

Minister Under Fire Over Serbian Offensive

As Belgrade approaches General Assembly vote on Kosovo with confidence, opposition in Kosovo accuses foreign minister of presiding over a debacle.

The Kosovo issue will again preoccupy minds at the UN next week – not at the Security Council, as it did a year ago, but at the General Assembly.

On October 8, the 192 member states will vote on Serbia's bid to seek the opinion of the International Court of Justice, ICJ, on the legality of Kosovo's independence.

Only 47 of these countries have recognised Kosovo's independence, and it appears that not all of them will vote against the Serbian resolution.

Sources in Brussels told Prishtina Insight that EU countries had decided to abstain from the vote in a bloc "due to the fact that not all EU member states have recognised the independence of Kosovo," as one Brussels-based diplomat put it.

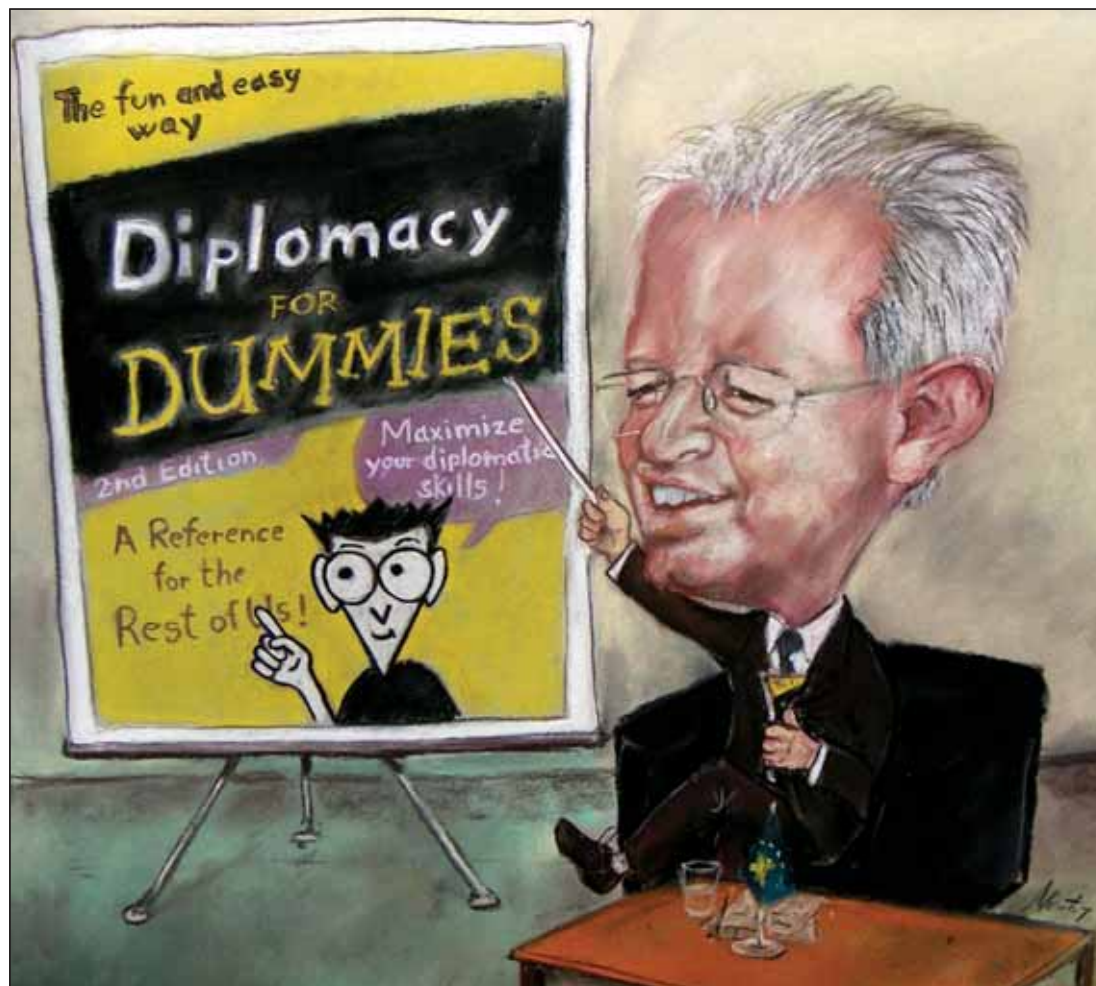
So far, 21 EU countries have recognised Kosovo. Five oppose granting recognition and a sixth, Portugal, has neither recognised Kosovo nor publicly opposed it.

Under the General Assembly rules, countries abstaining from the vote on October 8 will be counted as not voting. This means that for the case to go to the ICJ, Serbia needs the support of only a simple majority of countries that actually vote.

Serbia's Foreign Minister, Vuk Jeremic, last week appeared confident of victory. "Most UN members stand behind it [Serbia's initiative]," he said.

"Certain countries have openly told us that if the Court rules that it [recognition] was not in line with international law, they will withdraw their recognition of Kosovo," Jeremic added.

Kosovo's government disputes this prognosis but officials in Pristina do not conceal their dismay with the efforts of Foreign Minister Skender Hyseni. "If Serbia manages to send this case to the ICJ, this would be a significant failure for Kosovo's diploma-



Cartoon by Mentor Llapashtica

cy," one official told Prishtina Insight.

Albana Beqiri, an adviser to Hyseni, countered that the ministry was treating the Serbian drive with urgency. "Our strategy is to have more recognitions, to which end we've been working mostly with countries that haven't yet recognised Kosovo," she said.

Opposition parties in Kosovo have bitterly attacked the foreign ministry, claiming it lacked commitment. Besnik Tahiri, of the Alliance for Future of Kosovo, led by Ramush Haradinaj, said the

ministry had "utterly failed in the process of getting independence recognised."

At a special session of parliament on September 18, Ibrahim Gashi, from the opposition New Kosova Alliance, said the ministry was guilty of "nepotism and lack of professionalism." Adem Salihaj, of the Democratic League of Dardania, called on Hyseni to resign.

Some deputies say a cardinal error was the delay setting up Kosovo's embassies abroad. Official sources told Prishtina Insight the government had

indeed been tardy in deploying diplomats, adding that many had not yet obtained visas for the countries in which they would be residing.

President Fatmir Sejdiu has accredited ambassadors to ten countries but none has yet set off. They are still being trained in Prishtina, awaiting deployment to their respective countries.

Beqiri insisted this phase would soon be completed. "The foreign ministry is about to finish the technical issues around the opening of the embassies. This will be concluded very soon," she said.

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The BIRN Kosovo team is looking for proactive, motivated candidates with a strong command of the English language to fill the following vacant positions:

1. Marketing manager

JOB SUMMARY:

Responsible for day-to-day marketing operations as well as the overall, long term marketing strategy for Prishtina Insight.

ESSENTIAL FUNCTIONS:

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- Basic knowledge about the work of media
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- A willingness to travel locally

2. Sales agent

JOB SUMMARY:

The Sales Agent is responsible for the sale of newspaper advertising targeting the English-speaking community of Kosovo.

ESSENTIAL FUNCTIONS:

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- Promote Prishtina Insight as the top news source for the English-speaking community of Kosovo
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- Manage inventory and sales process for most effective selling

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- Excellent knowledge of English and Albanian languages
- Basic knowledge about work of the media a plus
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- A willingness to travel locally

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- Must be willing to adhere to Prishtina Insight's guidelines, deadlines and quality standards.
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Kosovo PM Vows New Spurt of Recognitions

photo by Petrit Rrahmani for Prishtina Insight



BALKAN INSIGHT, PRISHTINA

Kosovo's Prime Minister Hashim Thaci has dismissed the Serbian Foreign Minister's claims that some countries may soon retract their recognition of Kosovo's independence.

"There will be new recognitions for Kosovo that will surprise Serbia," Thaci said on October 2.

His comments were a reply to remarks by Serbia's Foreign Minister, Vuk Jeremic, that some states such as Costa Rica which have recognised Kosovo's independence may reverse their move if Serbia's resolution on the legality of Kosovo's independence is

forwarded to the International Court of Justice for its opinion.

The United Nations' 192 members will vote on Serbia's resolution on October 8. If Belgrade secures a simple majority, its resolution will be forwarded to the World Court.

Jeremic said he expects some countries to retract their recognition of Kosovo if the World Court decides Prishtina's independence was a breach of international law.

"There are certain countries that have very openly told us that if the Court rules that it was not in line with international law, they will withdraw their recognition of Kosovo," Jeremic said.

Czech Republic Recognises Kosovo Passports

photo by FolNet



BALKAN INSIGHT, PRISHTINA

The Czech Republic has reportedly, on October 1, officially recognised Kosovo's newly-issued passports, six months after having honoured Prishtina's declaration of independence from Serbia.

"The Czech Republic was added to the list of European Union countries recognising Kosovo passports," the Interior Ministry announced in a press release.

Meanwhile due to the lack of a Czech Liaison Office in Pristina, visas for Kosovars will be provided in neighbouring countries.

Until now, Kosovars travelled to the Czech Republic with travel documents issued by the United Nations Mission in Kosovo as well as Yugoslav passports, after having been supplied with the necessary visas.

Prague is also set to increase the number of its peacekeepers in Kosovo.

A report issued by the Czech government on October 1 revealed that the Czech Republic is set to strengthen its military presence in Kosovo and Afghanistan, due to the withdrawal of Czech troops from Iraq.

Through this plan, the Defence Ministry is set to increase the number of Czech soldiers serving in foreign missions from the present 900 to 1,386. Yet the plan still needs to be approved by both houses of Parliament.

Kosovo declared its independence on February 17, 2008. Swiftly backed by the United States and its main Western European allies, Kosovo has been recognised by 47 sovereign states but continuously opposed by Serbia and Russia.

Partition Would Wipe out Kosovo Serbs

BALKAN INSIGHT, PRISHTINA

Kosovo Serbs condemned the Serbian President's claim that Belgrade does not rule out Kosovo's partition, arguing the move would wipe out Serb communities living in enclaves.

Senior Kosovo Serb politicians claimed President Boris Tadic's declaration had sent a negative message to Serbs living in the enclaves that are spread out across Kosovo.

Marko Jaksic, Vice President of the Parliament of Serb Municipalities in Kosovo, seen as illegal by Kosovo's government, argued partition does not offer any alternative for local Serbs living in the other regions of the country.

"An opinion has been created that we are backing partition. Nobody wants to leave out

Gracanica, and the Pec (Peja) and Decani Patriarchates," claimed Jaksic.

Gracanica, Peja and Decani are home to important Serbian Orthodox monasteries but they lie in enclaves outside the overwhelmingly Serb-dominated regions of northern Kosovo.

Meanwhile the Vice president of the Serb National Council, moderate politician Rada Trajkovic claimed the partition of Kosovo would complete the ethnic cleansing of Serbs from Kosovo.

"Partition is against modern European values. Albanians may have such an option in exchanging northern Kosovo with the Presevo Valley," added Trajkovic.

The Presevo Valley is a small region of Serbia proper where ethnic Albanians make up a majority.

Libya 'Won't Back Serbia's Kosovo Case'

BALKAN INSIGHT, PRISHTINA

The head of Kosovar diplomacy, Skender Hyseni, is currently in New York trying to counteract a Serbian diplomatic offensive against the newborn country.

Kosovo's Foreign Minister says he was promised that Libya will not back Serbia in its bid to get the World Court's opinion on the legality of Kosovo's independence.

Skender Hyseni said the Libyan ambassador to the United Nations, Giadalla Ettalhi, pledged to back Kosovo's independence while opposing Serbia's initiative to contest this.

Serbia needs the backing of a simple majority of 192 countries at the United Nations General Assembly for its resolution on the legality of Kosovo's independence to be passed to the International Court of Justice.

The vote will be held on October 8. Earlier, Serbia's Foreign Minister said he expected some countries to retract their recognitions if the bid is successful.

Ettalhi told Hyseni that his country is carefully observing the developments in Kosovo.

Aiming to raise awareness of Kosovo, Hyseni also held a speech at Columbia University in the United States, arguing that Kosovo is a 'sui generis' case, not only historically, but politically and judicially as well.

The Ministry of Foreign reports the appearance featured a live debate in front of a large audience for more than two hours.

The Foreign Ministry has been enhancing its diplomatic offensive in the lobbying for Kosovo's independence, after coming under criticism from lawmakers and the public.

Macedonia to Decide on Kosovo 'Soon'

BALKAN INSIGHT, BRUSSELS

Macedonia's government will very soon announce its decision on recognising Kosovo's independence, Macedonia's President Branko Crvenkovski says.

Crvenkovski said in Brussels that the time for reflection and analysis regarding the independence of Kosovo has passed and it is time for decision. "I expect the government, which has the constitutional competence regarding this, to announce very soon the stance of our country concerning the independence of Kosovo," Crvenkovski said.

Earlier on Thursday he met the European Union's Enlargement Commissioner, Olli Rehn, who praised Macedonian leaders for their constructive approach towards Kosovo. "We count on your continued support for regional cooperation and our joint work for stability and progress in the Western Balkans," Rehn said.

Kosovo declared independence on February 17 this year. Macedonia and Montenegro – both home to sizeable ethnic Albanian minorities – are mulling whether to recognise Kosovo's independence. Serbia earlier this week vowed a 'response' if Podgorica and Skopje recognise Kosovo's independence from Belgrade.

"I would not like this to sound as a threat of any kind. We do not threaten anyone, we simply want to be partners with our neighbours in safeguarding regional peace and stability," Vuk Jeremic, Serbia's Foreign Minister, told Belgrade's Beta news agency. "But," he added, "no act violating our sovereignty and territorial integrity can be tolerated."

Montenegro's hesitation in recognizing Kosovo was mainly seen under an ethnic lens. A large Serbian minority, living in the former Yugoslav republic, has been quite loudly posing barriers for Kosovo's recognition.

Editor's Word

Prapë!



By Krenar Gashi

Here we go again. After a few months of analysing and enjoying the impact that the special edition of *Prishtina Insight* had in June, we're starting regular publication of our newspaper, which from now on will be in your hands every second Friday.

I must clear up one matter. We have now intentionally corrected the spelling mistake that we made in the last edition. Prishtina will now be written as it is supposed to be, and not as many international organisations, among them Kosovo's own government, write it. That means Prishtina being written as it is pronounced – with a "sh". We will not try to change the constitution, where it is unfortunately stated that "the capital of Kosovo is Pristina", but we will be using the standard spelling from now on.

This edition comes out in a very hot week of October - hot not only in the sense of the improved weather in the capital, but also in connection with many social and political developments here and around the world. In New York, an important vote is about to take place at the 63rd session of the UN General Assembly. Here, meanwhile, students from all around Kosovo have flooded back for the start of the new academic year. The Prime Minister, Hashim Thaci, is probably about to announce the name of the chief spy of our newborn country "very soon." The same timeline applies to the nomination of two deputy ministers, one for trade and industry and the other for foreign affairs.

With a woman deputy minister, our foreign diplomacy might not look like a typical men-only club, or *çajtore*, as we call it in Albanian. However, not even a woman may rescue our haphazard diplomatic efforts. Again, we may soon be feeling the discomforts of our poor diplomacy in our everyday life, such as being deprived of the freedom to travel abroad and having to cheer other nations' football teams rather than our own.

This word "again", *prapë* in Albanian, is the title of this editorial. Again, in *Prishtina Insight* you will be able to read an investigative report and many political and social pieces of analysis produced by the Balkan Investigative Reporting Network, BIRN. Besides that, we're also introducing an entertainment section for the newspaper, which we hope will continue improving. A special fun-page is also introduced to this edition, plus a page of restaurant and bars reviews. So again, enjoy reading.

Kosovo Slams Serb Leader's Partition Claim



Parliament speaker Jakup Krasniqi (left) and President Fatmir Sejdiu (right)

By Vjosa Musliu in Prishtina

Kosovo's leaders have condemned remarks by Serbia's President, Boris Tadic, that Belgrade would consider Kosovo's partition if all other options on its final status are exhausted.

"I don't want to comment on this. You have already been informed of our attitude towards Kosovo's partition," said Fatmir Sejdiu, President of Kosovo.

Kosovo's parliamentary speaker, Jakup Krasniqi, argued Kosovo has its own internationally recognised borders.

"All of those who aim to divide Kosovo, I want to say, it will end in nothing. Serbs lost their right to Kosovo with the unjust war against the Albanian majority," he said.

The comments were a reaction to Tadic's remarks on Serbian state television on Monday.

He said Kosovo's partition along ethnic lines will be considered by Belgrade if all other options regarding the former province's status have been exhausted.

"I'm ready to think about that option (partition) as well if we exhaust all other numerous alternatives. There are a lot of possibilities to find a solution within substantial autonomy," Tadic said.

"But," he added "if we drain all choices, we can then take up that alternative (partition)."

While the idea of Kosovo's partition was vivid in marginal debates, this was the first official comment. The Serbian President told national state television late on Monday that the partition of Kosovo, which declared independence in February "is not on the agenda" right now, and Belgrade insists on "the broadest possible autonomy for Kosovo within Serbia."

However, just half of the 100,000 Serbs living in Kosovo actually live in northern areas, while the rest are in isolated enclaves that dot the former province.

Although Tadic did not specify where the line of partition would run, it is most likely to include the municipalities of Zvecan, Leposavic and Zubin Potok as

well as the northern half of the flashpoint town of Mitrovica.

This area in northern Kosovo is overwhelmingly ethnically Serb and Prishtina's influence is barely felt there.

Serbia's request for debating a resolution on Kosovo at the United Nations General Assembly to seek the International Court of Justice's opinion on the legality of Kosovo's independence was accepted, and a vote will take place on October 8.

Belgrade has said it hopes that if the World Court rules in Serbia's favour the move would perhaps persuade other countries which have not yet recognised Kosovo's independence to refrain from doing so.

On the other hand, both Prishtina and many international leaders have reiterated that Kosovo's independence, which has so far been recognised by 47 countries, including the United States and the majority of the European Union member states, is irreversible.

The international community and Prishtina authorities have consistently warned that Kosovo's partition is not acceptable and, last week, a United Nations official pledged that "Mitrovica will be united in the same way it was done with divided Berlin."

Since the end of the conflict between Serbia and the ethnic Albanian majority in 1999, local Serbs have refused to integrate in the institutions led by Albanians. They constantly chose to look to Belgrade for their problems, arguing they cannot be represented by authorities in Prishtina.

Source: BalkanInsight.com



Kosovo Serbs Fear Sell Out

Serbia's diplomatic offensive over Kosovo cuts no ice with Kosovo Serbs, most of whom regard new centrist government with horror

By Nikola Krstic in Shterpce

Nenad Rakic, an art teacher in the northern, Serb-run, half of Mitrovica, in Kosovo, is too angry to follow the news. Now, he avoids reading newspapers and watching television, so as not to upset himself.

"From now on I'm only following sports and reading cartoons," he says. "I am too young to go insane."

The object of Rakic's anger is Serbia's new centrist government, loyal to President Boris Tadic. Although it has scored diplomatic successes over Kosovo in the world, mostly recently at the UN, the Serb minority in Kosovo follows Belgrade's actions with suspicion, fear and anger.

What has angered them lately is the government's decision to reinstate Serbian ambassadors to EU countries that have recognized Kosovo's independence.

A decision to remove discussion on government policy towards Kosovo from the agenda of the first session of parliament has also sparked protest. "I see that as a direct attack against us," a Kosovo Serb taxi driver from Shterpce, southern Kosovo, said.

Reiterating that Belgrade is not giving up its claim to Kosovo, Serbian diplomacy has launched an intensive diplomatic offensive aimed at halting recognition of Kosovo's independence.

Belgrade's efforts bore fruit when the UN General Committee backed Serbia's request to vote on a resolution from the International Court of Justice, ICJ, contesting Kosovo's independence.

At the same time, Belgrade has assured Kosovo Serbs that closer integration with the European Union will not come at the price of conceding recognition of Kosovo's independence.

But the majority of Kosovo Serbs do not take these assurances seriously.

Bojan Nakalamic, deputy mayor of Rahovec, told Balkan Insight "this initiative is only an advertisement ploy of the new government."

Zvonko Mihajlovic, Radical Party mayor of Shterpce, home to

10,000 Serbs, agreed. "Reinstating the ambassadors and removing the resolution on Kosovo from the parliamentary agenda sends a bad signal to Kosovo Serbs," he said.

While officials say the discussion on Kosovo was removed from the agenda with a view to reaching a broader consensus in parliament on the matter, Radical supporters are unconvinced.

To counter their suspicions, the government has undertaken other moves. The Coordination Centre for Kosovo, formerly located in Belgrade, has now moved to Gracanica, in Kosovo, for example.

The body is now to be assigned control over the spending of government funds for Kosovo, which the new government says was misspent in the past.

But Kosovo Serbs don't like the look of the new officials in overall charge of Serbian policy towards Kosovo.

Kosovo Serbs have been boycotting country's Albanian-led institutions beside the first elections organized by UNMIK, and have been organising parallel institutions under the government in Belgrade.

Ivanovic says he sees the new ministry's job as solving practical problems on the ground, while leaving "high politics" to others.

"From now on, we will be more present on the ground. We are working on equipping offices in towns with a Serbian population, and that is where our main activities will take place," told Ivanovic Belgrade daily Danas.

But that cuts no ice with Bojan Gvozdic, from Zvecan, in northern Kosovo. "Goran Bogdanovic and Oliver Ivanovic should not have been appointed to those positions because they have proven themselves traitors to the Serbian people," he said.

Even more moderate Kosovo Serbs – who support the government – have little faith in its diplomatic initiatives. Bogoljub Redzic, an engineer from Shterpce, says the initiative in the UN might be a good idea – but he doubts it will have any effect.

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Comment

Echoes of the Balkans in the Georgia Crisis

Georgia's problems may echo those of the Balkans in the 1990s but geography alone means comparisons between the Caucasus and South-east Europe can only be taken so far



By Tim Judah
in Tbilisi

Normally, when one talks of “diplomatic sources,” one is referring to the understood rule of thumb by which you do not identify a diplomat who is revealing something controversial or delicate. But I think the British ambassador to Tbilisi will not be cross with me for revealing that it was he who told me: “I have noticed more and more Balkan people turning up here.”

The ambassador did not mean large numbers of Serbs or Albanians, but rather diplomats, journalists, think-tankers, spies and who knows who else? This became obvious to me on the night of September 8-9 in the café of the Tbilisi Marriot, which serves as a hub for business and diplomacy, where I was having a drink with a diplomat who spends a lot of time in Serbia and now Georgia. “You know, Ivan Vojvoda was here,” he said, talking of the head of the Balkan Trust for Democracy, who is from Belgrade. At that same moment, up wandered Dan Bilefsky, who covers the Balkans for the New York Times.

The diplomat suggested that the agreement hammered out that day by French President Nicholas Sarkozy in Moscow meant Georgia was taking “the Tadic option”. So, I mused, the Balkans are even seeping into the diplomatic lexicon here. What he meant was that just as Boris Tadic, the Serbian President, had pledged not to use force over Kosovo, he had also said Serbia would never renounce its claim to the territory. Meanwhile, he has made the economy and European integration the priorities.

South Ossetia, Abkhazia and Kosovo were all “sub-republican” units of republics that in turn made up bigger federations. However, the idea that Kosovo was the spark that lit the fire in Georgia is absurd.

Georgia then, is indeed taking “the Tadic option.” Substitute Tadic with Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili, and Kosovo with South Ossetia and Abkhazia, and the Balkan comparison fits nicely.

An hour or so later I was at the Georgian presidency for the press



Russian Checkpoint in Karlaleti

photo by Tim Judah

conference with Messrs, Saakashvili and Sarkozy. But I found myself thinking that Javier Solana, the EU foreign policy chief, who was also there, looked much better than when I had last seen him in Pristina. Then he had appeared rather old and evasive, standing next to Hashim Thaci, the Prime Minister of Kosovo, just after Kosovo declared independence in February.

As for Bernard Kouchner, French Foreign Minister and former UN chief in Kosovo, who was also there, how does he do it? He looks almost the same age as he did in November 1991, when, under JNA shelling (and even then a French minister!) he raced into Dubrovnik. He came on a hydrofoil that had been shot at by the Yugoslav Navy and on his arm was dashingy escorting Margherita Boniver, an Italian minister.

I went to see Tamar Beruchashvili, who is Deputy State Minister for European integration. She said that the silver lining in the grey cloud of just having been stomped on by Russia is that people in [the rest of] Europe were finally understanding that Georgia is not just “in the neighbourhood” but actually part of Europe.

So far, EU “twinning” has meant, for example, sending Dutch customs officers to share their expertise in the Balkans. But perhaps a strategy needs developing by which EU-sponsored twinning projects send experts from the Balkans to Georgia.

In the meantime, a few words are needed on the much-talked-about theory that Kosovo “is

responsible for South Ossetia”. There are obviously some comparisons. South Ossetia, Abkhazia and Kosovo were all “sub-republican” units of republics that in turn made up bigger federations. However, the idea that Kosovo was the spark that lit the fire in Georgia is absurd. As Vladimir Putin, Russia’s Prime Minister, said on Thursday, in a clear articulation of the “Putin doctrine,” Georgia just needed a good punch “in the face.”

His words make one realise that in some areas the Balkans are now well “ahead” of the former Soviet Union, in the sense that

few Balkans leaders now use this kind of language. Indeed, with the recent apparent demise of the Serbian Radical Party, we may be able to bury the era in which political dialogue was defined by the likes of the Radical leader, Vojislav Seselj, who once infamously talked of gouging out Croat eyes with rusty spoons.

But some comparisons are not welcome, however appropriate. My impression is that Georgians don’t like to accept that their country shares many problems and issues with the countries of the Balkans.

Serbia is now hoping to have its

motion on Kosovo’s independence tabled at the UN General Assembly, which will ask the International Court of Justice in The Hague to give an advisory opinion on the legality of Kosovo’s declaration of independence. So, I put it to David Bakradze, the speaker of Georgia’s parliament, who is close to Saakashvili, that Georgia would have an interest in associating his country with this motion, or launching a parallel one on South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

I know certain diplomats have suggested the same thing. But the Georgian speaker thought it a bad idea. The Kosovars had come to independence, he said, though a process in which they were the victims of ethnic cleansing. In Georgia’s case, he continued, Georgians are the ones who have been ethnically cleansed. In 1990, only 17.8 per cent of the population of Abkhazia was Abkhaz.

One could answer that with the words, “Yes but the Abkhaz had been ‘cleansed’ previously by the Georgians” – and Serbs argue that since 1999 and before the era of Slobodan Milosevic, it was they who were ethnically cleansed by Albanians in Kosovo. But what would be the result? A lot of hot air. Georgia’s problem is simple. It is just in the wrong place. Had it been the seventh Yugoslav republic, it might have lost South Ossetia or Abkhazia, or even seized them back, as Croatia’s Franjo Tudjman did with the Krajina. But it would now be heading to Brussels, and not torn between Washington and Moscow, seeking salvation in the “Tadic option”.

Source: *BalkanInsight.com*

TV Adverts To Push Kosovo Independence

Kosovo’s government says it will hire an international public relations firm to promote Kosovo on global television networks and push for greater recognition of its independence.

“An international agency will be hired to promote Kosovo’s image in the prominent television networks around the world, such as CNN, BBC and the like,” Kosovo’s deputy prime minister Hajredin Kuci, told *Balkan Insight*.

The number two in Kosovo’s government said this new lobbying initiative will resemble the way some countries such as Malaysia, India and Greece broadcast adverts promoting

tourism on the main international television networks.

According to Kuci, the aim “is to present Kosovo as a stable country of possibilities, tolerance and equal opportunities.”

The new project will be supported with complementary activities led by the Presidency, the Foreign Ministry and our international friends, Kuci told *Balkan Insight*.

On Thursday the Kosovo government announced it was setting aside €3 million for a new lobbying strategy to push for more countries to recognise its February 17 declaration of independence.

Kosovo’s government, especial-

ly the foreign ministry, has been at the centre of criticism by members of the public in Kosovo amid claims it is not doing enough to push for greater recognition of its independence.

The United States and most European Union countries are among the 47 that have recognised Pristina’s move.

Members of Kosovo’s parliament argued in last week’s session that nepotism, a lack of expertise and vision in the Foreign Ministry have been largely blamed by the public for the sluggish recognition of Kosovo’s independence.

Source: *BalkanInsight.com*

Dervishes Keep Whirling in Western Kosovo

Many people think 'whirling dervishes' have all but disappeared from the Balkans but in Kosovo's western towns these peaceful mystics are going strong



photo by Petrit Rrahmani for Prishtina Insight

Whirling dervishes during their performance in Prishtina

By Refki Alija in Prizren

Azbije Ceska enters the Saracan Sufi Muslim shrine Saracan in Prizren in southern Kosovo with her 12-year-old son and another woman from neighbouring Rahovec. She has had a bad dream, she explains, "which is why I have come to pray".

Ceska, her son and her friend are dervishes. In Kosovo, there are as many as 12 orders of this Sufi sect, all of which trace their origins back to various saints and teachers and who unite in viewing Ali, nephew of the Prophet Muhammad, as their founder.

At the shrine, or "tekke", Ceska makes her way towards the eight grave headstones of deceased dervish clerics, known as shehs, which are covered with green velvet.

Ceska is one of thousands of dervishes in Kosovo. The exact number is unknown because, according to Mumin Llama, a local sheh from Gjakova, "each tariqah, or order of dervishes, takes account only of its own members".

Adrihusein Shehu, a sheh from the order of Rifa'iyyah from Prizren, believes that before the wars of the 1990s about 50,000 dervishes of all orders were spread around the former Yugoslavia, mainly in Bosnia, Kosovo and Macedonia.

Most dervishes in Kosovo are ethnically Albanian, though some are Bosniaks, Turks and even Roma. "Since the wars, the number of dervishes in Kosovo has remained roughly the same," Shehu says.

Ismail Hasani, a Kosovar expert in religious studies, says most dervishes in Kosovo live in Prizren, Gjakova, and Rahovec, with smaller numbers in other towns.

As he explains, the first dervish-

es were mendicant ascetics who lived off the charity of the pious on their travels. The word dervish derived from Dari meaning "door". A dervish, or darvish, was one "who goes from door to door".

"Most dervishes in Kosovo are ethnically Albanian, though some are Bosniaks, Turks and even Roma"

Adrihusein Shehu

Adrihusein Shehu inherited his title as "sheh" from his recently deceased father, Xhemail. Under dervish tradition, the calling is hereditary and some titles have passed from father to son over the passage of centuries.

Shehu says that the "whirling dervishes", as the world knows them, are not performing an ordinary dance. "It is something we call majdhb, an ability to reach a certain state of mind. It is a secret which is passed on for generations," he says.

Because of the pacifism of Sufis, they took little part in Kosovo's armed conflicts and most of the tekke in Kosovo survived the devastation of the late 1990s, Shehu says.

The Serbs left them largely alone in Prizren. "A part of Prizren was set on fire but we believe the downtown was preserved because of our tekke, and none of the local dervishes was murdered," he notes.

However, if people were often spared, books were not. "What hurts is that our library, containing 1,500 books, was set on fire," Mumin Llama says. "The losses included 39 scrolls dating from around 1719, which are irreplaceable."

"Dervishes have their own place in the Islamic Community of Kosovo, and acting on the proposal of the various orders, the mufti appoints individual shehs by giving mensura," Resul Rexhepi, secretary of the Islamic Community of Kosovo, told Balkan Insight.

But among ordinary believers, differences are obvious. Zeqir Shehu, 80, a dervish from Prizren, says the Sunni majority "often see us as something weird at the very least, though we've gotten used to it".

At the Saracan shrine, around 70 believers have gathered in the tekke by 10 pm for the weekly zikr. After exchanging small talk and pleasantries, the sheh taking part dress up in colourful garb, bow, and begin the zikr.

"What hurts is that our library containing 1,500 books was set on fire"

Mumin Llama

Led by the sheh, they start singing in rhythmic unison, with the theme changing every 10 minutes. After around half an hour, they begin standing up and whirling themselves into a trance.

Later, the dervishes take up their defts, shallow drums, which produce a high-pitched sound, stepping up the pace of the dance. The prayer reaches its climax.

As they leave the courtyard of the tekke, they recite a last prayer over the graves of ancient shehs and kiss the wooden fence three times. Shehu is delighted. "It was a good zikr," he says, beaming.

Source: BalkanInsight.com

Profits Double at Prishtina Airport



Prishtina International Airport

Prishtina International Airport has announced a "record profit" for the busy summer season of more than €5 million.

"850,000 passengers have been departing and flying from Prishtina Airport while net profit for three months went up to € 5.4 million," a press release from the airport reads.

During the same period last year, the airport's profit was some €2.7 million.

Agron Mustafa, the newly appointed managing director of the airport, told Balkan Insight that the profit is the result of a new business approach by this public company.

"The new, customer-oriented approach is the main reason for this success," said Mustafa.

"We are creating better condi-

tions for both passengers and airlines, something that Prishtina airport lacked in the past," he added.

A 2006 report by the UN Office of Internal Oversight Services, accused the United Nations Mission in Kosovo, UNMIK, of allowing "systematic corruption" in Prishtina's International Airport.

The airport's former managing director, Afrim Aziri, was suspended from his position after being indicted for corruption and mismanagement of company funds.

The new management, besides doubling its profit, says it has decreased the expenses of the company by 10 percent compared to previous years.

Prishtina airport is the only international airport in Kosovo.

EU Agrees Aid Package for Aspirants

The EU's executive arm has agreed how to spend €4.5 billion in aid to the bloc's candidate countries in 2008-10, giving priority to improving governance and the rule of law.

The European Commission's decision brings closer the release of the European Union funds to Croatia, Turkey, Macedonia, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia and Kosovo.

"The road towards the EU is paved with reforms to improve the everyday lives of citizens and to comply with the strict EU accession criteria," EU Enlargement Commissioner Olli Rehn said in a statement.

The Commission said the €1.8 billion of aid for Turkey would focus on supporting the stability of institutions so as to guarantee fundamental rights and freedoms, democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for minorities.

Turkey is an official EU candidate, but its membership is seen as distant, if achievable at all.

Croatia, which hopes to wrap



Olli Rehn

up its accession talks next year, is to receive €451 million.

Its priorities include strengthening state institutions, cross-border cooperation and preparations for the country's participation in the EU's regional rural development policies.

Of the other candidates, all from the Western Balkans, Serbia is to receive €584 million in 2008.

Real Estate

Dangers Abound in Kosovo Building Boom

Construction firms are transforming Kosovo's skyline with one high-rise after another - but as most have no planning permission, buyers could lose in the end.



photo by Petrit Rrahmani for Pristina Insight

Illegal builds are a constant headache for those dabbling in real estate in Kosovo

By Besiana Xharra in Pristina

Fahri Kumnova, from Gjakova in western Kosovo, is taking a good look at a new apartment block in Pristina. He wants to buy a flat in the capital but is worried the building may not have planning permission and does not know where to turn.

"I have no clue what to do," he says. "The construction company tells me the building has permission, while the municipal authority claims almost no new blocks have a licence."

For three months, Kumnova has toured many of the new buildings that have shot up recently in Pristina, crowding the city skyline.

But his worries about whether the buildings have any right to exist are so great that he is thinking of buying a pricier apartment in one of the city's remaining older blocks, whose planning permission was granted years ago.

Illegal builds and lack of urban planning is a constant headache for those dabbling in real estate in Kosovo. Development has been chaotic since the Serbian pullout in 1999, since when construction companies and entrepreneurs have built numerous high-rises, transforming the urban profile for good.

Many visitors say they no longer recognise Pristina when they return after an absence of a few years, thanks to the number

of new builds. Most have no construction permits. City hall in Pristina says 70 per cent of about a hundred new apartment buildings erected since 1999 have no permission and do not form part of the urban plan.

"Some construction companies were careful to secure permits but most of the buildings were built without permission," Muhamet Gashi, spokesperson for the City of Pristina, confirms.

This is reflected in the price tag. The cost of buying flats in new buildings is markedly lower than in the old housing stock dating from the 1950s and 1960s.

Staff working in real estate accept that many clients are afraid to buy new apartments because they know most have no permits.

"Buyers are most interested in apartments constructed before the 1999 conflict, even those that are expensive than the new ones," Muse Maloku, of Sazani real estate agency, says.

Maloku says the price differential between the two is significant. The average price per square metre in an old building is about 1,000 euro, while in new buildings it is only about 750 euro.

Safety is another consideration. "New apartments don't meet any particular construction standards, so people don't want to risk buying them," Maloku notes.

Fahri Kumnova is a buyer caught in the cleft stick of this dilemma. He is wondering whether

to save money by buying a new flat for 750 euro per square metre, or play safe and pay 1,000 euro or more for an older property. "These prices are very expensive," he laments. "It makes no sense that old apartments are much more expensive than the new ones."

Municipal authorities advice to buyers is not to rush, and to check out before putting down any money. "If you buy a flat in a building that lacks planning permission, you risk losing your property in future," Muhamet Gashi warns.

He says owners of illegal builds in Kosovo could suffer the same fate as their counterparts in other parts of Europe.

In Spain, where illegal builds on the south coast have become especially rampant, owners of those properties have seen them demolished, and received no compensation.

Gashi said Kosovo's parliament is now mulling a new law on building, which could have the same effect. "Once we have the new law, we will license only those buildings that pose no risk to the city's layout, while all the others will be destroyed," he says.

Buyers like Fahri Kumnova say it is up to the government and local councils to sort the matter out as quickly as possible. "Ten years has been past since the end of war and it is high time they dealt with this issue," he says.

Source: BalkanInsight.com

Analysis

Balkan Banks Feel Blessed By Isolation

Financial Institutions in Southeast Europe remain bullish about growth prospects, despite the global downturn.

By Besar Likmeta in Tirana

The Balkan banking sector has registered strong growth rates over the past year despite the financial crisis hitting Wall Street, EU and Asian markets, a Raiffeisen Bank report, CEE Banking 2008, says.

"Total banking assets in the region grew by more than 30 per cent in 2007, seemingly defying the impact of the US sub-prime mortgage crisis on the availability and pricing of external funding," the report, published on September 28, states.

"Although the contagion of the crisis to other parts of the financial market and the global economy, as well as its extended duration, have left their marks on the banking sector development in the first half of 2008, growth dynamics for the region remained strong," it adds.

The CEE Banking Report offers in-depth coverage of the most vibrant banking markets in the region.

Low levels of regional exposure to international financial institutions, weak integration with international markets and the strong capitalization of international banks operating in the region, are some cited factors behind the region's apparent immunity to the economic downturn.

However, the region's financial experts and top bankers warn against complacency.

"We judge that there are risks that have a strong chance of materializing and inflicting heavy damage to our financial system," Ardian Fullani, Albania's Central Bank governor, notes.

The region remains heterogeneous economically and in terms of EU integration. Slovenia joined the EU in 2004. Romania and Bulgaria joined in 2007; Croatia is short-listed as next to join the club, having commenced accession negotiations in 2006.

Macedonia signed a Stabilisation and Association Agreement in 2001, the first step towards membership, and gained candidate status in 2005. But it has not started accession talks like Croatia.

Albania, Serbia and Bosnia Herzegovina are further behind. They have only signed Stabilisation and Association Agreements and have not obtained candidate status.

The report explains that despite high growth rates in the region, "the degree of financial

intermediation remains low, with the notable exception of Croatia and Bulgaria".

Further legal and institutional reforms, obligatory as part of the EU integration process, should also have lasting positive effects on regional economies and in banking.

If anything, the region's economies now need more corporate lending. "Whereas in previous years the focus was on maintaining business profitability and diversifying the sources of revenue, now it's how to fund lending growth," Rushan Khvesyuk, head of Alpha Bank, said at a recent forum held by Euromoney Magazine.

Because of the credit crunch in international markets, businesses in the region are increasingly turning to local banks for loans. In an increasing number of countries in the region mortgage loans have become one of the most dynamic products in the retail segment.

Some of the legal and judicial requirements for EU entry, such as the creation of a reliable land register, new legislation and more efficient court procedures, have provided a framework for banks to be able to grant mortgage loans on a larger scale than before.

Financial institutions were able to sustain the strong growth in deposits from recent years as confidence grew in the banking sector, in tandem with the completion of bank privatisation, other institutional reforms and rising income levels.

Slovenia has the strongest deposit base in the region with almost 108 per cent of GDP in 2007, following a significant increase since joining the EU single currency area, the eurozone.

This already compares favourably with the 144 per cent level recorded in the eurozone, the report notes, adding that the increased confidence and trust in the banking sector in the Balkans, boosted by privatisation and the entry of foreign banks, has been reflected in a steady increase of deposits as a percentage of GDP.

"Many Western bankers have learnt a surprising lesson," Andrea Treichl, board chairman of Erste Bank, told the Euromoney forum. "The view has always been that banking in the West is safe and eastern markets are risky," he said. "However, banks have had a very responsible attitude of doing business in this part of the world."

Does Kosovo Need an Opera House?

With so many Kosovars jobless, plans to build a national opera, named after the country's first president, are proving controversial.

By Arif Muharremi in Prishtina

Months after Kosovo declared independence, the authorities are about to give the go-ahead to plans to build a new opera and national theatre. Named after Ibrahim Rugova, Kosovo's first president, the building will cost more than €20 million. Official enthusiasm for the project is high, with the ministry of culture insisting a temple for high art is a must-have for the newborn country.

But many disagree. With the population facing staggeringly high levels of unemployment, critics say an opera house is just not the first priority. Kosovo's existing National Theatre is undoubtedly in crisis. Staging only a few plays annually, the premises has increasingly become a location for commemorative and political gatherings rather a home for plays and dance.

"We need an opera house," Valton Beqiri, minister for culture, says. "Kosovo needs this building, and Kosovo institutions need it, too."

But Artan Muhaxhiri, a cultural sociologist, begs to differ. "The fact that we have remained undeveloped has nothing to do with the fact that we lack an opera house," he maintains.

Illir Bajri, a musician and composer in Prishtina, is also sceptical. "The worst justification for building an opera house is to say that we must have one because Berlin, London and Paris have one," he says.



The Opera House in Sydney

Bajri says the logic behind the project is faulty. "Such a structure is only needed when the production and cultural level is at such a high level that it requires a better space," he adds.

The large sum of money to be spent on the opera has caused resentment among other members of the artistic community, some of whom fear their own departments may lose out. Members of Kosovo's struggling Philharmonic Orchestra are worried. They have difficulties meeting the high cost of hiring foreign musicians for their concerts. Baki Jashari, the Philharmonic's director, says it's a battle coming up with the 5,000 euros that it costs, on average, to get a notable foreign musician to play.

To counter accusations that opera is an elite pursuit, open only to the rich, Beqiri says the ministry will work to ensure ordinary people can see the performances. "We will ensure there are

tickets for 20, 30 or 50 euro, which is reasonable", Beqiri says. But Muhaxhiri is unmoved by the promise of budget-priced entries to Swan Lake. "There are higher priorities than building an opera, which it will be difficult to maintain properly," he insists. "It is a mistake to undertake such an initiative, which just doesn't correspond with reality in Kosovo."

Ordinary Kosovars, who receive an average monthly salary of some €250, are also of two minds. "Opera isn't sexy," Rina Meta, a local journalist says. "The only time we listen to classical music is when somebody famous dies."

But others are rallying to the idea, saying a proper opera house will proclaim Kosovo's European identity to the world. "We must have an opera house," one Prishtina resident says, enthusiastically. "It's a must for Kosovo, as we want to join Europe."

70-year-old volunteer

Aziz Tahiri is an old man from Mitrovica region. But at 70, he is still hard at work every day, mending and filling holes in Kosovo's ruined roads.

The former employee of the Trepca mine is not getting paid for his labour. Unemployed and without a pension, he does it voluntarily.

"Nobody pays me. I just can't stay in all day without working," Tahiri told BIRN's TV show.

He said his wife had urged him not to do the work, as people might think he had gone insane.

Halil Bajrami, driver of the bus that passes along the roads in Bajgora, where Tahiri is currently working, brings Tahiri some snacks from time to time.

"Whenever we bring him some food, he is absolutely delighted and carries on with his voluntary work," Bajrami said.

The driver said he would give Tahiri as many free rides as he wanted, so he could continue

mending the potholed roads of Bajgora.

Not everyone is so helpful, however. Tahiri sadly noted that someone recently stole his spade. "I wonder who needed it?" Tahiri asked, scratching his head.

He aims to carry on working in winter, even when the roads are covered with snow. "I also went to Prishtina to fill in some of the holes in the streets, there," he explained.

People from other parts in Kosovo have increasingly heard of Tahiri's voluntarily efforts.

But officials from Mitrovica Municipality said they could not offer the devoted old man a job on account of his age.

"Tahiri is not of working age and deserves a pleasant and quiet retirement," Rasim Veseli, head of the local development department in Mitrovica, said.

But Tahiri said he needed a job owing to his economic hardships, adding that he would still want to work, even if he was extremely rich.

65-year-old Takes to the Road

Isuf Muhaxheri, from the village of Sllatina, in Fushe Kosova municipality, has gained record status in Kosovo. He is the oldest person in Kosovo's history to receive a driving license.

The 65-year-old said he needed a license because he was sick and tired of other people driving him around. Born in the Second World War in 1943, he said he felt confident now of taking to the roads.

"I haven't been confident in the

past, driving without a license in my hand," Muhaxheri said on BIRN's TV show.

Muhaxheri's score in his driving test was above-average.

He said both a car and a driving license were necessary to persons of his age, as they often could not walk as well as they once did.

Muhaxheri urged everyone, regardless of age, to take the same initiative. According to him, where there's a will, there's a way.

Running Out of Solutions for Water Shortage

Fed up with not being able to take a shower? Be warned – unless more people pay bills on time, the erratic water supply is not going to get better.

By Besiana Xharra in Prishtina

If you are a resident of Prishtina, you have probably noticed that the water supply is as irregular as ever. The times when you must wait to take a shower, or do your laundry are, if anything, even more limited than before.

According to the records of the city water company, the Mat, Vreshta, Sofali and Bregu i Diellit districts enjoy a water supply for only two or three hours a day.

Other neighbourhoods experiencing severe reductions in supply for six or more hours a day are Dardania, Ulpiana, Lakrishte and Arberia. In other words, most of the city is suffering.

"There is no worse feeling than waking up and not having water to take a shower, it's driving me crazy," complains Nexhmedin Sylja, of the Bregu i Diellit area, known in English as Sunny Hill.

The reason for the frequent cuts

is quite simply a lack of water in Prishtina's two reservoirs.

According to the water company, levels in Badovc lake, which supplies about 30 per cent of the city, are 11 metres lower than usual.

The rest of the city, supplied from Batllava lake, is little better off. The level in this lake is about seven metres lower than usual, despite recent heavy rain.

Officials from the water company say the frequent stoppages are not going to change any time soon.

This leaves many people in Prishtina fearing for the consequences. Apart from the sheer inconvenience of not being able to take bath when they want to, domestic appliances are at risk.

"Water deficiency causes a lot of damage," says Viktor Lekaj, of Sunny Hill. "Water heaters can break if we forget to turn them off during the night, when there is no water at all."

Lekaj says rodents are another threat. When there is no water,

rats move into the pipes, blocking them and coming into homes. "When no water is circulating, rats invade the system, and this is very dangerous," he says.

Some homeowners say they don't see why they should pay for water they don't get. Florije Ademi, who lives in the Ulpiana area, says she won't pay her next water bill, until she sees it running for 24 hours a day.

"We have severe water reductions for six or more hours per day, so why should I pay for water, when I don't have it?" Ademi asked.

Arjeta Mjeku, spokesperson for the city's water company, counsels against taking that course, as it will only make the situation worse.

Apart from low water levels in the reservoirs, non-payment of bills and misuse of water by residents are key reasons why the company has problems supplying the city with water, Mjeku explained.



Misuse of water is leading to the poor supply

"It's misuse of water by residents that has caused water levels to fall, leading to the poor supply," she said. The problem is exacerbated by consumers refusing to pay the company on time at the end of the month. Some 40 per cent of consumers do not pay water bills at all.

But now the company is going to start cutting off water to those who do not pay.

"During October, our company will discontinue water services to some entire apartment buildings as well as to individual homes," Mjeku warned. "It's the only way for us to collect our debts."

Smugglers Find Haven in Kosovo's North

Ethnic tensions in Kosovo's northern region, bordering Serbia, create an ideal environment for traders to smuggle goods into Europe's newest state – to the detriment of local businesses

By Krenar Gashi and Muhamet Hajrullahu in Pristina and Mitrovica

Alush Maloku, an Albanian from the divided Kosovo town of Mitrovica, prefers to buy fuel in the town's northern, Serb-controlled part.

Although ethnic hostility between Serbs and Albanians remains high in Mitrovica, following Kosovo's declaration of independence from Serbia in February 17, it doesn't stop Maloku from trading with the "other side", when the goods are smuggled and on sale at a lower price.

"A litre of fuel in the north... is up to 30 cents cheaper than in the south," says Maloku, who is well aware that the fuel has been illegally smuggled into Kosovo from Serbia.

An investigation by Balkan Insight can reveal that such trading in contraband goods in northern Kosovo is rife, and that gasoline and many other goods are being smuggled in from Serbia and sold to clients on both sides of Kosovo's ethnic divide.

Much of the trade involves Kosovo Albanians going to Serb-dominated areas to buy fuel and other goods for which no import tax or customs has been paid. Citizens of the Republic of Serbia are also doing the same, however.

The trade is depriving the cash-strapped Kosovo state of desperately needed funds. Tens of millions of euros are lost annually as a result of tax evasion. Legal businesses also suffer.

Kosovo's authorities and the UN mission in Kosovo, UNMIK, admit smuggling is booming and that the country is losing out, though calculations of the scale of the losses vary.

Kosovo police and customs officers say they cannot control the smuggling because they are not present on Kosovo's two northernmost border crossings with Serbia.

Because Kosovo Serbs in the north do not accept Kosovo's independence, they have forced police and customs to withdraw from the border crossings, leaving management of the frontier to KFOR – the NATO-led peace-keeping mission.

But KFOR is not controlling the illegal import of goods effectively. While they claim they are doing everything to fight smuggling, Balkan Insight can reveal that smugglers operate freely in the area and that the "grey" trade is carried on more or less openly.

"Nobody prevents me from buying fuel in the north," Maloku says. "It's all being done openly. Police don't stop me and neither do the customs."

"UNMIK have allowed smuggling in Mitrovica"

Bajram Rexhepi, Mitrovica mayor



A litre of fuel in Kosovo's north is up to 30 cents cheaper than in the south

The police – less than reliable:

Driving from the Kosovo capital of Pristina to the northern town of Leposavic, it's hard to miss the police checkpoint just outside ethnically divided Mitrovica, where police flag down vehicles and warn Albanians not to proceed into Serb-dominated northern Kosovo "for your own security".

A few miles further on, a mobile unit of the Kosovo customs service stops and checks trucks and vehicles heading in other direction, which they assume are entering Kosovo from Serbia.

But Kosovo customs officials have not been present on the two border points between Kosovo and Serbia since Kosovo declared independence in February.

A police source told Balkan Insight that the smugglers often take advantage of links with corrupt individual officers.

"The smugglers initially check whether our forces and customs are patrolling the highway. Once they clear that, they bring in the trucks with fuel. They also have inside sources within the police," the source said.

Veton Elshani, Kosovo police spokesperson, told Balkan Insight a few officers were under investigation regarding the smuggling.

But Elshani said most officers were doing everything in their power to stop the smuggling.

When Balkan Insight visited a police checkpoint, they were indeed confiscating all the fuel that they found, apart from what was in the car petrol tanks. Angry drivers complained of harassment.

No customs patrols on the border

Police and crime experts blame the tensions between the Kosovo government and the Serb-held north for the epidemic of smuggling.

Besim Hoti, police spokesperson in Mitrovica, says the absence of customs officers on the border crossings was the main reason why smuggling flourishes. Hoti described it is a political issue and said it was not up to the Kosovo police to solve it. "It is in KFOR's mandate to guard the borders", Hoti said.

The Albanian mayor of Mitrovica, Bajram Rexhepi, also blamed Kosovo's international administration for the smuggling boom.

"Until June 15, when Kosovo's constitution entered into force, the customs service belonged to UNMIK," he said. "UNMIK have allowed smuggling activities to become established."

"We don't want our officers to loose hands and legs again"

A UN official

However, the lack of any clear division of competences between KFOR and the international forces on one side, and the Kosovo police on the other, has aggravated the sense of muddle and confusion.

Herve Cozette, KFOR spokesperson, insisted that the Kosovo police was "in charge of all investigations regarding rule of law, not KFOR". Cozette said if KFOR noticed smuggling activity, their duty extended no further than reporting the matter to the police.

In the meantime, Bashkim Citaku, regional head of customs in Mitrovica, says customs officers are ready to resume their work on the border, but there is no political will for their reinstatement.

The UN said this was not a simple issue. "What stops us sending the customs back in the border

points is what happened in March 17," a senior UN official said, referring to burning down of the border points and the clashes with local Serbs that left UN police officers and KFOR soldiers injured.

"Seventeen soldiers lost their arms and legs. We don't want to see this happening again, which is why we are not sending the customs back to the border," he said.

The reinstatement of the border points is one of six issues that UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon mentioned in a letter on June 12 to the presidents of Serbia and Kosovo. It is also one of the items of negotiation between Kosovo and Serbia, mediated by the UN mission.

Alexander Ivanko, UNMIK spokesperson, said the UN was doing everything possible. "We have put the mobile customs controls in the area. [But] because of security, we need an agreement on this, because Belgrade at least has to agree that customs needs to be reinstated," he said.

Local businesses suffer, as does the budget

Eshref Latifi, who runs a petrol station on the Vushtri-Mitrovica highway, complains that smugglers are fast destroying his business.

"During the same period of time last year we would have had a daily turnover of 3,000 euros and now it's hardly 300," he lamented.

"We're losing costumers," he added. The smugglers "sell fuel with much lower prices from the north, as it's not taxed, and people don't buy it here any more".

Sources in Kosovo Customs told Balkan Insight at least 10 large trucks containing fuel enter Kosovo every day, crossing the two northern border points with Serbia.

"If this fuel was taxed, the Kosovo budget would gain some

10,000 euros from each truck," one official said. "This means we lose at least 3 million euros a month."

The Kosovo daily Koha Ditore, last month claimed the loss was higher. "Kosovo loses more than 5 million euros [a month] from imported oil alone," the newspaper concluded.

Citaku, from the customs in Mitrovica, insists the figure is lower. "It's roughly 1.5 million euros per month", he said. Bedri Hamza, deputy minister of economy, agreed. "We should refer to the statistics of the custom services," Hamza said. "The current situation is not catastrophic, though it is worrying," he added. Naim Maloku, a deputy from the opposition Alliance for the Future of Kosovo, said the problem will never be solved until the government comes up with an initiative to resolve the wider problem with the north.

"They lack a concrete plan about what should be done," Maloku said in a debate organised by BIRN.

Mayor Rexhepi meanwhile insists that "in order to stop the smuggling, we need to establish an efficient rule of law... The informal economy was present in Mitrovica even before independence."

Many locals in Mitrovica agree, saying that is precisely what lured them to the town in the first place. Aca, a Kosovo Serb from western Kosovo, left his village and moved to northern Mitrovica just before independence to open a cafe.

"Mitrovica is a perfect place to run a business," he said. "You don't need to pay any taxes or any kind of bills."

In the meantime, the people of Kosovo continue to buy their smuggled oil and other goods in the north. "Why not," asks Alush Maloku. "People do it all the time, because they can."

Source: BalkanInsight.com

photo by Petrit Rrahmani for Pristina Insight

Tim Judah: Kosovo, What Everyone Needs to Know

Small country, big dispute. So it's ever been. Think of Israel, Lebanon, East Timor, Ulster. One could go on

Reviewed by Marcus Tanner

Rewind the historical clock to the mid-19th century in Europe, and the continent was torn in two over the two small duchies of Schleswig and Holstein and whether they should go to Germany or Denmark.

It's a forgotten dispute now but for a couple of years it was touch and go whether the duchies would drag several great powers, Britain included, into a general war. Lord Palmerston quipped famously that only three people in Europe could get their head round this bitter quarrel, which pitted the rights of the Danish crown against the new principle of self-determination. "One was a German professor who has gone mad," the British Liberal leader declared, "the other was Prince Albert who is dead and the third is myself – but I have forgotten all about it."

Many might feel tempted to echo those words when it comes to Kosovo, a patch of land the same size as Jamaica, which has generated a remarkable amount of international heat compared to its size.

Fortunately, though, we have Tim Judah as our guide through this particular dispute, and he has neither gone mad, nor died, nor forgotten the salient details of what Serbs used to call the "Kosovo knot". On the contrary, in this small, concise book, he provides a detailed but very readable account of Kosovo's history

as it has unfolded over the past few centuries, ending with the independence declaration of February 2008 and its immediate aftermath.

Writing an impartial guide to Kosovo is like writing an impartial guide to the Israel/Palestine dispute. So contested and fought-over are even basic historical facts that ploughing an even furrow between them can seem impossible.

But Judah, who will be well known to most readers of Balkan Insight, prudently avoids being made hostage to either Serbian or Albanian versions of Kosovo's history, often by the simple method of supplying the reader with both accounts. He is careful to point out that many of the facts and figures used by either side, such as the number of Serbian colonists between the war, or the number of Serbian refugees after 1999, are suspect; supposedly reliable data has always been a tool in the propaganda war.

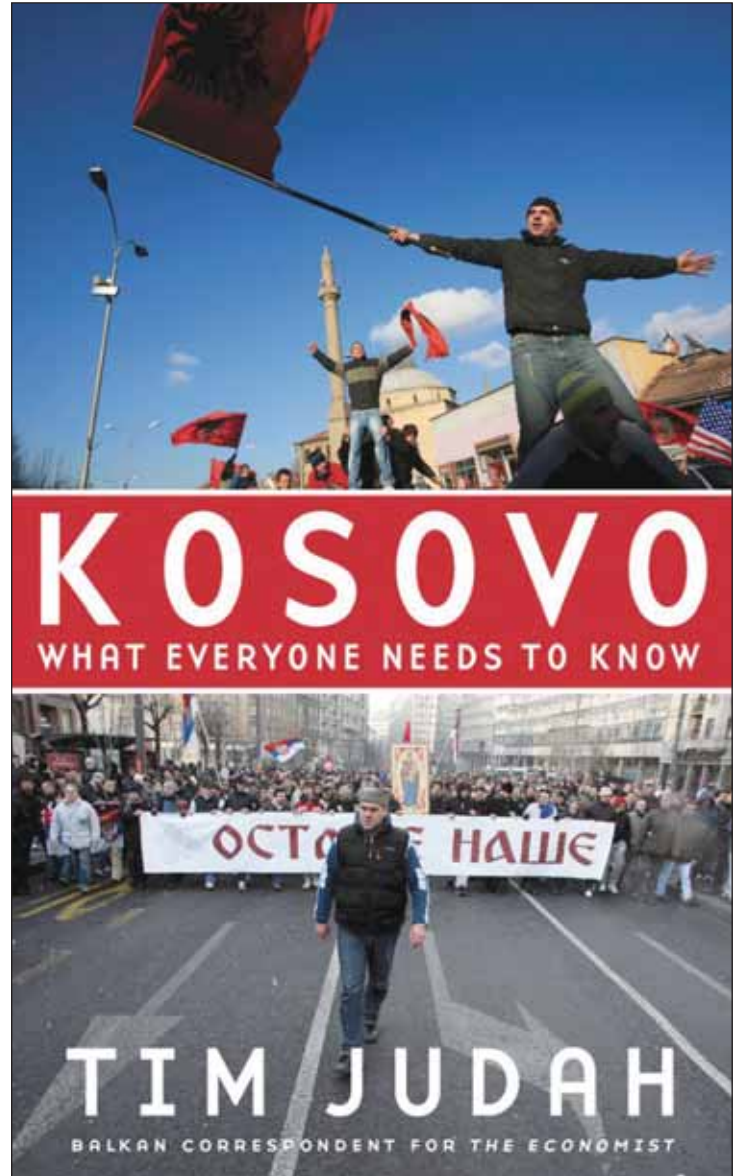
Judah is now, surely, the unchallenged doyen of foreign correspondents in the Balkans, which is one more reason to welcome this book. He has crisscrossed the region countless times since his debut there for The Times in the early 1990s. Long after most of us packed up and left, he remains at his post, for many years now the correspondent of The Economist, listening, talking and interviewing.

His experience on the ground, gathered over two decades in

most of the Balkan lands – Serbia, Kosovo, Macedonia and Bosnia in particular – must therefore be counted as unique. For that reason, his lightest word on the subject is heavy. Fortunately, though, possession of an extensive body of knowledge has not led to ponderousness or a tendency to preach – the besetting sins of so many foreign writers on the Balkans. Instead, the facts, such as they can be ascertained, are laid out with a disarmingly light touch, alongside often contrasting narratives, and the reader left to judge for him or herself.

Anyone expecting a mass of colourful anecdotes, along the lines of those contained in Judah's other works on Serbia and Kosovo will be disappointed. The title of the book in that respect is quite self-explanatory. The purpose of this OUP series is avowedly educational – to inform rather than to entertain. That it does very nicely, for which reason Judah's book should be an indispensable addition to the library of every student of Balkan history as well as to every foreign diplomat intending to head to the Balkans, or wrestle with the complexities of the "Kosovo knot" at home.

Tim Judah is the author of 'Kosovo: War and Revenge' and 'The Serbs, History, Myth and the Destruction of Yugoslavia'. 'Kosovo, What Everyone Needs to Know' is published by Oxford University Press. See: www.oup.com



Kosovar Talent: Lorik Sylejmani

Weird but true

In every edition of Prishtina Insight, we will promote one Kosovar artist and his work. This week, we chose to feature Lorik Sylejmani, a postmodern artist from Prishtina. Sylejmani is a radio and TV producer. His favourite multimedia artist is Laurie Anderson, although he confesses that he is so in love with Japan.

Although influenced by the underground art of the 80's, such as Bauhaus and Joy Division, Sylejmani's work maintains its unique spirit. He calls his style "neon, concrete and rock'n'roll".

If you would like to purchase any of the presented works, you can contact the author directly at loriksylejmani@yahoo.com.



My generation



Banana



A Song



O Superman



My generation 4

Restaurant review

Alegro

Reviewed by Ronan Macnamara

*"Take me to the magic of the moment,
On a glory night,
Where the children of tomorrow
dream away
in the wind of change"*

Brilliant!, I thought upon hearing the legendary Scorpions hit as we entered Alegro, an Italian restaurant tucked into Rexhep Mala lane on Aktash. This place, like so many others in Kosovo, has refused to turn its back on the glorious power-ballads of the early 1990s, and set the tone for things to come.

Alegro opened its doors in 2001 and despite being a favourite haunt of the early UNMIK elite, international patrons have thinned out in recent years. This is largely due to the plethora of establishments that compete fiercely to feed Prishtina's hungry. Many of these eateries last no longer than a few months but Alegro has been around for a remarkable eight years, and it's easy to see why.

Alegro's owner/chief chef, Fitim Kadriu (Fita to friends), cut his teeth in the catering industry in Toronto, where he worked for fifteen years before returning to ply his trade in his native land. Prishtina is flooded with Italian restaurants but what sets Alegro apart is its all-round quality. The staff are friendly and professional, even by Kosovo's high standards. You are made to feel welcome as soon as you enter and our waiter, Driton, knew all the tricks that set great waiters apart. He also wields the biggest pepper mill you're ever likely to see. Watching him approach with what, from afar, looked like a baseball bat, brought on a nasty, acid-flashback memory of Capone explaining his 'enthusiasms' in an infamous scene from The Untouchables. Alegro's staff must also receive extra credit for the manner in



photo by Petrit Rrahmani for Prishtina Insight

which they dealt with a slightly inebriated, gate-crashing colleague who had the audacity to pitch up equipped with his own burek! While your reviewer was suitably mortified (no really, I was), Dritan simply chuckled and suggested the House Red to wash it down. Classy.

Alegro's decor is not among Prishtina's most glamorous but it's comfortable and clean. Anyway, plush interiors count for nought with highly trained food critics such as your reviewer! Currently Kadriu's menu is not extensive, consisting simply of appetisers, salads, pasta and veal or chicken dishes. However, an exclusive glimpse of the upcoming brand-new menu suggests fish, steak and vegetarian delights are soon to grace the tables.

Artery-clogging, cheese-topped, garlic bread started my meal while my friend went for that old Italian reliable, 'Bruschetta', which proved to be far tastier than its simple ingredients of tomatoes and bread suggest. Our appetisers were accompanied by Brian Adams lyrically informing us that everything he does; he does (in fact) for us... Which was nice.

For main courses my friend ordered the day's special, grilled trout, while I took the veal parmigiana, which I was told, is somewhat of a signature dish.

Given its location I am generally sceptical of land-locked Kosovo's ability to produce fine fish. The trout was thus a pleasant surprise. It was cooked to a turn and had that delicious smokey taste that only a grill can produce. The veal was also superb and consisted of the biggest slab of veal I've ever seen (veal comes from a baby cow, right?), covered in golden breadcrumbs, smothered in a delicious tomato sauce and topped with molten parmesan. Both dishes were comple-

mented by a side of beautifully roasted vegetables though the portions left us struggling to accommodate such trivialities like veggies!

The main course was accompanied by Michael Jackson's tear-jerker You Are Not Alone and by the house wines. The white left a lot to be desired but the Red wasn't bad. The wine list also has a fairly impressive stock of more than twenty-five reds and whites from Italy and Spain. Alegro also boasts a fully-stocked bar, if a somewhat limited CD collection. Dessert was somewhat of a disappointment, with tiramisu being the only option. However, the new menu promises a 'Double

Chocolate Delight!' Exciting (and slightly pornographic) as the 'DCD' sounds I doubt there are many of us who can actually fit dessert into a belly-full of veal parmigiana. I was, of course, obliged to try dessert simply for the purposes of this review...

The final delight of the evening arrived with our coffee as the soundtrack shifted abruptly from Whitney Houston singing what is known in my family as 'that f*\$%ing song, to the Buena Vista Social Club. Not a bad way to end the night, especially as Alegro's strategic location allowed us to simply roll down Sunny Hill after a colossal and quality meal.

Café / Bar review

POSH

... is one of the newest and most happening cafes in town. Ronan Macnamara takes a look at why the fact that it doesn't quite live up to its name might prove to be its biggest draw.

The bar of choice for Prishtina's beautiful people this autumn seems to be 'POSH' just off Police/Luan Haradinaj Avenue. This new, flashy watering hole has already drawn a large contingent of regulars who can be spotted loitering in the comfort of POSH's squat terrace (they've actually just commandeered the footpath) sipping macchiatos by day and cool beers by night.

Yes, POSH has quickly made a name for itself as the place to be seen in Prishtina if you're young and smoking hot/affluent. If Paris Hilton lived in Prishtina (I think we're safe) you can bet your hair extensions she'd be hanging out at POSH. Perhaps the coolest/funniest thing about POSH is the decor. There are fake cheetah couches, fluorescent lights, life-size, man-shaped lamps and bizarre pic-



photo by Petrit Rrahmani for Prishtina Insight

tures of luxury boats and golf courses; both of which undoubtedly ooze with luxurious opulence but neither of which can be found in Kosovo. I even spotted a life-saving ringdinghy hanging on the tree outside reading, 'Welcome On Board'. Where did they even get it? It's hardly a required health and safety measure so I assume it's part of POSH's oh-so-weird decoration.

When it came to the interior design strategy for this trendy new hotspot I suspect someone simply looked in a holiday brochure from 1980s Miami, saw a photo of a bar, tried to recreate it in Prishtina, thought it looked posh, and settled for the name, 'POSH.' Having said that, I cannot speculate as to where the owners may have gotten their notion of posh, but their bar looks like it was designed by Tony Montana.

In keeping with the irony of POSH's theme, the owners have decided not to charge posh prices. A beer costs the regular €1.50 typical of Prishtina's mid-range bars/cafes, a coffee costs €1 and a simple cocktail (whisky & coke, gin & tonic etc.) costs a reasonable €2.

So POSH's name belies the fact that this hangout is actually very much mid-range. While a certain percentage of Prishtina's great unwashed will still be intimidated by the name, enough will show up that the real posh people will be frightened off. They will retreat to the nearby Iliria where they can be with their own kind, safe in the knowledge that the rest of us are kept out by their clever defence of over-pricing. No loss I say, at least the rest of us have the option to hang out in a place that at least has the name.



photo by Petrit Rrahmani for Prishtina Insight

A Long Journey for a Short Stay in Prevala

The mountainous terrain and fresh air of the Prevala national park is a wonderful place to hike, ski and unwind.



photo by Asdren Rrahmani

A small Glen surrounded by pine trees, with the mountain in the background. A perfect place for a family picnic.

By Asdren Rrahmani

The national park of Prevala is situated on the road to Prizren through Shterpce, passing by the Brezovica Ski Resort. Some 20 km from Prizren, Prevala covers a series of mountains, near the Kosovo – Macedonia – Albania border and is home to the source of the Lepenci river.

The roads are safe, and easily navigable with a small passenger vehicle. Numerous typical Balkan villages line the road on the way.

I hit the road on a cloudy day, with occasional sunny spots. But this did not stop me from enjoying my day out and looking forward to my next trip to Prevala.

As you pass the intersection



photo by Asdren Rrahmani

A ski slope, which is popular for both professional and amateur skiers alike

that leads to Shterpce the scenery starts changing dramatically and the road begins to wind

up through the foothills of the Sharr Mountains.

Past Shterpce the scenery becomes more picturesque, and one cannot resist pulling over to take a closer look. I parked my car and started to explore.

A bridge caught my eye. People were taking pictures from the top of it, which was more accessible from the other side. I decided to climb down to the mountain creek and take a picture from the other side of the mountain. I made the right choice. The bridge shows all its glory from that side, nestled among trees growing on both sides of the road.

I then began to hike upstream, taking photos along the way. Silence was everywhere. All I



photo by Asdren Rrahmani

A view of the beautiful mountain creek making its way down the mountain

could hear was the water flowing down the creek, splashing against the rocks. This was a perfect time to sit on top of a nearby rock and let my mind unwind.

I took a couple more shots of the mountain creek and made my way towards the car since I was still some 10km from Prevala.

On arriving in Prevala, there are motels and restaurants stacked on the right-hand side of the road. There is parking nearby. I took my hiking gear and made my way towards the slope, which in the winter time is used for skiing.

I took some pictures of the slope and made my way up the mountain on a road which is accessible for vehicles, too. It

began to rain, but that did not stop me, as the sun would occasionally break through the clouds and help dry my clothes.

Prevala is about 1,515 meters above sea level. Its mountainous terrain, fresh air and pretty surroundings have meant that for a long time it has been a favourite place for nature lovers and people who suffer from respiratory problems. I saw some foreign cyclists climbing slowly on the mountain road along the way.

If you like hiking or taking pictures, Prevala makes for a wonderful break. Even if you are unlucky and it rains, you can still enjoy the amazing and unique landscapes.



photo by Asdren Rrahmani

Ruins of a house damaged during the last conflict in Kosovo. These sights are becoming rarer as most of the destroyed houses are being rebuilt

Breathtaking Adventure in High Albania

Lawrence Marzouk is wowed by northern Albania's stunning landscape of pristine meadows, trout-filled rivers and soaring peaks – and finds talk of the areas 'wild' character much exaggerated.

The sun nudged the peaks of the Accursed Mountains as we settled down for cheese and raki on our last night in northern Albania.

The map was not much use for planning the next stage of our Balkan journey – those roads that are marked are marked wrongly, and the glossy new highway that would take us over the border to Kosovo the next day at Qafe Morine had been built too recently for the cartographers to catch up.

Three days earlier we had reached Valbone, in the northern Albanian district of Bajram Curri, by the Komani-Fierze ferry.

Forested banks rise sharply from the still water of Lake Komani, where farmsteads cling to the cliffs above this manmade wonder.

The four-hour chug is not a pleasure-boat ride, but the quickest route from Shkoder to Valbone.

It deserves, nonetheless to sit at the captain's table of cruises, next to the Norwegian fjords and the Nile.

Naively driving a Chevrolet Spark with an engine measured in pony power, we'd covered the 22km from Bajram Curri in "only" one hour and 40 minutes.

The route, dotted with waterfalls and haystacks drying in the sun, is a breathtaking, back-breaking, marriage-wrecking drive along a potholed track that criss-crosses the Valbone river and heads north towards the Montenegrin border.

The policeman lazing under a tree, several locals sensibly on horseback, and the drivers of three 4x4s had all, separately, assured us that this was the right road. Thank goodness we believed them.

The track peters out in the village of Valbone, one of a string of picturesque hamlets that have fended off the concrete creep and preserved traditional architecture, bar the ubiquitous satellite dishes.

Don't believe the Bradt Guide's promise of a hotel. It remains in ruins – a sign of the

area's former thriving tourist trade.

Alfred Selimaj, who runs the only restaurant in the area, just outside of the Valbone, offers comfortable rooms in his family home and acts as a guide.

With his help, it is possible to trek for days across this stunning landscape of meadows, icy rivers and towering peaks.

We based ourselves at his home, in walking distance of the Rilindja restaurant, which served enormous meals, including grilled kid, lamb and fish and homemade cheese.

My wife and I spent two days ambling across the lower reaches of the mountains, stumbling across serene lakes and unsuccessfully fishing for red-spotted trout.

Warnings that this was Albania's "wild north", a dangerous medieval fiefdom of honour killings, proved, to the tourists' eye at least, groundless.

As the hospitable Alfred and cousin Naim settled at our table with a second bottle of moonshine on that last night, our eulogy to Albania became increasingly – if less eloquently – enthusiastic.

The conversation flowed comfortably between politics, history and a Dutch missionary's plans to rename the area "The Blessed Mountains".

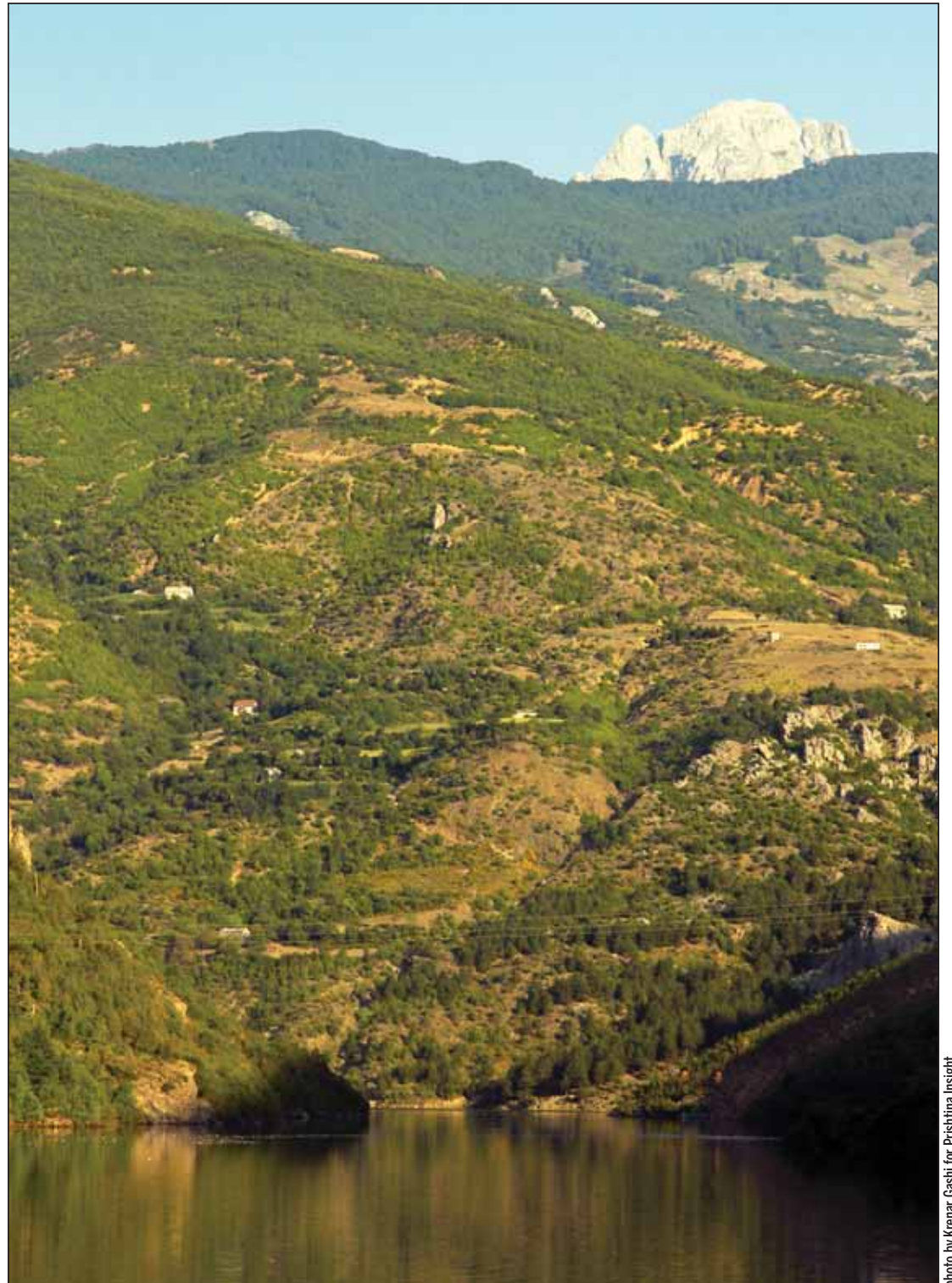
And then, to our surprise, the name of AA Gill – Sunday Times food critic and caustic commentator – was mentioned.

Our hosts were livid at the deeply hurtful words of this journalist, and others, who had done much to belittle their country.

Gill had described Albania as "a Gilbert and Sullivan country, a Ruritania of brigands and vendettas and pantomime royalty", its students as the "worst-dressed kids in the western world" and the general population as "short and ferret-faced".

While the communist concrete bunkers peppering the country may be crumbling, Albanians are struggling with a new, nebulous, but very free-market enemy – public relations.

Naim and Alfred were exas-



Lake Fierza

photo by Krenar Gashi for Prishtina Insight

perated at the regurgitated, superficial and inaccurate picture of their homeland so often paraded in front of the world.

And they had a point. So here is my pitch: Walk through the doors of the Rilindja restaurant and you will be welcomed into

one of Europe's last unblemished gems.

Unless, of course, you happen to be AA Gill.

Albania's Tourism Industry 'Unregulated'

Although it employs more than 138,000 workers, Albania's tourism industry remains largely unregulated, scaring off potential tourists who are not familiar with the area.

This is the warning from Albania's tourism agencies.

Tourism has experienced exponential growth in the last few years as the country slowly emerged from a difficult and often tumultuous transitional period.

More than 1.6 million tourists visited Albanian in 2007 and the numbers are expected to have

grown this year as well.

However, while the government points to statistics to show the success of the tourism industry, tour operators and lobby groups complain that the neglected infrastructure and lack of promotion are leaving the Albanian market several steps behind its competitors.

According to the data presented by the National Tourism Organization out of 627 hotels in the country, only 36 are certified with a proper rating.

Owners often rate themselves and assign as many stars of qual-

ity to their hotels as they see fit. The majority of the rated hotels are in the Tirana area.

Apart from these hotels, Albania also accounts for 908 other accommodation sites, with a total bed space of 33,943 units.

Other figures present an even more downbeat view of Albania's tourism reality.

If the 2007 report of the World Economic Forum on the competitiveness in the travel and tourism industry is taken into account, Albania is ranked 90th in a list of 140 countries.



The beach of Velipoja, Northern Albania

photo by Krenar Gashi for Prishtina Insight

Dead Judge Fired in Kosovo

Kosovo's Judicial Council has recommended that President Fatmir Sejdiu discharge three judges, one of whom is believed to be dead, Balkan Insight has learnt.

In a press release sent last week, the Council said it decided to recommend the discharge of three municipal judges.

"After considering the report made by the Council's Disciplinary Commission, regarding violations of the Code of Conduct and unlawful actions," the council decided to recommend the discharge of Anton Hila, Avdi Gashi and Teuta Vranica, all of them judges of Municipal Courts

in Kosovo, the press release reads.

But Balkan Insight can reveal that one of the judges, Anton Hila, actually died last week.

Ismet Kabashi, a member of the council and a public prosecutor, confirmed the death on Tuesday.

"The council was not properly informed by the Secretariat regarding this case," Kabashi told Balkan Insight.

This is the first decision the Council's Disciplinary Commission has taken and the first public recommendation made by the Council.

Kosovo's Judicial Council is the country's top body managing the justice system.



Bosnia Convicts Turn Pigeons into Drug Mules

Convicts at Bosnia's main Zenica prison have been caught using carrier pigeons to smuggle drugs as a prison rehabilitation programme yielded the wrong kind of results.

The prison administration allowed inmates to start breeding pigeons as a part of their "work therapy." Yet over the past few days, authorities discovered that four convicts have used pigeons to smuggle drugs into the prison, Banja Luka daily Nezavisne Novine reported on Thursday.

"They have misused this in the worst possible way," prison deputy director Josip Pojavnik, said.

Pojavnik added that the carrier pigeons have been smuggling cocaine and heroin, packed in little bags attached to their legs.

All four inmates have been tested positive for the use of drugs. It was unclear whether



the four have kept the smuggled drugs for themselves, or whether any drugs were sold to other prisoners.

Following this revelation, the

prison administration has shut down the pigeon breeding programme, while the four inmates are facing new criminal charges.

Macedonia Ministers Face 'Toilet Paper Fines'

Macedonian Ministers would be fined up to €1000 if they do not provide

enough toilet paper in the ministry buildings they run.

The warning was issued by the

government as it introduced a freshly-prepared bill on public hygiene.

Heads of public institutions will also be held responsible and face fines climbing up to €500 if the buildings where they work lack waste bins or hand dryers in toilets.

Penalties up to €150 are foreseen for people caught throwing litter or spitting on the street.

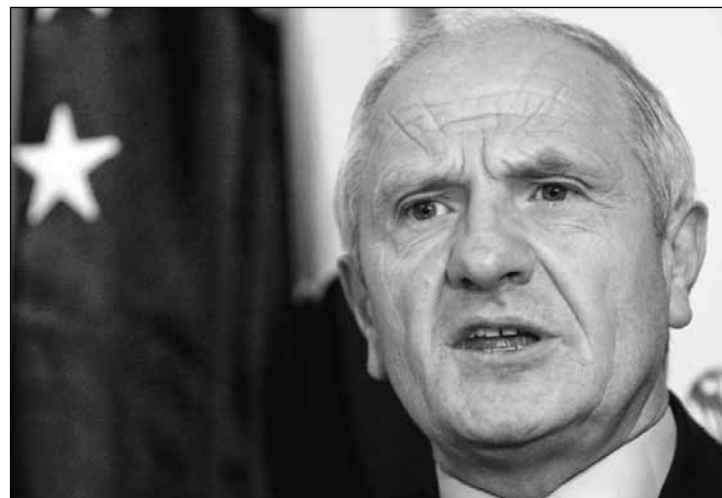
So-called 'public sergeants' will be recruited for monitoring hygiene in public properties, the government said. Police officers will also have the right to issue fines on the spot.

People caught littering could replace their fines with community service, the bill envisages.

The average salary in the country is roughly just over €250 so the Government hopes that the draconian fees will encourage people to act more responsibly.



Kosovo's President in Greek Gaffe



A mix-up left Kosovo's Presidential office red-faced last month, when President Fatmir Sejdiu met a senior Greek official without knowing who he was.

The Koha Ditore daily reported that Sejdiu was supposed to meet Christos Zacharakis, the special representative of the Greek Foreign Ministry to the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, OSCE.

But since Zacharakis was unable to make it to the meeting, he was replaced by Nikolaos Kalantzianos, a senior official from the Greek Foreign Ministry.

However, the President's cabinet were apparently not informed

about the change and Sejdiu proceeded with the meeting assuming he was meeting Athens' envoy to the OSCE.

"I would like to inform you that I had a very friendly meeting with ambassador Christos Zacharakis..." Sejdiu told reporters after meeting Kalantzianos.

Embarrassed but not wishing to create a fuss, Kalantzianos was brief when he addressed reporters.

According to Koha Ditore, Kalantzianos was neither properly received nor walked out of the President's office by people from his protocol staff. The daily quotes anonymous sources saying that Sejdiu realised whom he had really met only after the press conference.

Marijuana Plants Found by Bulgaria Govt HQ

Bulgaria's campaign against cannabis has gone literally to the doorstep of power, after marijuana plants were found growing amongst the flowers outside government headquarters.

Photos of the plants appeared in the Trud newspaper, prompting the authorities Thursday to acknowledge their presence, and to confirm that the problem has

been ruthlessly dealt with.

"We have the pleasure to inform you that the problem was immediately and literally rooted out," a government spokesman said, not without humour.

Police in Bulgaria are several weeks into a campaign against the illegal cultivation of cannabis - seizing six tonnes of marijuana from fields and private yards, including a priest's garden.



Kosovo Flag Takes Nation's Thanks To The World

From the peak of Mt Fuji to teeming Seoul, the first leg a mission to thank all the countries that have befriended Kosovo got off to a flying start

By Genc Kastrati in Tokyo and Seoul

Last month, the KosovoThanksYou.com team embarked on an ambitious but historic trip to thank those countries that had recognized the continent's newest republic and show the world Kosovo is here, and here to stay.

The plan was for the team to take the Kosovo flag around the countries that had shown support to the people of Kosovo, in an act of friendships signifying the hope that the Kosovo flag would continue to fly in those lands forever.

The first stop was Mount Fuji, an important cultural symbol, a sacred mountain and the highest point in Japan. We took the sunrise that many say can only be experienced on Mt Fuji, and the long climb to the summit, as a symbol of the struggle for Kosovo's independence and of the hope that the journey and the future of the Republic will be bright and prosperous.

The long climb was certainly challenging, as gusts of wind, rain, sub-zero temperatures and even lightning buffeted us. But on reaching the top we not only witnessed a splendid sunrise and had a sense of fulfilling our mission, but enjoyed a very friendly welcome.

Our fellow Japanese climbers were intrigued by the flag that was waving alongside theirs and were wreathed in smiles on learning it was the flag of Kosovo. Many cheered us on, while some shook our hands and others took photos. Tourists looked on with surprise, and smiles.



Kosovo's flag reaching Japan's highest mountain

A group of Slovak geologists climbing Fuji that same evening offered friendly support and congratulations to Kosovo and wished us luck on our travels through Europe. It was inspiring and heart-warming to see how Kosovo had become a part of the world in which we live. Everyone we met on the way, whether Australian, French, Belgian, German, Japanese, Chinese, or Slovak,

knew what this climb meant for us.

After Japan, we continued to South Korea, a country that has had its own share of wartime experiences, but which has now risen above that and is building a solid future. Our flag travelled the streets of the metropolis of Seoul and climbed the highest point, the Seoul Tower. Our stay in the tower lasted longer than planned, mainly due to the cake,

tea and coffee offered by enthusiastic Koreans who saw it as their duty to welcome us properly and hear all we had to tell about our mission. Presents, handshakes, hugs and bows were exchanged and farewells were wished. The warmth and welcome that Koreans showed us was exhilarating. This is a land from which Kosovo can learn a great deal.

The first leg of this mission has, in short, shows us something valuable. Kosovo is not an unknown place in people's minds, and is daily becoming more real and present. We aim to continue our mission throughout Europe in the coming months. It may be years down the line, when this flag has waved alongside all the flags of our allies, before it finally returns home to Kosovo.



A picture of glory in Seoul



Kosovo's flag at the Seoul Tower

Local Polls Deepen Sense of Crisis in Bosnia

As parties turn away from bread-and-butter issues and indulge in inflammatory rhetoric, ethnic tensions look set to worsen

By Srecko Latal in Gorazde

On the half-deserted, cold and wet streets of Gorazde, a Bosniak-dominated town in eastern Bosnia, there are few signs of the upcoming local elections.

Occasional tattered posters with election promises go unnoticed by the few passers-by. Most seem to have decided what parties to vote for in advance.

"The strength and quality of the candidates does not matter," sighs Slavko Klisura, local head of the Centre for Promotion of Civil Society, an NGO battling to introduce relevant local issues into the shallow public debates. "On the election day, people will still cast their vote along ethnic lines."

In most countries, elections heat up the political scene. But in Bosnia, the degree of heat is widely seen as out of control. Plagued by political tensions since the last general elections in 2006, the country appears to be on the verge of collapse.

"We see only endless, ferocious political confrontations," laments Srdjan Dizdarevic, head of Bosnia's Helsinki Human Rights Committee. "In this situation even ordinary people have begun to think it may be better if we divorce and separate."

As always, ignoring local issues

One common complaint about the local elections is that issues crucial for local communities have, as ever, gone almost unnoticed in the torrid debate.

"Ordinary citizens cannot influence politicians or set the theme of [election] debates," Demir Imamovic, of Aldi, a NGO in Gorazde, told *Balkan Insight*.

Instead, politics have stagnated for the past three years as the parties get ever more embroiled in constant infighting.

The main contest has pitted Bosnian Muslims, or Bosniaks, against Bosnian Serbs. While Bosniak leaders openly call for the abolition of the Bosnian Serb entity, the Republika Srpska, Bosnian Serbs have retaliated by blocking the work of key state institutions.

"Democracy doesn't live here," muses Demir Imamovic, adding that one consequence will be an increase in the number of Bosnians who don't vote.

The last local elections in 2004 registered one of the lowest-ever turnout levels in Bosnia, of 45.52 per cent. Analysts expect a similar or lower turnout in October.

In the absence of concrete debates and bread-and-butter issues, many of those who do vote in the elections will choose the nationalist parties, which appear loudest in defending their so-called communities. Because of this, election expectations are best viewed separately for the three ethnically almost homogeneous areas.



Sarajevo

Few doubts among Bosnian Serbs

In the Republika Srpska, and in most Serb-populated areas in the other entity, the BiH Federation, the Party of Independent Social Democrats, SNSD, will win comfortably, according to Banja Luka-based journalist Gordana Katana.

Under the strong stewardship of its leader, Milorad Dodik, and boosted by his tough confrontations with local and international counterparts, the SNSD won in more than 30 per cent of Serb-populated municipalities in 2004. In the 2006 general elections SNSD won over 40 per cent of Bosnian Serb votes and became the single strongest party in the country.

"We see only endless, ferocious political confrontations"

Srdjan Dizdarevic

Since then, Dodik and the SNSD have consolidated power, influencing, if not directly controlling, much of the media in the Republika Srpska and presiding over several lucrative privatization deals.

Dodik has left little to chance in these elections, personally running as a candidate in his hometown of Laktasi and attracting several famous Bosnian Serbs – like the rich businessmen Gavrilko Bobar – to run on local SNSD tickets. Dodik has also traveled across the country to take part in big public rallies.

His main rival for the hearts and minds of Bosnian Serbs, the Serbian Democratic Party, SDS, has in the meantime crumbled, thanks to poor leadership and lack of a proactive political programme. The SDS, once led by Hague indictee Radovan Karadzic, has tried to capitalize on growing complaints by civil society groups and some international organizations about Dodik's centralizing instincts but with little success.

Analysts say that numerous

public accusations of corruption and misuse of office could affect the SNSD's ratings.

But the likely beneficiary of this will not be the SDS but the Party of Democratic Progress, PDP, the SNSD's junior coalition partner. In the last elections this party almost disappeared from the scene but has since revived and remained afloat thanks to its leader, Mladen Ivanic.

Bosnian Croat opposition stirs

Ever since the first free elections in Bosnia in 1991, the Croatian Democratic Union, HDZ, has reigned unchallenged over the Bosnian Croat voting bloc. That remained the case in the 2006 general elections, even though the party had split in two.

Whether the HDZ remains politically ascendant in these elections remains to be seen, however. Thus far, its smaller, more moderate, rivals, such as the Croatian Peasants Party, the People's Party, the New Croatian Initiative, and others, have had little success.

That could all change in these elections, says Blanka Magas, Kupres-based correspondent for the Croatian daily *Slobodna Dalmacija*.

As the smallest of the three main ethnic groups, the Bosnian Croats feel marginalized. Increasingly, they see themselves outvoted at the local, regional and state levels.

The question is who will pay for this growing frustration whether voters will blame HDZ and its split-off, HDZ 1990, and if so, to whom they will turn, Magas said.

The HDZ still looks likely to win in the Croat western part of the southern city of Mostar. But most other municipalities could see a tight race among the two HDZs and the other opposition parties, Magas says.

Troubled Bosniaks

The biggest unknown in the coming vote is among Bosniak voters, as the main Bosniak parties are widely seen as having lost their way in recent years.

Wasting energy on struggles among themselves, these parties have seriously weakened the Bosniak community's overall negotiating position, allowing Dodik to become the strongest political force in the country, says Sead Numanovic, editor of the leading Sarajevo daily, *Dnevni Avaz*.

This infighting has blocked key economic and social reforms, as well as important privatization deals in the BiH Federation, allowing salaries and industrial production in the Republika Srpska to surpass levels in the Federation for the first time.

The biggest clash within the Bosniak camp is between the ruling Party of Democratic Action, SDA, and the Party for BiH, SzBH. In the 2006 elections the SDA won most Bosniak votes but lost the Bosniak position in Bosnia's presidency to the SzBH candidate, Haris Silajdzic. But now the SzBH seems to be losing ground to the much tougher and more aggressive campaigns run by the SDA and the Social Democratic Party.

"Democracy doesn't live here"

Demir Imamovic

Although Social Democrats are a declaredly multiethnic party, they rely mostly on Bosniak votes. Briefly the single strongest party in the country after the 2000 general elections, they lost members and voters due to what was perceived as the dictatorial and arrogant leadership and behaviour of their president, Zlatko Lagumdžija.

Mirroring the SDA's maneuvers, the Social Democrats have approached the local elections with an aggressive and expensive campaign, concentrating on general countrywide issues and problems, though with little local relevance.

Although some analysts see this as a weakness, their tactics may pay off as they siphon off votes from Bosniaks irritated by the

constant clashes between the other two parties.

Even the influential Islamic Community and its leader Mustafa Cerić – whose direct or indirect support in the past has helped to decide election winners – seem baffled by the rift in the Bosniak camp, and have so far failed to take anybody's side.

In his traditional speech at the end of the Islamic festival of Ramadan, on September 30, Cerić merely suggested Bosnia needed new political leaders. Most local and international officials agree the current ones have certainly outlived their usefulness.

Will newcomers get their turn?

Some moderate Bosnians of all nationalities hope this new alternative could be Nasa Stranka, meaning "Our Party", the party established a year ago by Bosnia's Oscar-winning film director, Danis Tanovic.

Without much of a budget or a local infrastructure, Nasa Stranka has decided to forget expensive jumbo posters and TV jingles, instead sending supporters on tours round the country and talking to ordinary people.

The question is whether many ordinary people are ready to put aside their national differences and vote for such a new and untried political outfit, however.

According to a recent report issued by Transparency International, the anti-corruption watchdog organization, about 70 per cent of Bosnians see their politicians as the most corrupt part of society.

But Slavko Klisura, from Gorazde, cautions against thinking that this mood of disillusion will prompt Bosnians to vote for an entirely new political option.

Despite all their hardships and disappointment, most voters will either abstain from voting altogether, or vote for their old nationalist parties, he says. "We are all prisoners of our own ignorance," he adds. "For many, the biggest fear is fear of freedom."

Source: *BalkanInsight.com*



FACTBOX

Bosnia and Herzegovina

Bosnians are heading to the polls on Sunday to elect representatives to local councils. Here are some facts about Bosnia and Herzegovina and the key political figures from Bosnia's three main ethnic groups.

Basic data

Population, (millions) 3.78
 Population growth (annual %) -0.11
 Life expectancy at birth, female (years) 77.28
 Life expectancy at birth, male (years) 71.99
 GDP (current US\$) (billions) 12.26
 GDP growth (annual %) 5.5
 GNI, Atlas method (current US\$) (billions) 12.57
 Inflation, consumer prices (annual %) 9.9 (measured in August)
 Foreign direct investment, net inflows (% of GDP) 3.45
 Unemployment, total (% of total labour force) estimated at 24
 Internet users (per 100 people) 25.15

Ethnic breakdown

According to the latest 1991 census, Bosnia and Herzegovina had 4.4 million inhabitants, of whom 43.7 per cent were Bosniaks, 31 per cent were Serbs, 17.3 per cent were Croats and 7.6 per cent were other nationalities. The population is similarly split along religious lines: Bosniaks are Muslim, Serbs are Orthodox Christian, and Croats, Roman Catholic. The remainder of the population is made up of some 17 ethnic minorities, of which the largest are the Roma. No census has taken place since the 1992-995 war; therefore official statistics on the current ethnic make-up of the country are not available.

Constitution

The constitution, agreed as a part of the 1995 Dayton peace accord, recognizes two "entities": the BiH Federation and Republika Srpska. The BiH Federation is divided into 10 cantons. The two entities are connected at state level. In addition, the northern town of Brcko enjoys separate status as a "district", outside of the two entities.

Election statistics

A total of 3,024,127 citizens are entitled to vote in 4,985 polling stations. A total of 80 political parties, alliances and independent lists are registered as participating in the ballot with 29,043 candidates, who will compete for positions in 149 municipalities in the two entities. The election silence starts on October 4 and voting takes place on October 5.

Main political parties

Mainly Bosniak (Muslim)

Party of Democratic Action, SDA; president, Sulejman Tihic,
 Party for BiH, SzBH; president, Haris Silajdzic,

Mainly Croat

Croatian Democratic Union, HDZ; president, Dragan Covic
 Croatian Democratic Union 1990, HDZ 1990; president, Bozo Ljubic
 Croatian Peasants Party and New Croatian Initiative; president,
 Ivan Krndelj
 Peoples Party; president, Mladen Ivankovic

Mainly Serb

Party of Independent Social Democrats, SNSD; president, Milorad Dodik
 Serbian Democratic Party, SDS; president, Mladen Bosic,
 Party of Democratic Progress, PDP; president, Mladen Ivanic

Others

Social Democratic Party, SDP; president, Zlatko Lagumdžija
 Nasa Stranka ("Our Party"); president, Bojan Bajic
 Liberal Democratic Party, LDS; president, Lamija Tanovic

Source: BalkanInsight.com

Macedonia's New Albanian Party Faces Tough Odds

Imer Selmani, leader of the newly formed New Democracy party, will only become a serious political player if he can transcend his current local appeal

By Sinisa-Jakov Marusic in Skopje

A key figure in the main opposition ethnic Albanian party in Macedonia, the Democratic Party of Albanians, DPA, has formed a new party, posing a threat to the Albanian political establishment in the country.

Selmani is seen as a charismatic figure with the potential power to shake up the ethnic Albanian political scene. He said he had resigned as the DPA vice-president and formed his own party, New Democracy, following a dispute with the DPA president, Menduh Thaci.

The row allegedly escalated after Thaci refused to take responsibility for the party's poor showing in the June general elections.

Selmani profiled New Democracy as a "constructive, centre-right oriented opposition party", positioning it in direct competition with the DPA on the political landscape.

New Democracy has gained the support of two of the other 11 DPA deputies in Macedonia's parliament, and Selmani claims many local DPA branch members are joining.

Selmani was a former health minister in Macedonia from 2006 until June of this year, when the DPA lost heavily to its Albanian rival, the Democratic Union for Integration, DUI. The DUI then replaced the DPA as the Albanian partner in Nikola Gruevski's centre-right government.

Selmani was a popular figure among some Albanians before he entered the government, after a successful term as mayor of Saraj, near the capital, Skopje.

"Osmani has political weight and is much respected among the Albanians"

Albert Musliu

However, the political analyst Imer Ismaili told Balkan Insight that Selmani needed to broaden his appeal in the country. "He enjoys great support among Albanians in Saraj and among some in Skopje, but other than that he has no great influence in Tetovo or Gostivar," he said, referring to the two western strongholds of ethnic Albanians.

Albanians make up roughly one-quarter of Macedonia's population, concentrated in the west and north-west, on the borders with Kosovo and Albania.

"Building a party from scratch is a difficult thing that requires a lot of field work," Ismaili added.



Imer Selmani

The politicians that have so far joined Selmani do not have high profiles and cannot automatically attract voters, analysts say. As matters stand, Selmani can win overwhelming support only in his Saraj base.

However, Albert Musliu, a political observer, claims the new party may yet displace the DPA if Selmani can lure other Albanian heavyweights to his side. One would be Ruzi Osmani, a respected former mayor of Gostivar.

Osmani has been out of politics and focused on a university career since being jailed for flying the Albanian flag from the town hall more than ten years ago. Since then, Albanians have seen him as a hero who took a stand against the then-rigid laws on state emblems.

"Osmani has political weight and is much respected among the Albanians; if he joins Selmani, this would definitely boost New Democracy's ratings," Musliu said.

Ismaili noted reports of a meeting between Selmani and Osmani, fuelling rumours that the ex-mayor might join the new party and so radically increase its appeal.

"In that case, maybe after local elections next March, New Democracy might seriously endanger the DPA as the second largest Albanian party in Macedonia and become a worthy opponent to the DUI," Ismaili said.

Ismaili explained how this might come about from a geographical perspective. "Selmani

is popular around Skopje, while Osmani is seen as a national hero in Gostivar, Kicevo, Debar and partially in Tetovo," he said.

Analysts agree that the violent political clashes between the DUI and DPA have alienated and disappointed many Albanians, creating a potential vacuum that a new party might exploit. With his milder image, Selmani could appeal to these voters.

During recent elections, the turnout among ethnic Albanian voters has been low, at only around 25 per cent. The clashes between DUI and DPA supporters in the June elections only made things worse, Musliu said.

"Selmani has a constructive vocabulary and proved a good manager during his terms as mayor and minister, which will contribute to his democratic profile in the Albanian camp", Ismaili explained.

At the moment, however, Selmani needs to prove he is not just a power-hungry marionette of Prime Minister Gruevski, as the DPA has implied.

Selmani denies any ambition to be a potential plaything of the government, insisting his party will remain in opposition. "We will act as an opposition", Selmani told the media, "We do not wish to be part of any government without first going into elections and gaining the support by the people," he said.

Source: BalkanInsight.com

Probe into Trade in Degrees Stuns Croatia

Police roundup of corrupt professors hailed as progress in war on graft – but some believe timing of arrests anything but coincidental.



photo by Albena Shkodrova

Zagreb

By Drago Hedl in Osijek

Twenty professors from Zagreb University – 11 from the Faculty of Traffic Engineering and nine from the Faculty of Economics and Business – were remanded in custody for a month on Monday, after police detained 105 people in a spectacular action. All of them – the apprehended included students – are suspected of involvement in a corruption chain in which professors sold exam results to students. Exam passes were being sold for between €400 and €1,000 euro, while entrance to the faculty without the required qualifications cost up to €9,000.

Among the apprehended academics was Desa Mlikotin Tomic, professor at the Economics and Business Faculty, who was recently appointed head of the parliamentary committee probing conflicts of interest. Tomic was later released and her lawyer told media that the charges against her client were unfounded.

The detention of the professor attracted special interest among the public, precisely because she headed a committee charged with preventing the conflicts of interest in which senior politicians often seem to be involved. The session of the committee that she was scheduled to chair this Wednesday has been postponed. “If all our institutions have been corrupted to that degree, one can only wonder where this society is going to,” an opposition MP, Damir Kajin,

told the Zagreb daily Jutarnji List.

The action, code-named Index – after the cards on which student grades are entered – is a spectacular denouement to a months-long investigation that police launched following numerous revelations in the media and in response to claims by various students. It has fuelled speculation about the existence about a veritable trade in the sale of exam passes at the Faculty of Traffic Engineering. The faculty has long had a questionable reputation. It was there that a number of generals acquired academic degrees almost overnight.

Some generals were reported to have obtained university diplomas in the mid-1990s at a time when the Croatian Army was busy preparing to recapture the Serb-held Krajina region. At least four of the recently detained professors had worked as lecturers to these generals.

Croatia’s President, Stjepan Mesic, described their exam results as suspicious. It was not logical to assume, he said, that these men could have “defended Croatia so efficiently while simultaneously passing exams and obtaining masters’ degrees, so I can only conclude that they either did not fight in the war, or did not study.”

The Prime Minister, Ivo Sanader, claimed credit for the action, describing it as “part of an anti-corruption campaign that we have been carrying out for several years.”

Although Operation Index has been widely reported, analysts

say people should not expect much change. Several similar actions have taken place in recent years, and all have been heralded as decisive evidence of the success of the fight against corruption. During last week’s visit to Brussels, Prime Minister Sanader was again warned that Zagreb needed to show more progress before important chapters in negotiations with the EU could be opened. Target areas are reform of the judiciary and the fight against corruption.

Some analysts suspect the latest police roundup was timed to coincide with another European Commission report on Croatia, due for release in November. They also note that the big political fish always seem to elude detection and capture. “What came out of these anti-corruption affairs to the public is not as important as what was kept in the drawers. What was left in there, the authorities will use for some other occasion: when they need to blackmail someone, distract the public, deny criticism from Brussels or raise ratings before elections,” analyst Tomislav Klauski said.

In its regular annual report published this week, the corruption watchdog Transparency International gave Croatia a mixed billing, ranking it 62nd out of 180 countries, with a rating of 4.4 out of 10 – zero being the mark for a wholly corrupted country. Croatia was placed well below neighbouring Slovenia, which ranked 26th.

Source: BalkanInsight.com

My mystifying September



By Vesa Sahatciu in Prishtina

I feel utterly daunted and mystified by my generation – by those who though no older than 25 and who are well educated professionals, apparently live by checklists. A degree from an (or any) international university – tick, a degree in management, or diplomacy – tick, NGO/Government job – tick, some project paper in hand – tick, girlfriend soon to be fiancé – tick. They seem to be keen on ticking off lists and on going by protocol, not on thinking critically, or asking questions.

Very well, perhaps this really is what our dreams are about, and perhaps our generation will be remembered as the generation of mediocre list-tickers who reached 50 at the age of 25.

But I am daunted by the prospect of such a blaze generation, one that believes in paper resolutions of all kinds without questioning, that is good only at filling in project forms and at reproducing utterances like “integration”, and “Transatlantic” without having the faintest idea what these words actually mean. Not that our government’s diplomatic corps would be able to fill us in on those, either.

It is surely not enough to know that we are speaking of deals and relations over the Atlantic when we say the word “Transatlantic”. There are politics behind these phrases – an accumulation of underlined meanings, gained from years of political and economic manoeuvres and diplomacy. When one utters such words one should be aware of the political and ideological baggage that comes with them.

In a similar vein, I feel equally mystified by recent events inside some of our cultural institutions. I did not know that the system of party political monopoly runs so deep as to decide who will be the next director of the national theatre. It is a grotesque state of affairs when an institution that should stand outside the political arena becomes a subject of political squabbles.

“All the world’s a stage,” Shakespeare wrote. But here in Kosovo, the play goes on in the very office of the Prime Minister, or maybe the President. Good luck to artists!



photo by Robert Atanasovski

Macedonia’s Premier Nikola Gruevski joined the Muslims who attended special morning prayers at the Sultan Murat Mosque in Skopje marking Eid ul-Fitr.



photo by Petrit Rrahmani for Prishtina Insight

Climbing in Rugova Mountains

Waiting For The Balloon to Pop

Even the most resilient and submissive society has its limits. Will the frustrations of Kosovo's disenchanted silent majority lead to social unrest?



By Agon Maliqi
in Prishtina

One of my favorite tools for measuring public opinion in Kosovo is the "vox populi" segment on KTV's morning programme. The sampling surely isn't scientific, but it offers authentic insights into the ways people perceive current events. So I listened in on the show with added curiosity one morning as citizens were discussing President Sejdiu's reported salary increase, making him the region's highest-paid head of state. While the majority of the reactions were negative in a generalized and diplomatic kind of way, the body language of respondents also seemed to convey subtle feelings of anger. One man brought it all out on the surface: "Our society has become like an overblown balloon," he said. "If politicians continue blowing air inside, they will make it pop."

His metaphorical warning echoed what many analysts have feared might happen following independence, namely that the dire social and economic situation, coupled with discontent with the political establishment, will make some kind of social unrest inevitable.

Sejdiu's reported salary increase (which he later reversed) is only the latest case of reckless behaviour by political leaders that strikes a nerve in a society gripped by economic hardship and anxiety. The most recent UNDP Early Warning Report, published in May, showed 68.4 percent of citizens were willing to go out and protest for economic reasons. This number that has been constantly high for years but it takes on a new significance after independence.

It's no mystery why patience is running thin. Kosovo has the low-

est GDP per capita in the region, unemployment remains high, infrastructure and basic utilities are worn out, 15 per cent of the population lives below the poverty line and more than double that amount are considered poor. On top of that, inflation was 13 percent only last year. Even those who do have jobs find it hard to make ends meet. Adding to people's anxiety are lousy public services, a culture of impunity in the justice system, endemic corruption and the frustrations of a state-building process supervised by unaccountable and colonialist international bodies.

So why hasn't the balloon popped yet? One reason is that the independence hangover has not faded away completely and the Thaci government is still seen as being on a test drive. Another reason could be that economic statistics are not capturing the whole picture, most notably the level of remittances coming from abroad and activities in the informal sector which provide a lifeline to many families.

But there are also other deeper reasons behind the resilience of Kosovars related to general political culture and history. After living in crisis conditions for decades, the nation's survival skills and patience are well trained. Furthermore, we have not yet developed the kind of sturdy democratic traditions within which authority is actively challenged. Society remains submissive and fatalistic. But there is a flip side to strong patience. I recall the long display of peaceful resistance to Serbian repression in the 1990s which then led to a build-up of frustration and a call to arms. The parallel between the 1990s and economic crisis today might appear far-fetched, but it suggests that even a patient and submissive society has a tipping point.

It's hard to predict where that tipping point would be in the cur-

rent situation. The majority of the economically distressed will see little tangible change within one government mandate, no matter how bold its reforms are, so their impatience is bound to grow. Whether this triggers something will depend on many factors. The most important issue is whether a credible structure emerges that can mobilize this silent majority of the disenchanted. The low turnout in the November elections signalled that voters are dissatisfied with the establishment as a whole, so it is unlikely that figures like Haradinaj, Daci and Pacolli will be able to gain a following beyond their current base.

The only existing structure that has any potential to reshape the political map is Albin Kurti's Vetevendosje. Although the movement still primarily views itself as a guardian of the national interest operating outside party politics, it has often used a populist discourse of social justice that might work well with voters in a country with widening inequalities and a hunger for a protest vote. Kurti's intentions remain unclear, but Vetevendosje's development into a left political party would perhaps be a healthy thing for Kosovo's democracy. It would awaken the self-serving establishment and diffuse social unrest by channelling the concerns of the marginalized into mainstream politics. Yes, the movement's rhetoric combines rather dodgy forms of dogmatic socialism and nationalism, but its views are likely to evolve once inside the mainstream. The risks of a balloon pop are much higher if extremists are standing on the sidelines and there is no one for whom the marginalized could vote.

Agon Maliqi is a graduate of political science and former civil society activist in Kosovo.

Kosovo's Son-in-Law

Our Super Duper Hero

With Kosovo as America's No. 1 priority, there is clearly no need to worry about international recognition, or the qualifications of Kosovo's new ambassadors. I feel relieved!



By Casey Cooper Johnson in Prishtina

I am always grateful and filled with pride by the Albanians' undying, unquestioning faith in America's ability to solve all of Kosovo's most pressing diplomatic issues. Recently, I heard about a comment that Prime Minister Hashim Thaci had made in reference to his decision not to appear at a meeting with a delegation from Arabic nations that visited Kosovo on August 26. Although some 50 or so Arab nations are still straddling the fence about whether to recognize Kosovo, Thaci scoffed at the delegation, citing that he does not meet people with "dubious addresses".

Having just returned from Israel, he appeared to make a specific point, emphasizing Kosovo's alignment with the United States and Israel, an obvious point perhaps, but a slightly arrogant and unwise diplomatic message nevertheless, as an already reticent Arab leadership hesitates over Kosovo's appeal for recognition. But apparently, Thaci has an ace in his sleeve. Yes, it's America, our Super Duper Hero.

It was equally interesting when Kosovo's Foreign Minister, Skender Hyseni, began unveiling his diplomatic corps. Several nations promptly began expressing reservations about the ambassadors that Kosovo planned to send them. Switzerland was particularly unsettled by the choice of Naim Mala as ambassador, as he has a record there. Now, some critics might fret that such a choice reinforces the Western European prejudice that Albanians are all criminals. But I get the logic. Who cares about neutral old Switzerland anyway? Besides their handy little pocket knives and pungent cheese, they are insignificant players in the world. All we need is America.

I was particularly impressed by the fact that several individuals in this cadre of foreign policy specialists come from the same village, Glareva. One is a relative of Deputy Prime Minister Rame Manaj. Maybe the red pepper imported from Serbia, for which Glareva is famous for packaging and reselling, is some magical elixir of diplomatic prowess... or perhaps Kosovo's diplomatic corps is being selected on the basis of family and personal ties rather than professional prerequisites. But it is of no great importance whether these diplomats are qualified or not. The US has our back.

Now Serbia is attempting a daring legal feat, appealing to the world court in The Hague to deem Kosovo's independence a violation of international law. As only 47 nations have recognized Kosovo's sovereignty, albeit the 47 most relevant nations of the world, Kosovo is again on the defensive against Serbia's diplomatic counter-strike. But Kosovo's leadership appears confident and unfazed. I think I know why. That's right, our Super Duper Hero, America will take care of this.

Kosovo's preservation is certainly the primary preoccupation of the United States government these days. Disregard the two wars in Iraq and Afghanistan that America is bogged down in. Kosovo is a bigger priority for Americans. Try not to worry about America's growing tensions with Iran and Pakistan, or the new stand-off with Russia following the invasion of Georgia. Kosovo is the first thing Americans think of when they wake up in the morning. Let's not dwell on the fact that the United States is in economic meltdown, with Wall St calling for a \$700 billion bailout by the government, or that the US is a month away from presidential elections. Kosovo's right to sovereignty is certain to get plenty of airtime on the American media outlets.

It's nice to have a Super Duper Hero on your side. You don't have to worry so much. You don't have the pressure of engaging the brightest and best of your nation to develop pro-active strategies for promoting your cause and your image. You certainly don't have to pay attention to "dubious" Arab delegations. All you need to do is enjoy another piece of baklava, and cherish that sweet, blind faith that America is working day and night, just for Kosovo.



photo by Petrit Rrahmani for Prishtina Insight

A protest organised by Vetevendosje

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Would you like to have your business listed in our directory?

Send us a suggestion at info@prishtinainsight.com or call us at 038 24 33 58

Alternative Directory

We recommend you 15 alternative businesses and activities:

Leather products: sandals, slippers, purses, phone cases
Dizajn_menda@hotmail.com
044 790901; 044 111350
(*Albanian and some French*)

Kulla e Mazrekajve near Deçan
Available for seminars, parties, etc.
Kosovo@chwb.org
038 243918; 044 609479
(*English, Albanian and Serbian*)

Locally-made greetings cards incorporating silver filigree flowers
kosovakards@gmail.com
044 661797 or 044 799673
(*English and Albanian*)

Notebooks covered in fabric from old hand-woven aprons, tablecloths, clothing etc.
elizabethgowing@hotmail.com
044 661797; 044 790901
(*English, French and Albanian*)

Night cream made with honey, beeswax and propolis.
linjajuaj@yahoo.com
0390 330098
(*Albanian and Serbian*)

Walks in Kosovo natural areas with a view to developing recognized footpaths
norakastrati@yahoo.com
(*English Albanian and Serbian*)

Wine tours with wine tasting tips from local expert
albertrexhepi@yahoo.com
(*English and Albanian*)

One-hour walking tours of Prishtina giving the historical and cultural highlights of the city
walkingtoursprn@yahoo.com
044 661797; 044 431438
(*English and Albanian*)

Volunteering opportunity for native English speakers teaching after-school clubs in local primary schools
044 661797
(*English and Albanian*)

International English language school with native English teachers from pre-school to age 13
ilgprishtina@yahoo.co.uk
044 162230 (*English*)

Rural cottage stays, tours and traditional agricultural crafts near Peja
Desantila_nene@hotmail.com
044 127783
(*English, French and Albanian*)

Kosovo Association for Parents International – network of international parents who share information about living with a family in Kosovo

http://groups.yahoo.com/group/kapi_kosovo/
(*English*)

International Women’s Club of Prishtina

http://groups.yahoo.com/group/iwc_pristina/

Books and movies of a vast choice Labirint bookshop
Address: Luan Haradinaj 16/3
038 738 090

Innovative new bonnets made from the embroidered 'plis' hats
044 256711
(*English and Albanian*)

Human Trafficking in Kosovo

Prishtina, September 25, 2008

To find out how bad the problem of human trafficking in Kosovo is and how to deal with this negative phenomenon, BIRN Kosovo organised a TV debate.

Guests in the debate, moderated by Muhamet Hajrullahu, were:

Artan Duraku, political adviser in the Interior Ministry; Fejzullah Hasani, Supreme Court Judge; Ariana Cosaj, expert on gender issues and member of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, OSCE's, anti-trafficking unit; Ramadan Ahmeti, head of the Kosovo Police department dealing with human trafficking; Nita Luci, UNDP project initiative for the security and protection of women.

According to statistics from NGOs and international organizations, there has been an increase in the number of women being trafficked within Kosovo. Ramadan Ahmeti reported that trafficking has been rife since the end of the war in 1999. Immediately after the war, victims were predominantly foreigners. However, new statistics show that most victims are from Kosovo. In the first eight months of this year, Kosovo Police assisted in 22 cases of trafficked women: 14 were Kosovars, four were from Moldova, two were from Albania,

one was from Bulgaria and one was from Serbia. Three of the victims were minors.

Asked what the police are doing to respond to the rising trend, Ahmeti said the Kosovo Police are cooperating with all relevant institutions against human trafficking, including the Interior Ministry, the OSCE, the courts, and NGOs. Regional police units in cities throughout Kosovo are trying to tackle the problem, he said.

Luci noted that there is a clear correlation between trafficking and prostitution. Hasani pointed out that not all trafficking is for sexual exploitation. Trafficking also involves the sale of human organs and other kinds of exploitation. Trafficking is dealt with under International Law, whereas prostitution comes under the category of sex crimes, which are also illegal, Hasani explained. Moreover, related activities such as blackmail and other types of abuse are subject to legal sanction.

Likewise, Cosaj pointed out, trafficking is invariably accompanied by false promises and fraud. The Kosovo authorities issue work permits to employees of hotels and motels where large numbers of women work as waitresses. In this respect, Duraku said the Interior Ministry is determined to fight trafficking wherever it occurs. Cosaj complained that

the authorities routinely declare that they are determined to fight the problem, but that little is done. She noted that only about 50 percent of the plan to tackle trafficking between 2005 and 2007 had been implemented.

"Organized crime and human trafficking cannot be tackled through conferences and seminars"

Artan Duraku

Duraku said organized crime and human trafficking cannot be tackled through conferences and seminars. Cosaj asked why the Interior Ministry hadn't taken steps to increase the budget to tackle human trafficking. She pointed out that the police raid premises where trafficking goes on but there are few facilities to accommodate victims. Cosaj said that some houses for victims had been closed. Duraku promised that this would not continue, particularly since, under the new constitution, the Interior Ministry has more discretion in the matter.

Duraku said the new government would adopt a long-term approach to human trafficking and he said this would involve offering

assistance to victims. On the other hand, Cosaj noted that two houses which had been financed by the OSCE had been closed.

Hasani said that Section 139 of Kosovo's Penal Code provided for a maximum sentence of 20 years in prison for human trafficking but that most sentences are shorter. Luci said that as long as trafficking isn't considered as part of organised crime traffickers will be able to get off lightly. She called for a strategic plan that tackles the problem at various levels.

Asked about cooperation between the police in Kosovo and police in Moldova, Macedonia and other neighbouring countries, Ahmeti said this has been largely a competence of the UNMIK Police. However, he said that the Kosovo Police cooperate with police in other countries through Interpol. He cited a case where the police in Moldova had reported suspicious activity to the Kosovo Police, resulting in the arrest of traffickers. "Many times we have been discouraged by sentences handed down by the courts in trafficking cases, but we never stopped our work," Ahmeti said.

Hasani said court verdicts depended on proof, but he also noted that they are influenced by the way the problem is perceived in the country. It was pointed out that many places where trafficked

women are kept are close to police stations and that police officers are suspected of being clients.

Cosaj said the biggest challenge was victim rehabilitation. She said most victims find it difficult to testify in court and to get on with their lives since Kosovo is a small country and the courts do not offer witness protection. She also stressed that victims suffer a stigma in the community, especially in cases when the victim is a minor. "Many school directors refuse to accept these girls at school because they tend to see them as a destabilizing factor," she said.

Luci added that the patriarchal mentality in Kosovar society plays a big role in branding a female as a prostitute, with a bias towards concluding that the victim "brought it on herself". This, according to Luci, "impedes her return to the community as she is believed to have destroyed her own morality."

Cosaj said there should be a public debate about legalizing prostitution as it will continue to exist in the country, despite the efforts of the police. She suggested that religious groups should be included in the discussion.

According to Duraku, a lack of cooperation among relevant institutions remains the biggest challenge to deterring human trafficking.

Illegal Construction in Prishtina

Prishtina, September 18, 2008

Does Prishtina have an urban development plan and, if so, why is it not being implemented? What is being done by the authorities to prevent public spaces being ruined by illegal construction? Are building contractors and their associates above the law? In order to discuss these issues, BIRN organised a TV debate with a discussion panel consisting of: Shiqeri Spahiu, head of the Urbanisation Department in the Prishtina Municipal Assembly; Lulzim Nixha, an architect, and the former head of the Urbanisation Department; Sylejman Ramadani, head of Lakrishte district; Shemsi Veseli, resident in Prishtina's Bregu i Diellit district.

The debate kicked off with Spahiu saying that construction has been banned completely in inner Prishtina. He said that more than 700 buildings had been put up illegally during election campaigns but that these were mainly in rural areas or in suburbs of Prishtina, such as Cagllavica. He said the number of cases in inner Prishtina was relatively small. Spahiu said that since the current government came to power, the Assembly had approved 46 of 713 applications for construction permits. He said the low number of permits issued in the capital was due to a shortage of qualified construction engineers and surveyors.

Nixha said that many more

buildings were built than the number of permits issued because of a lack of cooperation among the relevant agencies in the Assembly. He pointed out that his team had taken just three months to produce a strategic plan for Prishtina, compared to three years taken by the former city architect, Rexhep Luci, who died in mysterious circumstances. He added that an urban plan without adequate population statistics could not be accurate or complete.

Shemsi Veseli said responsibility for the present situation rested with the competent institutions, which are not protecting the public interest. He said there was a corrupt link between contractors and officials. The broadcast was recorded in the same week that prominent Prishtina architect Rexhep Luci was murdered. Veseli claimed that Luci's killing was orchestrated by contractors who objected to building constraints in the capital.

Spahiu said that buildings which did not follow necessary procedures had been demolished, while in some cases builders were given an opportunity to comply with regulations retroactively.

"Every individual who wants to build is informed about all the necessary criteria in the office of Urbanization in the Municipal Assembly of Prishtina," Spahiu said. Asked why this information is not posted on the official website, Spahiu said steps were being taken to rectify this.

Ramadani, head of Lakrishte district, pointed out that most citizens are unfamiliar with the details of urban planning and that Prishtina residents "are living in an urban chaos lacking infrastructure, proper planning and space."

Spahiu said the problems in the district were temporary and would be resolved when construction was finished. Nixha and Spahiu disagreed over the issue of which agency is entitled to issue construction permits in Prishtina. Spahiu said permits were issued by the Municipal Assembly, while Nixha said the Kosovo Trust Agency, KTA, was the relevant body.

Veseli pointed out that while the residents of Lakrishte had asked for the construction of kindergartens, a primary school and two secondary schools, only high-rise buildings were being put up.

Nixha pointed out that people continue to buy illegal apartments because they are cheaper, since permits have not been paid for and the quality of construction is low.

Veseli warned that demolition could be applied selectively to the advantage of public officials who are themselves involved in illegal construction, and he accused Spahiu and Nixha of building illegal annexes onto their own buildings.

Spahiu said he had done this for accommodation purposes and not for commercial gain.



Panelists agreed that there is no understanding among Kosovo architects that they should not work with contractors who deal in illegal construction projects.

These debates were organised as part of BIRN's Current Affairs TV show "Jeta ne Kosovë", which is broadcast every Thursday night on Kosovo's public TV station, RTK.

Fran Drescher in Kosovo

Famous American actress and writer Fran Drescher will visit Kosovo from October 7-9. Drescher, who is best known for her television sitcom "The Nanny," is a multiple nominee for Emmy and Golden Globe awards. She will visit Kosovo in the role of American Public Diplomacy Envoy for Women's Health Issues, a position to which she was recently appointed by the US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice.

Drescher has also made a name for herself as a writer of two New York Times best-selling books. Her first book, "Enter Whining," is a story of her life from her youth in Queens, New York, to becoming a television star. For her second book, "Cancer Schmancer," which recounts her experience with uterine cancer, Drescher received the National Coalition for Cancer Survivorship Writer's Award.

During her visit in Prishtina she will discuss her experiences as a cancer survivor and will encourage activities of the Balkans Breast Cancer Initiative, BBICI, an initiative headquartered in Prishtina that brings together women of the Balkans to fight a common enemy – cancer.



KINO ABC

INDIANA JONES and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull (2008)

Director: Steven Spielberg
Starring: Harrison Ford, Kate Blanchett etc.

Synopsis:

During the Cold War, Soviet agents watch Professor Henry Jones when a young man brings him a coded message from an aged, demented colleague, Henry Oxley. Led by the brilliant Irina Spalko, the Soviets tail Jones and the young man, Mutt, to Peru. With Oxley's code, they find a legendary skull made of a single piece of quartz. If Jones can deliver the skull to its rightful place, all may be well; but if Irina takes it to its origin, she'll gain powers that could endanger the West. Aging professor and young buck join forces with a woman from Jones's past to face the dangers of the jungle, Russia, and the supernatural.



15 - 19 OCTOBER "Turkish Film Week"

During this week Kino ABC in Prishtina is going to screen seven of the most known Turkish movies from the last decade. The week is going to begin with movie 'Takva', from director Ozer Kiziltan.

TAKVA (2006)

Humble and introvert Muharrem lives in a solitary and meager existence of a prayer and sexual abstinence adhering strictly to the most severe Islamic doctrines. His extraordinary devotion attracts the attention of the leader of a rich and powerful Istanbul religious group who offers him an administrative post as a rent collector for their numerous properties. Muharrem's new job throws him into the modern outside world he has successfully avoided for so long. He soon witnesses conflicting attitude towards alcohol consumption.

He notices that he himself has become proud, domineering and even dishonest. To make matters worse, Muharrem's inner peace is disturbed by the tormenting image of a seductive woman who tempts him in his dreams, both night and day. With the balance of his devotion now upset, his fear of God begins to eat away at his senses.



German Film Week
Opening date
Monday, October 6, 2008
Closing date
Sunday, October 12, 2008

4
deutsche filmwoche
JAVA E FILMIT GERMANIA I NEDELJA NEMACKOG FILMA I GERMAN FILM WEEK

For the 4th time, the Germany Embassy, together with Concordia Pictures, presents the German Film Week in Kosovo. The program includes feature and documentary films, children's films, Q&A sessions after the screenings as well as workshops.

German Film Week in Kosovo is going to be held at Kinostudio, near RTV 21.

DJ



Friday 10.10.08
Re-Charge Party with HED KANDI Label - Kelly Marie & Live Percussion by Chris B

Friday 17.10.08
Turntables On The Hudson Party @ SPRAY
New York City
Music by: Nickodemus & Mariano
Turkish Instrument - UD by Zeb (Spy from Cairo-The Pleb)
Nappy G, one of the world's best drummers



THEATRE

1 October – "Fourth Sister" – Agim Sopi
2 October – Ballet
4 October – "Uuuuh" – Isë Qosja
5 October – Truth in Translation - Play from Africa – 20:00 – 22:00
6 October – Truth in Translation - Play from Africa – 17:00 – 20:00
7 October – Truth in Translation - Play from Africa – 17:00 – 20:00
8 October – "Fourth Sister" – Agim Sopi
9 October – Ballet
10 October
"Uuuuh" – Isë Qosja
15 October
"Fourth Sister" – Agim Sopi
16 October
Ballet
22 October
"Fourth Sister" - Agim Sopi
23 October
Ballet
24 October
"Uuuuh" – Isë Qosja
29 October
"Fourth Sister" – Agim Sopi
31 October
"Uuuuh" Isë Qosja



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66					67						68			

Across

- 1: Sign of healing
5: Like restaurant towelettes
10: Hansom vehicle
13: Pat response
14: Geological span
15: Root beer alternative
16: Current generator
18: Table scraps
19: My girl cousin, to my mom
20: Not on schedule
21: Lions and Tigers and Bears
22: Cut to the bone
24: Spine-tingling
26: Time keeper?
29: Not yet ignited
32: Important work
35: Utmost
36: Opposite of staccato
37: 'Sister Act' extra
38: Minor deity
40: Player's peg
41: Loosens
43: White Stripes, for one
44: Gropes for words
45: Surveil, with 'out'
46: Soothing
48: Syrup source
50: Cherub's superior
54: Fix a hot dog?
56: Screen-measuring unit
59: Leaf in a book
60: Titanic
61: Concert program listing
63: Mocked by imitating
64: Merchandising scheme, briefly
65: Whiskey measure
66: Bananas, nuts, or crackers
67: Maudlin
68: Bathroom rugs

Down

- 1: Much teen talk
2: Eyelashes
3: Chips in a chip
4: Nut trees
5: American voters before 1920
6: October birthstone
7: Greek letter
8: Sea duck
9: '... and baby makes ___'
10: Mutually comparable
11: Flute or saxophone variety
12: Striped fish
15: ___ saw (carpenter's curve cutter)
17: Woodwind requirement
23: Ten to a buck
25: Regretted
27: Highlander's cap
28: Rust, tarnish, or laughing gas
30: Short newspaper piece
31: Corn-growing regions
32: Responsibility
33: Quarterback option
34: Pristine
36: Pilfers
38: Like one end of a pool
39: Firearm
42: Endorsed
44: Valor
46: Equus and others
47: Where Barry Bonds plays,
49: Has trouble saying sassafras
51: Maui greeting
52: Wine grape
53: Party throwers
54: Pillow cover
55: Cocoon's contents
57: Hoof-on-pavement sound
58: Rope fiber
62: Coquettish

On October 3...

- 1739

The Treaty of Nissa is signed by the Ottoman Empire and Russia at the end of the Russian-Turkish War, 1736-1739.
- 1778

British Captain James Cook anchors in Alaska.
- 1795

General Napoleon Bonaparte first rises to national prominence being named to defend the French National Convention against armed counter-revolutionary rioters threatening the three-year-old revolutionary government.
- 1849

American author Edgar Allan Poe is found delirious in a gutter in Baltimore, Maryland under mysterious circumstances; it is the last time he is seen in public before his death.
- 1873

Captain Jack and companions are hanged for their part in the Modoc War.
- 1910

King Manuel II was overthrown in a revolution and Portugal became a republic.
- 1918

King Boris III of Bulgaria takes the throne.
- 1921

The World Series was broadcast on the radio for the first time.
- 1929

The Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes is renamed the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, "Land of the South Slavs".
- 1932

Iraq gains independence from Britain.
- 1952

United Kingdom successfully tests a nuclear weapon.
- 1955

The Mickey Mouse Club debuts on ABC.
- 1962

The Beatles released their first hit, "Love Me Do," in Britain.
- 1990

Re-unification of Germany. The German Democratic Republic ceased to exist and its territory became part of the Federal Republic of Germany. East German citizens became part of the European Community, which later became the European Union.
- 1993

Battle of Mogadishu: In an attempt to capture officials of warlord Mohamed Farrah Aidid's organisation in Mogadishu, Somalia, 18 US soldiers and about 1,000 Somalis are killed in heavy fighting.

Knee Slappers

...and they are fresh!

Seismologists have discovered that earthquakes can be predicted from animals' behavior. Animals tend to get very nervous before an impending earthquake, so when cows start giving butter instead of milk...

Bush is so fearful of putting his foot in his mouth over this economic mess, he's at the point where he has to think before he thinks.

Bugging is such a way of life in some places. I know one US diplomat in the Russia who at the start of every meeting says to the ceiling, "Hey, could you beep twice when 90 minutes are up?"

I didn't realize how much Islang my son used until his high school asked him to enroll in English as a second language.

Couldn't watch the (Democrat/Cic/ Republican) party convention due to health concerns. I'm on a baloney - free diet.

People have a thing about corrupt politicians. Their corrupt politician is okay. Your's should be shot!

You want my definition of cruel and unusual punishment? The never-ending election campaign.

You know, being a politician can be dangerous for your health. Seems campaign promises lead to severe memory loss.

There's a brand new show just for sadists. It's called BEAT THE PRESS.

China has an interesting way of choosing their leaders. They pick one from column "A" and none from column "B."

Can you believe it? Now there are over one billion Chinese on the mainland of China. Just imagine when they start importing Viagra from Kosovo.

Speaking at a Manhattan fundraiser in New York,

Hillary Clinton said the 'Don't Ask Don't Tell' policy has been a failure.' She said, "I know from personal experience it doesn't work. For years Bill and I have had a 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell' marriage.

Believe it or not, they have a Dial-A-Joke service in Washington, D.C. You call up information and they give you the number of the American Congress.

Ask a stupid question and the American Congress will probably appropriate \$10,000,000 to find an answer for it.

Do you live a life of "quiet desperation" or do you have kids - or am I just repeating myself?



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