

**BIRN** July 18–August 28, 2014 • #139 • Price 1€

# Prishtina Insight

**Free market?** How Kosovo holds back local producers.

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**Sworn virgins:** Author opens up about novel.

PAGE 12



# A MISSION DEFLATES

EULEX is reducing its size – and its bite. But is Kosovo ready? PAGE 6

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PI Guide: Luxury on the street level. PAGE 10

# Page Two

## 7 reasons to stay in Kosovo this summer

1.



### Novo Brdo

Built atop a volcano, the Novo Brdo Fortress in western Kosovo dates as far back as the 1300's, and was formerly a densely populated center for trade and mining. Now a protected zone, anyone can drive up and check out what's left of the eight towers and three gates that used to make up the medieval city.

2.



### Bogë/Rugova

Bogë is a small village in the heart of the Rugova mountain range, and is a great starting point for lovers of hiking and the outdoors. This is the only place in Kosovo where you can find peaks, forests, caves and waterfalls all in one place. Go here for hiking, rock climbing and camping.

3.



### Ilixha e Pejës, or the Peja Springs

The thermal springs of Peja are supposed to have many healing qualities, and are one of the more popular forms of folk medicine in Kosovo. Located in a stone house surrounded by trees, it's well worth the journey.

4.



### Mranmor, Bear Sanctuary Prishtina

Set up in spring of last year, Kosovo's only bear sanctuary is situated in 16 acres of forest not far from Prishtina. The sanctuary is currently home to thirteen bears, all of whom were rescued from various restaurants and private zoos in Kosovo. The sanctuary does guided educational tours and is open all year round.

5.



### Brod/Dragash

The Dragash region in the south is home to one of Kosovo's best kept secrets: the Gorani village of Brod. The Gorani community is a Slavic-speaking and of the Muslim faith, with some of the richest and unexplored folklore and tradition in the country. Lying beneath the Sharr mountains, Brod is your gateway to the gorges, lakes, rivers, and mountains of southern Kosovo.

6.



### Prizren/Dokufest

Prizren is the historical heart of Kosovo, housing some of the country's oldest homes, mosques, churches, and architecture. Walk up the hill behind the town for close up look at the Prizren Fortress, explore the home of the League of Prizren, and most importantly, head over while the Dokufest Documentary and Short Film Festival is on from August 16 to 24.

7.



### Velika Hoca

The village of Velika Hoca in Rahovec houses one of the highest number of historical Serbian Orthodox churches at 13 - with the oldest dating from the thirteenth century. Don't miss the the wineries, either.

## from the editor

### The right dwelling for good living

When the summer comes, a lot of us, especially those with a foreign passport, have a tendency to get as far away as possible from Prishtina. It's easy to forget sometimes that there's a Kosovo outside of the capital - a place full of untouched nature and cultural heritage. (See above)

But as I've found from living here for nearly four years, having a good place you can call home - I've had five in Prishtina so far - is key to embracing what's outside.

My first flat, out in the Vellusha Neighborhood, was from the post-1999 tallava era of architecture. It lacked an address, and was somehow wedged into the interior of a city block. I was lured by the modern furniture and new kitchen, and was ignorant of the fact that it was about 100 euro too expensive and subject to frequent power outages. It took other tallava flats to realize that it's generally better to live in a place built during the Socialist Federal Republic of

Yugoslavia, when buildings were made seemingly to withstand an apocalypse rather than as a product of one.

It's also important to identify and resolve problems before you move in. With the newest flat, I withheld half the rent until a kitchen window was secured with a proper latch and handle, instead of a kitchen knife. The issue was resolved within a day rather than the two months it took to get a water-damaged wall painted over in the previous place. But by the same token, it's important to keep in mind that repairing or improving anything can create even more serious problems. For example, the replacement of two old creaky windows can come at the expense of large chunks of the wall.

Last, but not least, the plumbing. I've learned that having a second bathroom is also a second potential source of flooding. And as nice as a shower may be, and as many fancy nozzles as it boasts, it's worth checking that water drains to an actual drain - rather than the floor.

Getting these few basics right may not lead to having a little private paradise in Prishtina, but it does make living here a whole lot better.



Nate Tabak

Editor-in-Chief

## Prishtina Insight

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# Nation

 **€26m**

in unpaid wages owed to more than **900** former employees of Fabrikes se Tubave (Pipe Factory) in Ferizaj. Some **40** of them have been camped in front of the main government building in protest for more than six weeks, calling on the Privatisation Agency to make the payments per a decision of Parliament and the Constitutional Court.



Albanian protesters clash with police in Skopje.  
PHOTO/BETA

## Retrial demanded in mass murder case

By Sinisa Jakov Marusic and Edona Peci

An Albanian leader in Macedonia urged an internationally monitored retrial of the so-called 'Monster' case after six Albanians were found guilty of terrorism and jailed for life.

Ali Ahmeti, the head of the junior party in Macedonia's ruling coalition, the Democratic Union for Integration, DUI, demanded on Tuesday a transparent retrial and a public presentation of the evidence that led to the conviction of six ethnic Albanians for terrorism - a verdict that sparked unrest on the streets of the capital last week.

The statement came a week after a court gave life sentences to six Albanians for the killing of five ethnic Macedonians in 2012 in a case that raised ethnic tensions.

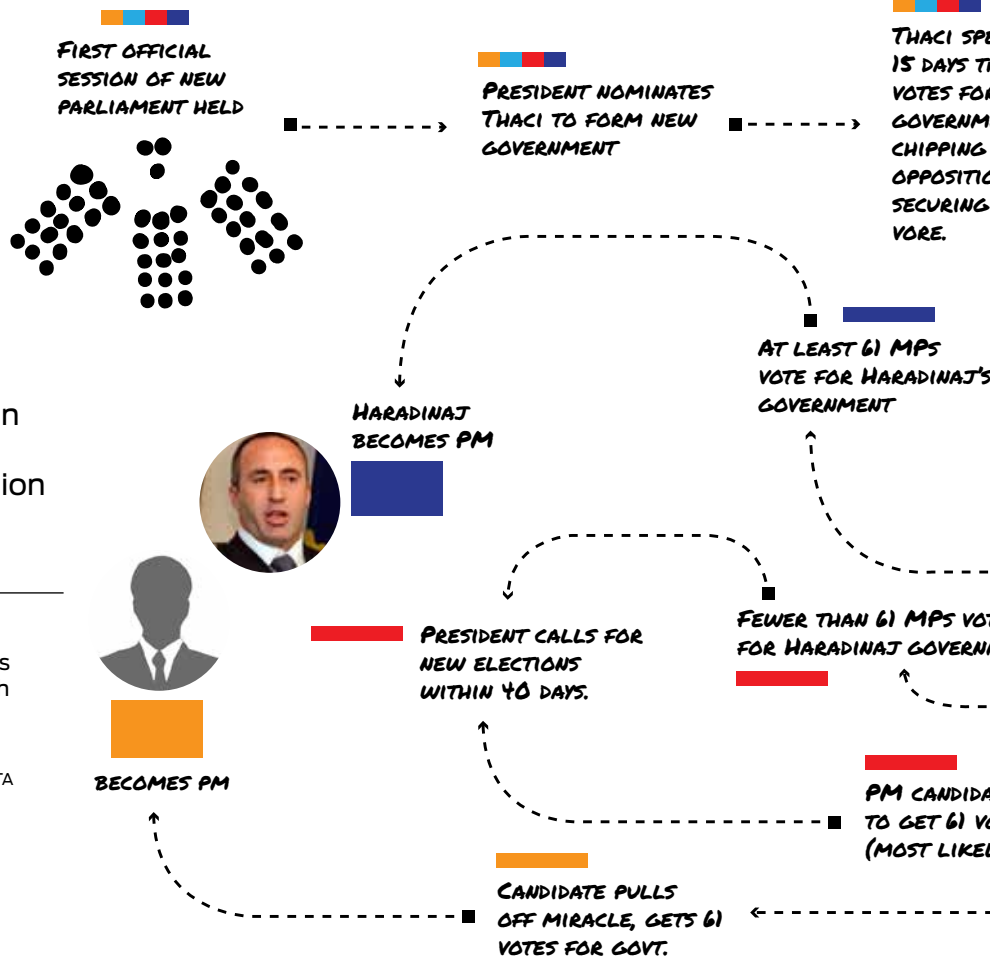
Alil Demiri, Afrim Ismailovic, Agim Ismailovic, Fejzi Aziri, Haki

Aziri and Sami Ljuta were found guilty of the grave offence of terrorism in connection to the killings. One defendant was acquitted. Two of the men who were convicted, Alil Demiri and Afrim Ismailovic, are serving prison sentences in Kosovo and were tried in absentia.

The verdict angered Albanians, several thousand of whom took to the streets of Skopje last week, throwing stones and bricks at the Criminal Court building and at riot police, who responded with tear gas, water cannon and stun grenades.

In Kosovo, more than 200 protesters took to the streets of Prishtina on Tuesday in support of the convicted men.

Holding posters with slogans like "Skopje is not alone" and singing nationalist songs, protesters headed towards the Macedonian embassy where they burned the Macedonian flag.



## Vetevendosje drives hard bargain

Party appears close to striking deal to back Ramush Haradinaj's coalition, demanding that it take charge of talks with Serbia.

By Edona Peci and Nektar Zogiani

The opposition Vetevendosje Movement in Kosovo has just 16 seats in the 120-seat parliament, but still appears to hold the key to the Prime Minister's office.

That key comes with a price. As of Thursday afternoon, as Parliament held its first session, Vetevendosje said it was close to reaching a deal to back the opposition bloc led by Ramush Haradinaj of the Alliance for the Future of Kosovo, AAK, pending an agreement on key conditions.

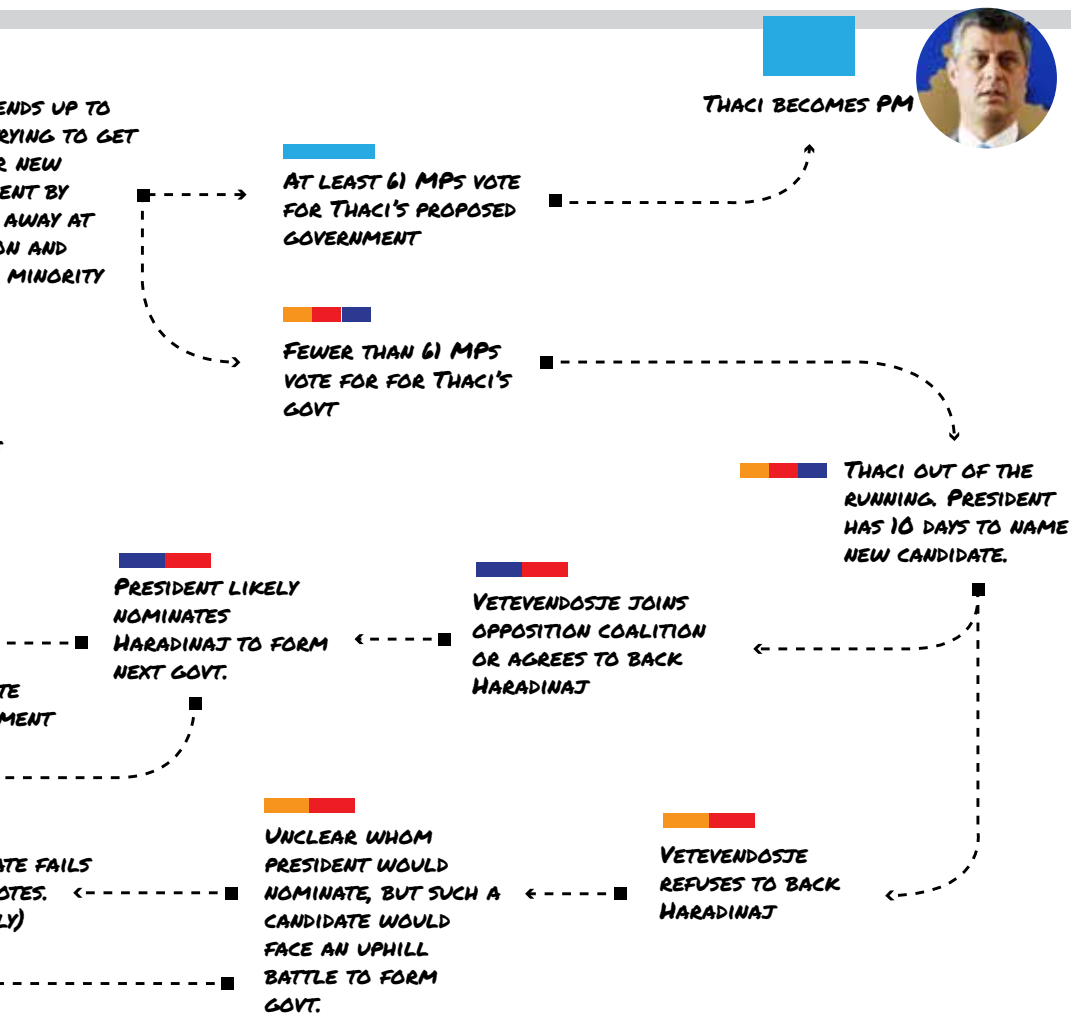
"The Vetevendosje Movement is making life harder for the oppo-

sition bloc by showing them it has the power in all this political mess," political analyst Halil Matoshi said.

Without Vetevendosje's 16 votes, the coalition of AAK, Nisma and the Democratic League of Kosovo, LDK, may not be able to stop Hashim Thaci from securing a third mandate.

With just 47 seats, well short of the 61 needed to elect a new government, it would otherwise need to get extra votes from ethnic minority MPs, or from defectors from Thaci's Democratic Party of Kosovo, PDK.

The main sticking point has been Vetevendosje's demand that it lead any future EU-mediated



## The scramble for the Prime Minister's office.

talks with Serbia. That amounts to a softening of Vetevendosje's original demand, which was to stop the talks altogether.

Vetevendosje, led by Albin Kurti, has taken a hard-line stance against the dialogue with Belgrade, insisting that it has aided the EU aspirations of Kosovo's former enemy while offering Kosovo little in return.

The opposition bloc has already agreed to one of Vetevendosje's other key demands, which is to halt the privatization of state-owned companies.

Haradinaj acknowledged the stalemate with Vetevendosje, while expressing hope that the deadlock would be broken.

"It will be hard to change the situation [in the coming days], but further communication is an option in future," Haradinaj said on Wednesday.

Thaci is meanwhile likely to make the first attempt to form a government, as President Atifete Jahjaga is expected to offer him this opportunity in line with a Constitutional Court decision earlier this month. Once nominated, Thaci will have 15 days to form a government.

If the opposition bloc votes against Thaci, and Vetevendosje does the same - as it has pledged to do - Thaci will not be able to form a government.

However, if Vetevendosje refuses to back Haradinaj, either, Thaci may find it easier to attract the extra votes he needs.

Nevertheless, Thaci's prospects for securing a third term remain slim, even though his party won the largest share of the votes - around 30 per cent - in the June 8 general elections.

If the opposition parties have closed ranks with Vetevendosje by the time that Thaci's 10-day window of opportunity closes, Jahjaga is likely to hand the nomination to Haradinaj. If he also fails to get 61 votes, Jahjaga will have to call new elections.

Matoshi predicted that the opposition will in the end reach a last-minute agreement that will result in Haradinaj becoming Prime Minister.

It remains unclear what the priorities of such a government would be. "We are clarifying the principles of the programs," Haradinaj said last week.

## Briefly



**A**

**Petition demands justice for wartime rape survivors.** An initiative to gather signatures for a petition demanding justice for Kosovo's survivors of wartime rape began on Monday in Prishtina. The petition, which is supported by political figures such as outgoing deputy prime minister Edita Tahiri, aims to call on the UN to produce a report on rapes committed by Serbian security forces in the 1999 conflict in Kosovo. An approximate number of wartime rapes committed during the Kosovo conflict has yet to be established.



**B**

**Serbs erect square on Mitrovica bridge.** Kosovo Serbs have begun building a square named after a medieval Serbian emperor on the bridge that separates the ethnically and politically divided town in northern Kosovo. Construction on the "Tsar Lazar" square began on Wednesday by the same construction company that removed the recently built "Peace Park" there. Nazmi Ismaili, an Albanian living in the northern Kosovo said the new square was a deliberate attempt to prevent any potential reopening of the bridge. "This is a blockage of the city and of the Albanians. We don't think we will ever be able to cross the bridge by car," he said.



**C**

**Croatia's parliament offers rights, benefits to LGBT community.** New legislation adopted by Croatia's parliament on Tuesday provides sweeping rights and benefits for the country's LGBT community. The legislation, titled the Law on Life Partnership, provides same-sex couples with most of the rights and benefits available to straight couples, such as inheritance rights, medical care, taxes, and pensions. The law does not allow for same-sex couples to adopt children, but does provide same-sex couples who are parents the same rights as straight parents.

## Cover

# EULEX begins to wind down

The EU's rule-of-law mission is scaling back personnel and its leading role in prosecutions, but some are not sure if Kosovo's institutions can pick up the slack.

By Valerie Hopkins  
and Edona Peci

EULEX is not going away just yet, but it's getting smaller - and less potent.

The EU Rule-of-Law Mission, in place since one day before Kosovo's 2008 declaration of independence, will shed nearly 30 per cent of its 2,070-strong staff and 20 per cent of its 111-million-euro budget as it transfers more of its duties to local authorities under a new mandate that begins in October.

"EULEX will be working more with Kosovo and less for Kosovo," a spokeswoman for EULEX said in an e-mail.

During its six-and-a-half years in place, EULEX has had a broad, sometimes decisive role in overseeing and shaping Kosovo's justice and law and enforcement systems with a complement of international judges, prosecutors and police at its core. Its most prominent role



A EULEX police officer during a raid in a war-crimes case.

has been handling cases - particularly corruption and war crimes - deemed too sensitive for the local authorities.

While the mission intends to see through existing investigations, its prosecutors will no longer initiate new cases in line with a law passed just before parliament dissolved in April and an agreement between Kosovo's president and EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton. Meanwhile EULEX judges will be outnumbered by local coun-

terparts on judicial panels. EULEX personnel will be available to "monitor, mentor and advise" their local colleagues in their new duties.

These changes however, are not set in stone. The EU mission says it may "request new cases to be assigned to EULEX prosecutors and request a EULEX majority on court benches in extraordinary circumstances."

It is the first major step towards a stated goal of transferring all so-called "executive powers" to local authorities by 2016, when the new EULEX mandate expires.

"We consistently encourage and support local actors in stepping up to the plate and taking responsibility," Maja Kocijancic, a spokesperson for Ashton, told Prishtina Insight in an e-mail.

To date, EULEX has dealt with around 2,500 criminal cases, 350 of which are considered high-profile corruption, war crimes, or organized crime cases, including the

Medicus organ-trafficking case. The mission has also dealt with a further 40,000 civil cases, mostly property-related, according to a EULEX spokesperson.

While some of the most sensitive war crimes cases - those involving former members of the Kosovo Liberation Army - will be handled by a new international tribunal in Brussels, most of the onus is being placed on Kosovo's institutions to pick up the slack.

While there are few enthusiastic supporters of EULEX in Kosovo - its mere presence is perceived as an affront to the young country's sovereignty - there is little indication that the country's own institutions are ready to pick up the slack, which is itself a sign of the mission's own shortcomings.

"There is no good time ever for EULEX to leave, but every second should be used to make local rule-of-law institutions more independent," said Shpend Kursani, a





EULEX was established to support the rule of law institutions of a newly independent Kosovo in 2008, but did not actually recognize the state's independence.

PHOTOS/ATDHE MULLA

**BY THE NUMBERS**

Prishtina analyst who has studied the mission extensively. "The presence of EULEX, with the powers it had so far, did not contribute to that, because EULEX has been a parallel mission above the local institutions and not one that has improved their work," he said.

Nevertheless, there are signs that the process may not be a smooth one.

Some EULEX staff have privately expressed unhappiness about how the mission is cutting 600 positions - 400 international and 200 local - in part through an open competition process.

Kosovo's acting chief prosecutor, Sevdije Morina, also complained that she has been left in the dark about EULEX investigations.

"So far, EULEX prosecutors did not share the information they received during their investigations," said Morina, who will be overseeing EULEX prosecutors in the Office of the Special Prosecutor, which to

<b>2,345</b>	<b>~2,500</b>	<b>~40,000</b>	<b>~350</b>	<b>~€110m</b>
days in operation	criminal cases handled	civil cases handled	verdicts in cases of high-profile corruption, organized crime, and war crimes	spent per year

date has handled some of the country's most sensitive cases.

Few local prosecutors have actually worked on war crimes cases, which are particularly challenging in Kosovo when the defendants are former members of the Kosovo Liberation Army.

The 2013 EU progress report on Kosovo noted that positions for prosecutors in the special prosecution chamber were unfilled and momentum to prosecute high-level crimes was lacking: "At the moment, there is a lack of capacity and commitment to investigate crimes that fall under the jurisdiction of the special prosecution," the report stated.

Morina, however, expressed a commitment to taking on tough cases, including war crimes.

"Although the war was a just fight for liberty, as anywhere else, there have been some violations [of the laws of war]," she said. "Any violation has to be investigated and the cases must be resolved."

Morina acknowledged that sensitive cases are difficult in Kosovo, but expressed hope that her prosecutors are up to the challenge.

"There are no reasons for prosecutors in Kosovo to be scared," she said.

In January, after a strategic review of EULEX's mandate was com-

pleted and plans for downsizing were taking shape, a group of international judges also raised concern that their local counterparts would be unable to take over the caseload.

"We have not yet reached the stage where the more complex and very sensitive cases, such as war crimes, serious corruption and organized crime, should be completely handed over to the local judiciary," the 17 judges wrote to Mats Mattson, the head of EULEX's executive division, suggesting the transition should happen more slowly.

This will be new terrain for judges, but Enver Peci, head of the

# Cover

## Rocky beginnings

During the status talks between a yet-independent Kosovo and Serbia in 2006, the EU had created a planning team that was supposed to transfer power from the United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), to a then undefined EU mission in Kosovo. When the talks failed it became clear that the Ahtisaari Plan, which envisaged Kosovo's supervised independence, would fail to be approved at the UN and the EU. In order to prevent the deployment of the mission from being blocked by EU member states, UNSC Resolution 1244 was chosen as the legal basis for what would later become EULEX.

## A status neutral mission

Kosovo's Declaration of Independence and constitution provided a legitimate invitation for the deployment of EULEX – however, as a mission based on the authority of UNSC Resolution 1244 and the Special Representative of the Secretary General (SRSG) to Kosovo, the mission should not technically recognize Kosovo's independence or laws. On the other hand, since the authority of UNMIK and the SRSG are no longer recognized by Kosovo's institutions, the decisions of EULEX judges can be challenged by Kosovo's Constitutional Court. Being status-neutral did, however, help with the mission's acceptance in northern, Serb-dominated Kosovo. Despite this inherent contradiction, Kosovo's laws have been used by EULEX judges thus far.

## Sore spots

The mission does not have to report to any of Kosovo's institutions, and EULEX staff enjoy immunity from Kosovo's laws. The mission can reverse and annul actions and decisions taken by Kosovo's institutions and governmental bodies – to date EULEX has yet to enact this power. EULEX staff typically have one-year contracts, without a high possibility of contract renewal. These short periods of employment don't provide EULEX staff with enough time to complete high level cases of organized crime, corruption, or war crimes. EULEX is unable to extradite suspects from other countries – most importantly, from Serbia.

## Highlights

High level cases involving powerful politicians and their involvement in corruption scandals and war crimes have been pursued, despite resistance from Kosovo's government. More capacity building, advising, and training of Kosovo's judiciary and police force are more than welcome.



## EULEX through the years

**2006:** EU Planning Team starts strategizing a handover of power

**2008:** EULEX deploys under UN Security Council Resolution 1244

**2012:** Supervised independence of Kosovo ends, president Jahjaga invites EULEX to remain engaged in Kosovo

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 7

## EULEX

Kosovo Judicial Council, says local judges are ready.

“We don't have any problems leading trials with EULEX judges in terms of professionalism,” he said.

“However, when it comes to sensitive war crime cases that involve ethnic Serbs, the Kosovo Judicial Council believes EULEX judges should continue to deal with these cases until an agreement of the re-integration of Serb judges is achieved.”

Nora Ahmetaj, Executive Director of the Centre for Research, Documentation and Publication in Prishtina, said she was concerned about Kosovo judges' ability to handle war crimes, as EULEX “has failed to strengthen the domestic judiciary.

“It is essential to increase the local judges' capacities, so that they get prepared to take the leading role in proceeding war crime cases,” she said.



Police from EULEX stand watch on Mitrovica's bridge.

EULEX, for its part, said that while it is cutting back, it remains committed to the integration of Kosovo's Serb minority and the implementation of the April 2013 agreement that is incorporating Serb institutions in northern Kosovo into Prishtina's institutions – including bringing Serb judges into Kosovo courts.

EULEX has already achieved some measure of success in the

north: customs collection began at the borders with Serbia early this year, Serbian interior ministry employees were removed from so-called ‘parallel institutions’ and the police force in north Kosovo, which used to answer to Serbia, was integrated into the Kosovo Police.

The renewed mandate comes as both Serbia and Kosovo are lagging behind on implementing unrealistic deadlines set in the April 2013 agreement. Serbia held early elections in March and Kosovo's parliament dissolved in April in anticipation of early elections, so Eurocrats and parliamentarians rushed to get a new EULEX mandate on the lawbooks before it was set to expire in June.

Bodo Weber, a German policy analyst, said that the EULEX transition is happening haphazardly “in the rush to the new mandate”.

“They created a mess,” Weber said. “From a legal point of view,

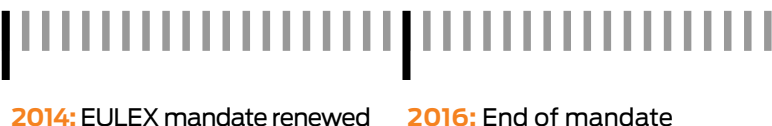
this is all problematic and is making a mockery of the principles of the rule of law.”

While EULEX's new mandate expires June 2016, it remains unlikely that it will make a precise end date to mission even as it continues to transfer more responsibility to the local authorities. The EU has invested more than a half-billion euros in the mission thus far, in one its most expensive foreign policy undertakings to date.

A former EULEX employee, who spoke on the condition of anonymity, said there's a sense in the mission that it was just starting to hit its stride with recent prominent corruption cases, including the charges against Uke Rugova, the son of Kosovo's first president, Ibrahim Rugova, a national hero who died in 2006.

“I wish they would stay as long as possible,” the former employee said.

EULEX has handled high-profile cases including the Llap group, right, and Nazim Bllaca, the self-proclaimed former assassin for SHIK, a defunct intelligence agency.



“There is no good time ever for EULEX to leave, but every second should be used to make local rule-of-law institutions more independent. The presence of EULEX, with the powers it had so far, did not contribute to that, because EULEX has been a parallel mission above the local institutions and not one that has improved their work.”

— Shpend Kursani, analyst

### EULEX staffing

Now	After the cuts
<b>2070</b> total	<b>1470</b> total (-600)
<b>950</b> local	<b>750</b> local (-200)
<b>1120</b> international	<b>720</b> international (-400)

**-29%**

Source: Internal EULEX plan

# piguide

Four stars: Perfection  
 Three stars: Superb  
 Two Stars: Good  
 One Star: Just OK  
 No Star: Don't Bother

**SUPERB**



## Fine dining on the boulevard

By Nate Tabak

Mother Teresa Boulevard isn't known for its compelling eating and drinking options. Prishtina's pedestrians'-only heart is the place to grab a table, enjoy the sun, and perhaps do a bit of people watching.

But as I sat tableside in the shadow of the Swiss Diamond hotel, I was fixated on the Negroni cocktail that was among the best I've had in this city. The simple mix of Campari, gin and sweet vermouth is well within the means of nearly every bar's inventory, but no one ever seems to get it right - or get it at all.

This being the Iliria Terrace, the luxury hotel's most downmarket eating and drinking venue, the cocktail did come with a price: the 6 euro and change. Most drinks range from 3 to 4 euro in bars. Consequently, I had just one.

During my Sunday afternoon cocktail, the food options also caught my attention, especially the Swiss Diamond Sandwich, and its promise of veal and peanut butter. At many places in Prishtina such a combination might frighten me. But for all its lack of affordability - this sandwich coming in at a whopping 4 euro - the hotel's kitchen knows how to prepare good food.

The sandwich bearing the hotel's name was no exception. The combination of thinly sliced steak and peanut butter evoked Thai satay. Fresh tomatoes, greens and corn helped offset the richness. I wasn't thrilled with the high bread to filling ratio, but the sesame seed roll was certainly good. The french fries served on the side, however, nearly stole the show. They were thick and clearly twice fried, as they're supposed to be but rarely are. The friend who joined me for lunch was pleasantly surprised with her tomato and mozzarella sandwich and its



A negroni cocktail will set you back more than 6 euro at the Swiss Diamond's Iliria Terrace.

healthy application of pesto, despite being inherently annoyed with having a meal at such a hoity toity place.

With two sandwiches and two Coke Zeros (marked up to 1.50 euro apiece), we escaped the Iliria Terrace for 10.50 euro. That's a lot to spend on lunch in Prishtina, especially for such a basic order. Therein lies the dilemma with eating at Swiss Diamond - especially with the 20 euro Sunday brunch and dinners that are among the priciest the city. The food is really good, but it's not clear that it's worth it.

On a subsequent visit I faced the similar conflict when I ordered the tabouleh salad. It was bursting with fresh herbs, and could certainly hold its own in the Middle East. But the 4.40 euro bought a portion that would have been fine as a side dish.



### ILIRIA TERRACE

Mother Theresa Boulevard (At Swiss Diamond Hotel)

8 a.m. to 12 a.m. daily



Iliria Terrace, like the hotel's main restaurant, Restaurant Iliria, and the hotel as whole, is selling an escape. The escape is one of luxury and proper execution that is lacking across the service industry in Kosovo. All of this comes at a price - and that's not for everyone.

# FYI



## A DRINKER'S HIDEAWAY IN THE CENTER

Newly opened Backgarden, just off Mother Teresa Boulevard, is a refreshing replacement to the short-lived Mexicana restaurant. It's a solid bar with typical beer and liquor offerings, with a particularly nice back yard that's a nice oasis in the heart of Prishtina.

Backgarden, Fehmi Agani 14, just off Mother Teresa.

## WHERE TO PICK UP PRISHTINA INSIGHT

06

### Hotel Prishtina

Hotel Prishtina's 43 charming guest rooms and suites are reminiscent of a small hotel in the European tradition. 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.

07

### Pizza Napoli

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. Pizzeria Napoli off Luan Haradinaj, opposite Newborn. 044/194-710. 049/194-710

04

### Hotel Gračanica

A place to relax in the calm and clean air of the countryside, just 15 minute sfrom Prishtina city center, 500 m from the center of Gračanica and its UNESCO World Heritage monastery and a short walk to the archeological site of Ulpiana. The boutique hotel combines contemporary architecture with traditional elements to create a unique atmosphere that will make you feel at home. +381 (0)38 729 888 (landline) +386 (0)49 764 000 info@hotelgracanica.com www.hotelgracanica.com www.facebook.com/HotelGra-canica

01

### Pallet Lounge

Pallet lounge is a newly opened, exquisite cafe restaurant that offers a variety of multicultural dishes and drinks. It is located right across the AUK University in the outskirts of the city, surrounded by nature. Gërmia Road (across AUK) +386 (0)49 880-777 palletlounge@gmail.com facebook.com/Pallet

02

### Lounge Papillon Bistro Bar

Papillon offers more than 60 types of wines from France, Italy, Spain, and Kosovo with great prices and delicious dishes. You can also try different types of local or international beers. Mother Teresa Str. Nr. 51 A info@caffepapillon.com 044 103 310

03

### 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. 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



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# culture

## The dark side of sworn virginity

Elvira Dones discusses the success of the English translation of her challenging novel, 'Sworn Virgin'

By Hana Marku

Hana Doda is a sworn virgin of the type that Albanians have never heard of: a woman who became a man, changed her mind, and reverted to being a woman again. After 14 years of living as Mark, her cousin, Lila, invited her to emigrate to America. When she did so, she not only had to adapt to a new country and a new culture, she needed also to "learn" how to act and dress like a woman again.

Her story is told with sensitivity and insight by Albanian author Elvira Dones, in the English translation of "Sworn Virgin," or "Hana," as it is known to Albanian readers. Dones' own story is almost as dramatic as that of her protagonist. Raised and educated in Communist Albania, she defected to Switzerland in 1988, eventually bringing her son along with her. During her time in Switzerland she published books and produced documentaries about topics as diverse as the Kosovo war, the sex trafficking of Albanian women in Italy, blood feuds, the lives of sworn virgins in northern Albania, and a semi-autobiographical, fictionalized account of her decision to leave Albania. Dones now lives in San Francisco, where Prishtina Insight asked her to discuss the buzz around "Sworn Virgin." The book won praise in international media such as the Guardian. "I couldn't put it down," reviewer Kapka Kassabova wrote.

"Sworn Virgin" tells the story of the dark side of the Albanian tradition of sworn virgins: one becomes a sworn virgin in order to carry on the family name in the event of no male heirs. It is the only method sanctioned by the so-called Kanun to avoid marriage, and to live a life of respect not extended towards women in traditional, rural, Albanian society. When Hana becomes Mark, she leaves Tirana, her university, her books, her crushes and her dreams for a lonely life of hard labour in the mountains. That's the price to be paid for refusing to marry the man her dying uncle chose for her.

The story highlights the absurd side



Elvira Dones

of the sworn virgin tradition: a person in skirts is not considered an autonomous being, capable of deciding their own fate. However, put that same person in pants and they can claim the respect of their entire community. While on an interview tour in Albania, TV talkshow host Ilva Tare questioned Dones' decision to portray Albanian customs in such a condemnatory light. Dones responded: "I don't think that a writer is an extended hand of the national tourism agency. A writer is someone who shows the wounds of society that he or she has chosen to show."

She remains just as unabashed about her creative choices in this regard when we talk one Monday morning over Skype. "Why isn't the same question presented to male writers - both foreign and Albanian - about their sensitivity towards female characters?" Dones asks. "I consider that question very chauvinistic. In this century, people still ask questions like why was this book written from a woman's perspective, or (and in Albania this question has always been asked, both indirectly and directly), why are you dealing with these 'strange' topics?"

In many ways, "Sworn Virgin" comments on the way sex, gender, and identity intertwine. In the US, Hana begins to "relearn" the social cues that signal womanhood: skirts (which she throws

across the room in frustration), lipstick (anxiously applied for her first date), styling one's hair, and flirting in the right way with a man. Her struggle reflects the experiences of a real former sworn virgin, one Dones met after the novel was completed.

"The only 'Hana' who regretted her decision was a big discovery. She gave me the runaround for three weeks, but I finally got to interview her," Dones says. A few years after a rakia-fuelled interview in northern Albania, Dones heard that this "Hana" had moved to the US, and had decided to dress and identify as a woman again.

"She wanted to grow out her hair, to not be a target of the village, and to be a caretaker for her sister's grandchildren. This woman's desire for her femininity had nothing to do with sex. She only wanted the dignity of confirming that she was female and a girl, not a lesbian, and she wanted to live with dignity in a city where no one would look at how she's dressed," Dones explains.

The politics of gender brought up by the novel are not lost on Dones, but the source of inspiration for the story is her interviews and direct experiences with sworn virgins. "Every time I get asked this question - why women? - my answer is because women are half of this society. My answer is that the Kanun, which we either glorify or reject in the most cannibalistic,



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"Sworn Virgin"  
By Elvira Dones  
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PHOTOS/MIKLOS VINCZE



murderous, and bloodthirsty way, had a few rules that show us that women were nothing in that family structure.

"When the idea came to me, it wasn't with a 'program' in mind. I was sixteen-and-a-half when two neighbors of mine from northern Albania (the wife was from Shkodra, the husband from Kosovo) showed me a photo from a big wedding in Kosovo. In the middle of the photo, in the midst of the clan, there was this tall, very handsome man - in traditional costume of course. I asked our neighbor, uncle Naim, 'Is this the man of the house?' He smiled and said, 'No, this isn't the man of the house. She is a sworn virgin,'" recalls Dones.

Hana spends her years as Mark in the mountains of northern Albania, an unforgiving and beautiful landscape that Dones describes with a timeless quality. This respect for the north spills over into her views on the northern "type", which can easily flirt with the caricature of the typical mountain man (or in this case, woman) as stoic, old-fashioned, and honorable. The character of Hana is clearly built on a combination of the tough, quiet, northern women that Dones met in her university years, as well as a potentially semi-autobiographical love of writing, reading, and poetry.

"When female students from the north, from towns like Dragobia, Kukesi,

Puka, and Lezha, came and studied at the Faculty of History and Philology, I noticed that those girls and women behaved differently. They weren't as loud as us, they weren't as modern as us, and they weighed their words more carefully.

"In a way I built 'Hana' up in my mind, bit by bit, as an act of rebellion - because I thought at that age, how is it possible to make such a decision [becoming a sworn virgin], when you don't know anything about your life, or the shape your personality will take? That's why my perspective on the book was on the loneliness faced by these women," she says.

"Sworn Virgin" suggests that Hana's emancipation is to be found in choice - the choice to both become a man and to return to being a woman again. However, the question remains whether sworn virginity is really a choice in a world governed by the stiff rules of the Kanun.

Dones posits that sworn virginity is a choice, and, in a certain sense, a revolutionary choice. "From a Western point of view, sworn virginity is almost a kind of enslavement, but it should always be viewed from the historical and cultural context of the tradition. It wasn't right, but they were given in marriage by their fathers when they were still in the womb, sometimes to men in their 50s.

"They had to wash the feet of every male family member in the house, and eat the leftovers of whatever meals they left behind... In this way, they [sworn virgins] are kind of revolutionary in their own way. With their own reasoning and in their own way they decided to go down that path, by telling their fathers that they would live as men. It was the only way," Dones says.

Despite the bizarre nature of Hana's situation to foreign readers, the resilience, imagination, and good humor of her voice, which narrates the novel, has met with high praise. Through her struggles to return to womanhood and femininity, to adapt to both her cousin's family and to the US, and to possibly find love, a strange, little-known tradition outside of the Albanian-speaking world is humanized and made familiar.

Asked why Hana's story has resonated so strongly with readers and critics, Dones responds: "That 'exotic' part of Albania, it speaks to them from within. The solitude that a woman of this kind experiences maybe this offers a break in perspective from daily life in North America or Europe. I could be wrong, but I think that the book has opened up a window to things that were unknown until then, and I think that's what makes them interested in the book."



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# Opinion

*Send us your thoughts to [info@prishtinainsight.com](mailto:info@prishtinainsight.com).*

## Local producers go it alone

The initial conversations I have with new Kosovar acquaintances all tend to be very similar: Hi, How are you, are you good, are you tired? Where are you from?

When I first arrived in Kosovo in August 2012, and started to go about the business of opening my microbrewery, I met more people than I could possibly remember. Some would eventually become significant to me and my business, while others would fade. Nearly all of the conversations started with some variation of the questions above.

So, I would give my answer: I am good; yes, very good; no, I am not tired. I am from New York.

The next question was as predictable as the first. Why would you leave New York for Kosovo?

I had moved here to be with the woman that I love and to pursue a business opportunity doing one of the things I love - making beer. When I look at Kosovo, I see a blank slate. So many products and services are just unavailable here that, at first glance, it's an entrepreneur's wild dream. All one needs to do is imagine a business slightly more inspiring than a car wash, and the possibilities are endless.

But ... Why Kosovo? Despite some vague admiration, to many people, my answer of following a passion did not seem satisfactory.

It's been just over a year since Sabaja brewed its first batch of beer, and just shy of two years since I moved to Prishtina. In that time, I've learned a hard truth: Despite all the potential, Kosovo is a terribly challenging place to start a small business.

There are the obvious barriers: corruption, near-monopolistic competition, and the omnipresent rumors of mafia protection rackets - all three of which are inevitably intertwined. But there are forces far less competent that really perpetuate the issue here.

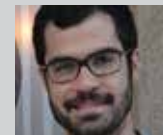
How does a young and unstable economy mature, grow, and develop sustainability? A better economist than I could write a dissertation on the topic, but in basic terms, an economy like Kosovo's stands to benefit most from increased manufacturing, which will offset imports and eventually increase exports, thus balancing the nation's trade deficit, providing



jobs, and improving the GDP. This is not an awfully complex idea, and of course some organizations have attempted and continue to support the investment in local manufacturing. Sadly, the law and local attitudes seem to work against them.

When we deal with importing ingredients, for instance, we pay customs and value-added tax (VAT) on everything that crosses the border, amounting to 27 percent added to the value of the goods. Then, when the goods are sold, another VAT of 16 percent is added to the wholesale price, and then another 16 percent on top of that is added when a bar sells the product at the retail level. Now, sure, the cost of VAT is passed on to the final customer, in theory, and if you wanted to invite the Tax Administration over to ruthlessly audit your books, go ahead. You might be able to reclaim that money, but that comes at the cost of disrupted operations and potentially devastating fines if "mistakes" are found (see the case of 3CIS, a tech firm that got unfairly saddled with a devastating tax bill).

Ultimately, the triple taxation on manufacturers leads to higher prices on locally produced goods, making them uncompetitive against global brands that are imported at extremely low cost and taxed only once or twice. It's no wonder Kosovo that has a massive black economy - small business



ALEX BUTLER

owners can't afford to compete legitimately.

At the same time, public support for domestically produced goods is remarkably low. Despite campaigns like Duaje Tenden (Love Your Own), many Kosovars still perceive imported products as higher quality, even despite the fact that Kosovo consistently imports second-rate products. Class D cigarette, anyone?

I have a litany of examples I could draw from - vague regulations that are nearly impossible for a new business to find, potential for powerful competition to influence legislation that could hinder small competitors, and inconsistently enforced rules to name a few. And yet, I have hope. We see the response that our modest little brewery is getting, and the fact that a few people are willing to pay a premium for a better product. Still, in light of all that I have learned, I am not running back to the United States to encourage my friends to invest in Kosovo.

Alex Butler owns and operates the Sabaja Craft Brewery in Prishtina.

