

## **UN Failing Kosovars**

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A year into its tenure in Kosovo, few of the UN's goals have been achieved.

Twelve months after NATO bombing put an end to Belgrade's ethnic cleansing campaign in Kosovo, local Albanians believe the UN's efforts to promote stability in the province are running out of steam.

UNMIK has clearly had some successes. Averting a humanitarian disaster last winter and the creation of an administrative structure in the province are arguably its biggest achievements.

But there have been many failings too. Ethnic cleansing continues to be a problem and little progress has been made in establishing a multi-ethnic Kosovo. Extremist Serbs and Albanians are the only beneficiaries of UNMIK's shortcomings.

A policy of reconciliation is now being promoted, with international officials pressing leaders of both sides, particularly Albanian, to encourage co-existence.

But can this be achieved in the foreseeable future? Definitely not. Albanians cannot forget what happened one year ago. The Hague Tribunal has sent forensic teams to exhume some 440 grave sites of Albanians killed by Serbian forces in the last two years, over three thousand people are still missing and more than a thousand languish in Serbian prisons.

The international community might be asking too much of local leaders. Certainly, its efforts to return hundreds of thousands of Albanian and Serb refugees are unrealistic. Albanian returnees have no shelter and no place to work, while Serbs can live only in small enclaves protected by the KFOR troops.

Meanwhile, UNMIK and the OSCE are registering people for municipal elections in the autumn. But to what end. The local administration may be given more powers than it already enjoys, but its international co-head will be able to veto any decision it makes. It could simply end up becoming a 'benign dictatorship'.

It is not surprising, then, that some Albanian political parties are far from enthusiastic about the new democratic institutions. And the international community would do well not to pressure them as they could end up offering the same sort of resistance they did when the Kosovo was under Serbian control.

Meanwhile, the international project in Kosovo is being undermined by funding shortages. Donor fatigue is setting in as the international community's willingness to finance the reconstruction and democratisation of the province comes under strain.

Further evidence of the West's diminishing concern for Kosovo is that international institutions are sometimes understaffed or employ unqualified personnel. It is not difficult to understand why Western countries prefer not to send their best people to a remote part of eastern Europe.

So what of Kosovo's future status? The UN's efforts to promote stability in the province are clearly being jeopardised by uncertainty over its status. Indeed, UNMIK chief, Bernard Kouchner, recently asked the UN Security Council to spell out exactly what it meant by pledging the province 'substantial autonomy'.

Provincial status is clearly unacceptable to Albanians. But while they yearn for independence, not a single Albanian politician has been able to outline how a sovereign Kosovo state may survive when it is landlocked, economically backward and surrounded by Europe's poorest nations. What investor, in his right mind, would have an interest in such a country.

Whatever Kosovo's eventual status, money will only start rolling into the province once it has become stable and sheds its image as a war-torn region.

Restoring relations with Serbia, at some point, will be important in this respect. With Milosevic in power this will be hard, but Kosovo might find it easier to establish some kind of dialogue with those who succeed him. Although it has to be said that the Serbian opposition is as opposed to an independent Kosovo as Milosevic.

No one is clear what the future holds for Kosovo. So many questions remain unanswered. But Albanians must fight hard to ensure that international community maintains its commitment to the province.

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**Location:** [Serbia](#)  
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