Kosovar minorities such as Roma, Turks, Bosnjaks, and Gorans; the meaning of the autonomy referred to in UN Security Council Resolution 1244; and the implications of these questions for neighboring states and for regional stability. The more than six million Albanians of the Balkans are dispersed among five states—Albania, Montenegro, Macedonia, Serbia, and Greece—making the Albanian question a regional one.

In neighboring states with substantial Albanian populations, such as Macedonia and Montenegro, governments now face political demands for special status for Albanians that have clearly gained greater legitimacy. (One participant at the meeting said with appreciation, “This is the first time in an international meeting that I am able to speak in Albanian.”) The issue of statehood and political rights for Albanians also forces Albania itself into a set of new roles and expectations at a time when its internal stability is far from assured. Furthermore, interethnic relations and international actions in Kosovo directly affect politics in Serbia and force confrontation with another long-avoided issue: the political identity and status of Serbs, whether living in Serbia, Montenegro, Croatia, or Bosnia.

Equally vital to participants at the meeting was the process of the European Union's enlargement and integration that had been given new momentum by the Kosovo crisis. The participants of the EU summit at Helsinki in December 1999 had agreed to begin the accession process with Bulgaria and Romania and to include Macedonia and Albania in a new process, the Stabilization and Association Agreements. The SPSEE, created in June 1999, had held its first funding conference just one week before the Budapest meeting, obtaining pledges of 2.4 billion euros for an initial “quick-start package.” The secretary general of the Council of Europe, who had been planning to attend the meeting in Budapest, could not be present because a special council session had been convened the very same week, “for the first time ever,” according to the representative who did attend, “on the future of the Balkans, not just on bloody conflict.”

The meeting took up all of these issues, revealing, as one Serbian participant told the press conference at the conclusion, “big, serious differences on the issues of the future.” But at least, as one of the PER organizers emphasized, “the dialogue has begun.”

THE EUROPEAN CONTEXT

The meeting was opened by a Hungarian official, who expressed his government's hopes that the new context created by the SPSEE and the clear international commitment that European security is "one and indivisible" would enable the region to shed its image as a trouble spot. The contrast between this theme—the principle of regionality and the positive role of European integration in ensuring a lasting peace—and the preoccupation of peoples in the area with their own political status and aspirations became the framing leitmotif of the meeting.

The role of Europe was elaborated on by a Greek official, who spoke of the "radical effect" that the "practice of having to become a member of the EU" had on overcoming a history that was very similar to what was going on in the rest of the region today. Warning that a "stick comes

with the money," he also emphasized the "fundamental question of inclusiveness" posed by the EU: that "no one can pretend to be an island in this region." He pointed to the sense of security that is provided by EU institutions for the

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development of the private and civic sectors. The "sense of participation by all in some larger enterprise" is the mechanism to overcome the "region's proclivity to the paraeconomic, paramilitary, and black economy, to find a common language about our history rather than competition over identity," and to achieve justice. The improvement of relations between Greece and Turkey illustrates the benefits. What the region needs now is "real democratization," economic development, and demilitarization.

The processes of European integration and of globalization also provide a possible remedy for Albanian government officials who are caught between international expectations and local sympathies regarding Kosovo. The emphasis on Europe makes it possible "to leave the past behind and focus on the future" and for all Albanians to be in one community without changing current borders. "The train is speeding toward Europe; those who don't jump on will be left behind."

Nonetheless, officials from the EU and from some EU states took pains to introduce a dose of reality into this proposed panacea. Had people from the region thought about whether the EU member states were

ready to receive them? The conditions for joining the EU clearly do not yet prevail in the region. In particular, only sovereign states can be members. Furthermore, there must be a national consensus about joining, and therefore full discussion about the meaning of membership. An aspiring nation must be prepared to give up a degree of sovereignty, something politicians who base their platform on national sovereignty find it difficult to do. And it must be ready to trust the other member states, for "at the core of the EU is the common market, and at the core of the common market is trust." The idea that the EU makes borders irrelevant "has taken forty painful years" to develop. Finally, one EU official warned, "We will not import the problems of minorities into the EU." The "family of Europe" is not just geography but "a certain set of values: peace, stability, democracy."

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The discussion on Europe also brought out the great differences of interests and positions among the states of southeastern Europe, particularly between those who are in the EU or are on the track to membership and those who cannot escape the uncertainty raised by the Albanian question. These differences were clearest in regard to assessments of the SPSEE. To Romania, for example, the funds for infrastructure that would link the countries of the region with each other and with the rest of Europe, through construction of border crossings, roads, and bridges, were most welcome, whereas a Macedonian expressed the fears of the second group that EU intentions were not inclusion but the ghettoization of the western Balkans. Participants from the EU did indeed hint that they intended lengthy apprenticeships prior to accession. The Stabilization and Association Agreements are "a way to learn about how to become a member, how to work with the EU, and what we expect." They aim at building a regional network of agreements and stages of integration, beginning with the Central European Free Trade Association, then moving to a Pan-European Convention of Origin, and only much later to the EU.

THE POLITICAL STATUS OF KOSOVO

Inevitably, the dominant focus of the meeting was on Kosovo, its future, and the character of interethnic relations within it. Kosovar Albanian

leaders were unanimous in their insistence on independence. Supported by the Albanian leadership of Macedonia, they declared that “the war” had changed all the options. Yugoslavia no longer existed; it was a dead country, and the sooner Serbs realized that, the better. Separation was no longer an issue; the only issue now was what the steps and pace toward full sovereignty should be.

One Kosovar Albanian participant declared that independence would best occur immediately, during the international civilian and military presence, because that would allow the region of southeastern Europe to stabilize more quickly. A colleague from Macedonia explained the logic: If Kosovo were reintegrated into Yugoslavia, the result would be three

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unstable entities—Kosovo, Macedonia, and Serbia. There would be a series of secret alliances in Macedonia, some pro-Serb and others pro-Albanian, as Albanians there would try to be allied with Albanians in Kosovo “as they were before.” But because Kosovar Albanians are not challenging the provincial borders, independence would also make Serbia more stable, because Serbs would have to “throw

off the burden of the past.” Other Kosovar Albanian leaders, however, said it was necessary to work first to set up governing institutions, and then, under improved regional conditions, organize an international conference to allow the citizens of Kosovo the right to decide on their own future. Albanians throughout the region insisted that fears of a “Greater Albania” were unfounded; this was a project never enunciated by Albanians but only by Westerners and by Belgrade propaganda.

The most direct opposition to these views came from some leaders of the opposition in Serbia, who insisted that UN Security Council Resolution 1244 had “not even been partially implemented,” that genocide was occurring and a “humanitarian catastrophe” was ongoing, and that “Kosovo is an integral part of Serbia.” Two Albanian states in the Balkans, or a Greater Albania, would be “the greatest contribution to instability.” “We have enough states already,” one of the opposition politicians from Belgrade said.

Yet the majority of Serb participants, whether from Kosovo or from the opposition in Serbia, demonstrated how much the NATO operation had changed conditions. These Serbs tried to focus on the short run and to emphasize the importance of democratization to Kosovo, Serbia, and the entire region. No matter what the future of Kosovo, it required a compromise with Serbs in Kosovo and with Serbia, and it required that all citizens have democratic rights and be treated as equals, not as members of ethnic groups. Some of these participants expressed the belief that the best, perhaps the only, way to get rid of the Milosevic regime was by seizing the opportunity that now presented itself of an alliance of democratic forces throughout Yugoslavia, including those from Kosovo. If instead the Kosovar Albanians insist on an independent Kosovo and do not join such an alliance, “we’ll remain in the trenches.”

Where is the end, if one can change who is the majority by changing borders?

The strongest reservations about an independent Kosovo, however, came from representatives of neighboring states, Western governments, and European organizations. Opposition was threefold. First was the misleading signal that it would send to the Albanians of Kosovo and to others, that independence can be based on military intervention alone. “It sometimes seems to me,” said one of these participants, “that some Albanians take the future independence of Kosovo for granted. The eventual result cannot stem from momentary advantages.” One American official said bluntly, “If Kosovo is monoethnic, intolerant, antidemocratic, hopelessly corrupt, it will not deserve or receive international community assistance.”

Second was the precedent it would set that would “completely destroy the sacrosanct institution of post-World-War-II Europe—no change of borders.” “Where is the end,” asked a European official, “if one can change who is the majority by changing borders?” Third, argued a Greek specialist, was “the perception among segments of the international community and among regional actors that Kosovo is only the first phase of Albanian irredenta.” The “fear of opening up” the next stage, he said, is actually “the primary stumbling block.”

These fears were being strengthened, a number of participants said, by statements of Albanian politicians in the region. For example, sugges-

tions by Kosovar Albanians of “inevitable cultural integration,” plans to unify the educational programs of Albanians throughout the region, and the “common political calendar of Tirana, Pristina, Tetovo, and others,” which hints at a “pan-national integration strategy,” all create uncertainty. Repeated incidents of violence in Presevo valley in southern Serbia following the Kosovo war; claims of the need to “repay” support given during the war by “brethren in southern Serbia,” as if to provoke the international community; use of the terms “Eastern Kosova” for parts of southern Serbia and “Southern Kosova” for regions of Macedonia; armed extremists creating incidents in Macedonia to “get autonomy”—these, too, give rise to reservations about the long-term vision of Albanians and Albania. For EU countries, said a Greek official, the psychological factor is very strong—not only the talk about a Greater Albania but also, and particularly, the demographic issue, as one can see in Turkey’s difficulties with the EU. As if to reinforce these concerns, one Albanian leader from Macedonia explained why there was an inevitability to political processes, even according to Serb plans: “If Yugoslavia were democratic, Kosovo would be independent.”

In any case, a U.S. representative declared, “There is no possibility to resolve the ultimate status of Kosovo while Milosevic is in power.” Although the hopes that a democratic Serbia and Yugoslavia would fundamentally alter future possibilities dominated the discussion, one participant warned about the consequences of uncertainty. “Can you have a peaceful and multiethnic region,” he asked, “without a map before your eyes, without borders in mind? Confidence about the future is necessary for peaceful coexistence.”

IS A MULTIETHNIC KOSOVO POSSIBLE?

The question of Kosovo’s political status cannot be separated from the fate of minorities within Kosovo. Can it be multiethnic, as UN Security Council Resolution 1244 requires? Who is responsible for the violence and the breakdown of law and order since Kosovo came under international protection, and what is necessary to stop the killing and guarantee human and minority rights? Must security come first, and if so, whose security is at stake—that of the Albanians in Kosovo against a still threatening Milosevic and Serbian army, or that of the minorities in Kosovo who have become victims of a freed Albanian majority seeking revenge? More than anything else at the meeting, the answers to these questions

were a barometer of the political climate and of the very different perceptions among the participants of what had occurred as a result of the NATO action.

Thus, for one Kosovar Albanian participant, “the duel is still over who is the majority. Serbs still want to be dominant by keeping Kosovo in Serbia. The issue is not to guarantee their rights but for them to recognize that they are a minority and to seek those rights.” Other participants insisted that Albanians had to realize that they could no longer blame Milosevic and that for the first time they were now fully responsible for events in Kosovo. Political status depends on responsibility. Several members of the democratic opposition in Serbia even warned that the violence was simply serving Milosevic’s plan, which was to gain popular support in Serbia by demonstrating that the goal of the international effort was “to kick Serbs out, create a greater Albanian state, and eliminate a country that doesn’t want to join NATO.” Then he would regain his international role as negotiator—his primary goal—by demonstrating that the international mission was a failure because it could not restore peace and provide justice. One American official spoke for many when he said, “Words have meaning. ... Albanians in Kosovo, Montenegro, Albania, and Macedonia say they are living on their own land,” but “they have difficulty saying that Serbs, Roma, and others are also living on their own land. The first without the second is Milosevic.” For him, “intolerance, violence, ethnic cleansing, and antidemocratic practices” will earn the “implacable hostility of the U.S.,” no matter where it occurs.

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The issue of responsibility also deeply divided the representatives of minority communities in Kosovo and Kosovar Albanian leaders. The latter were in nearly complete agreement that the international civilian and military administrations were responsible for security, and that until institutions were in place, they had very little authority in fact and their effort to bring an end to the killing could not be implemented. One leader tied the issue directly to the status issue: “As long as there is no Kosovo, and no parliament for national integration, there can be no institutions to protect human rights.” Many also insisted that this was a

two-way process, and Kosovar Serbs had to take their share of responsibility. Until Serbs in Serbia accept their collective guilt for the wars of the former Yugoslavia, and until Serbs in Kosovo accept responsibility for their own politics, demand their rights locally, and end their reluctance to participate fully in the joint interim structures created by the United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK)—the Interim Administrative Council and the Kosovo Provisional Council—they cannot expect a hearing. The joint institutions are the best guarantee of security and human rights, they insisted.

To the repeated pleas by one Kosovar Serb leader to “find just ten abducted Serbs of the 500 said to be in camps or graves ... tell me, are they alive

or dead ... just ten ... as a demonstration of your readiness for Serbs to return,” several Kosovar Albanians responded, “Why doesn’t he raise the issue of Albanians in Serbian jails?” Appeals were made to end the atrocities against “non-Albanians (Serbs, Gorans, Roma, Bosnjaks, Turks), [who] were now experiencing what Albanians did during the war” and it was pointed out that, of the 40,000 Serbs who had been living in Pristina, only

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300-500 old men and women, protected by KFOR, remained. Serbs were no longer to be found in urban areas, having retreated to enclaves, largely in the north, for self-protection, or having left Kosovo entirely. The response was that Kosovar Albanians were ready for reconciliation with those who were not involved in atrocities, but “frustrations are high ... we need time ... it has only been nine months ... we cannot forgive war criminals.”

Nonetheless, although radical views regarding Serb rights in Kosovo were expressed—for example, that Serbs representing the Serb National Council had no right even to be present at the meeting because the SNC was “illegal”—a more moderate view prevailed. As one Kosovar Albanian party leader declared, “It is good we’re discussing this.”

In a useful counterpoint to the discussion of these difficult issues, a Romani expert expressed the desire “to speak directly to Albanian lead-

ers” in hopes of “achieving a breakthrough in relations with the Roma.” Speaking on the day before the International Day of Roma (April 8) “on behalf of those refugees, abandoned, powerless, who feel no future, who are caught between Serb and Albanian, for whom there were no right choices to be made, that whatever they did was wrong,” he appealed for a “stop to vengeful neighbors, looting, expelling, setting houses on fire.” Rejecting outright the concept of collective guilt, he denied the assertion of one Kosovar Albanian that where there had been no atrocities, there is no violence now. The Romani position was that work had to be done to seek a just assessment of guilt, of the extent to which those guilty were forced or volunteered, and that those who were accused should receive a fair trial and be punished accordingly.

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Minority rights cannot be conditional, this Romani participant continued. Rights must be granted unconditionally, and individuals who violate those rights should be held accountable. Clearly, knowledge about the Romani community should be more widespread, including its size and the fact that many Roma share religion and language with Albanians. Of the 150,000 Roma who had lived in Kosovo, only 30,000 remained, and they were internally displaced with no houses to return to. He then issued an invitation to the leadership of Kosovo to attend a follow-up meeting on the issue of refugees and the internally displaced. There, Serbs and Roma who are the objects of threats can sit together with Kosovar Albanians who declare their readiness for reconciliation, for building institutions for minority rights, and for starting a dialogue.

The dilemma facing Kosovar Serbs was revealed in the appeal by one of their leaders to representatives of both the Albanian and the international communities for a democratic process in place of the “ethnic principle.” If Albanians demand national rights and special status, then Serbs will also demand national rights and special status, and there will be no end to the cycle. “If you keep saying ‘independence,’ we will say ‘cantoning,’ and each creates a reaction.” While Kosovar Albanian leaders demand that “Serbs be more ready” to participate, the real struggle had already shifted to within the Serb community of Kosovo—between

those who hoped to build on the “centuries-old bonds between Serbs and Albanians” with equal rights of citizenship and those who had retreated to enclaves, particularly Kosovska Mitrovica and northern Kosovo, in a strategy of self-protection and nonparticipation patterned after that of Kosovar Albanians in the 1990s. A Greek official commented that the first group of Serbs is in a “bind” – “condemned as traitors by the motherland” yet “not getting adequate signals on security from their ethnic counterparts, the Albanians.” The result, which he called “an old trap in Serbia,” is that there “will be no one offering moderation”—only some “accused of treason” and others “prodded into nationalist intransigence.” What can outsiders do to enable Serbs to play a constructive role in Kosovo? Can projects be devised to show that they can tangibly deliver what is now being delivered from Belgrade? Can the media be helped to explain their case?

The view was also expressed by several Kosovar Albanians that the problem of violence was not an issue of interethnic relations—of why, as one said, “Albanians and Serbs can’t just get along.” One of these participants said that the Kosovar Albanians were in the process of decolonization, and “whenever liberation movements win, they take revenge.” Another said they were dealing with a structural crisis: the end of the cold war and an early stage of democratization, economic restructuring, civil society, and good neighborly relations. In particular, “without the rule of law, one cannot talk of accountability for crimes.”

NEXT STEPS

The participants argued that the immediate problem in the region was the establishment of security: rounding up weapons, ending criminal activities, stopping the killings and threats, and creating conditions for the safe return of those who had left their homes or were forced out. This led to discussion about the next steps.

Some participants who were not ethnic Albanians insisted that the international community should provide this security and also should implement UN Security Council Resolution 1244. Others emphasized the need to calm the fears of both the Albanian and the non-Albanian communities, saying that “Albanians don’t have confidence in their own leaders.” Still another group of both Albanians and non-Albanians placed priority on moving from humanitarian issues to economic development: obtaining foreign investment (first of all from neighbors such as Greece),

privatizing enterprises, and building communication links so that, at the very least, travel time is reduced from Tirana to Shkoder, the Greek border, and Pristina.

The necessity of establishing the rule of law presents a genuine dilemma. The creation of institutions, a Serb participant warned, raises a most important and painful question: What kind of institutions, for what kind of society? A Kosovar Albanian leader moved the question back a step by asking: Can you build laws and institutions without a legal and constitutional framework? He answered his own question by saying, “No, not any more than you can privatize and restructure the economy without the rule of law.” Yet a European official, drawing comparisons from the Middle East, suggested proceeding “step by step.” Can one create a multiethnic reality before elections, focusing first on everyday problems, delaying consideration of the next steps until after elections are held?

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The greatest disagreement among participants outside of the former Yugoslavia was over elections. One such participant declared that any delay in holding elections was a form of paternalism that would only postpone the test of responsibility being demanded by the international community. Another suggested that there were many “illusions” about democratic elections. Citing the case of Bosnia, he said that elections based on ethnic divisions and the ethnic principle would produce a divided result and would not bring peace. An American official warned that “appeals to nationalism and independence in the elections will be popular, but will slow down democratic development and recognition.” Another participant said that there was no reason why there should not be elections soon—but, he warned, elections “won’t solve anything; they don’t produce institutions.” Other participants from this group also called on the international community to clarify UN Security Council Resolution 1244 as an urgent matter. First, what does its reference to “broad autonomy” mean? Second, what in practice does the international community itself intend by it, since there are so many differences within it? Third, a framework must be defined for the peace process and the role of the provisional administration.

The greatest consensus among all participants seemed to be the belief that once interim institutions were set up, calming conditions in the region, an international conference should be convened on the status of Kosovo. As one Italian participant said, such a conference, “like [the Berlin Congress of] 1878,” would also “legitimize the presence of foreign forces in the Balkans.”

A number of other proposals for interim steps, including the Stability Pact Good Neighborly Charter and initiatives from Kosovar Albanians toward their neighbors—to reaffirm good relations with Montenegro, to forge new relations with Macedonia, and to help strengthen democracy in Albania—made clear that, in the words of one participant, “Kosovo is a short-term problem; the long-term question of Albanians will be fundamental for decades to come.”

ALBANIA AND ALBANIANS

“Can Albania play the role of responsible ‘mother country,’ as Hungary did for Hungarians living elsewhere?” asked one of the participants. The answer came from foreign officials accredited to Albania who were present at the meeting. Whereas Hungary acted from political and economic strength, there was serious concern over Albania’s current instability. The importance of Albanian stability for the region, they emphasized, “cannot be exaggerated.”

The image of Albania abroad is far worse than reality, one European official and an American diplomat insisted. They cited the lack of discrimination against minorities, the near total absence of xenophobia, a moderate and reasonable foreign policy during the last decade, and Albania’s remarkable tendency not to take Western assistance for granted or to blame foreigners for their problems but to seek answers in their own behavior. On the other hand, the “mad political infighting” of the two main political parties, the failure to create and institutionalize public order, the legal inefficiencies that impede the enforcement of contracts and the protection of investments, and the high level of corruption and organized crime are serious obstacles to foreign investment and to the sound economic policy needed to lift Albania out of danger. At the time of the Budapest meeting, partisan bickering was manifest in the boycott by the main opposition party, the Democratic Party, of all institutional reforms—the anticorruption plan, the civil service commission, two commissions on the

media, a new Central Election Commission, and the weapons collection program.

External assistance, through the Friends of Albania, the World Bank, the OSCE, the EU, NATO, Italy, and Greece, is very large, but it could dissipate. Fears have not abated that there could be a repeat of the chaos of 1997 and again of the fall of 1998. The policy of the current Albanian government toward the Albanian national question and toward Kosovo, to subsume the issue of Albanian integration into the larger process of integration into EU and Euro-Atlantic structures, depends on Albania itself meeting the conditions for such integration.

An answer to the opening question did come, obliquely, from one Albanian party leader and one Kosovar Albanian party leader. “Trying not to give traditional answers to traditional questions,” the former said, “we don’t want Albanians to be spoken to only in English or ‘European’—we want a European program for integration while speaking Albanian as well.” But for both these participants, economic development was at the center of this program for cultural integration. The program does not intend to raise fears of a “Greater Albania.”

The importance of Albania’s stability for the region cannot be exaggerated.

While Kosovar Albanians were insisting on the prerogatives of a majority in Kosovo, minority Albanians in Macedonia and Montenegro appear to be on a collision course with the majority populations there. The two states represent two very different histories and conditions, “requiring different models.” Nonetheless, representatives from both places revealed an acute struggle between ethnic-majority governments striving under very difficult external conditions to create new states and democracy, based on a civic concept of citizenship and multiethnic governance, and Albanian minorities seeking proportional representation and special status based on an ethnic concept of citizenship. Both faced the new-found legitimacy of Albanian aspirations that was a result of the Kosovo war. The dialogue between leaders of Albanian national parties and representatives of the government and of nongovernmental organizations of the majority ethnic group in both places revealed what PER orga-

nizers cited as specific cases of a universal, very difficult problem, for which there is no universally acceptable solution.

MACEDONIA

According to the 1994 census, 23 percent of the total population in Macedonia are Albanians; 3 percent are Turks, 2 percent Roma, 0.4 percent Vlachs, 1 percent Serbs, and 2 percent other ethnic minorities. The Albanian community is represented by half a dozen political parties, of which two are major players, each having taken a significant role in forming the two coalitions that have governed Macedonia since independence. According to an unwritten rule, no Macedonian government can govern without Albanian representation—what a Macedonian Albanian called the “Albanian tail” of each major Macedonian party. The current

A chilly wind for the Macedonian ethnic map would be the country's ethnicization at the expense of the civic project of democratization.

government includes five ministers and five deputy ministers from an Albanian party.

This Macedonian model contains two risks, said a Macedonian analyst. First is the reaction of irritation from majority Macedonians at the privileges given to ethnic Albanians, and the concomitant fear of a threat

to the decomposition of the state and its borders and therefore a threat to democracy. This could be accompanied by an increase in sensitivity about ethnic Macedonians in neighboring states—Bulgaria, Greece, and Albania—that could generate nationalism and a reaction to the current ghettoization and isolation of the ethnic Albanian population, under instructions from political leaders. The second risk is an increasing disaffection of other minorities, which could challenge the multiethnic ambiance in Macedonia in reaction to the “ethnic elitism” of the Albanian minority and the “ethnomathematics” of the Macedonian state and their lack of parallel representation. This risk, a “chilly wind for the Macedonian ethnic map,” would be the country's ethnicization at the expense of the civic project of democratization.

In contrast to this portrayal, a Macedonian Albanian party leader was scathing in his charge of “satanization,” which “creates new confusions and tensions, at home and abroad.” The portrayal, he argued, casts the Albanians as “foreign occupiers” who have a secret agenda to create a

Greater Albania, with the support of the international community and a demographic advantage that will eventually win. To the contrary, this politician elaborated in detail, the history of Macedonia was one of coexistence among three ethnic groups, in equal proportion—Macedonians, Albanians, and Vlachs; their common struggle against the Ottomans in 1903; common political structures; and a common revolutionary platform against German invaders in World War II. If foreign powers—specifically, the United States and Germany—now demand accommodation, it must be remembered that this was the wartime program of the Communist leaders. If anything, events have seen a reduction in the areas of Albanian population (e.g., Manastir and Bitola, where they had been in the majority) and the imposition of the Cyrillic alphabet over the Albanian one. In parallel with the reduction of Kosovo's autonomy in 1989, the Macedonian state amended its constitution to make the country a state of the Macedonian nation and Albanians “just ordinary, second-class citizens,” including significant reductions in the right to use the Albanian language in official settings and to display Albanian national symbols. The Macedonian state, according to this participant, is an “ethnocentric state,” which imposes its will over that of the Albanians through “over-voting” by the majority.

Albanians have been necessary to the electoral victory of both coalitions that have ruled Macedonia.

The sense of disappointment among ethnic Albanians was evident. One said ruefully that “we have been more prepared to defend Macedonia than Macedonians themselves.” Another added that Albanians have been necessary to the electoral victory of both coalitions that have ruled Macedonia, but electoral promises made to get their votes have never been kept—not even minimum concessions concerning education, a fairer relation between Albanian votes and seats in parliament, and greater local autonomy for towns with an Albanian majority. Some ethnic Macedonian participants agreed on the need to increase local power as against the center and to improve electoral districting in the direction of a fairer count, but the insistence of the Albanians from Macedonia and from Kosovo that the Albanians in Macedonia have “equal national status” in a Macedonian state was seen as going too far.

From yet another perspective, a European diplomat long engaged in Macedonia issued a dire warning that, reminiscent of the failed negotia-

tions on Kosovo that eventually succumbed to violence, the several temporary successes in Macedonia were interrupted “because one cannot get media attention until there is shooting.” A U.S. official made it clear that his country would not support armed extremists in Macedonia who were attacking officials in order to achieve autonomy.

Demands for special status should also cause concern, observed the U.S. diplomat, who was experienced in the negotiations over the dissolution of Yugoslavia. In the 1991 EU convention, special status was proposed for Serbs in the Croatian Krajina and for Kosovo, he explained, but it was explicitly denied to Hungarians in Vojvodina, Muslims in Sandzak, and Albanians in Macedonia because it was reserved for “large conglomerations” of a minority population, and for that condition, “one would have to draw lines on a map to define territory.” Among the consequences would be to turn “Skopje into Mostar” and create “huge problems for places like Kumanovo.”

The choice seemed to be between, on the one hand, the possibilities proposed by an ethnic Albanian leader—consociational democracy (in which no “out-voting” is possible), confederation, or civil divorce along the lines of the Czechs and Slovaks—and, on the other hand, the position held by ethnic Macedonians and some of their neighbors that there will be no rearrangement of Macedonia. In the words of a Greek diplomat, “The territorial integrity and unity of that country is a sine qua non for the stability of the region.”

The discussion also revealed that more shared information about the promises and requests made by various parties in this region might help move the confrontation toward possible compromises, such as a reform of local government to increase its autonomy. An Albanian leader in the political minority emphasized the importance of meeting some of the Albanian demands, such as those in education, to prevent personal breakdowns from generating a collective neurosis for which there would be no cure. A hopeful note was struck by a Macedonian analyst who noted that “in business, there are no problems of interethnic cooperation.”

MONTENEGRO

The demands of ethnic Albanian political parties in Montenegro are the same as those in Macedonia: special status; representation in government offices and public administration, such as the courts and the inte-

rior ministry, closer to their proportion in the population (7 percent); education in their own language and with textbooks better representing their own history; the right to use national symbols such as flags; and greater local autonomy in areas (such as Ulcinj) where they are in the majority. Also similar was the view expressed that promises made to win Albanian support for the ruling coalition had not been fulfilled, particularly those made in the September 1997 agreement between Milo Djukanovic’s Democratic Party of Socialists and a number of opposition parties, including two parties of ethnic Albanians. Because the current government depends on Albanian votes, and because the democratic image of Montenegro abroad rests on the role played by the Albanian minority, they will demand constituent nation status if they are not given special status.

Montenegro will progress and Albanians will find their place in it.

A participant representing the largest party in the Montenegrin ruling coalition declared that in 1992 Montenegro, similarly to Macedonia, had “opted for the concept of a civic state.” The Montenegrin constitution includes a more extensive commitment to the principles of human rights than is true of any other constitution in the region, and special bodies had been set up to protect minority rights. An Albanian headed the newly established Ministry for Protection of the Rights of Persons Belonging to Ethnic and National Minorities, and there were two ethnic Albanian deputy ministers in the government. In disagreement with his Albanian colleague from Montenegro, pointing as well to achievements in culture, education, religion, and the media, he pleaded that “we’re trying to prevent Montenegro from being set on fire.” He said that he had not “seen a formal document” on the proposed special status, and he claimed that the majority of Albanians vote for parties supporting the “civic option.” Indeed, demands for special status for Albanians come from “people who support Milosevic” in order to undermine President Djukanovic by accusing him of “a secret deal with Albanians.” Like the Macedonian participants, this moderate Montenegrin felt threatened by nationalists on both sides: “Serbian nationalists (about 20 percent of the current parliament) who think we are traitors to the Serbian nation [who favor] the course of Lebanon,” and “Montenegrin nationalists” (about 6 or 7 percent of the parliament) who favor outright Montenegrin independence now

and are gaining the support of the younger generation, who do not want “to lose another ten years.”

The tone of this interchange was entirely different from that concerning Macedonia. The representative of the Montenegrin majority said, “We retain our different opinions...but it is important that we’ve started this conversation.” Montenegro has had statehood for more than two hundred years, he went on; its democracy “is young...[and] far from perfect, but in our environment, it is doing pretty well. We’ve laid the foundations for democracy that will enable us to enter the future with more optimism than today.” They could work together on the law regulating the use of national symbols, perhaps with assistance from PER. His Albanian colleague added, “There are problems, events that disturb and surprise us, but Montenegro will progress and Albanians will find their place in it.” Several Albanians from Kosovo expressed their gratitude to Montenegro for the risks it took for Kosovars during the war. All agreed on the need for greater international support for Montenegro, given the heavy burden it has borne in accepting refugees from Bosnia and Kosovo and its “dual isolation”—by the international community against Yugoslavia, and by Milosevic against Montenegro.

SERBIA

The greatest division of opinions emerged over Serbia. Did resolution of Kosovo’s status require an end to Milosevic’s regime? Could there be democracy in Kosovo without democracy in Serbia? Were Milosevic and the army still a threat to Kosovo? The Kosovo question was a “hot potato” in Belgrade, where constant media attention directed by the regime kept people in fear of discussing serious alternatives. The democratic opposition hoped simply “to remove the issue from the agenda,” said one participant. The war had further strengthened Milosevic. Although one opposition spokesman felt that his group had a “clear vision” toward the Kosovo question, another disagreed, saying that this was not possible until a clear answer had been developed about “Serb national identity...but perhaps the fact that Kosovo is outside Serbia will help us in that.” This brought a plea to the international community: “If all options are now on the table but one—if Kosovo is not to be a part of Serbia—then we want to know that.”

For many Serbs, resolution of Kosovo’s status required a compromise

with Serbia, but Kosovar Albanians replied that “their destiny had never been tied to Belgrade” historically. Rejecting an American proposal that Albanians in Serbia “show their common commitment to democracy and human rights” by participating in Serbian and Yugoslav elections this year, they said they could do no more than join in regional support of opposition efforts to move out of isolation. An appeal by a Serb opposition participant to “please differentiate” and “please note that we came to sit with you even if our position will be harmed when we return home” was met with sympathy from one of the Albanian Kosovar participants, but the majority of them demanded that Serbs go through the long process of “assuming collective responsibility for the wars of the last ten years, as German society” had done.

The analogy to Germany’s experience provoked reflections from several participants. A Greek official expressed concern that “the more isolated is Serbia, the more the effect of the deep freeze is serious. There is no need to create a new cycle of revanchism.” If collective responsibility is imposed, a Serbian participant added, the nation will be frustrated, prolonging the vicious cycle of antagonism and aggression of the last ten years. At SPSEE, a representative said, “we’re not into questions of collective or national guilt... Our goal is to reach out to the people of Serbia in practical ways,” such as through the Szeged process, which brings together mayors from the democratic opposition who have been elected in cities all across Serbia.

The more isolated is Serbia, the more the effect of the deep freeze is serious.

Although much of the discussion revolved around what the democratic opposition in Serbia could and should do for Kosovo and about Milosevic, one participant attempted to inject this note of reality: “In Serbia today, a significant process of democratization is actually taking place, though some opposition leaders don’t see it...Serbia today is like the position of the Albanians in Kosovo after Dayton, when the old power structure began to break apart...but don’t be surprised if you get what occurred in Albania in 1996-97.”

Inwardly focused for the most part, the two communities were not yet ready to see the similarity of their plight. As one Macedonian Albanian explained, “We have lost a lot from the dissolution of Yugoslavia. Once we could communicate fully within one state; now there are borders. We

want to be compensated with further possibilities for communication.” He could have been speaking for Serbs as well.

CARPE DIEM

More than anything, the meeting demonstrated, particularly in the terms used by participants, that the search for compromise was in an early stage. One American official said that he was worried about participants’ words but that the statement by a Montenegrin party leader to give the “provocative view” of his Albanian colleague “much thought” provided hope. On the other hand, deep differences emerged within ethnic and

territorial communities, particularly the Kosovar Albanians, Albanians in general, and the opposition Serbs.

You have the moment now--the international community is paying attention, but it is unlikely to last.

In conclusion, one of the organizers of the meeting offered two maxims based on more than ten years’ work on interethnic relations. First, “in interethnic disputes, all sides are

right, because all arguments are emotional.” Second, “the timing for compromise always seems wrong, and when the timing for compromise seems right, it may be too late.” To the Albanians, she said, “you have the moment now--the international community is paying attention,” but it is unlikely to last. And in the meantime, “your neighbors are watching you, and are fearful.”



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Fatos Nano

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