

Kosova Priorities

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Kosova must seek to establish itself as a functioning state

One can safely predict that five years from now Kosova will not be an exemplary democratic or economically prosperous state.

The reason is simple: it never has been, and in its present incarnation as a UN administered territory, Kosova is preoccupied with the process of transition after 50 years of communism, a decade of Serb domination, apartheid policies and war.

To complicate matters further, its status is undefined. Though a UN protectorate, Kosova falls formally under the sovereignty of the crumbling Yugoslav federation, FRY.

Maybe, for now, a viable democracy and prospering economy are overambitious aims. First of all, Kosova simply needs to establish itself as a state.

At present, UN Security Council Resolution 1244 denies Kosova sovereign status, until negotiated agreements say otherwise. But, importantly, the resolution does not impede its development as a functioning state.

There are real possibilities here. Last October's local elections, the first free elections in Kosova's history, revealed a desire for progress and reform.

The LDK, under the leadership of Ibrahim Rugova, won a forecast victory following voter dissatisfaction with the 'revolutionary behaviour' of the ex-KLA leadership who had forcibly gained political and economic advantages following the war.

Kosovars also expressed a willingness to push ahead with a provisional constitution, general elections and privatisation. Conducted wisely, this could bring about an unprecedented shift in Kosova's social and political dynamic.

But will that be sufficient for the Kosova Albanians? Not really. There are plenty more obstacles ahead for both Kosovars and the international community.

While political and economic reforms will factor heavily in shaping Kosova's future, two further considerations will need to be taken into account: the capacity for tolerance and the ability to create better relations between neighbouring states.

Kosovar willingness to build a tolerant society will have to go hand in hand with an even greater commitment by minority Serbs to accept majority rule.

For the past year and a half, however, tolerance has been singularly lacking. The international community has itself impeded the process by failing to weigh in when the rule of law has failed.

Addressing the issue of relations between neighbouring states is essentially all about resolving the problem of Kosova's relationship with Serbia. The latter, following the overthrow of Slobodan Milosevic, are viewed in a more optimistic light - nevertheless a degree of scepticism remains.

Milosevic may be history, but Serbian politics of the past decade have relied on a nationalist consensus, in which the then opposition participated fully.

Furthermore, any shift in relations between Kosova and Serbia depends on the very basic question of whether Serbia is able to root out extreme nationalists on the path to true democracy.

Serbia's neighbours still identify Belgrade with atrocities committed over the past decade.

Western euphoria over seeing Milosevic's fall cannot last forever and neither can its unqualified support for President Kostunica build bridges between the unwilling subjects of a federation.

Kosovars, Montenegrins and Serbs, need to project a desire to evolve independent and equal entities. Otherwise the continued curse of South-Eastern Europe's weak states will not only bring continued instability but force the West into making significant military and financial commitments to the region.

I've suggested before that the final act in the disintegration of Former Yugoslavia could be played out in a 'Taiwan scenario', in which all three states, going through a process of internal consolidation, will necessarily focus more on the function of the state than on its international recognition.

The fact that FRY was accepted into the UN does not strengthen Belgrade's relations with Podgorica and Pristina. The federal republic cannot emerge as a sovereign entity for the simple reason that not all its constituent states are willing to countenance the idea.

What I know for sure is that any attempt to resolve the issue is destined to fail if it undermines the Kosovars' right to decide their own future.

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