

Prishtina Insight

Dec 21, 2012 - Jan 10, 2013 Issue No. 102 www.prishtinainsight.com Price € 1



Anti-Gay Attacks Reveal Kosovo's Hidden Furies

Extremist attacks in Prishtina on magazine launch and LGBT organisation shock marginalised community but fail to dent their resolve. Meanwhile, Kosovo is forced to deal with the little-discussed issue of its gay community.

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For the love of music



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Kacanik Flouted Law in Troubled Land Deal

Municipality gave land worth 1.8 million euro to company without due authorization or clear title to the plot, Prishtina Insight investigation shows.

By Tinka Kurti

The municipality of Kacanik skirted Kosovo property laws when it gave away land worth 1.8 million euro so that a local company could develop a housing and business complex, Prishtina Insight can reveal.

The then mayor, Xhabir Zharku, signed off on the deal in 2008. As of Thursday, Zharku was a fugitive nearly a week after failing to report to the Kacanik court to begin serving a three-year prison sentence in

an unrelated case for extortion and illegal possession of weapons.

Zharku had declined to comment about the land deal before he became a fugitive.

According to documents released by the municipality, the land deal began with a letter dated September 12, 2008.

Elham Bunjaku, a representative from a local company, Clirimtaret, wrote to the town planning department requesting the use of 31 acres of land.

"The families of the KLA

[Kosovo Liberation Army] veterans, war invalids, veterans and the municipality of Kacanik will benefit from it," Bunjaku wrote.

Less than a month-and-a-half later, on October 23, Mayor Zharku signed away cadastral site number 650 to Clirimtaret for use as "collective housing and business facilities".

But the deal did not go through public procurement procedures. The municipality also had no right to give away the property for use for more than 10 years.

Under a 2000 law on the Regulation of Local Government, municipalities must seek central government permission for granting land use for more than 10 years.

Kacanik had not sought permission from the Ministry of Local Government, as required. After learning of the transaction, the ministry on April 24, 2009 wrote to Mayor Zharku to inform him that the transaction broke the law, telling him to review the decision.

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Kosovo MP Withdraws From Parliament Tender

An opposition MP, Agim Kuleta, has requested the annulment of an Assembly tender awarded to his own company after Prishtina Insight asked him about the apparent conflict of interest.

"After consulting the Anti-Corruption Agency on whether...

business

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Italian Energy Deal Holds Hidden Risks for Serbia

A key energy agreement between Serbia and Italy, paving the way for investment in new hydroelectric power plants in Serbia, is awaiting adoption in the Belgrade parliament.

The agreement envisages construction of ten hydropower...

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Prishtina Insight

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see page 16 for more info

Kacanik Flouted Law in Troubled Land Deal

from page 1

The head of urbanization in Kacanik, Bekim Troni, told Prishtina Insight that the deal did not break the law. "At the time, no law was in place on giving away municipal property for use, so we were able to take such a decision," he said.

But the head of the Ministry of Local Government's legal depart-

ment, Agron Maxhuni, told Prishtina Insight that the 2000 law clearly applied to Kacanik's land deal.

Ownership disputed:

Based on Zharku's decision, 20 per cent of the apartments were to belong to the municipality on completion of the housing and business complex.

However, it remains unclear whether the municipality owned the land in the first place.

The land formerly belonged to the state-owned Ramadan Agushi agricultural cooperative. It was listed as a socially owned enterprise on the register of the Kosovo Privatization Agency's properties until 2005, the agency spokesperson Ylli Kaloshi told Prishtina Insight.

"As is known, the KPA has a mandate by law to administer social enterprises and their properties and assets," he said.

In subsequent lists, the land mysteriously lost its designation as a socially owned enterprise.

Prishtina Insight asked Kacanik municipality to release its current ownership certificate, but the municipality has not done so.

An ownership certificate from December 2009 obtained by Prishtina Insight lists it as "social property."

The KPA is looking into how the municipality assumed ownership of the land. Doing so without informing the agency "would constitute a legal violation," Kaloshi said.

The then Minister of Local Government, Sadri Ferati, raised the issue with Zharku in April 2009 in a letter.

"Under the law on the KPA No. 03/I-67, the agency is the only authority authorized to administer and manage social property," he noted.

"The foreseen location for the construction of the facility is social property, namely property of the Agricultural Cooperative Ramadan Agushi," Ferati added.

Ferati asked the mayor to review the decision to grant the land. The municipality did so in 2009, but stuck with it.

"Everything related to the case was fine," Troni, the municipality's head of urbanization, told Prishtina Insight.

Change of owners:

Clirimtare's contract with the municipality obliged it to complete the housing and business project within two years.

But less than a year after the 2008 deal, Clirimtare signed a contract with another company, Bardhi, to take on the project. The

deal stated that the municipality would still get 20 per cent of the apartments, while Clirimtare would retain nine businesses.

"It hadn't turned out as we'd thought it would. Much more investment was necessary than we had foreseen, so it was better to withdraw," Clirimtare representative Elham Bunjaku told Prishtina Insight.

When the project started, Nuri Rexha from Kacanik decided to buy one of the businesses at the site from Clirimtareve and its partner, Vellezerve te Bashkuar, which also withdrew later from the project.

Rexha says he made a down payment of 20,000 euro but lost his money and his rights to the business after the change in contracts.

Rexha sued Clirimtareve and Vellezerve te Bashkuar in the municipal court of Kacanik and has been awarded 40,000 euro. The two companies appealed to the Supreme Court, which has yet to hear the case.

"I thought that since we were from Kacanik and all knew each other, I could trust them," Rexha said.



Xhabir Zharku, the former mayor of Kacanik.

PDK Chief Denies Lobbying Thaci Over 'Uncle'

PDK caucus chief says his chat with Thaci played no role in health ministry official getting his job back.



By Parim Olluri and
Jeton Musliu

When Adem Grabovci was recorded chatting with Prime Minister Hashim Thaci over the phone in November 2011, the chief of the caucus of the ruling Democratic Party of Kosovo, PDK, reminded Thaci that he'd "neglected an uncle."

"Mazreku?" Thaci asked. "No, Curr Gjocaj," Grabovci answered, mentioning the name of his wife's uncle. According to Thaci, that was the first he'd heard of the issue.

The conversation between the two was vague and didn't go into details about Gjocaj, who was then fighting to get his job back at the Ministry of Health.

The EU mission in Kosovo, EULEX, recorded the conversation as part of its corruption probe into the Ministry of Transport and Telecommunications.

It was one of several recordings of phone calls between PDK leaders that were publicly leaked in November.

EULEX has since condemned the leak while affirming that the calls were authentic. Thaci's government insists the recordings

were fabricated.

The November 2011 conversation came six months after Dr Gjocaj was fired as head of the Department of Health Services at the Ministry of Health in May 2011. He regained his job in May this year.

Grabovci told Prishtina Insight that he doesn't consider Gjocaj to be his uncle; he is merely his wife's uncle.

He also would not say if he had helped Gjocaj with his employment situation but maintained that his conversation with Thaci was not connected to it.

"Curr got his job back thanks to a decision of the Independent Oversight Committee. It had nothing to do with the fact that I mentioned his name to the Prime Minister," Grabovci said.

Sick leave row:

Gjocaj was fired as head of the Department of Health Services after a disciplinary committee ruled on May 12, 2011, that he had misused sick leave and was working as at a hospital in Ferizaj while taking sick leave.

Gjocaj appealed against his dismissal in August, filing a complaint with the Independent Oversight Committee for Civil Service in Kosovo. He accused the ministry of acting illegally and said he was receiving medical

treatment at the International Medicine Hospital while on sick leave.

The committee ruled in Gjocaj's favour on August 15, 2011.

On October 27, 2011, the then secretary of the ministry, Ilir Tolaj, issued a decision implementing the oversight committee's decision, placing Gjocaj in a different position as head of the Center of Professional Services for Mental Health in Ferizaj.

But Gjocaj did not agree to change jobs. The ministry contested the civil service committee's decision and filed a complaint at the Supreme Court. In November 2011, the court ruled that the civil service committee had not considered some facts in the case and stated that it would review their decision.

The committee revisited Gjocaj's case again and on May 4, 2012, again ruled that he should get his original job back.

Lots of people called Gjocaj:

Now back as the head of health services at the ministry, Gjocaj told Prishtina Insight in December that he doesn't know why Thaci and Grabovci talked about him over the phone.

"I do not know if they talked



Curr Gjocaj, the director of health services in the Ministry of Health.

about me or not. The two parties can explain this best," he said.

Gjocaj also denied that he was Grabovci's uncle, suggesting that the PDK caucus chief and Thaci might have been talking about someone else. "I have that name but I do not represent all the Gjocajs of Kosovo," he said.

Asked about his employment

issues at the health ministry, Gjocaj emphasized that the civil service committee got him his job back.

Health Ministry spokesman Faik Hoti also said the ministry's decision to return Gjocaj as the head of health services was simply a matter of respecting the civil service committee's ruling.



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Govt Envisages Surveillance Clearinghouse

Proposed law, establishing a single centre for intelligence and law enforcement wiretaps, working under the authority of the Prime Minister and President, may violate EU standards.



By Parim Olluri

When Prime Minister Hashim Thaci met the EU Commissioner for Enlargement, Stefan Fule, in October, he heralded the EU's recently released feasibility study.

The study was an "historic document for Kosovo since it's the first document of relations between the state of Kosovo and the EU," Thaci said on October 15. "We are convinced that within a few months we will fulfill the short-term criteria," he continued.

However, less than two months later, Thaci's cabinet on December 3 proposed a draft law on wiretapping that contradicts the EU recommendations in the feasibility study.

It also would weaken the ability of the EU rule of law mission, EULEX, to conduct wiretaps independently.

While the EU, through the document, called on Kosovo to adopt a wiretapping law, it asked for a separation between phone-taps used for intelligence purposes and those used for the judicial system.

The draft law put forward by the government foresees no such separation. It calls for the establishment of an Electronic Administrative Center within the Kosovo Intelligence Agency, which reports directly to the Prime Minister and the President.

Wiretaps by police, prosecutors, customs and EULEX would all go through this one centre. Telephone operators would be obliged to share information with the centre, or face a lawsuit from the state. The Inspector of the Kosovo Intelligence Agency would be tasked with monitoring the phone tapping.

"Limitations for EULEX"

Interior Minister Bajram Rexhepi told Prishtina Insight in December that the wiretapping law would place constraints on EULEX's activities in this field.

"The limitations for EULEX are in the law. I do not want to comment more," said Rexhepi, who has complained about EULEX and the UN mission in Kosovo, UNMIK, tapping his phones.

The government released the draft law less than a week after embarrassing telephone conversations between senior leaders of the Democratic Party of Kosovo, PDK, appeared on YouTube on November 28. EULEX had recorded the calls as part of an investigation into corruption at the Ministry of Transport and Telecommunications.

The conversations were leaked after EULEX released the recordings to the defence team of the former Transport Minister,



Thaci government wants to tighten grip on wiretapping.

Fatmir Limaj, who is charged in the case.

All the recordings feature Adem Grabovci, head of PDK's parliamentary caucus, talking among others to

Prime Minister Thaci, European Integration Minister Vlora Citaku, mayor of Skenderaj Sami Llushtaku and Kadri Veseli, former head of the Intelligence Service, SHIK.

The calls feature offensive language, insults, requests for favours, and suggest that PDK leaders fear losing control of their party.

The PDK-led government has condemned the recordings as illegal and as fakes. EULEX, for its part, has condemned the release of the court-ordered wiretaps but says they are authentic.

Had the wiretaps been done under the proposed law, EULEX would have been required to perform them through the Electronic Administrative Center, which is ultimately under the authority of the Prime Minister of the President.

Although EULEX has a representative on the working group that drafted the proposed law, the mission would not comment about the government's proposal directly.

"It is important for Kosovo to have a law on phone wiretapping but it's also important that this law complies with European standards and good practices," EULEX spokeswoman Bardha Azari said.

"One of the main principles of all modern and democratic societies is the clear and practical separation of the executive, legislative and judicial powers," Azari added.

The European Commission also did not comment on the draft law.

Disagreements within the working group:

Security expert Kole Krasniqi who was part of the working group that created the draft law, said the group met for about a year until March.

He said he and other members of the group, including the

EULEX representative, voiced objections to wiretapping being conducted under the auspices of the Kosovo Intelligence Agency.

"There should be a separation not only of responsibilities but also a physical separation between the facilities where the wiretapping takes place for intelligence needs and for courts' needs," Krasniqi said.

Jeton Oruqi, coordinator of the Prime Minister's legal office and a government representative on the working group declined to discuss the draft law with Prishtina Insight.

The working group also had representatives from the police. But Kosovo Police spokesman Baki Kelani said his agency has not taken a stance on the law. "We will implement the law as it is approved. We cannot comment on its content," he said.

However, Florian Qehaja, head of the Kosovar Center for Security Studies, an NGO, told Prishtina Insight that while a single office for a wiretapping would be a good thing, the government's proposal was problematic.

"We support the establishment of a Common Operations Center, but it should function as an independent mechanism, not as part of the KIA," Qehaja said.

"This is because there is a difference between the purposes of wiretapping done by police and those done by the KIA."

Qehaja, who said he asked to participate in the working group on the wiretapping law but wasn't invited, said Kosovo should look to Croatia for a wiretapping model.

The Croats have a single such centre, with an internal separation between wiretaps used for national security and those used for law enforcement.

While Qehaja is concerned that the proposed law goes too far in consolidating wiretapping, "the proposals of the international actors for the decentralization of the wiretapping system would also cause chaos and have great implications for national security", he said.

Editor's Word

Delusions of Privacy



by Flutura Kusari

Arguments that court-ordered wiretaps of leaders of the ruling Democratic Party of Kosovo, PDK, violated privacy aren't valid, nor was their release illegal. This is why the PDK leaders haven't followed through on their threats to file a lawsuit.

The leaked phone conversations — recorded as part of EULEX investigation into the Ministry of Transportation and Telecommunication and ex-Minister Fatmir Limaj— shouldn't be used to politicise the courts or prosecutorial system. But government leaders are doing just that, as evidenced by PDK MPs call on EULEX to leave and the Government's proposed wiretapping law, which would restrict the ability of EULEX and other law enforcement from conducting independent investigations.

The leak of five telephone audio recordings between MP Adem Grabovci and Prime Minister Hashim Thaci, Minister Vlora Citaku, Mayor of Skenderaj Sami Llushtaku, and Kadri Veseli, former Chief of Kosovo Information Service, no doubt angered the PDK-led government. They claimed the recordings violated their privacy and were done illegally.

However, according to the legislation in Kosovo and international practices, none of the violations claimed by the Government in the phone tapping case is valid.

When it comes to privacy, from a legal perspective, a distinction must be made between those that voluntarily joined the public life and exercise public posts and those that may become public protagonists by chance. The persons wiretapped belong to the former, and the public interest to understand their private life prevails, leaving them with little right to privacy.

The Constitution envisages protection of privacy in communication, but its interpretation cannot be that rigid, without looking at European practices. The media have made such materials public when they involved senior officials, and courts, moreover, supported them when they involved showbiz stars. For example, in the known case of the supermodel Naomi Campbell, whose pictures were taken as she attended a rehabilitation clinic shortly after she declared that she had kicked her drug addiction, the European Court of Human Rights found that the media had the right to publish that she was still using drugs and that she was recovering.

In the case of PDK leaders' tapping, they discussed party politics, employment of uncles and nephews, official trips, among other issues. It was also important for the public to be informed about internal divisions in the ruling political party, the language such leaders use and how and to whom the majority MPs report. No court in developed countries would find elements of breach of privacy.

But, was the phone tapping illegal?

No.

EULEX confirmed that they were ordered by one of its prosecutors. Article 258 of the Criminal Procedure Code stipulates that interception of communication is allowed only if it is approved by the Preliminary Procedure Judge. Since this telephone tapping was done with the consent of the court, in the investigation phase in the Fatmir Limaj-Ministry of Transportation and Telecommunications case, they are fully in line with the legal framework in Kosovo.

Even MP Grabovci has confirmed that he was investigated in the same case. And the conclusion that the wiretapping shouldn't have been submitted to the defence attorneys of Limaj group, as Grabovci is not accused in the case, is not a conclusion based on the law, but rather an expression of free opinion. It is in the competency of the prosecution to decide who should be wiretapped and they are obliged by law to make all relevant materials available for the defence. And such telephone interception may only have circumstantial value for the relevant investigation. We will hear the prosecution's reasoning very soon in court.

Some even said that the intercepted phone calls were confidential. All materials upon submission to the court, with some exceptions, are public documents and cannot be categorized as confidential. Furthermore, if these telephone interceptions were not published in the media, they would have been shown in court hearings — which are open for the public/media.

"The damaged parties" of the wiretapping haven't yet filed a lawsuit on the tapping, despite many threats to do so.

Instead, the Government proposed a draft-law on telephone interceptions that reduces the EULEX's scope in wiretapping. Its policy seems to be focused in reducing the possibility to control its officials, rather than installing a rule of law. In normal conditions, public institutions should be grateful to EULEX for its much anticipated action in the area of rule of law.

Unfortunately, in the past this mission too was more focused in politics. Nevertheless, perhaps corruption trials, including the case involving the former Ministry of Transport if the indictment is confirmed, could shed a little light on important issues related to the management of public money.

Some have asked, incredulously, how the Prime Minister's phone could be tapped.

But instead of worrying about the privacy of our top officials, there's a more important question: What are they hiding?

Kosovo's Detention-happy Judges Rapped

Exonerated suspects are suing courts for compensation, as judicial authorities acknowledge that judges are too quick to place people behind bars.



By Kreshnik Gashi

The Kosovo Judicial Council risks losing millions of euro as a result of lawsuits filed by citizens who have been placed behind bars and then exonerated.

The Council, which oversees Kosovo's courts system, is urging judges to show more caution in ordering the detention of criminal suspects and defendants.

A Judicial Council commission has ordered exonerated suspects compensation of 6 euro to 25 euro per day of detention. This year alone, it has awarded 135,560 euro in damages to 71 people.

But some people, unsatisfied with the compensation offered, have filed lawsuits against the Judicial Council to get more money.

Rexhep Ibishi was jailed for five months in December 2002 on charges of cigarette smuggling. Meanwhile, authorities held on to 200,000 euro worth of cigarettes that they had confiscated. The Municipal Court in Gjilan and the Supreme Court of Kosovo later acquitted him.

"For five months of detention they offered me 2,200 euro as compensation," Ibishi told Prishtina Insight.

Far from satisfied with the amount, he filed lawsuits against the Kosovo Judicial Council at the Municipal Court of Prishtina, seeking compensation for his

detention and for damages to his cigarettes.

Nearly 10 years on, the Municipal Court in Prishtina ruled in his favour, increasing his compensation for his detention to 10,000 euro. The court has yet to rule on his lawsuit seeking about 170,000 for damages to his goods.

Meanwhile, the court is also considering a lawsuit by urologist Tune Pervorfi, who was arrested in 2008 along with other doctors in the so-called Medicus organ-trafficking case.

Pervorfi was jailed for a month before prosecutors concluded that he was not involved in the alleged organ transplants and he was released.

Pervorfi's lawyer, Nike Shala, said the Judicial Council offered

the urologist 530 euro, which he rejected. He is seeking almost a hundred times that amount, 450,000 euro.

Judges warned:

With these cases in mind and others expected in future, the Kosovo Judicial Council is urging judges to be more cautious about detaining suspects.

The Supreme Court President, Fejzullah Hasani, told Prishtina Insight that judges have become too quick to detain suspects.

"According to the data, over 90 per cent of requests of prosecutors for detentions are approved... we have turned into a state of detention," Hasani said.

By comparison, Hasani notes



Judicial Council says judges are locking up too many suspects.

that the figure is 25 per cent in Croatia.

Enver Peci, president of the Kosovo Judicial Council, said most cases judges don't consider whether it is truly necessary to keep suspects in custody. The Council had warned judges about this during a recent private conference, he added.

"We have asked the judges to

exercise additional caution in their rulings," he told Prishtina Insight.

Meanwhile, judges face more supervision in their detention decisions. In future evaluations, judges may receive negative marks for detaining too many suspects who are later exonerated, Peci concluded.

Serbia Seeks 'Entity' Status for North Kosovo

Belgrade says the Serb-run north of Kosovo should become an autonomous 'entity' along same lines as Republika Srpska in Bosnia, daily newspaper Vecernje Novosti reports.



Prishtina Insight

Serbia's long-awaited "platform" on Kosovo envisages the broadest possible autonomy for the mainly Serbian north of Kosovo, the Serbian daily, Vecernje Novosti, reported on Tuesday.

The newspaper says that the document, which has yet to be made public, says Northern Kosovo should be "some kind of entity, such as the Republika Srpska".

According to 1995 Dayton Peace Accords, Bosnia is a sovereign state composed of two autonomous entities - the mainly Muslim and Croat Federation of Bosnia and Hercegovina, and the mainly Serbian Republika Srpska.

Northern Kosovo, which borders Serbia, is almost entirely comprised of Serbs, and the authorities there do not recognise Kosovo's independence or the government in Prishtina.

The area remains under the day-to-day control of so-called parallel institutions, funded by Belgrade, including town councils, health authorities, post offices and schools.

The platform adds that, referring to the constitution of Serbia, Belgrade will not recognize Kosovo as a state. So far, Kosovo has been recognized by 97 out of



Serbia will propose a Republika Srpska model for Northern Kosovo.

193 UN member states including the US and 22 of the 27 EU member states.

Vecernje Novosti said that the platform would form a subject of discussion with the international community.

The document has been signed off by all Serbia's top officials who met in Belgrade late on Sunday.

No details have been released about what the state policy on Kosovo further entails. The Prime

Minister, Ivica Dacic, said only after the meeting that all senior officials had agreed on a unified policy.

The emergence of the platform comes after Kosovo and Serbia leaders made a breakthrough deal in Brussels on December 4 on implementation of a deal on the border.

Known as "integrated border management, IBM, it involves each side appointing its own liai-

son officers to monitor its workings.

In the meantime, President Tomislav Nikolic met on Monday with the ambassadors of Russia, China and Britain to inform them of Serbia's progress in building a strategy on Kosovo.

Nikolic is expected to meet parliamentary whips in the second half of next week to present the long-awaited platform, Tanjug news agency has reported.

3.3 % of Kosovo's economic growth is predicted by World Bank for 2013. 7.000 euro is the annual average consumption of Kosovar household, whilst biggest part of this money is spent on food and non-alcoholic beverages.

5.4 million euro is the cost of rehabilitation of the drinking water distribution network in Ferizaj. City's assembly, ministry of economic development and Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, SDC are co-financing the project.

Prishtina Insight

www.prishtinainsight.com

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Design & Layout: "Rjeti"

Arben Grajqevci

Printing: Lindi Printing Center

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Anti-Gay Attacks Reveal Kosovo's Hidden Furies

Extremist attacks on magazine launch and LGBT organisation shock marginalised community but fail to dent their resolve.



By Donjeta Demolli

The apartment in Prishtina was supposed to be a refuge. But on Sunday, the Libertas organisation's office and drop-in centre was the scene of a brutal attack on the country's lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community.

Libertas, an LGBT organisation established this past summer, was having a party that night. About 20 people were there. They had planned to go to a bar but decided to stay in.

Two nights earlier, groups linked to a football fan group and an Islamic student group had attacked the launch event for Kosovo 2.0's newest magazine, Sex.

The attackers yelled homophobic slurs and beat up a Kosovo 2.0 journalist. Better to keep a low profile in the aftermath of that, Libertas reasoned.

A Libertas employee, who spoke to Prishtina Insight on condition that no name was printed, said he and a friend left the party to buy a corkscrew around 8:25pm. When they returned from a nearby market, several bearded men were waiting and chased them upstairs, yelling, "Get out, whores."

The man made back inside to the party, but his female companion did not. "They had a pepper spray in hand and beat my friend," he said.

During the attack, when a neighbour raised the alarm and threatened to call police, one of the men responded: "He's gay, too. Go get him."

The men fled before police arrived. The woman was taken to the hospital and treated for head injuries before being released. Police said they were investigating but haven't made any arrests.

The attack, hard on the heels of the earlier attack on the 2.0 event, has had a chilling effect on the LGBT community. "This has been a great shock. We do not feel free to go out," the Libertas member said.

Threats to event:

The first rumblings of trouble started the day before Kosovo 2.0's launch event.

The Prishtina media outlet,

which operates a website and publishes a biannual magazine, had planned release of its Sex edition with a debate and a party at the Palace of Youth and Sports in Prishtina.

The magazine features stories about the LGBT community in Kosovo and the Balkans.

Various media outlets had previewed the event in the preceding days without causing a public outcry.

But, one day before the event, Kosovo 2.0 started receiving threats, while other intimidating messages began appearing on news portals and websites.

"Son of a bitch, we will hang you in the centre of Prishtina," read one comment posted to Kosovo 2.0's Facebook page.

Ekrem Zajmi, leader of Paqja Studentore, a student group promoting a devout form of Islam, used Facebook to urge people to show up and prevent the event.

"I invite you! All those who live in and around Prishtina and who are capable of moving and are proud of the purity of their nationality, family and society, go to the Youth Palace and prevent the launch of a humiliating and crippling event for our century-old values!" Zajmi wrote on his Facebook page on December 14.

Jokes from police:

When Kosovo 2.0 reported the threats to police, Flora Ahmeti, spokeswoman for the police in Prishtina, said the police "didn't have time to prepare" and underestimated how many people might show up against the launch event.

In the event, Dardan Zhegrova, a Kosovo 2.0 journalist, told Prishtina Insight that about 15 people stood outside the venue as the staff set up for the event.

"In the beginning there were six or seven police officers, and later only two remained," Zhegrova said.

By around 6:40pm, Zhegrova said staff were putting the finishing touches to the set-up at the Youth and Sports Palace's Red Hall, when he heard shouting and a group of 20 men rushed in, wielding clubs. A video of the attack was posted later on YouTube.

"They were pushing us and even

started beating me. They broke all the things and demolished the set-up," Zhegrova said, adding that their assailants shouted: "Allahu Akbar!", "Gays!", and "Whores!"

Zhegrova said the attitude of the police who later took his statement was disturbing: "They were joking with me. One asked me, 'Where are you from?' I said: 'Prishtina.' The other then said: 'Why, did you think he was from Gjakova?' and started laughing."

Zhegrova said the reference to Gjakova, a city with a popular reputation as being heavily populated by gays and Jews, "suggested that the officers were implying that I had a certain sexual orientation" and didn't take the attack seriously.

Asked about Zhegrova's account, police spokeswoman Ahmeti said she couldn't provide any additional information about the case because of the ongoing investigation.

A larger contingent of special police in riot gear later appeared at the site. In spite of their presence, at around 10:30pm, shortly before the launch event was about to start, about 100 protesters gathered and approached the building, yelling: "Out, pederasts!" and "Allahu akbar!" according to a statement released by Kosovo 2.0.

Kosovo 2.0 said it opted to evacuate the building, despite the police presence, out of concern for their safety. Police escorted out those remaining inside in small groups.

One person was arrested on the night. Officers interviewed and released him, police said. No other arrests have been made.

Online call to arms:

A football fan group, Plisat, later took credit for having "undertaken an action against gays," a message on Plisat's Facebook page read, using a derogatory Albanian word for gay people.

Plisat's spokesperson, Denis Pitarka, said the team's official fan group was not responsible for the violence, however.

"If someone from our group was there on his own accord, I don't see it as reasonable to be held accountable for each single member," he said.

However, Pitarka, also the spokesperson for Kosovo



Kosovo 2.0's magazine launch was attacked.

Cadastral Agency, freely admitted that the team's fan group was homophobic. "They have no place among us," he said, concerning gays.

Zajmi, head of Paqja Studentore, similarly distanced himself from violence while condemning public displays of homosexuality.

"Every individual can follow his sexual orientation within the limits of the Constitution, since, as we know the Constitution allows such a thing," he said.

"We are not against a person applying his personal conviction by himself. But if such an event is made public in a fully public environment, we stand against it," Zajmi said.

The attack on Kosovo 2.0's event has since been condemned by civil society groups, embassies, international missions and the Prime Minister of Kosovo, Hashim Thaci.

"The government demands that law and order institutions find the perpetrators of these violent attacks and bring them to justice," Thaci said in a statement.

"Every citizen of the Republic of Kosovo has the right of freedom of expression, and citizens cannot be discriminated against on the basis of ethnicity, gender, religion or sexual orientation."

Nita Luci, a lecturer at the Prishtina University, said the actions amounted to terrorism. "By any definition, which states that the use of violence to achieve political goals is terrorism, what happened is terrorism," she said.

"The political goal is threatening the secular state of Kosovo," she added.

Imer Mushkolaj, a columnist for the daily newspaper Express, said the attacks revealed divisions in Kosovo society.

"It tells us that part of this society remains intolerant. A part of this society doesn't want debate, considering themselves guardians of a moral code that they have in their minds, and their agenda is not only religious but political," Mushkolaj said.

It remains to be seen what the attacks will ultimately mean for Kosovo's LGBT community.

Artan Muhaxhiri, a professor of sociology at the University of Prishtina, said Kosovo can no longer ignore the fact that it has a gay population.

"Until now this was under the carpet," Muhaxhiri said "It was known but it was not discussed. But from this situation onwards, the issue cannot be avoided any more."

The employee of Libertas, whose friend was attacked, agreed, saying the events of the past weekend should mark a first, painful step toward gays winning acceptance in Kosovo.

"This is the beginning of a debate on an issue from which there is no turning back, no matter what it costs us," he said.

"It is a sin to hide from people ... We are part of this society and sexual orientation is only one side of us; they do not have to like it but, for the benefit of society at large, they must acknowledge us."

Thaci Rejects Serbian Plans For North Kosovo

Kosovo Prime Minister dismisses Serbia's "platform" for Kosovo, ruling out calls for special autonomy for the Serb-run north as well as territorial partition.



by Edona Peci

Kosovo's Prime Minister, Hashim Thaci, on Wednesday said that Serbia's recently unveiled plans for Kosovo should be "filed away", along with other failed projects.

"That project will remain in the files of Belgrade's wishes, like all the other failed projects from the time of [the 19th-century Serbian

nationalist] Garasanin to that of current President [of Serbia, Tomislav] Nikolic," he said.

Thaci said the plan was "a continuation of Belgrade's old plans with regard to Kosovo... a plan that cannot be realized in any circumstances, with regard to autonomy in Kosovo or territorial partition."

He also said that the plan was "anti-European, and against peace and stability in Kosovo and the region".

Serbia's state "platform" was handed to top-officials in

Belgrade on Sunday, although the general public has yet to see the exact contents.

Serbia's Prime Minister, Ivica Dacic, said only that there was now general agreement amongst all senior officials on a unified policy.

According to the Serbian media, the platform will be presented to parliament this week by President Nikolic.

In the absence of hard details, the daily newspaper Vecernje Novosti reported that it will envisage the broadest possible

autonomy for the mainly Serbian north of Kosovo, saying the area could become "some kind of entity, such as the Republika Srpska" in Bosnia.

The northern part of Kosovo is predominantly populated by Serbs who reject all contact with Kosovo's institutions.

Its fate remains the subject of dispute between Prishtina and Belgrade. However, EU officials hope to resolve it within the Brussels dialogue that they are leading, aimed at normalizing relations between both parties,

which began in 2011.

The outlines of a future deal are far from clear, for Kosovo authorities insist on the territorial integrity of the state, the north included, while Serbian officials have stressed their right to defend - and financially subsidise - the local Serbian majority in the area.

As a result, Belgrade finances a whole network of so-called "parallel institutions" in northern Kosovo, including schools, hospitals, post offices and local government authorities.

Kosovo Urged to Reopen Post-war Murder Case

MP seeks retrial of the five men convicted of killing a Milosevic-era police officer and his family, a multiple slaying that shocked the country.



By Njomza Salihu

The Kosovo Assembly likely will discuss an 11-year-old murder case in January on the urging of an MP who hopes the debate will bring about a retrial for five men convicted of carrying out a notorious post-war revenge killing.

While the Constitutional Court, the highest judicial body in Kosovo, upheld the verdicts in June, Ramiz Lladrovci, an MP for the ruling Democratic Party of Kosovo, PDK, believes the case is a miscarriage of justice.

"The Kiqina case has been conducted in the absence of factual arguments and has passed through the courts based on fictitious circumstances while the constitutional rights of the accused have been violated," Lladrovci said in a proposal on December 3, which called on parliament to debate the case.

"The Assembly is obliged to ensure respect for the right to a fair and impartial trial," he added.

Lladrovci told Prishtina

Insight in December that he hoped a discussion would prompt a re-trial of the men convicted of the killing of Hamez Hajra, a former Milosevic-era police officer, his wife and three children.

"It is practice in the world, and in the region, that parliaments discuss court decisions," he said.

"I'm not claiming the court took the wrong decision, but as a democratic society we have a right to discuss it," Lladrovci said.

Lladrovci's proposal has been backed by a petition that 52,000 people and 85 MPs have signed.

But after Prishtina Insight's Albanian-language partner, Gazeta Jeta ne Kosove, reported on the story, Lladrovci requested on Monday that the Assembly president postpone the debate.

The new date for the debate hasn't been set, but Lladrovci said he anticipated the case coming up sometime after January 1. He said he wanted more time to review thousands of pages of documents from the case.

Ambushed after a wedding:

Two sets of brothers, Burim

and Arsim Ramadani and Arben, Blerim and Jeton Kiqina, are serving prison terms ranging from 11 to 30 years for the crime committed in 2001.

On August 20, 2001, Hajra, his wife, Miradije, son Xhevdet and daughters Mimoza, Pranvera, and Adelina were driving home from a wedding.

The family was ambushed between the villages of Baice and Terstenik in Glogoc.

Pranvera, the sole survivor, later said she heard a voice yell "Stop."

When the car did stop, a volley of automatic gunfire hit every window except where Pranvera had been sitting. She survived by putting her head on her lap and had remained like that until the shooting ended.

According to a report by the EU law mission in Kosovo, EULEX, in 2010, Hajra had been a police officer under the oppressive Serbian regime of Slobodan Milosevic.

The murders formed part of a spate of revenge killings in the aftermath of the 1998-99 war between the Kosovo Liberation Army, KLA, and the Serbian security forces.

Kosovo Albanians suspected of collaborating with the Milosevic

regime were routinely targeted.

But the killings of the Hajras shocked Kosovo because an entire family had been targeted, not simply one suspected collaborator.

On July 4, 2002, Kosovo and international police interviewed Blerim Kiqina who confessed to the killing and implicated the others who were later convicted in the case.

A video recording captured the confession. He made the same statements three days later in another interview. However, he then recanted his confessions on July 11.

The five men were ultimately charged with planning and carrying out the murders and convicted in 2005.

The defendants appealed to the Supreme Court in 2008. While some charges were thrown out, the court upheld the principal charges.

No legal authority:

The Kosovo Judicial Council, meanwhile, maintains that parliament has no authority to revisit the case.

"No one can intervene in court rulings. This is a rule. Not only the legislature, no other party can do



Ramiz Lladrovci,

this," Enver Peci, the President of the Kosovo Judicial Council, said.

"A retrial can take place, only... if there is new evidence," Ismet Salihu, a professor of penal law at the University of Prishtina and one of the drafters of Kosovo's Penal code, agreed.

He told Prishtina Insight that Lladrovci was engaging in a fruitless exercise.

"Apart from the competent bodies, neither Lladrovci nor the President of Kosovo nor the Prime Minister has a right to send the Kiqina 'case' for retrial," Salihu said.

Kosovo 2012: A Year in Review

January 12 Ilir Tolaj and two other officials of the Ministry of Health arrested on allegations of corruption and abuse of official position.

January Vetvendosje's blockade of Serbian goods from entering Kosovo escalates into violence.

January 24 US President Barack Obama announces his selection of Tracey Ann Jacobson as the next U.S. Ambassador to Kosovo.

January 26 Ghana recognizes Republic of Kosovo.

January 28 "The Return" by Kosovo filmmaker Blerta Zeqiri The Jury Prize in Short Film at the Sundance Film Festival.

February 10 Haiti recognizes Republic of Kosovo.

February 11-12A huge snow avalanche kills nine members of the Reka in Restelica village in Dragas. Only a 5-year-old girl, Amsera, survives.

February 17 Uganda recognizes the Republic of Kosovo.

February 28 EU member states agree to initiate Feasibility Study for Kosovo.

March 17 Sao Tome & Principe recognizes Republic of Kosovo.

March 31 Serbia arrests two Kosovo police officers. Although armed, Shukri Bunjaku and Sami Beqiri were arrested in the green area of Kosovo by Serbian special units. Their release was made after 48 hours.

April 6 The Anti-Corruption Agency files legal proceedings against the Deputy Prime Minister Behxhet Pacolli. The conflict of interest with the signing of memorandum in Nigeria, as a representative of the company "Seagas".

April 6 Thaci's preannounced meeting with President Obama doesn't happen. Instead, he meets with Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Vice President Joe Biden.

April 8 One person killed and five injured in an explosion at the Haradinaj family apartment in an Albanian part of north Mitrovica.

April 17 Brunei becomes 90th UN member state to recognize Kosovo.

May 6 OSCE organizes Serb parliamentary and presidential elections in Kosovo. Meanwhile illegal structures in the north of Kosovo organize local elections.

May 8 Kosovo Supreme Court confirms the verdict of the first instance court in case of Kacanik's mayor Xhabir Zharku. Zharku sentenced to 3 years in prison for the crime of coercion.

June 1 Chad recognizes the Republic of Kosovo.

June 8 KEK's Distribution Network sold for 26.3 million euro to the Turkish consortium Limak-Calik. Minister of Economic Development, Behlul Beqaj signed the contract on behalf of the Republic of Kosovo. The contract provides that debts to KEK shall not be settled.

June 14 Dino Asanaj, Chief of Privatization Agency of Kosovo dies, in what authorities rule a suicide.

July 9 The Government of Kosovo announces the resignation of two of its cabinet members, Bujar Bukoshi and Astrit Haraqija. Bukoshi was being investigated on suspicion of abuse and corruption in the Ministry of Health whereas Haraqija was faced with same charges in the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports.

July 21 Ali Podrimja dies. Podrimja was internationally renowned poet and intellectual, and excelled for his innovative poetry.

August-15 Arben Xhaferi dies. He was a prominent Albanian Politician and publicist from Macedonia. He played a key role in the political organization of the Albanians in Macedonia.

August-24 Presidency of Mali denies recognition of Kosovo. Presidency of this country calls forgery allegations of deputy prime minister Behxhet Pacolli that this country had recognized Kosovo.

August-29 LDK withdraws from the electoral reform agreement. LDK argues that Prime Minister Thaci's party has violated the agreement for the president, which was achieved with the help of the U.S. ambassador, Christopher Dell. The agreement was signed by the PDK, LDK and AKR.

August 10 The International Steering Group for Kosovo decides to end the supervised independence of Kosovo.

September 12 Sami Hamiti, head of the Municipal Assembly of Prishtina arrested on suspicion of corruption. Hamiti was sent to a prison for a month after the Pristina District Court had given a month detention.

September 21 Census in Kosovo -final data published - Kosovo has 1,739,826 inhabitants excluding the north.

September 28 Kosovo's most wanted felon Enver Sekiraga surrenders to EULEX police. Sekiraga says he does not believe in the Kosovo authorities.

September 14 Prosecutor decides to initiate investigations against Astrit Haraqija, Uke Rugova, Naser Osmani and Gazmend Abrashi in connection with corruption-related offenses in the "Grand" affair.

October 18 Kosovo Assembly adopts resolution for normalizing relations with Serbia. LDK and AAK have supported the resolution initiated by PDK citing national inter-

ests. Vetvendosje call it act of treason.

October 22 Vetvendosje organizes protests in Prishtina against dialogue with Serbia. The protests escalated into violence. Police arrest 63 protesters, including MPs.

October 28 Papua New Guinea and Burundi recognize Kosovo's statehood.

October 30 US Secretary of State of Hillary Clinton and EU High Representative, Catherine Ashton visit Kosovo. The visit aims supporting the dialogue to normalize relations between Kosovo and Serbia.

November 2 Former chief of Kosovo's Information Service, SHIK, Kadri Veseli enters politics with the Democratic Party of Kosovo, PDK.

November 16 Republic of Kosovo got membership at European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, EBRD.

November 1 Internal elections start at Democratic Party of Kosovo, PDK.

November 9 East Timor recognises Kosovo's statehood.

November 15 Kosovar judoka, Majlinda Kelmendi becomes European Champion for judo fights up to 23 years-old.

November 23 Kosovo's Post and Telecom, PTK privatisation fails for 2012.

November 28 Albanians celebrate the 100th anniversary of Albania's independence. Main festivities occur in Vlora and Tirana.

November 26 Fatmir Limaj is arrested related to Klecka case. Kosovo's Supreme Court sets a detention on remand for Limaj and three other persons for 30 days.

November 28 Saint Kitts and Nevis, two-island state in the West Indies, officially recognises Kosovo.

November 29 Former Prime Minister of Kosovo, Ramush Haradinaj and his two co-defendants, Idriz Balaj and Lahi Brahimaj, are acquitted of all charges of committing war crimes during the Kosovo conflict of the late 1990s.

November 29 Phone recordings of Kosovo's Prime Minister Hashim Thaci, minister Vlora Citaku, MP Adem Grabovci, Skenderaj mayor Sami Lushtaku and Kadri Veseli are made public in internet.

December 11 The Integrated Border Management, IBM has started to be implemented at Merdare and Jarinje border crossings.

December 11 Dominican Republic recognizes officially Kosovo's Independence.

By Bardh Shkreli

Kosovo MP Withdraws From Parliament Tender

Opposition MP pulls out of contract to print books for the assembly on the urging of the Anti-Corruption Agency, saying he had not been aware of the tender.



By Liridona Hyseni

An opposition MP, Agim Kuleta, has requested the annulment of an Assembly tender awarded to his own company after Prishtina Insight asked him about the apparent conflict of interest.

"After consulting the Anti-Corruption Agency on whether this would constitute a conflict of interest, they have suggested not signing the contract and the winning company withdrawing from the tender, as it's a conflict of interest," Kuleta told Prishtina Insight last week.

Kuleta, member of the opposition Movement for Unity, owns 50 per cent of the shares in X-Print. On December 7, the Assembly's procurement office announced that X-Print had won a contract for 4,100 euro to "print books for the needs of the Assembly".

X-Print made the lowest offer among three companies bidding for the tender, according to the procurement office.

Kuleta said he had not been aware of the tender. "I am not involved in tendering affairs. I didn't even know that the printing house had won this tender," he said.

"Since I starting working as a member of parliament, I haven't



Agim Kuleta

worked at the printing house anymore... it is all managed by my brother," he told Prishtina Insight after the announcement of the tender.

After the Anti-Corruption Agency started an investigation, Kuleta met the agency on December 13, after which he made a formal request for the Assembly to cancel the tender.

Kuleta said the company would not have made a bid for the tender had he been aware of it. "X-Print's

managers are not lawyers, so they didn't know that the bid wasn't legal," he said.

The Anti-Corruption Agency confirmed that Kuleta had inquired as to whether signing the contract would constitute a conflict of interest.

"We suggested that it would be best to withdraw," Hasan Preteni, head of the Agency, said.

He said that for an MP to own 50 per cent of the shares in a company seeking procurements from the Assembly would constitute a conflict of interest.

The Secretary of the Assembly, Ismet Krasniqi, said that the institution had not been informed that the MP had shares in private companies. "We didn't know that the MP was a shareholder, since the authorized person in this company was someone else," Krasniqi said. The authorized name for the company in the business registers appears as Esat Ejupi. Krasniqi confirmed that the tender would be annulled.

Kuleta is no stranger to the Anti-Corruption Agency. When he declared his wealth in March 2012, he told the Agency about his shares in X-Print and in another company, Fair Play.

One month after the wealth declaration, in April, the Agency obliged Kuleta to withdraw as operator of both companies. Holding these positions went against the 2010 the Law on Preventing Conflict of Interest, it said.



Shpetim Selmanaj

Haradinaj's Assistant Wins Gov't-Sponsored Tenders



By Liridona Hyseni

The government of Kosovo is sponsoring a 1.5 million euro project to repair the riverbed in a small municipality government by Ramush Haradinaj's Alliance for the Future of Kosovo party. A company co-owned by Haradinaj's personal assistant has been the biggest recipient of contracts.

Shpetim Selmanaj's Accord Investments is part of the consortium that won two of the largest tenders connected with repairing the Erenik riverbed. The contracts, from 2010 and 2012, are worth more than 750,000 euro.

The government of Kosovo, under Prime Minister Hashim Thaci, has supplied most of the funding.

While Thaci and Haradinaj, a former prime minister, have been political foes in the past, that have cozied up as of late. Thaci gave Haradinaj a warm welcome when he returned to Kosovo after his second acquittal on war crimes

charges on November 30.

According to Reuters, Thaci's Democratic Party of Kosovo, PDK, and Haradinaj's AAK are in talks about forging a coalition that could install Haradinaj as prime minister.

The 51-kilometer long Erenik River is one of the most important rivers in Kosovo. The repairing of the riverbed has been divided in four phases.

When Prishtina Insight contacted Selmanaj about the Accord Investments' contracts, Haradinaj's assistant suggested calling the other owner, Ismet Kelmendi.

Kelmendi told Prishtina Insight that the two are equal shareholders. The company is in its infancy, but he said it's becoming a leading business in Junik.

Kelmendi said while the company has no machinery of its own, it typically bids in consortiums that have the necessary equipment for contracts.

Accord Investments is officially registered in Kosovo as a company that builds highways, roads, airports and sports facilities and performs other construction activities.

Photo News:

Archivists Turn to Milk for Protection

Kosovo's state archive has launched a study to evaluate health risks to archivists. Kosovo's archivists are drinking a litre of milk per day, with the belief that it will protect them from the dust from the old documents. Zeliye Shala, head of archive's depot, welcomed the study. She said archive needs urgent investment to protect the "nation's memory."



Albania Accuses CEZ of Inciting Social Unrest

The Albanian government threatened last Sunday with criminal prosecution the Czech power giant CEZ for cutting electricity to local customers, who have held a series of protests over the last week.



By Besar Likmeta

“We call on CEZ Shperndarje to not provoke social unrest through its actions,” said in a press conference Deputy Minister of Economy Enno Bozdo. “The refusal to offer a necessary public service is criminal offense,” he added.

Bozdo's comment came after a series of protest were held over the past week in Tirana's suburbs by local customers who were left without power for days. In of the protest on Thursday, in the area of Lapraka, hundreds of local residents blocked the highway connecting Tirana with Durres, enraged with extended the power cuts.

Albania's electricity sector is dogged by electricity theft and large number of customers who do not pay their bills. A net importer of electricity the government has kept the power own by subsidizing costly imports through the state-budget.

In a statement on Monday CEZ said that the power outages were due to a combination of bad weather and illegal connections to the grid.

“We have mobilized more than 800 employees in order to fix in



Albania PM Sali Berisha warned CEZ about cutting power.

immediate and efficient manner every defect,” CEZ said.

When CEZ privatized the local utility OSSH in 2009 it promised to cut losses in the grid and invest more than €200 million. However, losses in the grid since then have increased and estimated 45 per cent of the electricity distributed is not billed.

CEZ Shperndarje, the local subsidiary of the Czech electricity company, has been locked in a row over debts with the Albania's state-owned electricity producer, KESH, and public enterprises over unpaid debt.

On November 16, police arrested 20 employees of CEZ Shperndarje who cut off power to local water utility companies; a move the gov-

ernment claims was illegal. All CEZ employees have been released since then.

CEZ claims that public institutions and companies owe more than €165 in unpaid electricity bills, which has brought the company to his knees.

In return CEZ has stopped making payments to KESH for more than one year. According to KESH, CEZ has accumulated a debt to the electricity producer of more than €208 million.

CEZ is currently looking to opt out of its investment in CEZ Shperndarje, which it privatized for €102 million. The company has complained that it has faced in Albania a substandard business environment.

Croatia's Credit Rating Downgraded to 'Junk'

Standard and Poor's downgraded Croatia's credit rating to junk last Friday, a development deemed "catastrophic" by a local analyst.



By Boris Pavelic

“The Croatian government's reforms have so far been insufficient to eliminate the structural rigidities that hamper the country's growth potential,” the rating agency said in a statement explaining its decision to lower Croatia's rating from BB+ to BB-.

“Labor and product market flexibility in Croatia is lacking,” and there's “little room for public investment,” because nearly three-quarters of the budget goes to central government spending, the agency added.

Noting that “since 2009, the Croatian economy has been either in recession or stagnant,” Standard and Poor's estimates “about a 2 per cent contraction for 2012.”

“During 2013, we expect the economy to stagnate, and then recover only gradually to trend growth of 2 per cent by 2015, well below the pre-crisis average,” the

agency predicted.

Croatian economist Zeljko Lovrinevic called the credit rating downgrade “catastrophic”.

“This is a total defeat of the government's policy. We need agreement with the International Monetary Fund, IMF, urgently,” Lovrinevic said.

Croatian Finance Minister Slavko Linic admitted that lowering the rating “aggravates the conditions for government and the economy,” and said the government would “certainly think” about cooperation with the IMF.

But Linic said the government wouldn't cut budget spending, especially not public sector wages, pensions and social services.

Croatian Labour Minister Mirando Mrcic announced changes to the Labour Law in an effort to increase the flexibility of the labour market.

Analysts calculated that because of the credit downgrade Croatia will have to pay two billion kuna (about 300 million euros) more than expected next year for the interest on its public debt.

Instead of paying 10 billion

kuna (1,4 billion euros) for interest rates, Croatia will have to pay about 12 billion, analysts said.

The credit rating cut by Standard and Poor's comes on the heels of downgrades by other rating agencies.

Only two weeks ago, Fitch Ratings agency lowered its prognosis for Croatia from “stable” to “negative”, which prompted discussion over whether the country is losing its battle with the economic crisis a year after Zoran Milanovic's centre left government took power.

GDP fell for a fourth quarter in a row, while experts have noted that during the last four years Croatia's industrial output fell by 17 per cent.

Unemployment continues to rise steadily, with more than 350,000 now out of work.

It is estimated that 150,000-200,000 positions has been lost since the beginning of the crisis in 2008, almost exclusively in the private sector.

Estimates are that over the same period Croatian GDP fell by ten percent.

Macedonian Budget Blocked in Parliament

The Macedonian opposition has blocked the adoption of the national budget for next year, as it battles with the government over proposed loans.



By Sinisa Jakov Marusic

Parliament's Commission on Financing and Budget is blocked with over 1,200 amendments submitted by the opposition Social Democrats, SDSM.

This makes it uncertain whether the commission will have time to submit the draft budget for adoption at a plenary session set for December 24 and meet the deadline before the year's end.

The opposition has resisted the government's plan to raise two fresh loans from the World Bank at the start of next year, altogether totalling between 250 and 300 million euros. In order to raise the loan, the government needs approval from the parliament.

“Their blockade of the budget and of the loan... will cost Macedonia an additional and unnecessary 84 million euros,” Finance Minister Zoran Stavreski told media.

He said that if the budget is not adopted, the government will have to find money elsewhere, for example by issuing Eurobonds that do not require parliamentary approval. But he says that the interest rate for those bonds would be double that of World Bank loans.

The Finance Ministry submitted the draft budget to parliament in early November. It plans to spend 2.7 billion euro in 2013,

while revenues are estimated at 2.4 billion euro. It intends to plug the gap through loans.

The opposition so far has rejected the plan, insisting that the government, led by Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski, has already raised the country's debt too much.

“SDSM will use all mechanisms available inside and outside the parliament to prevent this ruthless indebteding, and a Greek [debt] scenario for Macedonia,” said the vice president of the opposition party, Zoran Jovanovski.

They suspect that the government plans to spend the freshly borrowed money on projects they consider unnecessary, such as the grand revamp of the capital- ‘Skopje 2014’- and support for its election campaign for the local elections slated for March.

Government debt rose sharply this year when Macedonia took out or agreed to take out almost 700 million euros in loans from foreign banks and financial institutions.

In April, the World Bank offered Macedonia 100 million USD [75 million euro] to pursue economic reforms and address health, education and social welfare issues. Earlier that month the country took a loan of 250 million euro from Deutsche Bank to fill the budget gap.

In November 2011, Macedonia borrowed 130 million euro from Deutsche Bank and Citibank with a guarantee from the World Bank. In March 2011, it drew 220 million euro from its IMF precautionary credit line.

Romanian Crisis Takes its Toll on Newspapers

The print media in Romania are facing major drops in circulation as hard-pressed people cut out luxuries and news-hungry readers turn to the net.



By Marian Chiriac

The Jurnalul National has fared better. It recorded average sales of around the 20,000 mark in the third quarter of this year, similar to the same period in 2011.

Sales of tabloids were higher, but also show significant declines. The top seller, Click!, sold around 123,000 copies in September, down by around 40,000 from the same month last year. Sporting dailies have lost 10-20,000 copies on average.

Advertising has also fallen for the dailies, whose total circulation is about 1.2 million copies a day.

The effect of the economic crisis on Romania's newspapers has been seen in sweeping reductions in staffing in the sector as well.

More than 6,000 journalists have lost their jobs over the past few years after hundreds of small publications closed.

Analysts say the decrease in newspaper circulation is also due to the fact that more people now turn to the internet and mobile phones for news.

The circulation of most of Romania's daily newspapers and weeklies has suffered dramatic falls in recent months, as the country struggles with an economic downturn, official data show.

The sales of leading broadsheet Romania Libera dropped to a daily average of just under 30,000 in September, down by around 9,000 copies compared to the same month in 2011, according to the Bureau of Circulation, BRAT.

The Adevarul daily has suffered the biggest fall. Average sales per issue dropped from a little over 21,000 in July to barely above 14,000 only two months later. In the same period last year sales were around 30-35,000 per issue.

Bosnia Also Investigates Serbian Tycoon Miskovic

Prosecutors and police in Bosnia said that they have launched a probe into a Sarajevo-based furniture company owned by arrested Serbian tycoon Miroslav Miskovic.



By Elvira M. Jukic

Sarajevo's Cantonal Prosecutor's office said on December 18 that it was conducting an investigation into furniture maker Standard, owned by controversial Serbian businessman Miskovic who was arrested last week in Belgrade.

The prosecutor's office told Prishtina Insight that the probe was launched in August after it received an anonymous complaint.

"The complaint cited that its applicants- who call themselves small shareholders of Standard Sarajevo- were damaged by 'the criminal director of the company, his supervisors and the majority owner M.M' ," prosecution spokeswoman Dzenita Gobeljic said.

Bosnia's Federation Finance Police confirmed that they were ordered to investigate Standard, but refused to give any further details or comment on links between the Bosnian probe and



Miroslav Miskovic, in green shirt, was arrested in Belgrade last week.

Miskovic's arrest.

Miskovic, believed to be the richest man in Serbia whose business empire spans the whole of the former Yugoslavia, was arrested on December 12 along with nine others. They are suspected of illegally earning more than 30 million euros from privatized road companies.

Miskovic, his son Marko and five other suspects were remanded in detention for 30 days while Serbian prosecutors launched an investigation.

Miskovic's Delta Holding is Serbia's largest privately-owned

company, which is involved in a wide variety of activities including import-export, real estate, insurance, retail and wholesale.

In Bosnia, Delta subsidiary Delta Real Estate owns around 90 percent of Standard.

According to Sarajevo-based online magazine Zurnal Delta's interest in Standard is not because of its successful furniture production but rather because of the real estate it owns.

Miskovic's company planned to covert a large site in the Stup area of Sarajevo into shopping malls, Zurnal reports.

Neighbourhood news in brief

Macedonian President 'Disappointed' by EU Council

President Gjorge Ivanov, in his annual address to parliament on Tuesday, expressed regret about the outcome of the EU Council, delaying a decision on Macedonia's membership talks.

Macedonia's President said that despite the blockades on Macedonia's EU integration process coming from neighbouring Greece and Bulgaria, his country remained committed to the process and to building stronger neighbourly ties.

"I am afraid that the postponement of the enlargement process for Macedonia and for the region is not helping the achievement of the commitments of the founders of a united Europe," he said. "I regret that they failed to send a real message" the President added.

At the EU summit this month, at which Macedonia had hoped to obtain a start date for membership talks, Greece found an ally in Bulgaria in preventing this from occurring for a fourth year in a row.

While Greece cited the longstanding dispute over Macedonia's name, to which Athens objects, Bulgaria accused Macedonia of failing to nurture good relations.

Montenegro Closes First EU Chapter in One Day

At the Tuesday's meeting in Brussels, the first of Montenegro's 35 chapters in its EU membership talks - on science and culture - was closed.

Montenegro opened - and closed - chapter 25 on science and culture in one day, at the EU Accession Conference with Montenegro.

"Today's meeting launched substantial accession negotiations between Montenegro and the European Union, following the opening of negotiations on 29 June," the Podgorica government stated.

The rapid closure of the chapter came about as a result of an assessment in Brussels that special benchmarks for its closure were not needed.

However, it was closed only temporarily, meaning that, if it deems it necessary, the EU might re-open the chapter later on.

Chapters are pieces of EU legislation that a candidate country has to transpose before becoming a member.

Montenegro started its accession negotiations with the screening, that is examination, of its preparedness for opening Chapters 23, on Judiciary and Fundamental Rights, and 24, on Justice, Freedom and Security.

Finland Ratifies Croatia's EU Treaty

Vote confirms warm ties between Zagreb and Helsinki and means only seven EU countries remain to ratify the treaty.

The Finnish parliament on Tuesday ratified Croatia's European Union Accession Treaty, with the Speaker of the Croatian Parliament, Josip Leko, attending the vote.

Finland is the 20th of the EU's 27 countries that should ratify the treaty by July 1, 2013, when Croatia is scheduled to join the EU.

The ratification was supported by 131 deputies of the ruling coalition and part of the opposition while 34 voted against.

Before the vote, Leko met Finnish Parliamentary Speaker, Eero Heinaluoma, who described the vote as historic.

He said Finland and Croatia had enjoyed good relations for years, noting that Croatia had approximately the same population as Finland.

"I hope that in future, after Croatia joins, the voice of the small peoples will be heard in the EU," Heinaluoma said.

After the talks, Leko said Croatia and Finland were partners, and that Finland believed Croatia was on the right track.

One Third of Adult Serbs Now Unemployed

Newly released figures show that almost a third of working age Serbs are unemployed, while one economist warns the situation may not improve in the coming year.

As many as 172,422 people lost their jobs in Serbia in 2012, data from the National Employment Agency, NSZ, data has shown.

The official figure does not reflect those individuals who lost their jobs but did not register at the NSZ, which pushes the actual number of unemployed even higher. There are 2.8 million people of working age in Serbia, a country of about seven million.

According to the survey, those working in the construction, textile, metal and hospitality industries have been the hardest hit by the job losses.

As many as 4,267 people with university diplomas lost their jobs, the statistics show.

Prior to 2012, the country already had 755,442 unemployed individuals; with the addition of the 2012 figures, one-third of the total working age population is now jobless.

Croatia Sees Population Drop Over Decade

Croatia's population dropped by some 150,000 people over the past decade, according to the results of the 2011 census published on Monday.



By Boris Pavelic

4,284,889 people currently live in Croatia, the census data showed. The drop in population is equal to the size of the country's third city, Rijeka.

Commenting on the preliminary census results, Croatian President Ivo Josipovic described the drop in population as "one of the most important political, economic and cultural questions Croatia faces."

Of the total population, 90 percent declared themselves to be Croat, which is one percent more than in 2001.

The number of declared Serbs fell by 0.2 percent compared to 2001, from 201,000 to 186,000.

Bosniaks are the third largest ethnic group, totaling 0.76 percent of the total population.

The number of Catholics dropped while the number of atheists rose over the ten year period examined.

In 2001, 88 percent of the population declared itself Catholic, while that number had dropped by two percent by 2011.

At the same time, the number of atheists rose from 2.2 percent in



Croatia's population is declining.

2001 to 3.8 in 2011.

Despite the drop in the number of Serbs in the country, the number of Orthodox believers rose from 4.42 percent in 2001 to 4.44 in 2011.

The Serbian National Council, SNV, which is the local authority of Serbs in Croatia, said in a statement on Monday that there were "serious irregularities" during the census process.

The process "did not respect Eurostat regulations," the SNV said, adding that "members of the Serb community were given suggestions as to which ethnic and religious affiliation they should declare."

"The resistance towards the

return of refugees and the fulfillment of their rights, together with still existing intolerance towards Serb people in Croatia, is a serious threat to Serb participation in Croatian life and to the freedom of their national declaration," SNV warned.

The census results were published almost a year and a half after the survey ended, a delay which prompted criticism of Croatia's Statistical Office.

The director of the office, Ivan Kovac, blamed the previous government for not allowing the office to hire additional administrative staff to process the data on time.

Italian Energy Deal Holds

Deal before parliament with Italy will bring Serbia's energy sector much-needed investment – but experts say it's not as beneficial as it appears.



By Stevan Veljovic

A key energy agreement between Serbia and Italy, paving the way for investment in new hydroelectric power plants in Serbia, is awaiting adoption in the Belgrade parliament.

The agreement envisages construction of ten hydropower plants on the Ibar River, with an installed power capacity of 117 megawatts, three on the Drina, with total installed power of 235 MW and an upgrade of the existing Bajina Basta hydropower station with another 40 megawatts.

The agreement stipulates that all the electricity produced in these plants will be exported to Italy for 15 years at a fixed price of €155 per megawatt-hour.

The energy is to be exported to Italy through the Tivat-PESCARA cable under the Adriatic, passing through ground interconnections between Serbia and Montenegro.

The first intergovernmental agreement on energy cooperation between the two countries was signed in 2009 and a second followed in 2011, which now awaits adoption in the parliament.

At the end of October, Serbia's Ministry of Energy, Development and Environmental Protection withdrew the document from the procedure in an attempt to renegotiate the

projects listed in the annex to the agreement. But Serbia's government since adopted it again and sent it to parliament without changes.

To build the plants on the Ibar, an investment worth €285 million, Elektroprivreda Srbije, EPS, Serbia's state-owned power utility, and Italy's Seci Energia established a joint venture, Ibarske hidroelektrane, in 2010.

Serbia's EPS holds 49 per cent of the shares in the company, while Seci Energia holds a majority stake of 51 per cent.

Serbia is not the only country in the Western Balkans with which Italy has made plans to import energy.

Deals contracted with Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro have also drawn scrutiny from NGOs and the media.

CEE Bankwatch Network, an international NGO that monitors international financial organisations operating in the region, in its June 2012 report, Partnership of Unequals, called the Ibar and Drina plants plans "controversial".

This is because Serbia's deal with Italy was reached without a tender, while Seci Energia, although a part of the established Maccaferri Group, lacks experience in building hydropower plants.

Italy's RAI 3 TV station also recently published a report asking whether the Italian energy agreements with Serbia and Montenegro favoured certain companies, giving them major financial benefits.

Serbian energy experts are more concerned about the country's ability to recon-



Serbia, Italy agreement on energy cooperation was signed in 2009.

cile its export obligations with a separate obligation to increase Serbia's share of energy from renewable sources.

In terms of total consumption this needs to rise from 21.2 to 27 per cent until 2020.

This was after the Ministerial Council of the Energy Community of Southeast

Europe agreed on October 18th 2012 to implement an EU Directive on promoting renewable energy sources.

Under this agreement the contracting parties of the Energy Community Treaty, including Serbia, Albania, Bosnia, Montenegro, Croatia, Macedonia, Moldova,

marketing



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Hidden Risks for Serbia

Ukraine and the UN Mission in Kosovo, all set national targets for their share of energy from renewable resources in terms of total consumption by a 2020 deadline.

The target figure excludes adding larger hydropower plants, which make up most of Serbia's present renewable capacities.

With the deal with Italy now ready for adoption, experts warn that Serbia could end up exporting cheaper renewable energy from small hydropower plants to the EU while subsidising more expensive energy sources, such as solar or geothermal power, to reach its own green targets.

Risky solution:

Italy's plan to import significant quantities of renewable energy from Balkan countries reflects its need to meet its own target of obtaining 17 per cent of its energy from renewable sources by 2020.

Although this proportion of Italy's total requirements may not be very large in absolute terms - 9 TWh in total a year - it is no small quantity of power for small Balkan countries, many of which already have energy deficits.

Bankwatch warned in its 2012 report that both Serbia and Bosnia currently depend heavily on coal for electricity production, while exports of hydropower - a useful resource in stabilising energy supplies - could drain their capacities and force up prices.

As they attempt to make the transition to more renewable energy and meet EU targets, exporting electricity from renewable sources may not prove a prudent idea, although partnership with Italy will bring much-needed investment to Serbia.

Slobodan Ruzic, director of the Energy Saving Group, a consultancy, says agreeing to export all the energy produced from the new hydropower plants is a risky strategy for Serbia.

"By exporting our renewable energy we risk both achieving our own targets [in this field] and incurring potentially higher costs," Ruzic said.

Expert calculations show that one megawatt of energy produced in small hydropower plants ranges in cost from €1.8 million to €2.5 million.

This makes it more expensive to produce than energy from wind farms, but cheaper to generate than power from solar, geothermal and biomass sources.

"Italy didn't give us such a high incentive because they love us, but because it will be more expensive for them to do the same thing somewhere else to reach their target," Ruzic said.

"While EPS will own 49 per cent of the hydropower plants, Serbia will not be able to include a single percentage of this production in its own renewable target," he noted.

He added that if the EU decides

in future to pass a directive obliging countries to focus on meeting their own renewable energy targets before exporting renewable energy elsewhere, this will also apply to the Southeast Europe Energy Community.

Target first, export later:

Meanwhile, one foreign investor in Serbia's power sector, who wants to remain unnamed, has already sought an opinion of the Energy Community Secretariat on the possibilities of exporting "green" energy from Serbia.

The answer was that transfer of renewable energy sources will be possible only for energy that exceeds the agreed 2020 targets.

This means that Serbia and the region "have to have some extra capacity for export first" before they can export significant electricity from renewable energy in the EU.

According to the Secretariat, the Ministerial Council, on the request of an interested party, may allow transfers of specified amounts of energy from renewable sources to an EU member state.

This will then be deducted from the total amount of energy when measuring compliance with the targets by the party making the transfer.

Maja Turkovic, from Serbia's Wind Energy Association, SEWEA, maintains that export-



Slobodan Ruzic.

ing energy from renewables and meeting target obligations are not necessarily in conflict - as long as there is enough potential in the renewable sector, which she says is the case in Serbia.

"The problem is that the Energy Community doesn't allow third countries to export their 'green' energy to EU members before achieving their own targets," she said.

"This means that we have to build more capacities to satisfy our needs and only then may we continue with exports."

Nikola Rajakovic, a former state secretary in the Ministry of

Energy from 2008 to 2011, says Serbia should strive to achieve its renewable energy target with minimum possible investment.

"Of course you want to use the cheapest resources available in your own country," he said.

"But what if someone wants to pay a very high price for 'green' kilowatt-hours and you don't have the money to invest?" he asked.

"The issue is how to get an optimum mix of using our renewable capacities to meet our target while having space for exports that can help us build our own capacities," Rajakovic concluded.

Karadzic's Witness Says Serbs Felt Threatened

A defence witness said at the trial of the Bosnian Serb leader, Radovan Karadzic, that the forming of the municipal crisis headquarters in Vogosca in the spring of 1992 was in accordance with the law, denying that Bosnian Serbs took over power by force.



Justice Report,
The Hague

Svetozar Stanic, who was the president of the Serb municipality of Vogosca and a member of the crisis headquarters until the autumn of 1992, testified that he never got the order nor suggestion to expel non-Serbs.

"Everyone who wanted to leave was allowed to do so, regardless of being a Muslim or Croat, while Serb conscripts were forbidden from doing it due to the mobilisation," said the witness.

Karadzic, the former president of Republika Srpska and supreme commander of its army, is charged with the expulsion of Bosniaks and Croats from 20 municipalities in Bosnia. He is also charged with terrorising civilians in Sarajevo, genocide in Srebrenica and taking international peacekeepers as hostages.

In his testimony, Stanic suggested that the municipal crisis headquarters in Vogosca was dedicated

to communal problems such as regular supply during war conflict.

The creation of the Serb municipality of Vogosca, Stanic interpreted, was in accordance with the decision on regionalisation of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Stanic confirmed that he knew about people being held in custody in the Vogosca motel Kontiki where the prisoners were questioned before being transferred to the Kula prison.

During the cross-examination, the prosecutor, Alan Tieger, claimed that the crisis headquarters were formed after the leadership of the Serb Democratic Party headed by Karadzic issued an instruction on taking power over in municipalities in December 1991.

Reiterating that the establishment of the headquarters was in accordance with the law, Stanic confirmed that this was also envisaged by the party document, which he took as a "warning" for the Serbs how to behave under the threat of "secession" of Bosnia and Herzegovina advocated by

Bosniaks and Croats.

Tieger presented the witness with the fact that, by implementing the document, Bosnian Serbs established firm control in the municipalities in which they had the majority, and "secret governments" and armed units where they had the minority.

Stanic denied this, emphasising that Bosniaks formed municipalities and crisis headquarters before Serbs, who "felt threatened" by it.

To the suggestion by the prosecutor that the president of the crisis headquarters in Vogosca, Jovan Tintor, also formed Serb armed units in the municipalities as well, the witness responded that it was not true, saying that the brigades were formed on decision of the legal Secretariat for National Defence.

Stanic also denied the prosecutor's suggestion that Tintor was "heading an illegal brigade in Vogosca", after which Tieger told the witness it was something Karadzic himself said in his assembly speech in 1995.

The prosecutor then asked whether it was true that the



Radovan Karadzic at the Hague.

Bosnian Serb leadership issued an order that Vogosca "must be taken because of its industry", including the Pretis military factory, to which the witness replied "it was only partially true", since that the primary reason was the fact that the "urban settlement of Vogosca had predominantly Serb population."

"We have not been seizing anything, on the contrary, we have defended company facilities and the industry," said Stanic.

Stanic denied that Serb forces in Vogosca had the intention of seizing community centres with Bosniak majority.

The prosecutor showed him the minutiae from the session on November 15, 1992, held in the headquarters of the Sarajevo-Romania Corps of the Army of Republika Srpska, according to which Stanic spoke of a plan to take over the Bosniak village of Kobilja Glava.

"I don't recognise those words as mine... I responsibly claim I was not at that meeting... On the day before I resigned at a session and refrained from any activities," said Stanic.

Karadzic will call his next witness on Wednesday, December 19.

Bulgaria's Brussels Blockade Leaves

Bulgaria's decision to join Greece and block Macedonia's EU accession talks has sparked anger in Macedonia - further chilling relations between Sofia and Skopje.



By Sinisa Jakov Marusic

The cover illustration of the Macedonian daily, Vest, with the headline, "Shoot cousin, shoot!", well displays the resentment felt among many Macedonians after Bulgaria recently joined Greece in blocking the start of Macedonia's accession talks with the EU.

The line from the cover borrows from a well-known Oscar-nominated Macedonian movie, Before the Rain.

As in the film, the main character utters these words with a calm smile, confronted by a gun pointed by a dimwitted cousin.

The headline on Vest about the Macedonians' Bulgarian "cousins" is reflected in internet discussions too.

Posts reading "Thanks Bulgaria, thanks for nothing!", or "God help us with these backstabbing neighbours", overwhelmed networking sites following the December 11 EU meeting in Brussels.

At the meeting, where Macedonia had hoped to obtain a start date for membership talks, Greece again justified a blockade citing the bilateral dispute over Macedonia's name.

While the Greek blockade is old news, and had to some extent been expected again, Bulgaria's move was more of a surprise.

Bulgaria only emerged this year as a potential obstacle to Macedonia's EU aspirations, say-

ing on December 11 that it could not support a country that had failed to nurture good relations.

Dimitar Bechev, head of the Sofia office of the think-tank, the European Council on Foreign Relations, describes the growing dispute with Bulgaria as ominous.

"The danger is that we enter an enchanted circle of nationalism from both sides, which will only complicate things," he said.

"The Bulgarian move might spark nationalistic reactions from Macedonia with more hard-line statements coming from there," Bechev added.

Thus far, Macedonian officials have refrained from commenting directly on Bulgaria's move in Brussels.

In an address, the Prime Minister, Nikola Gruevski, expressed disappointment about the decision in Brussels, but trained criticism solely on Greece.

Bechev says this may be because the Skopje government is less interested in EU membership than it claims to be.

It "has already proven prone to using the Greek veto as an excuse for a lack of reforms and progress at home," he maintains.

"Bulgaria is now giving more room to the Macedonian government to search for excuses!" he added.

As a result of combined Greek-Bulgarian objections, the EU Council in Brussels concluded that any decision on opening accession talks would be based on the report of the European Commission, to be published in



Bulgarian FM, Nikolay Mladenov

spring 2013.

This will monitor whether Macedonia has taken serious steps to settle the "name" dispute with Greece, and whether it has improved relations with Bulgaria.

What hurt Macedonians most in Brussels was that Bulgaria opposed the EU bid of its neighbour after Macedonia recently accepted all the terms that Bulgaria put on the table - in exchange for a promise support in relation to the EU.

In November, Sofia outlined three consecutive steps that it wanted Macedonia to undertake, which Macedonia almost immediately accepted.

The first was a signed agreement on good neighbourly relations in accordance with EU stan-

dards, based on a 1999 declaration that both countries had signed.

The second was building infrastructure to enhance co-operation and establishing working groups to strengthen relations in key areas.

The third was the creation of a high-level council, tasked with managing annual intergovernmental meetings.

In addition, Bulgaria's President, Rosen Plevneliev, wrote to his Macedonian counterpart, Gjorge Ivanov, proposing joint celebrations of the notable personalities and events "in our common history".

To that Macedonia also assented, proposing only that first on the list should be events "oriented towards our common future",

such as EU Day.

However, on Tuesday, hours before the start of the EU meeting in Brussels, Plevneliev and Prime Minister Boyko Borisov repeated that Bulgaria's support for Macedonia was "not unconditional" and accused Macedonia of waging an "anti-Bulgarian campaign".

They said they would change their minds only after Macedonia had translated its stated good intentions into actions.

Macedonia's "prospect of EU membership will be unlocked not by propaganda and 'marketing campaigns' but through real actions to strengthen good neighbourly relations between Bulgaria and Macedonia," they wrote.

Bechev says that several fac-

Pet-Lovers Use Net to Rescue Albania's Many Strays

Animal rights activists are using social networks to rescue and arrange adoptions for hundreds of abandoned kittens and puppies.



By Besar Likmeta

Blerita Kambo is a busy fashion photographer working for some of Tirana's leading magazines.

What little free time she has from running from one photo shoot to the other is often dedicated to the unfortunate pets that are abandoned every day in the streets of the Albanian capital.

Together with a handful of friends Kambo runs Animal Rights Albania, ARA, an organization set up two years ago, which has created a vibrant online community, raising awareness on an issue often sidelined in impoverished Albania.

"Sometimes I get anxious to open my email inbox, because there is always at least one message signaling and abandoned kitten or puppy in a dumpster," Kambo says.

"Many pet owners do not have the consideration to neuter their animals and when they have puppies or kittens they simply abandon them on the street," she laments.

Albanian municipalities lack shelters for abandoned animals and for many mayors a conventional solution for the problem, particularly for stray dogs, is to shoot them.

Kambo says that the elimination programme is ineffective as well as cruel, because the vacuum is soon filled by dogs from other areas and remaining dogs are encouraged to have more puppies as resources are freed up.

She urges for an alternative solution, involving the capture of the dogs, the vaccination and neutering of the animals, and their adoption.

The organization has arranged nearly 600 adoptions of puppies and kittens over the past two years. Working with a Facebook page that now has more than 11,000 fans, ARA rescues the abandoned pets from street and offers them temporary refuge until a home is found.



Social networks are being used to rescue pets in Albania.

Activists post pictures of the puppies and kittens on Facebook and call on supporters to spread the word. Once someone expresses an interest in adopting one of the abandoned pets, the activists organize a screening process for the potential owner.

Without a proper shelter to house strays, ARA relies on its core activists and supporters to house them.

"We have rescued 15 puppies and three kittens this week alone," Kambo said. "During the reproductive period for cats we

rescue a kitten almost every day," she added.

Kambo says that the animals they rescue are often malnourished and ill-treated and without a proper shelter to house them it's often a challenge to host them.

"Only this summer I had 25 kittens in my apartment, and at one point 12 of them had to buddy for space with my own three cats," Kambo said. "The situation for animals here is very difficult and I wish I could do more," she added.

Macedonia Bitter

tors explain Bulgaria's moves, including general elections due to be held in July 2013.

Bechev argues that Bulgaria also acts on a well-known syndrome of the "EU as an elite club", copying past Italian blockades used to impede Slovenia's EU accession, Slovenian obstacles used against Croatia as well as the ongoing Greek blockade of Macedonia.

More personal motives may also be important, observers note. The autumn premiere of the Macedonian movie, *The Third Half*, drew strong criticism in Bulgaria.

Inspired by wartime events in Skopje, the film is set against the background of the deportation and destruction of Macedonia's Jewish community.

But three Bulgarian MEPs, Evgeni Kirilov, Andrey Kovatchev and Stanimir Ilchev, accused the movie of disinformation and of defaming their country by suggesting that Bulgarians had assisted the Nazis in deporting Macedonian Jews to death camps.

"The movie may have hit [Bulgarian Foreign Minister] Mladenov personally, as he invests much effort in good relations with Israel," Bechev explained.

"At the moment, the policies of Greece and Bulgaria are tending to match one another. But even by playing neutral, Bulgaria is helping the Greek position regarding Macedonia," Bechev said.

Some Macedonians see Bulgaria's recent moves as unprincipled, after Macedonia gave such a constructive-seeming response to Sofia's demands.

"Greece conditions [Macedonia] with a name change

and Bulgaria conditions good neighbourliness. In the background of both lies the non-recognition of Macedonia's identity, language and people," the journalist Aleksandar Damovski wrote in a recent column.

While an "anti-Macedonian" policy is a constant for Greece, it is only now becoming more open from Bulgaria, too, as Macedonia gets closer to the EU, he continued.

Others voices are more cautious, however, saying it is important not to alienate Bulgaria any further.

"If there are reasons for any increased Bulgarian mistrust of Macedonian policies, that should be carefully considered from our side," a former Macedonian ambassador to Bulgaria, Gjorgji Spasov, warns.

In contrast to Macedonia's strained ties to Greece, marred by the longstanding dispute over Macedonia's name, Bulgaria and Macedonia have had relatively friendly relations in the past.

Bulgaria was the first country to recognize Macedonia when it proclaimed independence from Yugoslavia in 1991.

Moreover, Sofia, unlike Athens, recognises its neighbour under its constitutional name, that is "Republic of Macedonia".

On the other hand, Sofia is reluctant to recognise the existence of a Macedonian language, separate from Bulgarian, and many Bulgarian historians still maintain that Macedonians are ethnic Bulgarians.

Bulgaria also does not recognize the existence of a Macedonian minority in southwest Bulgaria, though Macedonia reluctantly admits

that there are people with a Bulgarian identity living in Macedonia as well.

Bulgarian nationalists in the past long claimed Macedonia as part of Bulgaria and Bulgaria also occupied Macedonia in the Second World War.

Back in March 2008, Macedonia's then President, Branko Crvenkovski, joined the Bulgarian President, Georgi Parvanov, in laying a garland at a monument in Melnik, Bulgaria.

This acknowledged the fact that both countries celebrated Jane Sandanski, an Ottoman-era revolutionary, as a national hero.

"Now, such thing would be unthinkable," Bechev laments, noting how relations have deteriorated since then.

In 2010 a draft friendship treaty proposed by Bulgaria caused turbulence when some in Skopje claimed it was an attempt to establish Bulgarian dominance in bilateral relations.

"The longer we stay outside the EU and NATO, the more terms and preconditions we will receive from neighboring countries," former Macedonian Foreign Minister Denko Maleski said.

He says the pressures from Greece - and now Bulgaria - have in common that they are both seen in Macedonia as attempts to threaten its identity.

"The alliance of these two countries brought to the surface a serious problem, the theme of identity," he says.

"We are in dispute with Greece about the ancient past, arguing over who is the reincarnation of the ancient warrior kings... and we are also in dispute with Bulgaria over more recent history", Maleski notes.



The cover of Macedonian daily, Vest with the headline, "Shoot cousin, shoot!"

He says the only way out of the current stalemate is for all sides to work harder to calm antagonisms and overcome differences.

"Without their [neighbours'] support we cannot continue further in Euro-integration," he said.

But for now, he does not see

much sign of a change in policy from the Macedonian side. Bechev is equally downbeat.

The issues minorities and of radically opposing views on history are "hard issues entangled in much symbolism", he said. "I do not see much readiness from either government to make progress."

Serbian Mountain Offers 'Refuge' for Mayan Doomsday

Doomsday cultists are flocking to Serbia's Mount Rtanj, which they believe can save them on December 21, the "end of the world" according to their interpretation of the Mayan calendar.

Five days before "the end of world" according to some interpretations of the Mayan calendar, all rooms on Mount Rtanj in central Serbia are booked.

Obrad Blečić, manager of ethno-village centre "Balasević" in the village of Boljevac, said his telephone line has been ringing nonstop.

"We are getting more than a hundred calls per day, but unfortunately all 80 beds are already booked for December 21," Blečić said.

December 21 marks the day when the 5,125 year-old calendar used by the ancient Maya of Central America suddenly comes to an end, resetting to 0.0.0.0.

Mount Rtanj is one of the few places on the planet that believers in the end of the world say will save them. They believe that a 'pyramidal' structure left

behind by alien visitors thousands of years ago is hidden inside the mountain and that it will protect all the people around it.

Rtanj came to the spotlight after Arthur C. Clarke, the British science fiction writer, described it as "the navel of the world," holding "special energy."

Many Serbs believe that the mountain, which is normally visited by day hikers, has mystical powers. It is the source of 'Rtanj tea', which is seen as a powerful aphrodisiac.

Blečić said that he had not expected such great interest in the mountain but that both Serbs and foreigners have booked rooms at his hotel.

"One of our guests has even reserved a bed for his ill grandmother," Blečić said.

The price for salvation seems to be as low as a bed and breakfast for 2280 dinars (around 20 euro).

Many say such end of the world claims are based on an incorrect interpretation of the ancient Mayan calendar.



Is Serbia's Mount Rtanj a refuge from the end of the world?



For the love of music

+ Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian musicians in Kosovo sound off about their art.



By Donjeta Demolli and
Dardan Sinani

For Sefedin Kryeziu, music is everything. It's tradition, pleasure, and food. He learned how to play bugle from his father. For him, it's a kind of art.

"I was a good student at school, but I loved music with all my soul. During the day I go to weddings with bugle, whereas during the night I go to play the saxophone with Mustafa Sisters," he says.

What's special is the music he has created himself. What the other bugle players have created is never enough for him. He invents new melodies himself.

Sefedin has decided that his son Sejdulla Kryeziu should carry on with the tradition. He's given him lessons — the only requirement is that he becomes even better than his father.

"I want to do it as long as I'm healthy. I will let my son do it if he learns it well and becomes better than me, if he is not better than me, then I won't let him continue with it," Kryeziu says.

Sejdullahu loves music, like his father.

"I want to continue this profession. I like

the clarinet, saxophone, bugle", he says.

Although these three instruments are very difficult and each requires schooling to be learned, Sejdullahu can play them very well thanks to exercising and great dedication that he has toward music.

Together, they sing about the worries and problems of Roma people hoping that at some point in the melody they play, a person listening it will forget his problems.

Jazz and Roma history

Gypsy Groove is a band formed in 2010 and has brought a new spirit of music, a revival of the traditional Roma music, by bringing together the traditional and the modern in the jazz and reggae style.

"Our purpose has been to make a kind of music that is not being cultivated in Kosovo. Our music is based on the traditional Roma music but influenced by jazz, latino, reggae, however with themes from the traditional roma music," says Mirsad Dalipi, drummer of the group.

For the front man of the group, Bajram Kafu Kinolli, the creation of this musical group was the result of looking for identity.

"That's what pushed me to do something more artistic, to show to the people, that Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian people do not only make tallava music, but also jazz, rock and funky," Kafu says.



A band plays outside in Kosovo.

They are known throughout Kosovo, not just in the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian community. They often play in Prishtina.

Because music is made for pleasure

The Danqi brothers have continued a family tradition dating back many generations. They play music for their own enjoyment and if they make any cent from it, then it's welcome.

"I am very much into music and have learned it on my own", says Ekrem Danqi.

His son has inherited the profession. Morning, afternoon, evening they have practiced together, until Egzon has learned it.

"I am not interested in money, I have liked the tupan since childhood," he says.

Muhamet Bangolli is very keen on playing music, it's difficult because of circumstances.

"Both my parents are sick, father and mother both paralyzed since two years, I never the chance to make music. I have to go and collect tins, to maintain the family," he says.

"Since a year and a half, we started with a

friend for fun, just to practice. He had a Casio synthesizer. It was small, with an adapter and batteries, practicing all night, now I'm used to it", Muhamet says.

"I have gone without food or water. My mother is sick, my father also — they need things. I went without food and water for almost a month to buy the best synthesizer," Muhamet claims.



Music starts at a young age.



Bajram Kinolli-Kafu

The Most Striking Ways U.S. States Have Loosened Gun Laws



by Suevon Lee

Friday's deadly rampage at a Connecticut elementary school marked the 13th mass shooting in the United States this year. Among the 11 deadliest shootings in U.S. history, more than half took place in the last five years. During the same period, states have often relaxed their gun laws, making it easier for individuals to obtain guns, extending the places where concealed guns are permitted, or giving gun owners more robust protections.

We take a closer look at some of the more striking measures:

1. Five states allow students to carry concealed guns on college campuses

A March 2012 Colorado Supreme Court decision held that the University of Colorado could not ban students and employees with state-issued concealed weapon permits from carrying guns on campus. The decision overturned the university's long-standing gun ban. While school policy prohibits guns at ticketed athletic and cultural events, Boulder and Colorado Springs' campuses now designate dorms for permit-carrying students. (Guns are still banned in other dorms). "Not a single student has asked to live where guns are allowed," the Denver Post reported last month.

In September 2011, the Oregon Court of Appeals issued a similar ruling, allowing guns on campuses throughout the Oregon University system.

Wisconsin passed legislation in 2011 allowing college students in the University of Wisconsin school system to bring a concealed weapon on campus grounds, parking lots and "other spaces that aren't enclosed," according to the Wisconsin State Journal. The school can prohibit guns in buildings, but only if signs are posted at each entrance.

A law passed by the Mississippi State Legislature in 2011 broadly extended the places where concealed weapons are allowed, including college campuses, secondary schools, courthouses, polling locations, churches, bars and passenger terminals of an airport - places previously off-limits. This year, the University of Mississippi, which previously required students to leave guns in their vehicles, began allowing students to bring concealed weapons on campus, provided they have a concealed weapons permit and take an 8-hour training course.

Utah grants the least discretion: Since 2004, the state has prohibited any public college or university from banning concealed weapons, as campuses are considered state property.

2. Some states now allow you to bring guns into daycare centers, churches, and even "gun-free zones"

Last week, the Michigan Legislature passed a law that would allow concealed weapons in current "gun-free" zones such as schools, day care centers, bars, churches, hospitals and stadiums. Gun owners are required to receive eight hours of extra training before bringing guns into these places. The bill, which has yet to be signed into law, gives private business owners discretion to ban firearms on their property.

While Michigan's legislation has gained attention given its timing to Friday's shooting, it's far from the only law of its kind. As we've already noted, Mississippi has also expanded the list of permissible concealed carry locations.

Elsewhere, loaded guns in bars are now allowed in Tennessee, Arizona, Georgia, Virginia and Ohio. Georgia lawmakers introduced legislation earlier this year that would expand the list of places where you can bring in a concealed weapon, proposing to allow them in colleges, places of worship and polling places.

Virginia, Louisiana and Maine allow firearms to be carried in state parks, state historic sites and state preservation areas. Recently passed federal legislation also allows the carrying of loaded guns in national parks, but only if state laws don't interject.

3. You don't have to be 18-years-old or sober to lawfully use a gun in some states

In Missouri, it's no longer a crime for an intoxicated person to handle or fire a gun, so long as they were acting in self-defense.

Federal law prohibits licensed firearms dealers from selling a shotgun or rifle to anyone under 18, or handguns to anyone under 21. Still, some states impose minimum age limits that go below these federal limits.

For instance, in Vermont, it's legal to sell a handgun or rifle to 16-year-olds. It's legal to sell a rifle to a 16-year-old in Maine, Alaska, Minnesota or New York. In

Montana, the legal age is 14, according to the Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence, a non-profit organization that tracks state gun laws.

4. Eight states have (symbolically) asserted their freedom to be exempt from federal gun regulation

Current federal gun laws set baseline standards regarding the sale and possession of guns. For instance, the Brady Handgun Violence Prevention Act requires licensed gun dealers to perform background checks on prospective gun purchasers. And agents with the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives can conduct warrantless inspections of any licensed gun dealer - although, as we've previously noted, its authority has been hamstrung in recent years.

Still, eight states have passed resolutions stating that guns made and manufactured in-state shouldn't be subject to federal regulation: Montana, Idaho, Wyoming, South Dakota, Utah, Arizona, Tennessee and Alaska.

The Montana gun activist behind the state's legislation, whom the Wall Street Journal profiled, explained he felt he should be "free from federal laws requiring him to record transactions, pay license fees and open his business to government inspectors."

The states' moves are basically symbolic. The states are still following the few federal rules that exist.

But that could change. Montana Shooting Sports Association and Second Amendment Foundation have filed a lawsuit in federal court to enforce the law.

5. Some states want to make it a crime for doctors and employers to ask about your gun

In 2011, Florida became the first state to enact a law prohibiting any health care professional from

asking patients whether they own guns or store them safely. A federal judge later struck down the law based on free speech grounds, stating that a physician who "counsels a patient on firearm safety...does not affect or interfere with the patient's right to continue to own, possess or use firearms."

Other states have followed in Florida's footsteps: Alabama and North Carolina have introduced similar legislation in the last year.

In 2010, Indiana made it easier for people to store guns in their vehicles in a workplace parking lot. A year later, Indiana passed a law allowing job applicants and current employees to sue a private or public employer for requiring disclosure of firearm ownership or use.

6. Nearly half of states have adopted some type of "Stand Your Ground," or "Shoot First" law

Florida and 24 other states have enacted "Stand Your Ground" laws that expand a person's right to self-defense. Under these laws, individuals no longer have a duty to retreat to avoid confrontation in any place he or she has a right to be.

Florida was the first state to introduce such a law in 2005 - and many other states have followed suit. The law came into national spotlight when an unarmed 17-year-old teen, Trayvon Martin, was shot and killed by a neighborhood watch guard in Florida earlier this year. The shooter, George Zimmerman, was not initially charged with a crime; he has since been charged with second-degree murder and awaits trial.

7. A few states make it easy for even violent felons to get their gun rights restored

The New York Times conducted an extensive investigation into this issue last year. The story reports that in 11 states, nonviolent felons have automatic restoration of their gun rights while a handful of other states allow felons convicted of violent crimes to regain their gun rights.

In Minnesota, for instance, violent felons can petition a court to regain their gun rights by showing "good cause." There is no waiting period. In Ohio, a violent felon need only demonstrate to a judge that he or she has "led a law-abiding life" since they've left prison. In Washington State, felons can get their gun rights restored as long as they haven't been convicted of any new crimes in five years. Under Washington State's Hard Times for Armed Crimes Act, judges actually have no discretion to deny restoration based on a felon's character or mental health.

Felons in other states have other ways to get their guns back: Georgia and Nebraska have granted a high number of pardons to restore felons' right to bear arms even for those convicted of crimes like voluntary manslaughter or armed robbery.

And Montana makes it possible for felons to get their gun rights restored as long as they didn't use a dangerous weapon in the commission of their crime.

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Photo News:

A girl looks outside her tent at a refugee camp in Azaz, Syria, where temperatures dropped to 2 degrees Celsius in Azaz. Thousands of Syrians have fled their homes as fighting continues between Free Syrian Army fighters and government forces. (Manu Brabo/Associated Press)

Refugees' Plight



Here is Prishtina Insight's guide to the best places in town to eat, drink, shop and be merry. We'll keep this section updated with the newest and coolest places opening in Kosovo.

Restaurants:

Liburnia 1 and 2

Rr Meto Bajraktar, tel. +381 (0)38 222 719. There are actually two Liburnias opposite each other, both very similar in style and food. Housed in a fine Ottoman abode and surrounded by pleasant walled gardens, Liburnia oozes atmosphere, whether in winter or summer. The food is a roll call of decent traditional Albanian food, including the usual stews (tave) and grilled meat. It's not the best place in town to sample local delicacies, but a good choice given the setting. Open 8 am - 11 pm

Country House

Off road to Podujevo from Pristina, right after the Muciqi Mercedes-Benz garage, tel. +377 (0)44 656 054. This rustic restaurant is a 15-minute drive outside Pristina (on a good day) and provides glorious views across rolling, verdant hills and is especially pleasant place in the summer to watch the sunset. The overall food quality is decent, with special marks for the fresh bread, straight from the wood stove, and specia me maze (peppers in cream). 10 am - 11 pm.

Princesha Gresa

23 Rr. Fehmi Agani, tel. +381 (0) 38 24 58 41. If you have a horse-size hole in your stomach to fill, this is the place to come. The meal starts with some free bread and dips and is followed by gargantuan portions of salad, meat, fish, or anything else on this varied menu. The food is sometimes great, sometimes average but always served in massive portions. Open 10 am - 11 pm.

Hemingway

Rr Ilaz Kodra, tel. +386 (0)49 145 637. Yes, you can get fresh sea fish in landlocked Kosovo. Hemingway is tucked away in an unappealing end of the city but worth a trip if you are craving food of the piscine variety. It's a pretty basic sort of set-up and relatively expensive for the setting, but undoubtedly one of the best places in town for fish. Open 9 am - 11 pm

Le Siam Thai

Rr Fehmi Agani, tel. +377 (0)45 243 588.

Stylishly designed and smoke-free, Le Siam has become a real hit for the international community of Kosovo. If you are acquainted with Thai food, you're not in for any surprises here, with the typical assortment of curries, salads and deep fried treats, delivered to decent standards. At 7 or 8 euro for a main course, it's relatively pricey compared to its neighbours. Open Monday-Thursday 11:00-14:00 and 17:45-22:30; Friday-Sunday 11:00-23:00.

Renaissance II

Rr George Bush (behind the Pro Credit Bank HQ), tel. +377 (0)44 118 796. Renaissance offers arguably the best overall dining experience in Prishtina. It's quite an experience just to find the place. Tucked away along a tiny alleyway, you enter the homely, stone building through heavy wooden doors. It's 15 euro per head, and for that you will be kept fed, watered and supplied with booze for at least a three course meal, including a wonderful meze starter and a delicious main course cooked on embers. Open 11 am - 11 pm.

Bars:

Crème de la Crème

Rr Robert Doll, tel. +377(0)44259912. Crème is probably the best all-round bar in the city. It's run for the amusement of the young, arty owners and not for profit, which explains the more-than-generous pricing arrangements, especially for the perfectly executed cocktails. Its five tiny floors heave on Fridays and Sundays with Pristina's cool to the variety of beats. Every Wednesday, Friday and Saturday from 8pm to 3am.

Filikaqa

Rr Mujo Ulqinaku BL 4/1, Pejton, website www.filikaqa.com; 038 244 288. Whistle, as it translates from Albanian, offers a dizzying array of televisions on which to watch your sport of choice and eat the best burgers in town. Select a booth, ask the amiable staff to tune into your match and grab a 'double decker' or 'triple burger', which look like American fast-food classics but taste better. Friday night Karaoke is a must-see, must-see event.

Hard Rockers Club

Road Ilaz Kodra, contact: vraja_fatos@hotmail.com. It's one of the few places in Prishtina where you can catch regular live acts and the only place which caters for those who like their rock served up heavy, or hard. On a quiet night, it's quite a comfortable venue to grab a beer, even if you are not being entertained by hirsute musicians.

The Cuban

Road Luan Haradinaj Tel: +377(0) 45 620 620. This is a decent addition to the city's drinking scene, even if the place can be full of spivs and tarts who aren't going to a fancy-dress party. The Cuban-themed décor is decadent Havana, the food is average, and not very Caribbean, but the cocktails are good. 8 am - 1 am.

Khoni's Bar

Rexhep Mala, Pristina, tel. +377 (0)44 750 720. Khoni's is, without doubt, a Prishtina institution. It's small, friendly and smoky, plays excellent soul, disco and classic rock music from vinyl and is open until the last man or woman staggers out. Arrive by 11pm at the weekend to secure a corner, or even better a seat, if you intend to make a night of it. Next to A&A restaurant and has round windows. Opens: 8pm-to late. Shut on Sundays.

Fastfood:

Bel Ami

Rr Luan Haradinaj, Tel: +377 (0)44 133 848, +386 49 133 848. The ideal town-centre stop for a quick lunch or takeaway snack, Bel Ami unceremoniously serves some of the best chicken doner in Prishtina in a surprisingly un-greasy, smoke-free environment. Ask for a "komplet" to get the classic doner packed with salad and sauces and wrapped in tin foil. Monday-Friday 9 am - 7.30 pm; Saturday 9 am - 8 pm.

Clubs:

P1

Fehmi Agani, +377 (0)44 608 669. If you're looking for cool, then P1 is probably not the spot for you. The decor is pretty uninspiring, the music is bog standard and the atmosphere reminiscent of a cattle market. But if your thing is scantily clad young women or packs of amorous boys, than it's an excellent choice. And, in the venue's defence, it does have a pleasant outdoor area for summer dancing. Working hours Wednesday, Friday, Saturday from 9 pm to 3 am.



Hot Food:

FRESCO (LEFT). Rr. Fehmi Agani. The newest eatery to hit Prishtina's fine-dining scene, Fresco has designs on being one of its best. Forgive the excessive interior design - the food is elegant and simple, with a gastronomic sense that in-step with the times. The salmon filet (11.50 euro) is a standout: succulent and flavorful, appearing alongside a sweet potato puree and tempura-fried zucchini. The steaks are perfect, too. +377 (0) 44 333 772.

PAPIRUN Tel. 045 26 23 23. Papiro has seating at two perpendicular counters in what's basically a hole-in-the-wall just off Mother Teresa Boulevard, near the Grand Hotel. The menu has 13 options: 6 pizzas and seven sandwiches. The sandwiches are the stars, though. Every component is handled with care. The bread alone is good enough to make just about any sandwich into a glorious feast. It's freshly baked and seasoned with rosemary.

Hot Shop:

SACRO(ABOVE), Rruga Garibaldi, Behind Metro Caffe, Prishtina, tel. +377 44 234 499, www.sacrobio.com Where in Pristina can you buy dried Kamenica mushrooms? Lentils to help with a vegetarian/vegan diet? Marshmallow root? Sacro, the newly-opened shop in central Prishtina, is an education and a delight.



Where to pick up Prishtina Insight?

Prishtina Insight has teamed up with these excellent venues to offer a limited number of complimentary copies of Kosovo's only English-language newspaper. Grab a copy of the publication and settle down with a drink or a meal to read it.

A taste of Napoli in Prishtina.

After ten years of making pizza in Napoli, and with only love to blame, Fatmir, the head chef, returned to Prishtina. His pizzas, made in a woodburn stove, are definitely genuine napolitanas. Fatmir also has several delicious pastas on offer, a true joy for the taste buds. Napoli has an excellent selection of red and white wines or, for the more ambitious, one of the region's best quince raki. Napoli makes for delicious lunch, dinner or even after-theatre time out in the centre of Prishtina.



Pizzeria Napoli
off Luan Haradinaj, opposite Newborn
044/409-402402

Hotel Prishtina

Hotel Prishtina's 43 charming guest rooms and suites are reminiscent of a small hotel in the European tradition. You'll immediately feel at home in our living room, sipping a glass of wine in our fine restaurant surrounded by a gallery of paintings by local artists.

The hotel offers free, fast wifi internet, complimentary breakfast, conference room, swimming pool, sauna and laundry service.

Hotel Prishtina,
St. Vaso Pasha nr. 20
+381 38 / 22 32 84



Hotel AFA

Located in a quiet neighbourhood just outside the city centre, Hotel Afa can guarantee guests a peaceful night while being within walking distance of all the action. The venue has won a host of awards for its excellent service to customers and offers a good range of facilities, from an exclusive restaurant and VIP bar to pretty, tranquil gardens. Rooms start at 45 euro for a single, and luxury rooms and apartments are available. The hotel's rooms are well appointed and comfortable.

15, Rr Ali Kelmendi,
Sunny Hill, Prishtina
+381 38/225 226
www.hotelafa.com



Te Komiteti

Te Komiteti's large trees and a beautifully garden, which surround the small outdoor terrace, give you an impression of an exclusive place for ordinary people. And this is exactly what it is. From brunch to lunch-time snacks and special evening meals, this restaurant offers dishes comprising quality, varied ingredients, combined to perfection. Alongside one of Prishtina's best 'modern European' style menus, you'll also find a good selection of wine, and great sangria and cocktails.

Te Komiteti
Qamil Hoxha Street
Prishtina
+381 38 24 96 63



Paddy O'Brien's

The staff at Paddy O'Brien's have a saying: "It's easy to walk in, but very hard to leave."

And with its warm atmosphere, fantastic range of drinks and excellent food, it is easy to see why.

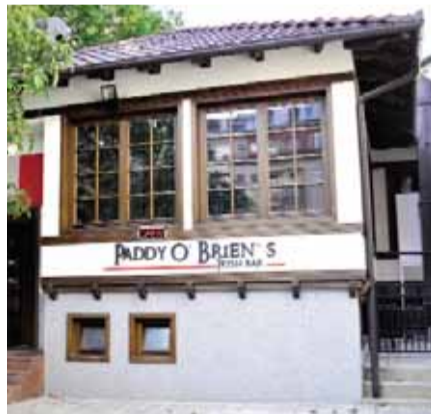
There have been many attempts to establish a proper Irish pub in Prishtina, but this is the only one to hit the spot.

From classic coffees to cocktails, via, of course, Guinness, you really won't find it difficult to select the perfect drink.

A mouth-watering menu of Irish specialties is also on offer, spanning from all-day breakfasts to Irish stews at night.

Options include shepherd's pie, bangers and mash, fish 'n chips, and whopping great burgers.

Thursday is pub quiz night, but there is always something going on at the pub, whether it is sport screenings or just a good shindig.



Paddy O'Brien's
Tringe Smajli Street, by the Illyria Hotel
Prishtina: 045-420900

Papillon Bistro Bar

This newly reopened bar in Prishtina, Papillon, offers more than 60 types of wines from France, Italy, Spain, and Kosovo with great prices and delicious dishes.

They serve pasta, sandwiches, salads and different appetizers.

You can also try different types of local or international beers.

The bar, with its stunning new design, is located in the centre of Prishtina, near ProCredit Bank headquarter, RTK radio centre, and the Mother Teresa cathedral.

Papillon
Mother Teresa Str. Nr. 51 A
info@caffepapillon.com
044 103 310



If you live in Kosovo and would like to receive the hardcopy of the newspaper delivered to your door, you can also subscribe for 13 editions, the equivalent of six months, for 13 euro, including delivery, or for 26 euro for the whole year. Please note, deliveries outside of Prishtina may be refused due to transport costs.

You can pay through an international bank transfer or in cash at a Kosovo branch of Raiffeisen bank.

If you are interested in subscribing please email us at info@prishtinainsight.com with the subject "subscription", listing what type of subscription you require. We will then provide you with an invoice and bank details.



"Life off PI"

A young man who survives a disaster at sea is hurtled into an epic journey of adventure and discovery. While cast away he forms an unexpected connection with another survivor... a fearsome Bengal tiger.

Director: Ang Lee
Writers: David Magee (screenplay), Yann Martel (novel)

Stars: Suraj Sharma, Irrfan Khan and Adil Hussain | See full cast and crew.



"The Expendables 2"

Mr. Church reunites the Expendables for what should be an easy paycheck, but when one of their men is murdered on the job; their quest for revenge puts them deep in enemy territory and up against an unexpected threat.

Director: Simon West
Writers: Richard Wenk (screenplay), Sylvester Stallone (screenplay), and 4 more credits »

Stars: Sylvester Stallone, Liam Hemsworth and Randy Couture



Soon in Kino ABC will be shown Premiere of Movie "Parental Guidance"

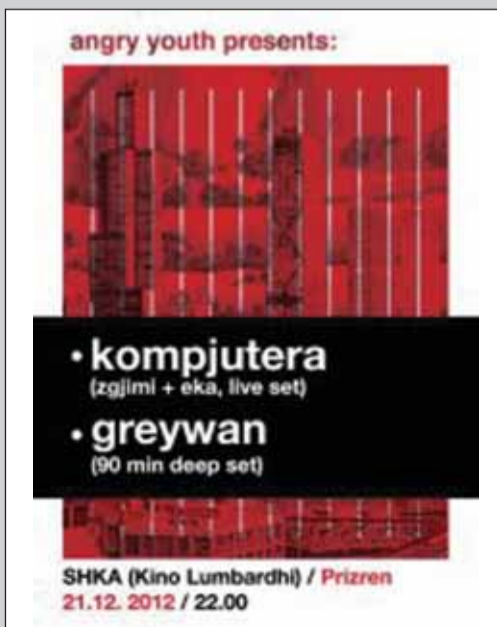
Synopsis: Old school grandfather Artie, who is accustomed to calling the shots, meets his match when he and his eager-to-please wife Diane agree to babysit their three grandkids.



For any further questions or reservations call at 038 243 238 or visit them at www.kinoabc.com

Angry Youth

10pm Friday, 21 December / Prizren - Kino Lumbardhi, 20000 Prizren
Kompjuterera (live set//zgjimi + eka)
Greywan (90 min deepset//lumi)



National Theatre

Eda Zari BAND / Live Concert at ODA Theatre
8pm Friday, 21 December
The tickets will be sold at ODA Theatre.

Gert Kapo - Piano,
Fender Rhodes
Rhani Krija - percussion, gum brie
Christian Kappe - trumpet
Martin Gjakonowski - contrabass
Fatmir Ilamaj - clarinet

National Theatre

8pm Saturday, 22 December
"The killing of the mosquito"
By Xhevdet Bajraj, directed by Donard Hasani

8pm Sunday, 23 December
"Solo concert"

8pm Monday, 24 December
"Auction House"
By Fadil Hysaj

8pm Tuesday, 25 December
"Auction House"
By Fadil Hysaj

8pm Wednesday, 26 December
"The twelfth night"
William Shakespeare, directed by Ilir Bokshi

8pm Thursday, 27 December
Ballet "Friendly Fire"
Choreographer Arthur Kugeleyn

8pm Friday, 28 December
"The killing of the mosquito"
By Xhevdet Bajraj, directed by Donard Hasani

8pm Saturday, 29 December
The end of the year.

Prishtina Diary

Crème de la Crème
9pm Saturday, 22 December - the day after tomorrow // music: Betimisht

Filikaqa Sports Bar
9pm every Friday - Karaoke Night

Hamam Jazz Bar
21 December - Onija Blues Band
22 December - Crossroad Blues Band

Duplex Club
Grand Opening
December 22, Saturday

Stacion - Center for Contemporary Art Prishtina

The Slovenian Box
Unveiling the Neue Slowenische Kunst archive
Curatorial by Michele Drascek

18 December 2012 - 26 January 2013

"In the 1980s, art and culture made fundamental contributions to the social and political change with which Slovenia entered the last decade of the second millennium".

Neue Slowenische Kunst played a radical and leading role in this charged time. A highly complex and multi-faceted organization, its impact extended beyond the subculture of 1980s Slovenia scene to the whole of Eastern Europe. And further.

In revealing the archive of Neue Slowenische Kunst, we give to the public the opportunity to experience the vibe that the collective brought to UK, the feelings instilled in the audience and the response provoked within the cultural scene during those years. This, through the selection and display of significant items from the Neue Slowenische Kunst archives in Slovenia and the David Gothard archive in London. In fact, in 1980s, Gothard was uncovering contemporary culture in Yugoslavia and bringing it to the attention of audiences in London and UK.

And it was in London that I came across a box of material from Slovenia almost two years ago. The resurfacing of the Slovenian archive in London started with the meeting with David Gothard. Knowing that I was based in Ljubljana, he shared his memories related to Slovenia. During long conversations, we proceed in unearthing deep connections between London and Ljubljana. And, right after, Gothard revealed the presence of an archive contained in a box labelled "The Slovenian Box". We came up with the plan to organize and file his box, containing mostly Neue Slowenische Kunst items from the 80s. The research that followed put in context the content of "The Slovenian Box". Slowly we uncovered, shaped and presented the stories which form the history of Neue Slowenische Kunst.

The research developed as proper fieldwork in Ljubljana, where most of Neue Slowenische Kunst archives are located. Through meeting with Laibach member Ivan Novak, I gained access to Laibach Kunst archive at MGLC International Centre of Graphic Arts. IRWIN archive was collected in AVA Academy of Visual Arts, where IRWIN's member Miran Mohar and the Academy director Pepi Sekulich gave me the opportunity to be based and where from that moment on I have been collecting new material that enriched the archive. The search on New Collectivism, coordinated with Darko Pokorn, took place in his studio, which houses a systematized archive. I acquired further informations on Scipion Nasice Sisters Theatre during intensive meetings with Dragan Živadinov, held either in his studio or in Modern Art Gallery.

Building a net with the former members of Neue Slowenische Kunst enhanced the understanding of past events. The priority was to define and classify an archive. But curating an archive enables its transformation from what could be describes as a collection of items to a revealing body of knowledge. And so, the archive was exhibited in London, at Chelsea Space, giving the start to a series of successful events on Neue Slowenische Kunst that shaped new interest and enthusiasm around the collective and its powerful presence in the cultural and political scene of the Eighties.

Exhibiting archives helps all the actors involved - artists, archivists, curators, publics - to reconfigure meanings in the contemporary. It happened in London. And since every place and space has its own specificities, Stacion Centre for Contemporary Art Prishtina represents a new call and challenge for the Neue Slowenische Archive. In Prishtina, particularly dear to David Gothard, the archive meets new cultural and political specificities and originates, anew, different interpretations and questions. "The Slovenian Box" is brought again to life and speaks loudly.



Contours of Contemporary Kosova

Live performance: Grupi Gazmor - Shpat Deda & Friends / DJ His Mother

A new band comprised of old loves. The 2 members of Cute Babulja, Genc Salihu & Enes Bajramliqi, are back together reinforced by Arber Salihu, a great new singer-songwriter, and Tomor Kuci, who excels with his band The Freelancers. The acclaimed drummer Nesim Maxhuni, a life-long collaborator and friend, is still there with his sharp groove and smooth touch. Here are masterful songs performed by an all-singing band of brothers and close friends, coming together to celebrate and drive forward a songwriting style established in 2004 with the album 'Cute Babulja', and further explored with Genc Salihu's 'Kange e vene'.

As we've got almost 10 days to a taste of Kosovo, here in Istanbul, we are pleased to announce the official program of Contours of Contemporary Kosova.

The details on the exhibition, concert and the rest of the program:

27 December 2012 - Thursday
7pm - the opening of the exhibition & the festival
10pm - ROXY CLUB Istanbul // live performance: Grupi Gazmor, Shpat Deda & Friends, DJ His Mother
28 December 2012 - Friday
12pm - Pera Muzesi-Museum // Contradictions of Kosovar Identity
2pm - Pera Muesum Auditorium // Urban transformation and the historical city of Prizren
4pm - Pera Muesum Auditorium // Kosovo 2.0: The transformation of media
8pm - Cemal Re it Rey Konser Salonu // Petrit Ceku solo concert (For invitations - rezervasyon@cckosova.com)
29 December 2012 - Saturday
12pm - Istanbul Modern | Istanbul Museum of Modern Art // DokuFest and Prizren
2pm - Istanbul Modern // Film screening: Shkurtë e Shqip
5pm - Istanbul Modern // Artist talk: Sislej Xhafa
8pm - Pera Caffè // live performance: Trio of Love & Gipsy Groove

'One Flew Over the Kosovo Theatre'

This new political comedy from Kosovo, set in the days before the declaration of independence, offers a subversive take on the theme of the Kosovo art world's dependence on politics.



By Nemanja Cabric

Following a sudden visit from a state secretary, actors from the National Theatre of Kosovo, haunted by existential worries, stop their rehearsals of Samuel Beckett's "Waiting for Godot" in order to work on a new national drama.

The new piece, whose topic has been chosen by the Prime Minister of Kosovo himself, is to be given a central place at the independence celebration in Prishtina.

Moreover, the Prime Minister's speech is to be included in the play as a monologue to be read on the stage by one of the actors.

However, neither the date of the declaration of independence, nor the actual contents of the PM's speech are known to the actors for the most of the play.

This is how the producer Jeton Neziraj and the director Blerta Neziraj have chosen to present Kosovo's politically controlled cultural scene in their play, "One Flew Over the Kosovo Theatre."

From the opening scene this metaphor dominates the play: a man in an expensive suit conducting a composition played by a duo on harmonica and violin.

Although the music is out of tune, and the artists look depressed, man in the suit looks satisfied and gains more and more energy.

Such is the metaphorical environment in which four actors step onto the stage. A fifth, the conductor from the opening scene, appears later on as the secretary in charge of organizing the celebrations, dressed in the same shiny suit, contrasted to other actors' poor wardrobe.

The play dances along to broken, out-of-tune music, symbolizing the artificial quality of art that is conquered and oppressed by "higher" interests.

However, the creators of the play obviously weren't satisfied to have only passive characters following directions; the artists tie their hopes and wishes to the government's play, which forces them to act.

The director hopes to grab some money, and get new attractive projects, while a young actress wishes to play on Broadway. Only the old drunken actor has small aspirations - a few tots of rakija brandy.

The most comical figure in the grotesque scenes that follow is the young all-around scene worker, James, who aims to steal the engine from the rotating scene of the Kosovo Theatre and install it in a broken German airplane from the Second World War.

With the plane, James aims to fly away and lobby the world for the recognition of the independence of Kosovo. He is a true representation of a patriotic idealist.



Actress Anisa Ismajli | Photo courtesy of Centre for Cultural Decontamination



Photo courtesy of Centre for Cultural Decontamination



Susanna Tognella, Gabriele Marangoni, Bajrush Mjaku | Photo courtesy of Centre for Cultural Decontamination

Everything that the actors do in the play moves further away from culture and art. Forced from their original position either by politics or patriotism, they rush to fulfil their own lucrative interests, or higher ideals. This is the tragic component of the comedy that makes it both satirical and somewhat bitter.

The outcome of this hysterical situation is almost evident from the beginning - a total theatrical catastrophe that passes almost unnoticed, from whose consequences only artists suffer.

The use of the theatrical device of "a play within a play" helps create a strong impression of a negligent politically driven reality, as well as of the state of the Kosovo culture scene, yet without leaving the world of comedy.

The intertwining of real and fictional elements sheds new light on how ordinary people see the independence of Kosovo and the new false patriotism that stemmed from it as a cover for lucrative interests. At the end of the play, the audience gets to open the envelopes provided earlier at the entrance and find out what happened to the characters after the play ended. In this way, failure is underlined, and the comedy completed. "One Flew over the Kosovo Theatre" premiered on December 5 in Prishtina, since when it has travelled to Skopje, Tirana and Belgrade. Instead of tickets, the audience at the Centre for Cultural Decontamination in Belgrade were given a paper airplane with the message: "Please recognize the independence of Kosovo." The play is supported by organizations such as the Swiss Cultural Programme in the Western Balkans, the European Union, the Hartefakt fund, the Goethe Institute and the Youth Initiative for Human Rights.

Cast:
Bajrush Mjaku
Adrian Morina
Anisa Ismajli
Adrian Aziri
Ernest Malazogu
Musicians:
Susanna Tognella (Violin)
Gabriele Marangoni (Harmonica)

Prishtina through the Eyes of:



Judit Ros

Former staff of Council of Europe Kosovo-IBP Education in Kosovo: Inter-culturalism and the Bologna Process

1. What surprised you most about Prishtina?

The first time I visited Prishtina was almost ten years ago and the first thing that caught my attention were the black birds (I am sure I am not the first one nor be the last to mention them) and since it was winter, the very strong smell of charcoal being burnt. What surprised me the most for good, the people. At the time I was working with a group of students from the University of Prishtina, and they made me feel like at home since the very beginning.

2. What's/was your favorite hangout?

When I moved to Prishtina, my favourite place with no doubt was Zanzibar especially when Emir and Zanzibar would play. I enjoyed going to Sokoli e Mirusha Wednesday nights and when they opened the underground level we would stay until the end. I would like to mention Marroon in memory of my flat mate and very good friend with whom we would always end up going to Marroon, if she was there it was always good fun!

3. Do/did you do anything cultural?

I volunteered at Freedom Festival first edition and helped at the Roma Film Festival. I would attend most of the activities during the "Francophonie Week". I remember attending the jazz festival twice and the "jam for the cow" and a couple of concerts at the stadium (I remember Sunday evenings going to the red hall for some classic music concerts). While in Prishtina I had the feeling there was always something going on which I really liked.

4. What is the most annoying thing about Prishtina?

I used to smoke like a chimney when living in Prishtina but I quit almost a year ago. I recently visited some friends in Prishtina and I couldn't stand the smoke, it was too much.

5. If you were mayor of Prishtina for the day what would you change?

I would try and integrate some more green areas in Prishtina, especially downtown. I know it has been an issue for a long time but still I don't see much of an improvement in regards to the stray dogs apart from not hiring "hunters" anymore (allow me to express my admiration for the people working so hard at the Kosovo Dog Shelter and the Animal Friends of Kosovo.)

6. How many macchiatos do/did you drink a day?

I very rarely drink coffee; I would drink bambi or chai.

7. What's the tastiest Kosovar food?

Not sure about the culinary boundaries but I certainly enjoy Ajvar Sarma and Pljeskavica. I have long considered experimenting and mixing Kosovar and Catalan food. When that day comes I promise to share the recipe! We can certainly learn a lot from Kosovo.

8. What landmark do you use to tell taxi drivers where you live/lived?

I lived in three different places, at first I would tell them "ambasadë gjermana" afterwards "King casino" and at the end I would live so much downtown I wouldn't use taxis very often but I just had to say Kino Abc or Maxi Supermarket.

ECOSOVO No Food With a Face: Prishtina's New Vegetarian Eatery



By Elizabeth Gowing

Phoebe, the vegetarian character from the American sitcom "Friends," explains the basic rule underpinning her eating habits as "no food with a face." There's now a great chance for her to eat well at a Prishtina restaurant, with the opening of a wonderful new venture by the former chef at Tingell Tangell bar.

The eatery recently opened by Nuki and her husband, Vigan, is part of a developing counter-cultural quartier of clean living in the alley behind Metro cafe, across from the Grand Hotel. Regular readers of this column will know I've already drooled over the restaurant's nearest neighbour, the health food shop Sacro, which opened a while ago offering delights for the gourmet, the environmentalist and the vegetarian – unusual teas and tisanes, exotic spices, rare local products (barley flour, fantastic honeys, dried porcini mushrooms), and an abundance of lentils.

Nuki's place now develops the theme, and shows just what can be done with some of those ingredients in the hands of an excellent chef. I was impressed by the soup of the day, which was lentil with a good squeeze of lemon, but friends told me I'd be even more wowed on a day when it's pumpkin. It was followed by meze-style dishes including carrot dip with nigella, baba ghanoush, falafel and patatas bravas. At a time when my regular suppliers of chickpeas are all out of stock, and even one of the restaurants I frequent for a hummus hit has taken it off the menu because they can't source the ingredients, Nuki has found some magical supply and produced another wonderful dip with that.

Where possible, ingredients are locally-sourced, including excellent local fruit juice and wine. You can even taste the food and drink properly because, as the final touch to its impeccable credentials, this is a no-smoking restaurant.

It's not all hairshirts and sandals though – it's a cool, modern setting for jazz music on the stereo and funky photographs (also local produce – Vigan's work) on the walls. If anything is going to tempt you to turn all or part of your diet vegetarian, then this is the place to do it.

There are some reasons even more convincing than Nuki's hummus though. As well as your own health, and the arguments of animal cruelty, particularly in the context of factory farming, how about the fact that across the world livestock are responsible for more greenhouse gases than all the forms of transport put together (the impacts are as a result of feed production and land use as well as the methane produced from animals during their lives). It takes, on average, 28 calories of fossil fuel energy to produce 1 calorie of meat protein for human consumption, whereas it takes only 3.3 calories of fossil-fuel energy to produce 1 calorie of protein from grain for human consumption.

Meat farming has an impact on precious water resources too – it takes 550 litres of water to produce enough flour for one loaf of bread (Nuki's bread, by the way, comes in excellent crusty ciabatta-style loaves) but 7,000 litres of water to produce 100 grams of beef.

Not everyone feels able to lose meat entirely from their diet, but how about having a certain number of meat-free days a week? I'd suggest you celebrate them by going down to Nuki's restaurant.

Elizabeth Gowing is a founder of The Ideas Partnership, a Kosovan NGO working on educational, cultural and environmental projects. She is also the author of Travels in Blood and Honey; becoming a beekeeper in Kosovo and The Little Book of Honey. She can be reached on theideaspartnership@gmail.com

After Attacks, an Opportunity for LGBT Rights in Kosovo



By Seyward Darby

This past summer, when I was conducting interviews for an article about LGBT life in Kosovo, a source told me, "We're all paranoid. That's part of the whole gay experience." On the heels of the attacks this past weekend that targeted the magazine Kosovo 2.0 and the LGBT organization Libertas, the same source said, "The paranoia I talked about with you will just grow now. ... Everything regressed." It was a statement imbued with sorrow and frustration, and one that I hope proves incorrect. Whether that happens, however, depends on how the Kosovo government and public respond to the recent attacks. So far, in that respect, there is some room for optimism—but there is also room for profound concern.

By now, what happened over the weekend is well-known: On Friday, a group of men stormed Kosovo 2.0's publicity event for its "sex" issue, which included my article and others with LGBT themes. They destroyed equipment and beat one staff member. Later that night, a large group protested outside a second event, a dance party, yelling "Jasht, Jasht Pederrat" (among other things) and forcing some attendees to flee and hide; the police escorted others away as the crowd jeered and shouted. Then, on Sunday evening, as Libertas hosted a small, private gathering at its Prishtina office, a group of men attacked and beat one partygoer in the street, forced their way into the building where the office is located, and threw some sort of gas into the premises.

Prime Minister Hashim Thaci, Human Rights Ombudsperson Sami Kurteshi, Deputy Foreign Minister Petrit Selimi, the OSCE, the U.S. Embassy, and others have issued statements condemning the attacks. Officials have promised to probe what happened, and they have firm legal ground on which to stand: Article 40 of the constitution guarantees freedom of expression, so long as it is not used for the "encouragement or provocation of violence and hostility"; Article 43 guarantees freedom of media; Article 44 protects the right to gather peacefully; and the country's Anti-Discrimination Law protects all people

from discrimination, including on the grounds of their sexual orientation.

The responses to the attacks, certainly, are heartening. They came rapidly and hit all the right notes. Yet words, just like laws on paper, are not enough; they must translate into action.

Too often, in Kosovo (as in many countries), promises to investigate and prosecute human rights abuses are never fulfilled. In part, this is due to the numerous growing pains that plague the country's capacity for governance. But there are other, more personal reasons that can explain, in particular, a failure to protect the LGBT community and its supporters. This summer, I spoke with Kurteshi about why his office has not handled a case related to LGBT rights. He said it is because no one has ever filed one, but he also admitted that he cannot be sure what would happen with such a case. "We cannot promise to do too much," he said. "People who work here are part of society, too. ... [Perhaps] they cannot identify with [the LGBT community] and are maybe not able to do their best to solve the problem."

Kurteshi's comments indicate an awareness of the deep-seated prejudice that many in Kosovo harbor toward LGBT people. It is fair to assume the same sentiments exist in other government ministries, as well as among law enforcement. Overcoming biases within their own ranks will be officials' first task in responding substantively to the weekend's attacks. Prejudice cannot permit impunity.

The government's second task will be to use these events as a launch point for raising awareness about LGBT rights. No one, of course, should be under the illusion that the government can snap its fingers and eliminate bigotry or even discomfort felt toward the LGBT community. But all states have an obligation to impart information about and encourage respect for human rights. In other words, the government should not stop talking about these attacks; it should point to them as examples of that which Kosovo aspires to move beyond.

Officials, however, are not the only ones who bear responsibility. So too do those among the Kosovo public who profess to believe in human rights. Here, there is a troubling refrain. I have heard it since the attacks, and I heard it over the summer in the course of my research. It goes some-

thing like, "Rights are good, and I don't have a problem with gay people. But why can't they just keep to themselves and not show us they're gay? Kosovo is not ready for gay people."

There are many problems with this argument. First, someone who says they support rights, whether an activist or not, cannot pick and choose which rights to respect. This implies that certain people are not worth the same treatment as others. Second, saying LGBT people should hide themselves—something most of them already take great pains to do—implies that they should not be allowed to exercise their full range of rights and instead accept living in silence and fear for the foreseeable future.

Third, saying "Kosovo is not ready" is not entirely inaccurate; as we saw this weekend, conservative notions of family, religion, and other institutions have strong roots. But it is wrong in the sense that LGBT people already live in Kosovo. They are not being created. They are Kosovars like any other, holding jobs, worshipping in mosques, cherishing their families, and sipping coffee in cafes on Mother Theresa. The "Kosovo is not ready" argument cannot be an excuse to preserve the status quo that suppresses and intimidates these individuals, because doing so means allowing forces of hatred to win the day. The situation will change only when there is ongoing dialogue and outreach, both formal and informal, which encourages tolerance and hopefully acceptance.

In a statement after the weekend's attacks, Libertas and Qesh, another LGBT organization, said, "Even though these actions created fear, [they] also made us stronger. From these incidents, [the] LGBT community will continue to fight... and advocate for our rights." The determination of LGBT leaders must be met with both government action and public support. Otherwise, as my source told me, paranoia will grow, and hard-fought, incremental gains for LGBT rights will be lost.

Seyward Darby is an American freelance journalist. She spent the summer in Kosovo working for Youth Initiative for Human Rights on a LGBT project and researching a related article for Kosovo 2.0. This op-ed does not necessarily reflect the views of either organization.

NED: Western Balkans Face Democracy Challenges

Nadia Diuk, vice president of National Endowment Democracy, says the Western Balkans' emerging democracies are on challenging path.



By Petrit Collaku

Nadia Diuk, vice president of National Endowment Democracy, says the Western Balkans has experienced a different transition to democracy than the former communist countries in Central Europe.

"There are many more complex societal influences for example: rising nationalism, overbearing influence of church in some cases, and as well the Western Balkans is not in an entirely unique situation in the world but it is in unique situation in Europe," Diuk said in an interview with Prishtina Insight.

Some Balkan countries are still in a

post-war period, and as such, have the legacy of conflict to address. Democracy in the Balkans is more complex than elsewhere in Europe and will need more time to develop, Diuk says.

"It's not that the European Union is the end point in democratization but it does give some markers that society and government should follow, which they should be following anyways regardless of whether they join the European Union," she said.

Diuk was in Kosovo last week for the Prishtina Youth Summit last week, where she discussed the role of young people in building democratic societies.

She said the potential of Kosovo's youth is great and the country should use this to its benefit.

Diuk stressed the fact that the half of

population in Kosovo is under the age of 27 and many young people don't have a full memory of the war.

Diuk, who oversees many NED programs throughout the world, said that it is up to the youth to carry on with the future and that they need to start thinking and acting as to how they want to see their country.

"I think it is important for young people not just to adopt the prejudices of their parents and older people and older generations, but to start making up their minds themselves in what kind of worked they want to live in," she said.

Nadia Diuk is NED's vice president of programs in Africa, Central Europe and Eurasia, Latin America and the Caribbean.

Macedonia and the EU Council Conclusions



By Gerald Knaus

As EU member states gathered last week to discuss Council Conclusions relating to Macedonia two camps of member states emerged with two versions of these conclusions.

To understand whose arguments prevailed – and how to judge what happened – it is important to go beyond facile conclusions and take a closer look at both proposals.

On the one hand there was a majority of member states who favored very positive language. These states were hoping to encourage a proactive Commission to take the initiative and to prepare the ground to launch EU accession talks with Macedonia already in June 2013. They were hoping that in the end both Greece and Bulgaria would agree that this was also in their interest ... that this was truly an issue where all sides could win.

In this group's draft of the Council Conclusions a concrete date – June 2013 – is given for the possible opening of accession negotiations. This version states that the Council examines further progress in Macedonia on the basis of a Commission report before June 2013. It asks the Commission to submit "in due time" (i.e. at its own discretion, meaning it could start work on it right away in early 2013) a proposal for a negotiations framework, to be ready by June. It also invites the Commission to begin the "analytical examination of the acquis" (screening) right away.

Here are the key paragraphs of this maximalist proposal, backed by most member states and the Commission last week:

3. The Council largely shares the Commission's assessment that the political criteria continue to be sufficiently met and takes note of its recommendation that accession negotiations be opened with the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

5. With a view to the possible opening of accession negotiations with the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia in June 2013, the Council will examine progress in the implementation of reforms in the context of the High Level Accession Dialogue, on the basis of a report to be presented by the Commission in the first half of 2013. The Commission is invited to submit in due time a proposal for a framework for negotiations with the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia in line with the European Council's December 2006 conclusions and established practice, which also takes into account good neighbourly relations. Taking into account the new approach to accession negotiations as regards the chapters on the judiciary and fundamental rights, and justice, freedom and security, the Commission is also

invited to carry out the process of analytical examination of the EU acquis on these chapters.

Faced with this France, backed by a much smaller number of other EU states, put a counter-proposal on the table late last week. This version assesses progress in Macedonia less positively (the Council no longer "largely" but only "broadly" shares the Commission's positive assessment).

The minimalist proposal removes any reference to any concrete date. At an unspecified future moment, the European Council would once again have to decide and invite the commission to submit a proposal for a negotiations framework. This would happen only "once all the conditions are met", which is not explained. The minimalist version states that in order to start screening another Council decision would be needed to task the Commission to do so. For now the commission gets no mandate to do anything until further notice.

Here is the full text of the minimalist version:

3. The Council broadly shares the Commission's assessment that the political criteria continue to be sufficiently met and takes note of its recommendation that accession negotiations be opened with the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

5. Before opening accession negotiations with the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, a decision which will be considered in due time by the European Council, in line with established practice, the Council will continue to examine progress in the implementation of reforms including in the context of the High Level Accession Dialogue. Once all conditions are met, the European Council will invite the Commission to submit a proposal for a framework for negotiations with the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia in line with the European Council's December 2006 conclusions and established practice, which also takes into account good neighbourly relations. Taking into account the new approach to accession negotiations as regards the chapters on the judiciary and fundamental rights, and justice, freedom and security, the European Council will also invite the Commission to carry out the process of analytical examination of the EU acquis on these chapters.

So what actually happened? In all EU negotiations there is usually a give and take. However, if one takes a look at the final text of the Council Conclusions one sees clearly that the maximalist proposal emerged largely victorious.

In the final text the following was agreed:

- the council "largely" (not "broadly") shares the



Gerald Knaus

Commission's positive view that Macedonia was ready to open talks (the maximalist version).

- The council tasks the Commission already now to produce a report "in spring 2013" "with a view to a possible decision of the European Council to open accession negotiations".

- The council commits that it will assess this report "during the next presidency", i.e. before July 2013.

- Provided that the assessment is positive, the Commission will be invited to submit "without delay" (i.e. as quickly as it can) a framework for negotiations.

- Provided that the assessment is positive the Commission will be invited to start screening two chapters, i.e. before accession talks begin.

- The Council even "takes note" that the Commission "will conduct all the necessary preparatory work in this respect" ... which means that Commission can start preparing both the negotiations framework and screening right away.

Look at the finally agreed text of the conclusions and the answer whose arguments won the day is obvious:

40. The Council largely shares the Commission's assessment that the political criteria continue to be sufficiently met and takes note of its recommendation that accession negotiations be opened with the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

42. With a view to a possible decision of the European Council to open accession negotiations with the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the Council will examine, on the basis of a report to be presented by the Commission in Spring 2013, implementation of reforms in the context of the HLAD, as well

as steps taken to promote good neighbourly relations and to reach a negotiated and mutually accepted solution to the name issue under the auspices of the UN. In this perspective, the Council will assess the report during the next Presidency. Provided that the assessment is positive, the Commission will be invited by the European Council to: (1) submit without delay a proposal for a framework for negotiations with the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, in line with the European Council's December 2006 conclusions and established practice; (2) carry out the process of analytical examination of the EU acquis beginning with the chapters on the judiciary and fundamental rights, and justice, freedom and security. The Council takes note of the intention of the Commission to conduct all the necessary preparatory work in this respect.

The original plan of the Commission and of the member states who supported the maximalist version was to create a new momentum emerging from this Council. In this they succeeded.

- The Commission can immediately begin to prepare its "spring report" which the Council will assess before July 2013.

- The Commission can immediately begin to prepare for the analytical screening of two chapters and draft a proposal for negotiations.

- Once the Council accepts a positive Commission report the Commission will submit the framework for negotiations "without delay"

One basic reality has obviously not changed: Greece will have to agree to the opening of accession talks. Expecting anything else was always unrealistic. The hopes of the friends of opening accession talks were to kick-start a process of finding a solution to the name issue in the first few months of 2013. Both supporters of opening talks soon and minimalists agreed on this paragraph without arguing:

41. As set out in the European Council conclusions of June 2008, maintaining good neighbourly relations, including a negotiated and mutually accepted solution to the name issue, under the auspices of the UN, remains essential. There is a need to bring the longstanding discussions on the name issue to a definitive conclusion without delay. The Council welcomes the momentum that has been generated by recent contacts/exchanges between the two parties, following the Greek proposal for a memorandum of understanding. The Council is, moreover, encouraged by recent contacts with the UN mediator.

The important point is this: if there is a positive European commission report following enough movement on the name issue and

on good neighbourly relations all preparations will have been made to launch accession talks in 2013 without delay.

Clearly the pressure has increased further for a serious effort to find a breakthrough in early 2013. This is pressure on everyone: on the Commission, on interested EU member states, but above all on Skopje and Athens. The fact that Greece accepted these conclusions, however, is another small positive sign.

The European Commission's hope from the very beginning was to energize the search for a mutually agreed solution to the name issue. The commission and most member states wanted a date in the conclusions when accession talks would possibly be opened. Now there are two dates in the conclusions: a report by the commission on progress by "spring" (April) with a view to start accession talks; and a Council assessment of this "before the next presidency" (before July).

An additional paragraph was also inserted upon the initiative of Bulgaria:

In light of the overall importance of maintaining good neighbourly relations, the Council also notes the recent high level contacts between the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Bulgaria and looks forward to their translation into concrete actions and results.

This means: if there is an agreed solution on the name issue soon, and if there are 'concrete actions and results' from high level meetings with Bulgaria till April, the goal to start accession talks in 2013 "before the next presidency" or very early in it remains alive.

These are one big and one (slightly) smaller if. But a focused effort by the Commission and by member states supportive of opening accession talks soon has prepared a more promising playing field for a breakthrough than there has been in a while.

What is needed now is a serious and imaginative solution to the name dispute before the commission reports "in the spring"; a solution that allows both Athens and Skopje to unlock the current destructive stalemate in a manner that both governments can defend before their domestic constituencies.

The Council was a warm up exercise. Now the real game begins. Athens and Skopje face a prisoners dilemma: if neither side believes that a solution is possible, and acts on this, both will lose. If both sides take a calculated risk to take the search for a mutually acceptable solution seriously both can win.

By spring 2013 we will know the outcome ... sooner rather than later.

Gerald Knaus is founding chairman of the European Stability Initiative. This blog was initially published at Rumeli Observer.



Border Collaboration

Kosovo and Serbia started to implement the agreement on Integrated Border Management at Merdare and Jarinje crossings on December 10. There are no national symbols in the facilities shared by authorities from Kosovo and Serbia. Citizens who frequently travel across those crossings told Prishtina Insight the collaboration has led to easier and faster procedures at the border. (ARMENIJA ZAJMI BESEVIC/BETA)



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