

## **Comment: The Unrealistic Dream of a Multi-Ethnic Kosova**

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The international community wants to end debate over the crimes in Kosova and reach an understanding between Serbs and Albanians. But so soon after the war, cohabitation cannot work and a new strategy for living side-by-side must be found.

Serbs no longer consider Kosova to be their historical entity - the cradle of their past. This is obviously an exaggerated political idea. Serbian rule in Kosova is really a colonial concept brought about by the building of orthodox monasteries in the territory. Celebrated in Serbian folklore, the ideal remains the main trauma in Serbian collective memory.

And it is now being masterfully replaced by the idea of the victim, which the Serbs are enduring in this postwar period. The process seeks to end debate on the crimes and the victims - that is, the Albanians - and turn them into the culprits.

International representatives face the difficult task of pacifying Kosova. This cannot be an easy return to normality, as if nothing ever happened.

This means that the debate on crimes committed by the Serb forces should not end. Forgiving sins so easily or under outside pressure seems ugly - too transparent and moralising by the international community.

Serbs who left Kosova are not victims of a new wave of ethnic cleansing, unjust collective blame, or the intervention by the international community. They are victims of their own support for the policies behind the wars of Slobodan Milosevic.

For years, Kosova was really two minority problems. The Albanians, the majority in the province, were a minority in Yugoslavia, whereas the Serbs were a minority in Kosova. The Serb minority was further reduced due to migration. This was evident in particular during the phase of total Serbian totalitarianism in Kosova, 1989-99. Attempts to "re-colonise" Kosova, such as by settling Krajina refugees here, failed to change the demographic reality. The first wave of Serbs who left in June 1999, after the NATO campaign, was made up of those whose consciences were not clear. Very few left afterwards.

Now the Serb population numbers less than 5 percent. More Serbs left Kosova during colonial rule than after the international intervention, yet their support for the same policies only continues through Oliver Ivanovic, the Serb leader in North Mitrovica. Milosevic's influence is growing among Serbs here in spite of the moderate priest Artemije. Everybody knows this. Bernard Kouchner, the UN chief, knows this, even as he engages in the process of trying to work with Serbs and Albanians to reach some kind of understanding in Kosova.

The longer a solution is delayed, the greater the risk of new clashes in the region. What remains of Yugoslavia seems headed towards a total and violent disintegration, with the crisis shifting to Montenegro and Vojvodina. But keeping the situation in Kosova under control is not easy either. Ethnic tension in Kosova is directly linked to the unhealed wounds of the war. A renewal of violence could have grave repercussions outside Kosova's borders.

To avoid violence and advance the political process an urgent international peace process is necessary. There is also a moral imperative to find a solution, since Albanians in Kosova now are treated as if they are foreigners on their own soil. They are hostage to the territory's geo-strategic remoteness and to the international community's inability to remove Milosevic from power because of the support he has from his

own people.

But the core of the international community's approach, insisted upon at all costs, is unrealistic. It is the dream of a multi-ethnicity. In truth, it is unworkable because the Serb community is unwilling to live under the new economic structure that is being created. Most Serbs have no means of support. Because of the "national key" approach to employment under communism as well as the Serbian colonial administration, they have no continuity now. The benefits of colonial rule have been lost, and they can survive either through international support or by selling up and moving on to a better life in impoverished Serbia.

The main question is how to initiate meaningful dialogue between Belgrade and the Kosovar Albanians. But it is widely accepted that this cannot happen until Milosevic goes, Serbia undergoes real democratisation, and Serbs offer an official and sincere apology. Even now, Serbs vote for radicals up to their noses in war crimes. Even now, Ivanovic's influence over Serbs in Kosova is dominant, and growing. (Artemije is cloistered in his monastery in Gracanica, and his only support comes from abroad because of the international promise that the Serbs will return to Kosova.) Even now, Milosevic remains the main factor to deal with in Serbia - even by the West. China and Russia have even been supportive of the crime and the criminal, legitimising this kind of rule.

Mediation over Kosova and its final status thus needs a powerful push from the West. An international presence is needed, especially American: a US withdrawal from the region means war. But there should not be any exaggerated coddling of the Serbs, with the sole aim of destroying the peace process. Even if such a process were started soon, Kosova independence may still be irrevocable. In this case, Serb enclaves such as Gracanica and Kosovo Polje could be put under permanent Serb control, guaranteed by the United Nations, but under the overall auspices and security of the Albanians.

The wrongdoing of Albanian extremists should not be excused. Their actions, along Ivanovic, are the worst evils in Kosova. But trying to bring Albanians into line by equalising the crimes committed during the war with the ones after it will bring about failure, and damaging consequences for the international community.

Serbs as individuals are innocent. But the destruction of Kosova was the Serbs' national mission. It was institutionalised by leaders who remain in power and are still supported by the people.

After the aggressive propaganda by Milosevic and the opposition, there is no doubt that people in Serbia have lost their marbles. There is a touch of insanity in Milosevic's rule. But Serbia is not a product of Milosevic - quite the opposite. Milosevic is a product of Serbia, and the Serbs for a very long time produced the crimes that ended with the mass graves in Kosova.

So after such a short time, there cannot be "cohabitation". At best, there could be life next to each other. Western powers should understand that they will have to be in the region for a long time. They should also understand that the final form of a solution for Kosova must be made more explicit. This means, first, dispensing with the illusion that Serb forces will return to Kosova. It also means dispensing with the Albanian illusion that they can have a state without a system of Western values.

The status quo cannot - and should not - continue. Otherwise tension and uncertainty will continue, and the risk of conflict in the Balkans will live on.

The Serbs should not be left to suffer in solitude and accumulate anger. But the Western approach should be based on new arrangements rather than a reconstruction of the old system based on absolution for their own evil-doing. They can have leaders washed in blood or they can have co-existence and Western economic support. They cannot have both.

Baton Haxhiu is editor-in-chief of Koha Ditore. This article continues an exchange of reports and responses

between IWPR and Koha Ditore about minority rights and the future of multi-ethnicity in Kosovo. For the complete file, see [www.iwpr.net](http://www.iwpr.net).

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