

## **Western Mediation in Yugoslavia Urged**

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Speakers at a London conference on the Balkans call for the West to help Yugoslavia resolve its internal problems peacefully.

International mediation based on clear and consistent principles will be needed to help Yugoslavia through a painful period of further constitutional and political change.

At a public debate in London on January 16, two leading liberal voices from the region - one Serb, one Albanian - both stressed the scale of the difficulties confronting local political leaders.

They also emphasised the need for continued international engagement to ensure peaceful and durable final settlements of the decade-long Yugoslav crisis.

"We now have a chance for democratisation and reforms," said Zarko Korac, Social Democratic Union leader and a vice-president-designate in the Serbian government. "But Serbia is beginning to realise the depth of its problems, and that it cannot deal with all of them on its own."

Speaking at the conference "New Settlements in the Balkans after Milosevic", organised by IWPR and the Royal Institute for International Affairs, Korac called for "consistent mediation from the international community" to help Yugoslavia resolve key outstanding issues peacefully - especially the Montenegrin and Kosovan desire for independence.

"While Belgrade still opposes separation, it now seeks dialogue and negotiated constitutional adjustments," he said. "For the first time, it is determined to be a partner - rather than an isolated opponent - in bringing this about."

His remarks were echoed by Veton Surroi, publisher of the leading Kosovo Albanian daily *Koha Ditore*, who has served as an independent representative on Kosovo Albanian negotiating bodies.

"We are now living through the final stages of the disintegration of Tito's Yugoslavia - a shift from communism to democracy, from apartheid to majority rule and from violence to the rule of law," said Surroi.

He said there was an urgent need for new agreements to legalise both Montenegro's current status as a functioning state and Kosovo's "self rule".

Surroi argued that the process of Yugoslav separation has effectively already occurred, "Montenegro and Serbia now have fewer common institutions than the member states of the European Union."

As for Kosovo's independence, he continued, the priority is not to discuss international recognition but whether Kosovo is able to function as a state.

UN Resolution 1244 denies the province sovereignty for the moment, but does not prevent its practical development as an independent state with its own competencies, Surroi insisted.

Ultimately, he said, Pristina's neighbours should support Kosovo independence as this will enhance regional development.

Independence would stabilise existing borders, while ethnic partition of the province would immediately spark similar calls from radical Albanians in Macedonia, he explained.

Korac said Belgrade was beginning to comprehend the strength of support for both Kosovan and Montenegrin independence, but stressed that Serbs increasingly have pragmatic, rather than emotional, concerns over any new settlements.

"Serbia is starting its reforms 10 years late, and we are still facing problems with the constitution, statehood and borders," he said. "Our new government is not effective yet, almost 10 per cent of the population are refugees, and our citizens have an average salary of £40 [\$62] a month.

"The fear of most citizens of Serbia - and not only Serbs - is that if Montenegro gets independence, Serbia will have to apply for readmission to international institutions, which would take more than a year and would delay aid and investment."

The speakers, who both have long combined intellectual and activist careers, agreed on the necessity for Serbia to begin a debate over its past and remove those responsible for the tragedies of the past decade.

"People feel Milosevic should be tried for corruption and electoral fraud but not war crimes," Korac said. "We need to open a very deep and painful discussion of our past."

To illustrate how difficult this would be, Korac pointed out that the republic's current president Milan Milutinovic is an indicted war criminal.

Surroi noted that talks on future settlements will be jeopardised by Serbia's continued failure to arrest those suspected of war crimes, pointing out that many in the region still refused to travel to Belgrade for that reason.

Discussing Montenegro's bid for independence, Korac argued that President Milo Djukanovic is likely to face problems because much of the population there still supports a federal Yugoslavia.

On the issue of Kosovo, Korac said most people in Serbia see the continuing violence against the remaining Serbs in the province as a form of "ethnic cleansing".

Surroi acknowledged that "Albanians have to recognise the Serbs as a presence in Kosovo and not just as representatives of Belgrade.

"The Kosovars need to make a much bigger offer and show that they are willing to engage in positive discrimination on behalf of Serbs and other minorities."

But he also expressed frustration over the "West's mantra of Kosovo as a multi-ethnic society".

"Kosovo is no more mixed than Slovenia, but nobody talks all the time about multi-ethnic Slovenia," he said.

In response to questions from the audience, Korac dismissed suggestions that the "Serbian revolution" was in fact a "coup" aimed more at averting a fundamental collapse of the establishment than ushering in real changes.

"I was there and was speaking to everyone all the time, and unless they are much better at keeping secrets than I imagine, this was no organised process but a real revolution," Korac said.

Still, Korac - who has publicly clashed with President Vojislav Kostunica over his recent secretive meeting with Milosevic - acknowledged that his was a minority view within the governing coalition.

Korac warned that unless new settlements are reached on the basis of agreement, there was danger of a nationalist backlash.

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